

**"A MORULA TREE BETWEEN TWO FIELDS."**  
**The Commentary of Selected Tsonga Writers**  
**On**  
**Missionary Christianity**

By

**SAMUEL TINYIKO MALULEKE**

Submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY**

in the subject

**MISSIOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**PROMOTER: PROF J.N.J. KRITZINGER**

June 1995

Student Number: 567-423-9

I declare that "A Morula Tree Between Two Fields." The Commentary of Selected Tsonga Writers On Missionary Christianity is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....  
SIGNATURE  
(S.T. Maluleke)

.....  
DATE

#### **Centre for Science and Development: Acknowledgement**

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this thesis and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science and Development.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY . . . . .	vii
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	viii
CHAPTER 1 . . . . .	1
MISSIONARY INTERVENTION AMONGST THE VATSONGA - AN INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
1.1 Statement and Outline . . . . .	1
1.2 Black Theology of Liberation as a Framework . . . . .	4
1.3 The beginnings of the SMSA - A brief history . . . . .	6
1.3.1 Swiss Background . . . . .	6
1.3.2 The Lesotho Connection . . . . .	8
1.3.3 Pedi, Venda Chiefdoms and other Missionary Societies . . . . .	12
1.3.4 Joao Albasini . . . . .	16
1.3.5 The Basotho Evangelists Initiate work at Spelonken . . . . .	19
1.4 The ideological and historiographical problematic . . . . .	20
1.4.1 An Indigenous Commentary . . . . .	26
1.4.2 The abiding impact of missionary intervention . . . . .	29
1.4.3 Can an Indigenous Commentary be Constructed? . . . . .	34
1.5 Sources . . . . .	38
1.5.1. Tsonga Newspapers . . . . .	38
1.5.2 Published Sources to be Considered . . . . .	40
1.6 The question of legitimacy . . . . .	41
1.6.1 Broader Historical and Missiological Issues . . . . .	45

<b>CHAPTER 2</b> . . . . .	<b>51</b>
<b>THE COMMENTARY OF TSONGA HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS</b> . . . . .	<b>51</b>
2.1 General Introduction . . . . .	51
2.2 In Praise of our Heroes and Pioneers . . . . .	53
2.2.1 <i>Rhuma Mina</i> (Baloyi 1965) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	53
2.2.2 Of no Historiographical Use? . . . . .	59
2.2.3 The <i>Mabunu</i> vs <i>Vaneri</i> dialectic . . . . .	60
2.2.4 Missionaries: Noble Heroes Amidst People in Darkness . . . . .	62
2.2.5 The Vatsonga: Backward and in Darkness . . . . .	63
2.3 The Fly Fallen into a Bowl Full of Milk . . . . .	64
2.3.1 <i>Ta Vutomi bya Mina</i> (Maphophe 1945) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	64
2.3.2 Some Historiographical Issues . . . . .	72
2.3.3 The Black Male 'Mother' to Paul Berthoud's Children . . . . .	74
2.3.4 Calvin Maphophe - a Missionary who Sacrificed much . . . . .	74
2.4 National Histories . . . . .	78
2.4.1 Introduction . . . . .	78
2.4.2 <i>Ta ka Mpisana</i> (Sihlangu 1975) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	78
2.4.3 Historiographical Issues . . . . .	83
2.4.4 Bushbuckridge mission - A local Initiative . . . . .	84
2.4.5 The 'darkness' at Mpisana . . . . .	86
2.5 The Morula Tree on the Boundary between Two Fields . . . . .	87
2.5.1 <i>Muhlaba</i> (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	87
2.5.2 Historiographical Issues . . . . .	91
2.5.3 Was Muhlaba Converted? . . . . .	93

2.5.4 Muhlaba and his Culture . . . . .	94
2.5.5 Muhlaba the Diplomat . . . . .	95
2.6 Conclusions . . . . .	96
2.6.1 Genuine Appreciation for Missionary Christianity . . . . .	96
2.6.2 The Fly versus the Morula Tree . . . . .	98
2.6.2.1 Fly in a Milk Bowl Christianity . . . . .	98
2.6.2.2 The Morula Tree In Between Two worlds . . . . .	100
2.6.3 Tremendous Local Input . . . . .	101
2.6.4 Political Undertones . . . . .	102
2.7 Summary . . . . .	103
<b>CHAPTER 3 . . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>THE COMMENTARY OF SELECTED TSONGA NOVELISTS . . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
3.1 General Introduction . . . . .	105
3.1.1 Eminent Tsonga Authors . . . . .	106
3.2 <i>Mibya Ya NyekaNyeka</i> (Mtombeni 1967) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	107
3.2.1 An Urban Setting . . . . .	107
3.2.2 Characters and Plot . . . . .	108
3.2.3 Christian Commitment and Tribal Loyalty . . . . .	115
3.2.4 The ideal Christian Family . . . . .	116
3.2.5 Church, Mission and Ministry . . . . .	117
3.2.6 Church in an Urban Setting . . . . .	118
3.2.7 Culture and Traditional Customs . . . . .	118
3.2.8 Which Sling-skin Has Become Loose? . . . . .	119

3.3 <i>Tinhlolo Ti be Mitsatsu</i> (Nkondo 1973) - Summary and Overview . . .	120
3.3.1 The New and the Old . . . . .	124
3.3.2 <i>Vujagani</i> and <i>Xihina</i> (our traditions) . . . . .	124
3.3.3 The characterisation of the Muneri . . . . .	125
3.3.4 Political undertones . . . . .	127
3.3.5 The Dilemmas of well-meaning <i>Majagani</i> . . . . .	128
3.3.6 Which bones have erred and how? . . . . .	129
3.4 <i>Xisomisana</i> (Thuketana 1968) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	130
3.4.2 Effectively told story . . . . .	135
3.4.3 <i>Xisomisana</i> as a case study . . . . .	136
3.4.4 An exhibition or denigration of rural Tsonga Culture? . .	138
3.4.5 Misfortune as Justice and misfortune as Injustice . . . . .	139
3.4.6 Missionary Christianity as the answer . . . . .	140
3.5 General Conclusion . . . . .	141
3.5.1 Style and Plot Construction . . . . .	141
3.5.2 Depictions of Missionary Christianity . . . . .	141
3.5.2.1. Religious Issues Feature Prominently . . . . .	142
3.5.3 Missionary Education . . . . .	144
3.5.4 Local Customs . . . . .	145
3.5.5 Mission and Politics . . . . .	146
3.5.6 Conclusion . . . . .	147
<b>CHAPTER 4 . . . . .</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>TSONGA PLAYS, RHYMES AND POEMS . . . . .</b>	<b>149</b>
4.1 General Introduction . . . . .	149
4.1.1 Plays . . . . .	149
4.1.2 Poetry . . . . .	150

4.2	<i>Mhlopheki Ngwanazi</i> (Nkondo 1974) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	151
4.2.1	Realistic and Openly Political . . . . .	159
4.2.2	The gods under Siege . . . . .	160
4.2.3	Tribalism and Nationalism . . . . .	162
4.2.4	Veiled attacks on Christian teachings . . . . .	163
4.3	<i>Mihizo Ya Kayivela</i> (Mtombeni 1974) - Summary and Overview . . . . .	165
4.3.1	As a Play . . . . .	170
4.3.2	Life and Death as Mystery . . . . .	171
4.3.3	Christianity and Traditional Tsonga Beliefs . . . . .	172
4.3.4	Mbolovisa Challenges the Church . . . . .	174
4.4	Summary of Issues . . . . .	174
4.5	Selected Poems . . . . .	175
4.5.1	Children's Poems . . . . .	175
4.5.1.1	Conclusion . . . . .	178
4.5.2	Poems in praise of missionaries and their legacies . . . . .	179
4.5.3	Poems on the Christian life-style . . . . .	181
4.5.3.1	Conclusion . . . . .	184
4.6	Poems on Religion and Politics . . . . .	184
4.7	General Conclusion . . . . .	188



<b>CHAPTER 5 . . . . .</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>A MORULA TREE IN BETWEEN - AT THE CUTTING EDGE . . . . .</b>	<b>189</b>
5.1 Introduction . . . . .	189
5.2 Revisiting the Basic Thesis . . . . .	189
5.3 The essential Commentary . . . . .	208
5.4 The Morula Tree Metaphor in Context . . . . .	218
5.4.1 Personally Torn . . . . .	221
5.4.2 On the Edge . . . . .	222
5.4.3 A Positive Metaphor . . . . .	223
5.5 Towards a Conclusion . . . . .	223
5.5.1 An Ideological Break . . . . .	224
5.5.2 Towards a Black Missiology of Liberation . . . . .	227
5.6 Challenge to Missiology . . . . .	230
<b>LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED . . . . .</b>	<b>237</b>

## SUMMARY

The thesis of this study is that indigenous Tsonga literature forms a valid and authoritative commentary on *missionary Christianity*. In this study, the value of literary works by selected Tsonga writers is explored in three basic directions: (a) as a commentary on missionary Christianity, (b) as a source of and challenge to missiology, and (c) as a source of a Black missiology of liberation. The momentous intervention of Swiss missionaries amongst the Vatsonga, through the activities of the Swiss Mission in South Africa (SMSA) must be granted. Similarly, its abiding influence formerly in the Tsonga Presbyterian Church (TPC), now the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (EPCSA), the Vatsonga in general and Tsonga literature in particular must be recognized. But our missiological task is to problematise and explore both missionary instrumentality and local responses variously and creatively.

The first chapter introduces the thesis, central issues of historiography and ideology as well as an introductory history of the SMSA. In the second chapter, the commentary of Tsonga writers through the media of historical and biographical works on missionary Christianity is sketched. Selected Tsonga novels become the object of inquiry in the third chapter. The novels come very close to a direct evaluation of missionary Christianity. They contain commentary on a wide variety of issues in mission. The fourth chapter concentrates on two Tsonga plays and a number of Tsonga poems. In the one play, missionary Christianity is likened to garments that are too short, whilst in the other, missionary Christianity is contemptuously ignored and excluded - recognition granted only to the religion and gods of the Vatsonga. The fifth and final chapter contains the essential commentary of indigenous Tsonga literature on missionary Christianity as well as the implications for both global and local missiology.

**KEY TERMS:** Indigenous Tsonga literature, Swiss Mission in South Africa, Black missiology of liberation, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, Missionary Christianity, Black Theology of liberation, Tsonga historical and biographical works, Tsonga novels, Tsonga plays and poems.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### To the Extended Family

My journey in academic theology started in 1982. My childhood years were shared between Valdezia, the Mtsetweni area (now called Ha Mashao or Give-Shandaan), Nkowa-Nkowa near Tzaneen, and Soweto where I was born. My nomadic existence was precipitated by the premature and sudden death of my young mother in 1965. She left behind four children aged nine, seven, four, and eight months - and I was the third of these. My younger sister, whom we lovingly call Sesana, was less than a year old when death snatched her mother's breast away! Various sectors of the Maluleke-Dumazi extended family courageously took turns in helping my father raise his four motherless children. Sometimes all four of us stayed within one unit of the extended family. At other times, we were spread around the various units of the clan. Nevertheless, raising four motherless children was such a challenge that it sometimes threatened to wreck the very harmony of the extended family. This is especially so because ours was a very poor family. Often, there was simply nothing to share. And yet we - brothers, sisters, uncles, grandmas, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces - somehow survived. To rephrase, somewhat out of context, what Steve Biko once said, I am tempted to say: ``Those who question the efficacy of the extended family, let them go and tell it to van der Merwe in the northern Transvaal''! I, my brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces, are living proof of the value of an extended family. All members of my extended family living and deceased, contributed tremendously to make me what I am today. It is impossible to mention them all by name.

I thank my mothers. Mhani Sophie, N'wa-Bene ntombhi ya Mulambya. My mother's death added four more children to her one and only infant, Suzy. What a challenge for a young newly married woman! To her I can only say, *khani mambo*. My thanks also go to mhani Rhosi, Xindalani, N'wa-Dumazi. Like an 'uncle', she defended and fended for me. Since she is now a Mungoma, I ask her to speak to her sister Mamayila N'wa-Muhlava ntombhi ya ka Xiviti, my biological mother. Announce me to her and her to me. May my mother know how thankful I am for the gift of life she left me. Let me also thank Mhani Ndaheni - another of my mother's sisters. She too pitched in to join the group which collectively mothered us.

I thank my grandmothers. Nhlupheki, N'wa-Diki, N'wa-Mazinu - my mother's mother. She is the only one of my grandparents still alive today. She has been the leader and referee of the pack of women who brought me up - advising and admonishing them all accordingly. If it was not for her old pensioner's earnings, I might have never started school. Nor can I forget my father's mother, N'wa-Muhlaziso - child of Nkami and Yingwani. I can only hope that some of her strength of character has rubbed off onto me.

I thank my mother's children: Sesana Rose Tshameleni (now Mrs Ngoveni), the miracle baby whose survival skills will inspire me forever. Wilhemina Munyamani, our eldest sister, should have been included amongst my mothers. For truly that is what she has been to me. My brother Josias, who gave me the break in life. He stood aside so that I could walk past.

I thank my own father; now a member of the living-dead society. Mapfotlosa, Pfipfi Obed Huhlwani Maluleke. He had little, but he gave us much, teaching us to be tough and to stand our ground.

## **FEDSEM**

Early in 1982 I alighted from the train, then known as the Trans-Natal, at Pietermaritzburg station. A White man by the name of Andre Kaltenrieder was there to meet me and other first year theology students. He took us to the Federal Theological Seminary (FEDSEM) at Imbali Township. I had never heard of this seminary before. Yet my entire life perspective was to be transformed radically in this very place. To begin with, FEDSEM was, even as recently as 1982, one of the very few places in South Africa where people from various 'race groups' lived together, for twenty-four hours every day. It was both an enriching and a traumatic experience. Whilst the similarities between various 'races' became clearer, so did the differences. So the 'racial miracles' in terms of relationships and acquaintances existed alongside the most basic 'racial conflicts' within the same four walls. Not only were the members of the FEDSEM community racially diverse, they were also denominationally and confessionally diverse. And confession was often even more divisive than race! And yet below and above all the surface conflicts, I was keenly aware that FEDSEM was special. Here, a whole new world was unfolding, at least for me.

For the first time in my life, I discovered that I could compete with anyone regardless of race. Even more significantly, coming from a Bantu Education background, I discovered that my opinion and my evaluation counted. My lecturers were interested more in what I thought than in what I had memorised. For a long time I struggled with this. Because I was closely involved in the student leadership of the Seminary, I got to know, quite intimately, how FEDSEM operated. That meant getting to know the 'up-sides' as well as the 'down-sides'. At FEDSEM, I met some of the most stimulating people in my entire life. My academic appetite was whetted and established once and for all at FEDSEM. Amongst the staff members, I want to mention Mazwi Tisani, Themba Vundla, Fiona Bullman, Dr T.S.N. Gqubule, Dr K. Mgojo, Dr S. Dwane and Dr Lizo Jafta. The Duncans, Graham and Sandra, although they were staff members too, became my friends. They stand right in front of the row, of all those who not only contributed, but actually suffered right through my academic progression - up to the process of the writing of this thesis. Now I consider them part of me, part of my family.

#### **UNISA Colleagues and Teachers**

I want to thank my colleagues and teachers here at UNISA. I belong to a warm circle of veteran Black theologians based at UNISA and beyond. From the times when I coordinated the Black Theology Project, I started rubbing shoulders with these distinguished scholars. These are the theologians who have remarkably endured my youthful excesses without abdicating their responsibility to teach me. I am speaking of Profs Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, Itumeleng Mosala, Bonganjalo Goba, BGM Motlhabi, Drs Lizo Jafta, David Mosoma, Revds Zuze Banda, Andries Buffel, Mlungisi Menziwa, Tobias Masuku and Victor Molobi. The list is endless - I could never exhaust it.

I thank also my immediate colleagues in the 'biggest department of Missiology in the world', as Willem Saayman likes reminding us all. I thank Prof Willem Saayman because he gave me the most precious gift a doctoral student can ever ask for - he made me believe that I could do it. I thank Revd Nico Botha for having provided a shoulder on which I could cry as well as sharing with me his own trials and tribulations in the quest for a doctoral degree. I also thank Marietjie Willemsse, the departmental Secretary. I will always treasure her friendly disposition and helpfulness. I am grateful to Annalet van Schalkwyk

who has breathed a new spirit into the department. I recall many constructive discussions and debates I have had with her - and she has only been at UNISA for five months! No words can express my appreciation of Klippies Kritzinger, my promoter. His help, trust and support for me goes far beyond this very narrow project of my doctoral thesis. I recognise all this and am very proud that Klippies has allowed his name to be attached to my doctoral studies. My thanks also go to our subject librarian, Mrs Monica Strassner who did sterling work with providing me with helpful references. I also thank the staff of the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand for warm and helpful assistance. I thank, in the same breath, the staff of the Giyani Archives for the same.

### **Immediate Family**

My family deserve my heartfelt thanks. I start with my children's mother, Danisa Eleanor Noelle. I thank her for giving me the space, freedom and support to do this thesis. Hlanganani and Xihluke, my two daughters have had to cope with a highly irritable father for many months. Sizwe Sam, my namesake, the only begotten son, suffered innocently. All he knew was that between him and his father stood a toy (the computer) and a pile of books. He has never understood why I am so selfish with this toy. Nevertheless, I thank him for his persistent disturbances. Georginah Masenya (Moyo) is the wonderful woman who stays with young Sizwe when we all go off to work. Without her sacrifices, this thesis would not have been possible. Her love for radio Tswana Stereo meant that there was always good music whilst I worked from home on my thesis. Thina Ramanugu is my nephew, currently staying with us and doing his standard ten. He too, must be thanked for being so shy, so quiet, so behaved and so unintrusive. Living with a personality like his certainly does no harm to a doctoral student.

### **Tembisa Parish (EPCSA)**

Included as members of my family are all the members of the North Rand (Tembisa) Parish of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. I became their minister in 1988. Without their support, especially during the tumultuous years (1990-1994) of disagreement between the parish and the church authorities, I could not have stayed a minister, let alone a doctoral student. No words could ever express my gratitude to Mrs PDM Mathabathe, the parish treasurer, school principal and trusted friend of our family. My association with her includes my participation in the governing body of the school she heads - namely Swize Senior Secondary School. I will always be thankful for the confidence she has shown in me. Similarly, Mrs RA Mongwana, the parish secretary, has been extraordinarily supportive. No words can thank her adequately enough. I mention also Maurice Mathonsi (parish choir conductor), Ernest Mzamani, Dr Abner and Mrs Nofumana Tlakula, Dr Lybon and Mrs Bridgette Rikhotso, Ephraim and Mrs Maria Mnisi, Lucas Moyo (youth leader), Herbert and Mrs Lydia Matjokana, Solomon Jazi Ubisi, Matthews Vukeya, Ellen Mongwe, the late Albertina Sehlabela, Mrs Raphaelalani and her late husband, Norman and Mary Mukhari as well as Petrus and Elizabeth Hlatshwayo - all elders in the Parish. Without the support of these and others, I do not know where I would be today. Officially, I am supposed to have been the pastor of the Tembisa Parish, but in reality, the Tembisa Parish has been pastor to me and my family.

### **Standing for the Truth**

Let me also thank some of my 'partners in crime' - members of the EPCSA Standing for the Truth Campaign (EPCSA SFT). Like me, these people are dissatisfied with the missionary awareness of our beloved church, the EPCSA. Together we have attempted to remedy the situation. Our efforts have been neither perfect nor beyond reproach. But they have been concerted and genuine. Unfortunately, these actions have also earned us the wrath of some sections of the EPCSA. I am thinking here of such people as: the Revs Michael Desmond Nyawo, Wilson Ndwamato Rambau, Jameson Ngomane and François Bill. In fact François and Molly Bill gracefully obliged to proof-read the final draft of the thesis. Molly's skills as an academic, a scholar in Tsonga literature and her knowledge of the history of the SMSA came in handy. I thank her heartily

for her helpful comments and suggestions. However, she is not to blame for any of the positions taken and conclusions reached in the study. Those are mine. I also thank Mr J.M. Mahuhushi (the fiery old man), Dr Russel Marivate (Chairperson of the EPCSA SFT), Mr I Dlomu (lecturing in the Geography Department, Turfloop), Mr G.S. Mayevu (lecturing in the Department of Tsonga language and literature, Turfloop), Mr C.E. Mushwana (now Minister of Finance in the Northern Transvaal Region), and Rev N.J. Ngwenya. The crime is Christian mission. Let us commit it again and again. Let us commit ourselves to it forever. May this, my humble thesis, make a contribution towards the quality of mission, at least within the EPCSA.

### To the Ancestors

And now to all the Van'wanati I announce my piece and implore their peace. I speak of the children of Maxakadzi, Malenga and Gunyule. Vadyi va bangu. The grandchildren of Majeje. N'wina va ka mafula-hi-xivuri va tshika nyundzu. In all the places where you are, where you sleep. Be it at Zari, Bileni-Masiya, Gaza, Xinavane, Xikundu or Xipilongo xa minhlata ni timanga. Those of you lying amongst the stumps of Maledza and Zinjiva. Wake up. Awake you who congregate daily at the sacred place, *eRikatsini*, up on the Mariri hill. The hill that looks down upon the Valdezia mission station. Up there, *eRikatsini*, lies N'wa-Swihaleni, Jika-Bayi Mukhuva wa Gwayimani, Ben Huhlwani, Obed Huhlwani, N'wa-Mthombo, N'wa-Xilala, N'wa-Muhlava, N'wa-Ngholeni, N'wa-Honoko, Xitulu, Xilebvu and many others. I beseech you all, those whom I know plus all the multitudes I do not know. Huhlwa leyo bava. Huhlwa leyo leha ku tlula swiharhi hinkwaswo. Accept me, your child. Guide me on. Stay with me.

### NSUMO - A PRAYER TO THE ANCESTORS

Mayeke!!!

Xinyela-Babeni.

Va ka macimba ya tihuku yo lema rihlelo.

Bangu hi leri. Dyanani. Mi siyerisana.

Byelanani. Vikelani na Nsila-Mbowana.

Lowo sungula ku baleka nhlangeeni.

Byelani Gwambe mi byela na Dzavani.

Khuyekani hambu phambeni ka Nhlange-Ntima.



Tiko va tekile. Vukosi va hlungile.  
 Vana va hunguka.  
 Kumbe ku vula-vula, kumbe ku khanela,  
 hambi ku vereketa; swi tibya i mani.  
 Xilungu xi nga lungela nsele. Vumunhu mbooo!

Bangu a ra'ntswa. Namuntlha ku njhani?  
 Lwasi ra kona!  
 Ku dyiwa nyama ya munhu.  
 Ngati i vukanyi bya kona.

Byelani na Xikwembu lexikulu - Ye Nkwembu hi byakwe.  
 Hikusa na yona kereke vu'.  
 Lomu phakati ka yona.  
 Vudliti-dliti. Vukhwenu-khwenu. Vumina mina.  
 Makondlo ku dyanana.  
 Mali na switulu. Matimba na mavitu.  
 Ku nusaniwa hi tinkokola.  
 Hi ri vanhu va tshivelana hi milomu hi!

Muswisa na Mutsonga swo fana ntsena.  
 Ko basa nhlonge mbilu dzwii! Kereke mbooo!  
 Ko sa ku hlambanyisa. Mphikizano wa swihlambanyiso.  
 Maswisa hi tlhelo. Na hina vu' hi tlhelo.  
 Va Standing for the Truth hi lavayaa.  
 Portland Place na yona yi ku ndzi kwala.  
 Yi kwi' nhloko?  
 Yi hlangane khale.  
 Se ku ta lungha yini!

Solanga mali yi nghena. Ri xa ri ya mahlweni.  
 Muchini we'ndliwile.  
 We'ndle i Koroni na Bereto - Majaha ya Swissa.  
 Mavhilwa ya rhendzeleka.  
 Mati va karhi ku tshwetiwa tinhlokweni.  
 Hi Makhisimusi na Magudu-gudu.  
 Vhinyo ya khweviwa.

Switifiketi swa phakeriwa.  
 Lava faku, va heleketiwa hi nawu,  
 Nawu wa xibukwana lexa ntima.

Vakiresite vuhefu-hefu. Tijunifomo.  
 Madodana ha ku hlavelela.  
 Tinghoma ta vaprofeta va Baal.  
 Le ntshaveni ya Karmela.  
 Magandzelelo ni Mijikelezo swi kona.

Kambe xitlhangu-nkulu, magqwetha na vumbiwa.  
 Ku jinga ku banga vusopfa.  
 Ku mbhonya manyala.  
 Risema hi to ri yi'?

Vamanana va ri: *Si ya Bonga Baba.*  
 Ku vongiwa yini? Serekisi ya mahala.  
 Ntlangu wa Sonto na Sonto  
 Vujele-jele bya lembe na lembe  
 Ve' i Sinodo loko va hlaya.  
 Ntlangu wa ntlutlamo.  
 Xitumbelelani xa Vabvana na Madoda.

Wu khandhiwile lowu muchini hi!  
 Van'wana wa hlanta.  
 Vambeni wu raha wu dlidlimbeta.  
 Kasi vanwana wo gaya wu tlhe' wu sila.  
 Lebyin'wana byi karhi ku phokotela mavoko  
 Ku ri karhi ku fiwa hi mafenya.

Njhe' muchini a wu nga jiyeli siku rin'wana?  
 Ntswiri. Jeke-jeke. Tshwu! Ku ku khwixi!  
 Xinyami xi ku vuya-vuyani.  
 Vafundhisi va yini? Va nga tirha yini?  
 Kereke ya yi'? Kwihhi ke?  
 Inxiii! A v'endla yini?  
 Ambani ku nona.

Mana-mani? Hlambanyani?  
Hi byo vupfumeri bya kona?  
Vujagani bya namuntlha?  
Hi rero khombo.  
Vanhu va hlalerile.  
Madoda ya xinge makhwiri.

Hi cha' no boxa.  
Swi ta ka' swi twiwa hi tincece.  
Ko Vafundhisi. Ku ku Vaneri.  
Ko Vamanana. Ku ku Vatatana.  
I jazi ra Seme.  
Hi ri kereke ya foo!  
Mo la' yi za yi huma ngati?

N'we lavakulu.  
A mi hi lamuleli ki?  
A mi ndzi twi leswi ndzi bukutselaka?  
Leswi ndzi nga tseketsela na ku godela.  
Me rhumbu na rhumbu ra n'wina.  
A mi ndzi cuvukeni mi ndzi cingela?  
Leswi ndzi khinsameke.  
Lanu hansa ka Nkanyi vakithi.

Ndzi byela wena Mukoki.  
Na wena Madzivi Maphophe ka Xixongi.  
Vikela makwenu Jonasi le ka Mpisana.  
Mi nga siyi na Mn'wanati,  
Lowo ndzi siyela vito, xivongo ni vurhumiwa;  
Samuel Malale ka Mhinga.

Va kwihi va Timotiyo Mandlati.  
Va Mahlekete na va Matjokani.  
Va Hlayisi na Va Mabulele.  
Va Matlanyane na va Mphelo.  
Byi kwihi va Mavanyisi, na va Mboweni?  
Mi nga rivali mukhalabye, Hakamela Tlakula.

Na wena mamana Lois le ka Magudu  
Ha ku losa mamana wedzrhu  
Byela nuna Mandlakusasa  
Lowa mandla layo sasekisa ntirho ka Mpumu.  
Hi ri: Khani mambo.

Na n'wina matabyani ya kona.  
N'we mi nga muka tolo kunene.  
Va Disi na va Magadzi.  
Va Shimati na va Thuketana.  
Va Khosa na Tlhavela.  
Na wena Ntsanwisi a hi ku rivali  
Swinwe na Famanda mfana ka Mashaba.

Swona!!  
We N'wa-Xihlomulo u hi vangele khwara  
Rikumba-dzedze ra madzedze.  
A wu pfumelela yini?  
Lamulani ka.  
N'whe va le hanshi.  
Tsika!

## CHAPTER 1

### MISSIONARY INTERVENTION AMONGST THE VATSONGA - AN INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Statement and Outline

Now is the time for Africans, who are a product of western missionary work, to reflect on what mission means for the church in Africa and what the church has done in Africa because it is in mission (Muzorewa 1990:xiv).

The thesis of this study is that indigenous vernacular (in this case Xitsonga) literature forms a cogent, independent and *under-side*<sup>1</sup> commentary<sup>2</sup> on *missionary Christianity*<sup>3</sup>. As such this corpus of literature constitutes a fertile and valid source of missiology, in the same way that missionary archives, memoirs, biographies, theological and ethnographical works have been thus far considered. The call contained in the above quotation by Muzorewa, must therefore be considered to be both a call for initiative and for critique. These decades-old calls for, and attempts at, the construction of

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'under-side' is being used here to mean, coming from the side of the poor, those on the 'under-side' of history. Cf. subtitle to the work of Torres & Fabella (1976).

<sup>2</sup> The notion of a 'commentary' is something that I have borrowed from the Comaroffs (1988:6). They use this term to refer to the 'symbolism of gesture, action and reaction [and] expressive manipulation of language' that characterised the encounter between missionaries and their potential converts. In other words, without the help of propositional argument, a literate culture, military might or direct disputation, the indigenous population still 'acted' and 'reacted' to the missionary intervention. Similarly, I suggest that without the advantage of theological sophistication and the benefit of a direct confrontation and analysis, indigenous vernacular writers nevertheless provide evaluations of and reactions to missionary Christianity. That is what constitutes their *commentary* on missionary Christianity.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this study, the phrase 'missionary Christianity' will be used to denote the kind of Christianity that Western missionaries have sought to plant in the Third World in general and amongst the Vatsonga people in particular. The phrase must therefore *not* be understood to refer to a type of Christianity that is missionary in character, as the phrase can at times be used. Basically, I use the phrase in a descriptive non-pejorative sense. The phrase is also intended to underline the fact that 'missionary Christianity' was a contingent, interpreted type of Christianity rather than the ideal.

Third World missiologies of liberation<sup>4</sup> will benefit immensely from recourse to indigenous vernacular literature.

In fact, I submit that, in ignoring this source, the entire quest for Black and African theologies of liberation has been greatly impoverished. Therefore, this study forms part of the decades-old project of calls for missiologies of liberation - taking the 1976 Dar es Salaam meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) as a starting point. More specifically, this study seeks to contribute to a local Black Missiology of Liberation.

In putting indigenous vernacular literature forward as a valuable and viable source of missiology I must not be understood to be merely offering an 'addition' to the available repertoire of missiological approaches. The very suggestion that indigenous vernacular literature is a valid source of missiology is both ideological and 'subversive'. It is not as if vernacular literature exists, albeit in some untapped form, unproblematically side by side with well-established sources of missiology. In that case, the task at hand would simply be to *supplement* and *complement* the well-established sources accordingly. My proposal carries, at least two cardinal implications, namely; (a) for a local missiology of liberation, indigenous vernacular literature features at the level of a primary source, and (b) the dominant and established Western sources of missiology must be subjected to interrogation by indigenous vernacular literature rather than vice versa, as it is 'normally' the case.

More narrowly, my thesis as stated above will be tested by means of reference to Tsonga writers, many of whom wrote under the shadow and tutelage of Swiss missionaries who worked for the Swiss Mission in South Africa (SMSA)<sup>5</sup>. In the

---

<sup>4</sup> Although not always spelt out in precise missiological terms, such works as, Torres & Fabella (1976), Anderson & Stransky (1976), Appiah-Kubi & Torres (1979), Costas (1982), Balia (1991), Kritzinger (1988), Muzorewa (1990), Mugambi (1989) all testify to the thundering calls by Third World theologians for a local missiology of liberation as well as their various attempts to contribute to it.

<sup>5</sup> Originally (1875-1882), Swiss missionary work in South Africa was the concern of the *L'Eglise Libre du Canton de Vaud*. From 1883 to 1928, it became the joint concern of the free churches of the cantons Vaud, Neuchatel and Geneva who together formed a missionary society called *La Mission Romande*. In

context of this study, the phrase 'missionary Christianity' refers to the blend of Christianity that Swiss missionaries sought to establish amongst the Vatsonga (Shangaan)<sup>6</sup> peoples of the Transvaal and Mozambique since 1875. The basic approach will be one that concentrates on the missiological issues at stake in this encounter rather than historical chronology. However, a brief historical account of the origins of the SMSA will be given in this chapter as an important background.

Because the study relies heavily on works written in Xitsonga I shall offer frequent own translations of quotations, phrases and terms. In cases where I consider the vernacular rendition to be important, I shall use it with a footnoted translation. All such translations are mine - unless stated otherwise.

In this chapter, I shall (a) state the thesis (b) declare my theological and ideological orientation (c) offer an account of the origins of the SMSA, ~~(b)~~ d consider some historiographical and missiological issues evoked by the thesis e ~~(c)~~ give a historical review of Xitsonga literature as well as an outline of my specific vernacular sources, and ~~(d)~~ discuss essential historiographical problems evoked by this study.

In the rest of the study, I shall consider selected works by Vatsonga writers in the genres of (a) historical and biographical works - chapter two, (b) novels - chapter three, (c) plays and poems - chapter four, and end with a concluding fifth chapter. Since this is missiological study and not an

---

1929, the society became a national Swiss Protestant concern called, *La Mission Suisse dans l'Afrique du Sud* (Swiss Mission in South Africa [SMSA]) (Bill, J-F 1965:149). In 1962, the new name of the missionary body became the *Departement Missionnaire* (DM). Notably, in 1962, the local 'mission' (church), the fruit of the SMSA, also became known as the Tsonga Presbyterian Church (TPC) - a name that was to be changed again to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (EPCSA) in 1982. Of all these names, the most widely used, even to date, has been the SMSA, so that even the EPCSA continues to be referred to as the SMSA. In this study, the term SMSA refers to all of the above bodies.

<sup>6</sup> The names given to these people have ranged from the Magwamba, Knobnoses, Thonga, to Tsonga-Shangaan, in our own times. In an attempt to seek a historically accurate term that avoids the limitations of all of the above, Patrick Harries (to whom I will refer liberally) used the phrase 'East coast immigrants' to refer to the Vatsonga people (cf. Harries 1983, 1988, 1989, 1994).

exhaustive study of Xitsonga literature, reference to a wider circle of Tsonga and missiological works will be made throughout the study. A special attempt to compare the views of missionaries to those of the indigenous Xitsonga writers is made in the last chapter so as to demonstrate the validity of the thesis.

## 1.2 Black Theology of Liberation as a Framework

The symbolic value of the word 'black' is that it captures the broken existence of black people, summons them collectively to burst the chains of oppression and engage themselves creatively in the construction of a new society (Tlhagale 1985:126)

The above quotation supplies an adequate 'symbolic' justification for the preference of South African Black Theology as the overall theological framework within which I shall conduct this study. The missionary nature and challenge of Black Theology have been demonstrated<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the framework is of more than 'symbolic value'. Christian *missions*<sup>8</sup> have been and continue to be overwhelmingly perceived to be 'something which benevolent white people did to 'backward' black people' (cf. Kritzinger 1995:1). This perception of mission is so deep-seated that where it cannot exist openly, it masquerades in 'numerous' softer guises. I am thinking here of the such expressions as the 'facile talk about *senders* and *receivers* in mission' (Saayman 1995:21 cf. Maluleke 1994a:99) where invariably, the senders are White and the receivers Black. It is also an open secret that to speak of 'older' and 'younger' churches (cf. Bosch 1978, 1991a:4) is largely to speak of Black and White churches. It is possible to argue that even the great missiological debates,

---

<sup>7</sup> In his work, Kritzinger (1988:365) has adequately demonstrated the 'relevance of Black Theology for a liberating understanding of Christian mission'. But he goes further to posit Black Theology as a stimulant for 'a theology of white liberation' (1988:259). In the broad African context, Bosch (1984) has argued that most types of African theology share the common trait of being missionary in character.

<sup>8</sup> This must be differentiated from Christian mission understood holistically in terms of the *missio Dei*. Rather, what one is referring to is the *missiones ecclesiae* of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, in terms of popular usage, even the concept Christian *mission* has tended to be understood to mean something that White people do for Black people.



first around the 'three selves formula', then the moratorium and more recently around the ideal of 'partnership' experiments (cf. Maluleke 1994a) can be explained in terms of the global phenomenon of White racism<sup>9</sup>. Within the South African situation, even in 1995, after the miraculous transition from Apartheid to democracy, racism will continue to dictate the quality of people's lives for a long time. This reality will also affect the constitution and witness of the church in South Africa.

Whilst not the only issue, race has featured so prominently both in missionary work as well as in missiological debates that to ignore it would be sheer self-deception. Because a basic objective of this study is to make a contribution to the construction of a Black missiology of liberation, an awareness of the abiding problem of race in Christian mission is vital. Other theological approaches are available, e.g. contextual theology and African theology. However, because of its sensitivity to issues of race, Black Theology is the ideal framework in which to pursue this study.

Taking my cue from Black Theology's established methodology, my commitment is with Black people, usually *othered* as 'receivers' or 'younger churches', etc. This bias and commitment will influence my reading of the sources of this study. Indeed, in the very choice of indigenous Xitsonga literature as the primary source of this study, I have already demonstrated my bias towards local voices. My bias is more people-orientated than 'fact-orientated'. Although this stance may look 'weak' and 'emotional', it is in fact a tough and risky stance. For the people towards whom Black Theology is biased - the 'receivers', the 'younger churches', the Black, the Vatsonga - are imperfect; much too imperfect to be 'idealised'. But this is the risk and genius of the methodological choices of Black Theology.

As hinted above; to dub Black Theology a missionary theology is to state that it is not an 'exclusivist' theology. One of its central aims is to evangelise

---

<sup>9</sup> I include amongst the 'debates' and/or 'developments' that have a bearing on White-Black relations in mission, the historical ascendancy of the concept of the *missio Dei* at the expense of the *missiones ecclesiae*. A fuller discussion of this will be conducted in the final chapter. I am using the term racism to mean more than racial prejudice. It refers to an ideology of power abuse as practiced collectively first by colonial powers and later by capitalist states of Europe and America against people of colour all over the world.

and re-evangelise (Kritzinger 1988:171). In the same spirit, indigenous vernacular commentary on missionary Christianity does not constitute a wall between local people and missionary Christianity. On the contrary, it seeks to intensify the trading and negotiating processes between missionary Christianity and local culture. It has always been the aim of Black Theology to 'save Christianity' (Biko 1979:74), to ensure the 'future of Christianity in this country' (Goba 1980:22) because 'the credibility of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at stake' (Boesak 1981:2). In the same spirit, this study seeks to 'defend' the Christian faith. However, such a defense is also a critique and a rejection of oppressive, narrow forms of Christianity. More than a *reaction* we will find through the help of indigenous Xitsonga literature a re-definition of what it means to become a Christian. Thus in a telling rejection of the dualistic pressures of the missionaries to either become a 'Christian' or stay a 'heathen', Muhlaba, a chief of the Vatsonga, described his stance as that of a Morula tree standing between two fields. It is this pregnant metaphor that I have chosen as the *leitmotiv* and title of my study.

### 1.3 The beginnings of the SMSA - A brief history

#### 1.3.1 Swiss Background<sup>10</sup>

The Swiss canton of Vaud experienced some stirrings of missionary zeal since the early 1820s<sup>11</sup>. However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that a more pronounced and direct involvement in mission by the Free Church of Vaud would emerge. By 1857, the Free Church of Vaud had not only acquired its freedom from the state (1845), but had taken an official decision recognising

---

<sup>10</sup> For information obtained from the French sources i.e. van Butselaar (1984) and Grandjean (1917) I am indebted to two translators, namely Revd Kabala Emmanuel Tshilenge of the Presbyterian Church of Zaire (now based in Pretoria) and Rev Dr François Bill of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

<sup>11</sup> The first missionary society of Vaud was formed in 1821. But it had a very short life-span. In 1826, the Evangelical Missionary Society of Lausanne (1826) was formed. Its main activity was the publication of missionary bulletins. A school for missionaries was established in Lausanne, but it too had to close prematurely, in 1836. However, in 1834, The Lausanne Missionary Society sent the first missionaries from the canton of Vaud to the Sioux in North America. Unfortunately, poor preparation caused the work to die after eleven years - and the Lausanne Missionary Society asked the American Board to continue with the work.

the responsibility of the whole church for mission. In 1860, a number of missionaries from Vaud were sent out. Adolphe Mabilie, Paul Germond, Frederick Ellenberger and Louis Duvoisin went to Lesotho to work under the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS). Another missionary, Oscar Rau, went to China. In 1869 Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux wrote a letter to the synod in which they both offered themselves as missionaries and challenged the Free Church of Vaud to initiate a missionary enterprise of its own (Cuendet 1950:6). The letter was received positively by synod. A mission committee entrusted with the task of raising funds and studying the possibility of sending out the two missionary volunteers was set up. The two, having just completed their basic theological training, had met and become friends at the theology faculty in Lausanne (Cuendet 1950:8). In Lausanne, the two would have been influenced by the theological ideas of Alexandre Vinet (1797-1847), a theologian dubbed the Schleiermacher of Swiss Protestantism.

Having spoken out against the cantonal state of Vaud during the controversy over the freedom of the church from the state, Vinet advocated a radical separation between church and state. His theology was influenced by his belief in individualism as propagated by Rousseau and Locke. This individualism also affected Vinet's view of the church. For him the church had two aspects, the visible and the invisible. He was uncomfortable with an over-elaboration of visible authority, e.g. in Roman Catholicism. Vinet emphasised that church membership was based on individual confession and conviction. For him, this type of membership, as opposed to the virtually automatic membership of all citizens in a state church, was the true mark of a free church as opposed to a state church. Although Vinet himself died somewhat prematurely (1847), some of his theological ideas continued to be influential at the theology faculty in Lausanne long after his death (van Butselaar 1984:22). One such abiding influence was Vinet's keen sense of mission as the chief function of church. The rigorous, individualist and yet conservative ecclesiology combined with the heightened sense of mission to produce a crop of "...enthusiastic, impulsive and full of life ... sometimes more narrow, but also often more steady and more tenacious" (Ellenberger 1938:115) missionaries. Herewith a fuller description of the 1860s crop of Swiss missionaries who went to Lesotho:

They [thus] came to Basutoland with a more individualistic conception of the Church and an inclination to demand often more from its members and to appeal more to the initiative of Christians. Their education had accustomed them to envisage Christian life from a narrower point of view, but also from a deeper one. The former [French] missionaries had sometimes been tempted to confuse the Church rather too much with the nation [state]. No danger could be feared from the newly arrived men on that score ... (Ellenberger 1938:115).

Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud are part of this generation of Swiss missionaries whose missionary orientation is described above. Despite their explicit request for their own church to send them rather than another missionary society, it was under the auspices of the PEMS that they landed in Lesotho.

### 1.3.2 The Lesotho Connection

In 1872, the two young men, Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud, from Switzerland's *L'Eglise Libre du Canton de Vaud* (The Free Church of Canton Vaud), together with their wives, arrived in Lesotho (then known as Basotholand) (Bill J-F 1965:114) for the purposes of missionary work. The PEMS, which had been working in Lesotho since 1833, was their initial host (Maluleke 1993a:237, cf. Grandjean 1917:44, Ellenberger 1938:199).

By 1872 the PEMS mission in Lesotho was 44 years old and had known the best and the worst of times. Their initial successes (up to around 1847) were rudely interrupted by "the contact between Moshoeshoe's subjects and the South African settlers [ushering in] ... a new era of wars and insecurity" (Ellenberger 1938:47f). The wars and disturbances lasted for two decades. Many converts, including chiefs and headmen, left the church due to their disappointment with the role of missionaries in the wars. The Basotho lost land, lives, power and livelihood during the wars. In the second phase of the wars, it was Moshoeshoe's kingdom against president Boshoff's newly formed Boer Republic of the Orange Free State. Once again, the Basotho were the essential losers. This situation did not augur well for the work of the

mission. However, the arrival of new missionaries in the 1860s improved the situation.

Before 1860, ``practically only France had sent her children to the land of Moshoeshoe, the Protestants of French-speaking Swiss were now joining them'' (Ellenberger 1938:115). Between 1858 and 1862 no less than six French-speaking Swiss missionaries joined the PEMS. Of these, three were ``natives of the Vaud Canton, viz Revs A. Mabilie, P. Germond and D.F. Ellenberger'' (Ellenberger 1938:114). This breed of missionaries ``breathed a new spirit and brought methods that were to renew the whole work'' (Ellenberger 1938:115) of the PEMS. More importantly they came at a time when the mission suffered from fatigue and lack of enthusiasm. Not only was young blood needed but new ideas too:

The dream of seeing the whole tribe embracing the Gospel was now over. The hopes of the conversion of the whole nation had disappeared. Most of the chiefs had gone back to a kind of heathendom worse than that of the early days and believed that in that way they were increasing their own popularity. It was necessary, then, to restart mission work on a new plan, aiming at reaching the people individually rather than the masses, the ordinary clan rather than the great chiefs. It would no doubt be a more humble, more difficult and slower process, but perhaps more sure and more efficient in the long run (Ellenberger 1938:92).

Amongst these Swiss missionaries, Adolphe Mabilie was a visionary who developed considerable ``influence over his colleagues, even the older ones, as well as over the Basutos themselves'' (Ellenberger 1938:116). The arrival of Creux and Berthoud coincided with Mabilie's own plans for a mission outside Lesotho. Ellenberger's (1938:199) comments on these plans are apt:

At first sight it might appear strange and contradictory that the Mission should have conceived the idea of establishing a new work far beyond its boundaries, at a time when it was concentrating on Basutoland. In the minds of the missionaries, however, that plan was legitimate and natural, since the contemplated outside

Mission was to be a branch and fruit of the Basutoland Church itself. It was meant to open up a field of activities for the energy of the Basuto Christians, and to be as much in their interests as in those of the heathens to whom the Gospel would be brought.

The story of the genesis of the Mission of the Free Church of Vaud, which we shall discuss below, seems to confirm Ellenberger's interpretation of the rationale for 'foreign' mission. Mabile is said to have

... taken a special interest in the Bapedis or Basutos of the Transvaal, many of whom came to Basutoland to study; ... he had succeeded in imbuing several of his colleagues and of his evangelists with his enthusiasm, so much that in 1872 the question of a Mission in the north of the Transvaal had become a pressing and a practical one, the only thing that prevented its immediate realisation being the want of missionaries (Ellenberger 1938:198).

This was the PEMS context into which Creux and Berthoud arrived in Lesotho. It was a context of missionary renewal. But Creux and Berthoud were not lacking in missionary zeal of their own. Earlier (1869) Creux and Berthoud had both challenged the Free Church of Vaud to commence mission work amongst the 'heathen' and offered their services for the initiation of such an undertaking. With the help of the expertise of the PEMS missionaries, notably Adolphe Mabile, they took lessons in the Sesotho language at Morija. They even started doing mission work in Lesotho at the Masitisi mission station (Terrisse 1954:5). However, "their desire was to establish a mission of their own church ..." independently of the PEMS (Bill, J-F 1965:114). It was only in 1874 that the Free Church of Vaud's synod formally approved the formation of its own missionary society (Rejoice 1975:18). The synod of the Lesotho Mission formally caught Mabile's vision for mission when its synod decided in September 1872 to engage in mission amongst the Bapedi of the Transvaal.

Therefore, when an exploratory missionary expedition to the Transvaal was undertaken in 1873, the interests of both the Swiss missionaries and the

Lesotho Mission were being served. It is noteworthy that the 1873 expedition, led by Adolphe Mabilie (Grandjean 1917:46), included a number of Basotho 'missionaries'. Here are the members of the expedition: Adolphe Mabilie, his wife and two children, Paul Berthoud and wife, Ernest Creux and wife, Eliakim Matlanyane, Asser Sekgakgabane, Bethuel Raditau and Josiah Molepo (Rejoice 1975:19, cf. Creux 1921:2). Of the native evangelists, Ellenberger (1938:199) describes Asser Sekgakgabane as ``one of the most remarkable evangelists whom Basotholand has ever produced, an orator of the first rank and courageous pioneer whom no obstacle ever stopped''. Furthermore, Ellenberger describes the close connection between the PEMS Lesotho mission and the Vaudoise mission, later to be called the Swiss Romande Mission:

Although independent, from either the Basutoland Mission or the Committee in Paris, that Mission belongs to a small extent to ours, by its origin; it is, so to say, a daughter of the Basutoland Mission, and the best relations have always existed between these two missions, which are so similar in their methods and their personnel. Basutoland has had the privilege of training the first Magwamba evangelists and teachers, and for many years our brethren of that Mission entrusted the training of their first ministers to our Theological School (Ellenberger 1938:199).

Even by the late 1950s, EPCSA ministers were still trained at the theological seminary in Morija. Similarly, the EPCSA publishing house - Sasavona - continues to use Morija Printing Works for the printing of many of its publications. However, at present, no official relations exist between the Lesotho Evangelical Church and the EPCSA.

### 1.3.3 Pedi, Venda Chiefdoms and other Missionary Societies

It had been the wish of Mabile that mission work would be started amongst the Bapedi of Sekhukhune in the North-Eastern Transvaal, but Sekhukhune did not welcome them (Creux 1921:2, cf. Ellenberger 1938:199). Mabile's expedition team found Sekhukhune's attitude towards missionaries to be very negative. Initially, it had been thought that unlike his father Sekwati, Sekhukhune would be positive towards missionaries and Christianity. But such hopes were soon dashed. According to Baloyi (1965:14), Sekhukhune said to the members of the expedition: 'I have enough white missionaries, I require no more dogs'<sup>12</sup>. Sekhukhune was not only inhospitable to missionaries, he also 'persecuted' Christian converts amongst his subjects. Du Plessis (1911:347) recounts Sekhukhune's actions towards his subjects and the Berlin Missionary Society missionaries thus:

... heathen influences proved too strong, and he swung round to the other extreme, and set in motion a most violent persecution against Christians. They were exposed, without food or fire, to the bitter mid-winter frosts; they were beaten with rods; they were driven from Sekukuni's territory, and forbidden ever to return. Not content with thus maltreating, and banishing his own subjects, the chief ordered the Berlin missionaries out of his country.

Du Plessis' explanation of Sekhukhune's actions as emanating from 'heathen influences' is hardly adequate. These actions must be understood in context. It is worth noting that Sekwati was himself not always opposed to White missionaries. Alexander Merensky and Albert Nachtigal had been very close to him, as they were indeed to Sekhukhune initially. It fell to these two missionaries to play the roles of emissaries and intermediaries between Pedi chiefs and the Boer authorities. It was these missionaries who wrote letters under the dictation of the illiterate chiefs in their exchanges with the

---

<sup>12</sup> It does appear therefore that a level of distrust existed in the minds of some local chiefs in the Transvaal towards the missionaries. This must be related, at least in the case of Sekhukhune, to the kind of stance that missionaries took in the land and political conflicts between the local chiefs and the Boers.



Boers. Inevitably, they were forced to take sides even in conflicts between rival African chiefs.

It is important for us to understand the context because, even if it is not identical to the context in which the Swiss missionaries would later find themselves, it definitely impacted on the Swiss missionaries<sup>13</sup>. Attitudes towards missionaries, especially from the side of the African leadership, were greatly influenced by events that preceded the arrival of the Swiss missionaries. The Berlin Missionary Society had been doing missionary work in the north and north-eastern Transvaal for more than a decade before the arrival of Mabile's expedition. Alexander Merensky and Albert Nachtigal were the first Berlin missionaries to work amongst the Bapedi, whilst Carl Beuster, Erdmann Schwellnus and Johannes Mutshaeni (Mathivha 1985:42f)<sup>14</sup> worked for the same missionary society amongst the Vhavenda. The Dutch Reformed Church had also started work amongst Bapedi, initially through Alexander McKidd, but later through Stefanus Hofmeyr (Du Plessis 1911:285, cf. Maree 1962) and others. As 'predecessors' to the Swiss missionaries, these missionaries had, through their interactions with Africans (especially their leadership) and the White settlers, laid the basis for attitudes towards missionaries, and perhaps vice versa.

The explanation for Sekhukhune's rejection of Christianity, Christians and missionaries must be sought in the complexities surrounding relations between missionaries, Africans (e.g. Bapedi and Swazis and the Ndebeles) and White settlers. The whole Transvaal, especially the North-East, was in a state of instability due to conflicts between the White settlers and the local inhabitants on the one hand and the African chiefdoms on the other. The Bapedi and the Vhavenda chiefdoms had withstood the furnace of the Difaqane. The Bapedi under Sekwati actually emerged stronger from the Difaqane, especially against the Swazis (cf. Delius 1983). But the Swazis were 'the principal prop to Z.A.R. [Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek] in the Eastern Transvaal' (Delius 1983:95) whose headquarters were situated at Lydenburg. The cooperation between the Swazis and the Boers created sleepless nights for Sekhukhune,

---

<sup>13</sup> As we shall see in the chapters ahead, Swiss missionaries did later find themselves in precarious relations with native chiefs.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent critical appraisal of the work of the Berlin Missionary Society, especially amongst the Bapedi, see Delius (1984).

forcing him into 'unholy' cooperation with the Boers (Delius 1983:97). In the 1860s, the Boer settlers were bent on extending and strengthening the hold of their young Republic on the whole Transvaal. This meant either the waging of wars against African communities or manipulating hostilities between them. Over and above Sekhukhune's fears of the Swazis was the internal threat to his throne mounted by his brother Mampuru. Of significance to us is the fact that the Berlin missionary, Nachtigal 'maintained close contact with Mampuru and remained sympathetic to his cause' (Delius 1983:99). Elsewhere Delius (1983:89) points out that Mampuru 'made a point of cultivating the friendship of the missionaries'. Herein lies a most likely explanation for Sekhukhune's negative attitude towards missionaries:

It seems that in the period immediately after the succession of Sekhukhune, the Christian movement became intertwined, if not synonymous with the supporters of Mampuru ... A number of converts in this period participated in Mampuru's defiance of his brother, and the most prominent and active of the Christians living at Thaba Mosego - Sewushane - was also one of Mampuru's supporters. Sekhukhune's decision in 1862 to bar Sewushane from preaching at the capital was probably more the consequence of his growing unease about his brother and the political complexion of the missionaries' adherents than of a desire to attack Christianity (Delius 1983:114).

Apart from this there was a belief 'prevalent amongst Berlin missionaries that Christian advance depended on the destruction of chiefly power' (Delius 1983:109). This impulse can also be found as a kind of hermeneutic principle in some writings of the nineteenth century missionaries and theologians (cf. Du Plessis 1911). The crushing of African political and social structures was seen as a preparation or even a prerequisite for conversion and evangelism. Closely related to this was the generally negative view of African culture that missionaries had.

There was the issue of the 'cavalier fashion in which converts treated conventional [Pedi] ritual forms and observances' (Delius 1983:115). The missionaries, especially Merensky and Nachtigal, also maintained a respectful attitude towards the Boer authorities: 'Merensky and Grützner were careful

to observe the code of conduct laid down for missionaries by the Z.A.R. and sought to avoid presenting any open challenge to the claims to authority of the Boer State'' (Delius 1983:119). As time went on Merensky emerged as an official representative of the Z.A.R. authorities amongst the Bapedi, thus clearly taking sides. Sekhukhune's distrust for the missionaries was therefore certainly connected to his wars with the Boers. He is said to have ``given great trouble to both the Boers and the British [but] was ultimately worsted in an encounter with the latter, largely through the instrumentality of a regiment of Swazi allies ...'' (Du Plessis 1911:347).

For a long time, the Boers were not able to subdue the Vhavenda and the Bapedi. Soon, the Bapedi under Sekhukhune were able to shake off the Swazi, thus neutralising their hegemony in the Eastern Transvaal. With reference to the Vhavenda, Du Plessis (1911:349 cf. Mathivha 1985:11) has the following to say:

The Boer government found the Bavenda an exceedingly difficult problem to solve, and for many years the policing of the country was beyond its power. Of all native tribes the Bavenda were able to resist Boer rule the longest, and this resistance was only finally overcome when Magato - ``the Lion of the North'' as he was called - and his successor Mpefu were subjugated by General Joubert.

As we saw in the case of Lesotho, the local people failed to understand why one group of white people could claim to bring them the good news while another group was bent on killing them and taking their land. But the missionaries - especially the French - were distrusted by both the local chiefs as well as the Boer authorities (cf. Bill, J-F 1965:115, Kgatla 1988:20). On being rejected by Sekhukhune, Mabile's convoy proceeded to the far northern Transvaal in the Spelonken area.

#### 1.3.4 Joao Albasini

In the Spelonken area the missionary expedition arrived at the Piesang Kop (Riyonde) mountain where Joao Albasini, a person of mixed blood (Grandjean 1917:60f) who originated from Inhambane in Mozambique, had settled<sup>15</sup>. He, together with the missionaries already at work in the Northern Transvaal, became somewhat useful (if not unavoidable) contacts for Creux and Berthoud. He had served the Portuguese in some military capacity. Initially, he settled in the Lydenburg area. Later he moved on to the northern Transvaal, probably because he had taken sides in the succession dispute between Muzila and Mawewe claimants to the chieftainship of Manukosi which broke out around 1862.

Apart from his military background, Albasini is said to have possessed many guns and much ammunition. Thus many Vatsonga refugees who fled to the Transvaal as a result of the war between the two brothers and their supporters, found refuge with Albasini. Although there is little doubt that he exercised authority over the Vatsonga as 'chief', it is unclear *who* made Albasini chief of the Vatsonga. Was it the Boers? Was it the Vatsonga? Or did Albasini make himself chief? Baloyi (1965:16f), in his very unsympathetic assessment of Albasini, is under no illusion as to who made Albasini chief - it was Albasini himself. For Baloyi, Albasini was 'a white man who ended up here on treacherous pretexts'.

Did Albasini mean well for the Vatsonga? The question is a complex one; and so is the answer. A well armed man with a military background whom most of the refugees would have known or heard about in their country, must have been a natural ally to many in the new and insecure environment. His military expertise and possession of superior weaponry made him formidable in the eyes of both the locals and the refugees. In such a context Albasini and his adherents would be valuable allies to either side, especially to the white authorities, if only for policing purposes. Albasini and his adherents held something of a 'casting vote'. In the case of Sekhukhune, for example, only the English eventually defeated him.

---

<sup>15</sup> We must note that although Grandjean identifies Albasini as a 'coloured', other references to Albasini are either ignorant or unaware of this fact - so they simply describe him as Portuguese (cf Marivate D.C. 1950, Brookes 1925) or white (cf Baloyi 1965:16). Similarly, assessments of Albasini's character and his role amongst the Tsonga vary.

The fact that Albasini spoke and understood a dialect of the Xitsonga language, knew, accepted and even practiced Tsonga customs, must have endeared him to the refugee clans. With him they found some space to be themselves and the military security they needed so badly in the unstable situation of the northern Transvaal, as the Boers sought to take land from the Bapedi and the Vhavenda who had lived in these parts for a long time. However, the impression must not be created that all the Vatsonga in South Africa at the time were under the chieftainship of Albasini. Due to internecine wars and economic migration, the Vatsonga frequently travelled between South Africa and Mozambique, between Kimberly and the northern Transvaal and even between Mozambique and Natal.

But what did Albasini get in return? There were obvious advantages and benefits in being a chief of a tribe. Amongst these was the practice of *xibalo* (taxation), although this was probably paid in kind rather than monetarily. Similarly Albasini would have been the recipient of the numerous 'court fines' which his subjects would need to pay for admission of guilt in the 'civil' disputes over which he presided. More importantly, in the militarily unstable situation, Albasini had a reservoir of potential soldiers and income-generating mercenaries. In the wars between the locals and the Boers, as the Boers sought to annex more land and establish their political hegemony, the Vatsonga were at the service of Albasini. In other words, whichever side Albasini chose, they would take. In effect, this meant that the Vatsonga often found themselves either in a neutral position or on the side of the white authorities who had made peace with Albasini to the extent of making him a Natives Commissioner. Could this be part of the reason for the disdain that some locals (Vhavenda and Bapedi) had for the Vatsonga, as indicated in the 'othering' names they were given (cf. Harries 1988, Mathebula 1989, Mathumba 1993:13)? Brookes (1925:7) has this to say about Albasini and the Thonga:

Large numbers of [the Thonga who] had fled to the Zoutpansberg, then in widely primitive condition, where they gathered round a Portuguese adventurer named Albasini whom they recognised as their chief. Albasini was a strange character, who, while he would occupy a relatively low position judged by the standards of conventional morality, was possessed of great ability and firmness. Both the South African Republic prior to 1877 and the

British Administration of the Transvaal (1877-81) having found it too difficult to subdue him, thought it best to come to terms with him and to recognise him as 'Native Commissioner' of his huge district.

Creux (1924:1) recalls an incident in which Albasini wanted to open a canteen to sell European liquor and how the missionaries organised a petition, signed by most whites living in those parts, that put paid to Albasini's plans. The element of jealousy and envy for the hold that Albasini had on the Vatsonga cannot be ruled out. However, the immediate concern of the missionaries was the 'heathendom' that Albasini seemed to encourage amongst the Vatsonga with respect to things such as lobolo, polygamy and wizardry (cf. Baloyi 1965:17). Yet, some form of cooperation between the missionaries and Albasini who was, after all, a state official (commissioner) was unavoidable. The liquor canteen incident recounted by Creux above may point to a deeper feeling of animosity between Albasini and the pioneer missionaries. Such a feeling of animosity is palpable in the work of Baloyi (1965), who wrote under the tutelage of (Swiss) missionaries. The basic point of difference between Albasini and the missionaries was attitude towards culture. As indicated above, Albasini had an overwhelmingly positive view of Tsonga culture.

If it is true that Albasini was half-caste, it is not inconceivable that his 'race' probably meant that he was not altogether welcome in the White community. That way he found more acceptance among the Vatsonga, whose chief he eventually became. Albasini's attitude towards Tsonga culture stands therefore in acute contrast with that of the missionaries. Since it seems that many Vatsonga recognised Albasini as White, he obviously was more tolerant and more accepting, in their eyes, than the missionaries were.

### 1.3.5 The Basotho Evangelists Initiate work at Spelonken

On the 17th August 1873, the first church service of what was to be called the Swiss Mission in South Africa was held. While the role of Creux and Berthoud in the establishment of the Vaudoise mission can and should never be eclipsed, the role of the native Basotho evangelists should also not be underestimated. In recognition of the personal calamities of Creux (losing two children) and Berthoud (losing his wife and all his children within the space of twelve months), Brookes, (1925:9 cf. Grandjean 1917:94) seems to go to one extreme:

Those who know South Africa will read between the lines and understand. African Christianity has been built up on blood and tears, and the lives of white women and little white children have paid the price for the redemption of the black races from paganism and savagery. May they never forget, as they advance in civilisation and true happiness, what they owe to the white men and women who have spent themselves for Africa's sake.

African Christianity has indeed been built on some blood and tears, but it is not only the blood and the tears of White men and White women; it includes the blood, sweat and tears of Black women, men and children (cf. Saayman 1994:40)<sup>16</sup>, as I shall argue in forthcoming chapters. If White missionaries suffered the ravages of Africa's tropical diseases as well as falling prey to Africa's wild life; Blacks suffered and died mainly in the hands of White Christian people (cf. Gutiérrez 1993). This reality is probably a significant factor in the Basotho withdrawal from Christianity following the wars between Moshoeshe and the settlers. We need therefore to find a way of talking about the sacrifices that humanity has made for the sake of Christianity without being racist about it.

---

<sup>16</sup> A variation of Brookes' viewpoint is to revert to the old saying of Tertullian; 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'. More recently, David Bosch (1991b), basing his views on the (mis)fortunes of 16th century Christian mission(aries) in Japan, has written in favour of what he has called 'the victim image' of mission. However, the recognition of the role (virtue) of suffering in Christian mission often implies the appreciation of the role of Whites in mission against the equally remarkable, but unsung, sacrifices of Black 'missionaries'.

Having explored the possibilities of initiating mission work in the Zoutpansberg area, the white members of the exploratory expedition returned to Lesotho, where they proposed that mission work should be initiated amongst either the Gwambas (as the Vatsonga were known then) or 'the place of a chief called Moletse, whose tribe spoke a Sesuto dialect' (Ellenberger 1938:199, cf. Grandjean 1917:49).

Meanwhile the Basotho evangelists Asser Sekgakgabane and Eliakim Matlanyane commenced work amongst the Vatsonga. Their work included the establishment of a small school and the translation of the Lord's prayer as well as several Sotho hymns into Xitsonga. It was these evangelists who made the first convert, a woman whose name was only noted as Xihlomulo. She was baptised on the 4th October 1876 and renamed Lydia (Grandjean 1917:91). Although Xitsonga was as strange to the Basotho evangelists as it was to the Swiss missionaries, one can assume that due to linguistic similarities between African languages, the Basotho evangelists were positioned to learn Xitsonga much quicker than the missionaries.

One of the first acts of the missionaries was to purchase the farm Klipfontein from a Scotsman - John Watt (cf. Creux 1924:1). This farm was to become a base for further mission work. Here, the first mission station, called Valdezia in remembrance of Canton Vaud and the Free Church of Vaud was established.

#### 1.4 The ideological and historiographical problematic

Official church histories<sup>17</sup> of the Swiss Mission in South Africa (SMSA) and the subsequent Tsonga Presbyterian Church (TPC) or Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (EPCSA) tend to portray the East Coast immigrants in a way that maximises the impact of Swiss and 'Christian' intervention on their history. The (official) story begins with the Free Church of Vaud in Switzerland. It narrows down to Creux and Berthoud in Lesotho before their

---

<sup>17</sup> The phrase 'official history' is used loosely and advisedly, since there is no objective, approved, official history of either the SMSA or its successor, namely the Tsonga Presbyterian Church and later the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa. What I am referring to here are publications in mission/church newspapers, monographs on the history of the mission by Swiss and local writers, and archival documents such as minutes and letters containing 'historical' information (cf Grandjean 1917, Cuendet 1950, Bill 1965, van Butselaar 1984, Baloyi 1965, Brookes 1925, etc.)



final arrival in the Spelonken area near the Zoutpansberg. In this way, the 'Christian irruption' into the lives of the Vatsonga people is made the point of departure. It is for this reason that Switzerland, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Free Church of Vaud, Swiss Mission in South Africa, Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud are 'vital' in the construction of the story.

The impression is often given that it is the Swiss intervention that put the Vatsonga peoples 'on the map', as it were. Effectively, a dull and 'frozen picture' of the Vatsonga people is portrayed - until the whole picture springs into motion when the missionaries arrive. Harries (1984, 1994) provides a welcome, fresh alternative, and a somewhat broader, more secular picture of the Vatsonga. This provides a healthy corrective and supplement to the narrow 'salvation history' in missionary literature which presents Creux and Berthoud as the 'starting point' of the significant history of the Vatsonga.

In the process, consciously or unconsciously, the impression is often given that little of significance 'happened' amongst the Vatsonga people *before* the missionaries arrived. Of what happened *before* the 'great' intervention and *outside* of the immediate sphere of that intervention, we have to make do with a dim picture of 'pre-Christian' habits such as the practice of polygamy, ancestor worship, the practice of the lobolo custom, witchcraft, sorcery etc. In this way the tendency of relativising all other possible variables in the history of the Vatsonga people is encouraged.

Furthermore, in the 'official' histories the Swiss in general, Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud have been singled out and crowned as the founding church fathers. Neither their own wives, the Lesotho-based Paris Evangelical Missionary Society missionaries nor the known local evangelists, teachers, informants, translators and interpreters are awarded a status comparable to that of Creux and Berthoud. This is done despite the fact that there exists clear and acknowledged historical proof of the vital role of all of the above participants in the story of the genesis of the mission. The initial 'vision' of the establishment of a 'mission' in the Transvaal belonged to the Lesotho based Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and not to the Free Church of Vaud or to Creux and Berthoud specifically. The 'official histories' do not represent a blatant denial of the contributions of people other than Creux and Berthoud, in fact such contributions do get acknowledged (e.g. Rejoice 1975:2,

Grandjean 1917, van Butselaar 1984). However, these contributions are often regarded as *aides* to and *steps* in the irruption of Swiss evangelism, the initial and decisive phase of which is personified in Creux and Berthoud.

The issue here is not whether Swiss intervention was significant or not. Its significance is beyond debate and dispute. The issue is one of methodological (and theological) bias in the presentation of a history. This tendency is not the monopoly of what I have referred to as the 'official' histories of the SMSA. It is a tendency that has been widely recognised in much church and mission history writings (cf. Kalu 1988). Mission history, as is the case with much of what has been known as church history, tends to present a narrow 'golden thread' of those events that are regarded as 'salvific', thereby excluding large chunks of happenings and information considered to be outside of the salvific realm. In reality, the latter is seldom excluded in totality. Rather, functional reference to these is periodically made *in order to* clarify and emphasise aspects of the 'salvific' story. In this way, indigenous contribution is underplayed even as it is acknowledged.

Having made the charge that the story is (a) told too one-sidedly and (b) too narrowly, the challenge of how to remedy that situation still remains. The African participants in the creation of the EPCSA did not leave voluminous literature about their roles or assessments of what was going on. Indeed many of their names have been forgotten even by the missionaries who refer to them. The first convert of the SMSA, made by a Sotho evangelist Eliakim Matlanyane, is only remembered as *Xihlomulo* Lydia (the second being the name she was given at baptism), her surname having been ignored (cf. Cuendet 1950:17). Similarly, an important black couple, who played a critical role in the establishment and consolidation of what was later to become the Swiss Mission in the Magudu area of Mozambique, are only remembered by their first names; Lois Xintomane - being the two names (the first probably a baptismal one) - and that of her husband, Eliachib Mandlakisasa (once again, the first is probably a Christian name given at baptism) (cf. van Butselaar 1984:27f). This amnesia of surnames is especially surprising in the case of Xintomane and Mandlakisasa, owing to their critical contribution in the formation of the young mission in Mozambique. Schneider (1983:i), in his preface to M. Bill (1983), recounts the critical role of these 'forgotten' 'evangelists':

The members of this little Christian community came together on a regular basis in the village of Eliachib Matlakusasa (*sic*) and his wife Lois Xintomana - their surname is unknown. They came not only for fellowship, but to be served from Lois' ever-full cooking pot, or 'mbita' as it is called in Tsonga ... But at the same time, they were sharing the fruits of the labours of the translators of the first book in Tsonga. They came to hear portions of the Bible read, to pray, to exhort one another in their new-found faith, and to sing hymns.

Yet, their surnames were not regarded as important enough to warrant noting. Most local Christian 'activists' of their generation and several generations after Xintomane and Mandlakusasa have since died out. So, we have no direct access to them and their story. Therefore, in terms of accepted 'scientific' evidence, we have very little of substance emanating from the mouths of our African ancestors in the church. The construction of a local 'response' and/or perspective on Christian mission is therefore fraught with many difficulties. Yet it is a task that continues to beckon us - a challenge to be embraced concretely; beyond the missionary-bashing rhetoric, of which there is no lack. This means the development of new, ingenious and creative ways of reading both history and reality. In their study of 'the colonial encounters' between the Tswana and Protestant missionaries, the Comaroffs (1988:6) creatively paint the following picture:

We trace out a colonial encounter of the first kind, the moment when two systems of meaning and action - one imperial and expansive, the other local and defensive - begin to engage one another. The process presents itself most accessibly in letters, reports, and published works recounting the self-conscious journey to the mission field. But *there is also a discernable Tswana commentary on these events, spoken less in the narrative voice than in the symbolism of gesture, action and reaction and in the expressive manipulation of language.* The interplay, of course, was between two parties of incommensurate power; this

being reflected in the fact that the evangelists were acutely aware of their capacity to 'make' history<sup>18</sup> (Emphasis mine).

In this study, I submit that a multi-faceted Tsonga commentary on the eventful Swiss intervention into their culture exists and can be constructed, although it does not exist either in the conventional 'narrative voice' or in the conventional literary and acceptable 'scientific' moulds. My reservations about the Comaroffs basic point of departure, wherein culture and symbol are assumed to take precedence over material and *realpolitik* is that it still relies rather heavily on the missionary (Western) records for the reconstruction of an African commentary. There is a limit to any creative re-reading, and that limit is the accepted 'primary source'. It has been argued (Cooper 1994:1542), for example, that an over-emphasis on oppression may become a way of

denying colonized people any history but that of oppression, any ambiguity to the ways they might confront and appropriate the intrusions of colonizers. ... [providing instead] a sociological determinism [in which] the petty bourgeois was absorbed in mimicking the culture of the colonizer and was best understood in terms of psychopathology, [with] the working class [becoming] a labor aristocracy intent only on capturing the privileges of the white workers.

The sheer ideological and psychological effect of allowing (only) missionary sources to provide the picture of debate and discussion may mean that no authentic African response is ever constructed. One recognises the ingenuity

---

<sup>18</sup> The basic standpoint of the Comaroffs (1988), about which I am in principle ambivalent, is that, ideology, culture i.e. ritual and sign should take precedence over the material and economical in historiography and/or ethnography. It is this concern that has driven them to an interest in the 'missionary vs locals' cultural discourse. But the Comaroffs (1988:6) are quick to recoil by saying, 'this is not to deny the salience of 'concrete' political and economic forces in such processes. It is to stress that those forces were - from the very start, right down to the last instance - inseparably material and cultural, practical and symbolic'. What I do find attractive about the Comaroffs' proposition is their suggested devices of reading the African commentary on the colonial discourse out of missionary records. However, missionary records of their exchanges with local chiefs, for example, remain the primary sources of their deductions.

of devices to read the same missionary documents differently so that a subversive picture becomes possible to construct. There is indeed a sense in which it is not possible to take total flight from missionary discourse. To attempt to do so would be both unrealistic and paternalistic in the sense that we would be ascribing undue, demonic or divine powers to the missionary sources. Missionary views about either mission or Africans are not always so bad that they are not worth our attention. Nor are they so good that they are always indisputable. Missionary discourse is also a form of response, interpretation and negotiation. It should therefore neither be regarded with total awe nor avoided like a plague.

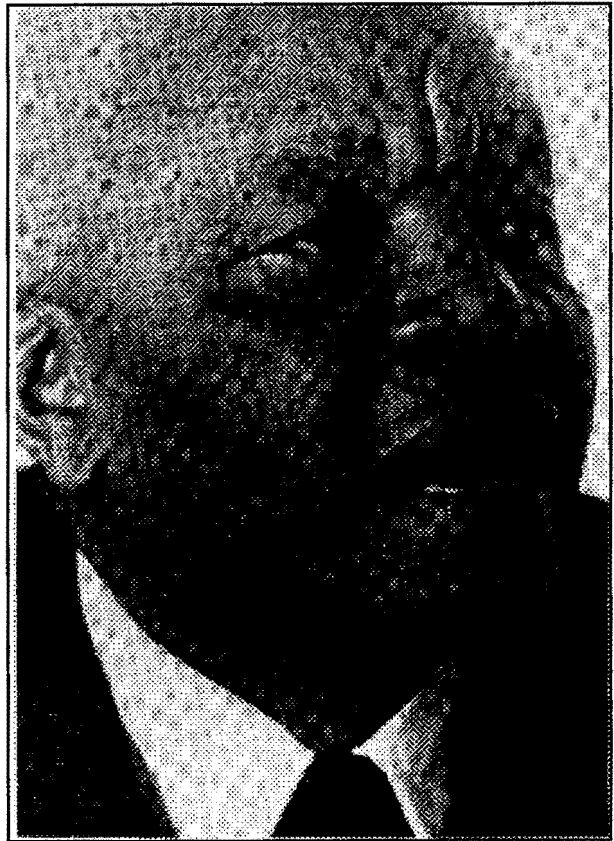


Figure 1 D.C. Marivate

What I propose in this study is neither a preoccupation with missionary sources nor a hasty rejection of these, but rather a 'side-ways' shift, towards the use and recognition of indigenous vernacular works as the raw material out of which a local commentary may be constructed. Literacy having been one of the products of the cultural encounter, it is clear that not even the field of creative local writing is free of, and unrelated to missionary influence (though our intention would not be to eschew such influence). However, in local vernacular writing, we have a case of an appropriated tool capable of being used originally, and even defiantly. This possibility is especially strengthened by the fact that the 'expected consumer' of the writing is not necessarily the missionary, even though the missionary may still be regarded as the general overseer. In missiological circles, as I shall further illustrate below, the creation of a literate culture has been regarded as one of the proud achievements of the missionary enterprise. There have also been those who have regarded it as a mechanical imposition. Yet in both cases, mere pronouncements are *made*. Few concrete attempts are made to

demonstrate, explore or problematise these pronouncements. I plan to do some of that in this study by providing a case study. In this way, I shall be going beyond both the Comaroffs (1988) and Sanneh (1989), as I shall illustrate below.

#### 1.4.1 An Indigenous Commentary

Full-blown evaluations of the missionary activities of the SMSA by local people are scarce<sup>19</sup>. A hundred and twelve years of written Xitsonga has failed to produce such assessments. Several explanations are possible for this dearth of local comment. Vernacular speakers have been assessing and evaluating in other ways than through the written, published or propositional approach. Through songs (traditional and Christian), proverbial wit, folktales, idioms and poetry, local people have formed and broadcast their assessment of missionary Christianity and missionary culture. Another possible explanation for the lack of direct appraisal of SMSA activities is the fact that publishing in Tsonga, as well as the custodianship of the very act of writing Xitsonga down, have been for many years under the total control of the SMSA missionaries<sup>20</sup>. Missionaries would not be willing to publish materials which 'did not conform to their own notion of what was good for the community for whose education they felt responsible' (Gerard 1981:181). Under these circumstances it was easier not to publish material that would be confrontational and evaluative of the missionary enterprise<sup>21</sup>. In other

---

<sup>19</sup> Strictly speaking, apart from Mathebula (1989), there is only Maluleke (1993a, 1995a). Although, I shall later argue that Tsonga writers have been indirectly evaluating missionary Christianity and thereby the SMSA, especially the historical writers whom we shall consider in the second chapter, not all the authors were consciously engaged in evaluation of the mission.

<sup>20</sup> The very first Tsonga works had to be sent to Lausanne for printing. Later, in cooperation with Morija Printing works of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) based in Basotholand, the SMSA published almost all Tsonga works, from Bible translations to school readers and text-books. This they did variously under the names, Central Mission Press (based in Doornfontein, Johannesburg), Swiss Mission in South Africa (based in Kensington, Johannesburg), and in our own times, they have (re-)named their publishing house *Sasavona* (based in Braamfontein, Johannesburg) which was the title of the first Tsonga book to be written by a native Tsonga.

<sup>21</sup> For example, as recently as 1993, my article (1993a) which is evaluative of the missionary enterprise, drew a defensively sharp (albeit welcome) response from a group of five Swiss theologians (Blaser et al. 1994), the majority of whom are former missionaries with connections to the SMSA.

words, indigenous writers would leave issues considered to belong to missionary expertise to missionaries. Unfortunately, *such issues* included the very temerity to engage in any writing with the intent for publication in Xitsonga.

It is noteworthy that, although D.C. Marivate was assisted by the missionaries Alexandre Jaques and Bernard Terrisse in the publication of *Sasavona* (Bill, M 1983:20), which was the first book to be written by a Tsonga, the *incentive* for this work was a literary competition initiated by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. It seems, therefore, that the first Tsonga writer, D.C. Marivate, was more of a restless spirit who unconsciously 'defied' missionary 'constraints' to write a novel. For his efforts he won the first prize in the above-mentioned competition.

By 1938, as M. Bill (1983:15) reports, in typical hagiographical style, some seventy odd Tsonga titles had been published, due to the

... zeal and dedication ... of Swiss missionaries [and] other societies and churches, who faced severe hardships, difficult climatic conditions, isolation, inter-tribal and inter-racial conflicts, and personal tragedy in the fulfilment of their calling to bring salvation, education and heath to the Tsonga people.

Apart from missionary control and dominance, Tsonga initiative in creative and 'confrontational' writing was later stifled by the

... South African government supported elite in the so-called 'self-governing' and 'independent' states in South Africa [who] would not take kindly to any serious criticism of their policies and positions, through the medium of creative writing (Bill, M 1983:21).

Bill makes an important point here. As the clutches of missionary control on African literature slackened, a new and even more politically conservative elite replaced them. This elite was housed under various guises and committees

within the homeland and governmental structures of educational control<sup>22</sup>. C.T.D. Marivate (1985:25) makes a similar point, but he lays the blame at the door of the Department of Education and Training:

Va ndzawulo-ya-dyondzo va ni xihlawu-hlawu hi tlhelo ra tibuku leti ti faneleke ku hlayiwa eswikolweni. Leti ta vuntswaka byo fana ni vupolitiki, vuoswi ni byin'wana vuntswaka, a va pfumeli leswaku ti lawuleriwa vana ku tihlaya. Hi yo mhaka leyi loko vakandziyisi va kuma tsalwa-mbisi (manuscript) leri mutsari a va kombelaka leswaku va n'wi kandziyisela rona va vutisaka loko ri amukeleka eka Ndzawulo-ya-dyondzo<sup>23</sup>.

In this prevailing atmosphere the vernacular writer's ability to confront and evaluate important socio-political, religious and even moral issues in his/her writings was greatly curtailed.

However, I want to propose, with reference to missionary Christianity, that while we may not find direct confrontational evaluations and objections, it is possible to construct at least a preliminary indigenous evaluation from the available Tsonga publications. Because such evaluation would not appear in direct and confrontational form, I have chosen to term it a *commentary* rather than an assessment, evaluation or appraisal. This term seems to encapsulate the unassuming and subtle manner in which Tsonga writers, as I shall argue later, managed to slip in some telling assessments of missionary Christianity and the missionary enterprise. The same can be said of the manner in which vernacular writers managed to sidestep the political landmines and restrictions and *nevertheless* make political comment.

---

<sup>22</sup> In his survey of Tsonga literature, C.T.D. Marivate (1985:23f) lists the following amongst the factors that stunt the growth of Tsonga literature: inadequate theoretical skills on the part of authors, the unwillingness of Tsongas to read books written in their own language, and monotony in the choice of themes.

<sup>23</sup> The Department of Education and Training is highly discriminative in terms of which [Tsonga] books can be prescribed at schools. Those books that contain confrontational issues such as politics, adultery etc. cannot be prescribed. As a result, upon receipt of a manuscript, publishers inquire first with the Department of Education and Training if the manuscript is prescribable [before making a decision about publication].



#### 1.4.2 The abiding impact of missionary intervention

Although other denominations and nationalities engaged in mission amongst the Vatsonga, especially in Mozambique where the Catholics and the Methodists' Robert Mashaba (cf. van Butselaar 1984:162ff cf. Bill M. 1983:34) actually 'competed' with the Swiss missionaries, it was the latter who dominated the Tsonga 'mission field'. The Swiss dominance was especially elaborate amongst the Transvaal Vatsonga. No aspect of Tsonga life has been influenced by missionary intervention more than that of literature and the creation of a literate culture. For this reason it is fair to extrapolate that the Swiss influenced the Vatsonga - at least in literature - far beyond the confines of their specific congregation. Thus C.T.D. Marivate (1985:2) states rather as a matter of fact that:

Kereke leyi nga tirhwexa mpingu wo tsala Xitsonga i ya Swiss Mission in South Africa, ... Vafundhisi vo sungula va le Swissa va kereke leyi, ngopfu-ngopfu Mufundhisi Paul Berthoud na Mufundhisi Ernest Creux, hi vona va nga pfinyana na ntirho wo vumba matsalele ya Xitsonga<sup>24</sup>.

Clearly, therefore, missionary intervention had repercussions far beyond both their religious agenda and their immediate religious constituency. When the first Swiss missionaries commenced their missionary work amongst the Vatsonga in the early 1870s, little social cohesion, ethnic homogeneity and linguistic uniformity existed amongst these peoples (Harries 1988 & 1989, Maluleke 1993a, cf. Vail 1989). Along the East Coast of the Delagoa Bay hinterland, then part of what was known as Portuguese East Africa, social cohesion and homogeneity amongst the Vatsonga was probably more advanced than it was in the Transvaal. However, there was certainly little comparable to the tribal consciousness of what has come to be known as the Tsonga/Shangaan people of South Africa today. Nor is there indisputable proof that such ethnic homogeneity existed in the century prior to the Swiss intervention amongst these peoples. The 'missionary field' that presented itself to the Swiss missionaries was complex, slippery

---

<sup>24</sup> The denomination that assumed the awesome responsibility of the writing down of Xitsonga is the Swiss Mission in South Africa, ... The first Swiss missionaries belonging to this church, especially Paul Berthoud and the Revd Ernest Creux, tackled the difficult task determining a [scientific] way of writing Tsonga down.

and therefore difficult to 'pin down'. It consisted of waves of war and famine-fleeing refugees or economic immigrants<sup>25</sup> who were moving in and out of the Transvaal and Natal during the latter half of the nineteenth century. An important step in the establishment of a firm grasp of the 'mission field' was the reduction of the Xitsonga language to writing. The development of a written language, the standardisation of a single spoken language and the cultivation of some ethno-tribal consciousness became important elements in the missionary strategies of the Swiss.

At the time of Swiss intervention, various names were used to describe the peoples constituting the host tribe - the East coast immigrants. The indigenous locals called them *Gwambas*<sup>26</sup> or *Koapas*, while the Transvaal Boers called them *Knobneuse*. In Natal, it seems that the most preferred name for these people was the *Thongas*<sup>27</sup> (pronounced *Thoga* by Bapedi in the Transvaal) and later the name *Shangaan*<sup>28</sup> took prominence. To begin with, almost all these names were 'terms of exclusion rather than inclusion' (Harries 1988:30) with a substantial pejorative nuance. Yet in the very allocation of these names, a process had begun - the process of ascribing (prescribing) some homogeneity to the East Coast Immigrants, elsewhere described as:

---

<sup>25</sup> Whereas missionary historiographies tend to explain Tsonga migration from Mozambique to South Africa in terms of internecine tribal wars, Patrick Harries (1983, & 1994) has shown that there were substantial economic reasons (gains) for Tsonga migration.

<sup>26</sup> The name *Gwamba* originates from the belief that all the East Coast immigrants were descendants or subjects of a chief who ruled those parts during the eighteenth century. But it is also possible that the name originates from a belief amongst some *Thonga* clans that the two great ancestors of all humanity are *Gwambe* and *Dzavani*. It is noteworthy that, during our times, the Gazankulu homeland authorities - especially H.W.E. Ntsanwisi, used the Gwambe and Dzavani myth to sacralise the common origins of all Tsongas.

<sup>27</sup> Note that Thonga was the name that H.A. Junod had used in his ethnographical works. Because 'the term Gwamba was unknown outside the Spelonken, Henri Berthoud [also] recommended that the mission abandon the term' (Harries 1988:35) in favour of Thonga.

<sup>28</sup> This name owes its existence to the fact that some of the East Coast immigrants were descendants of an absconded general of Shaka, the Zulu king, with the name of Soshangane. More precisely, according to H.A. Junod (1927:15), Soshangane was 'one of the surnames of Manukosi, the Zulu chief who settled on the East Coast and subjugated most of the Thongas at the time of Chaka'.

... a dauntingly confusing *pot pourri* of refugees drawn from the length and breadth of coastal south-east Africa, who shared no common language and lived in scattered villages that were independent of one another. They had few important chiefs and no concept of themselves as a community. But despite their lack of any group cohesion, these newly-arrived immigrants were defined by the indigenous peoples of the area as a group. For, by applying to them a number of genericisms, the local people attempted to exclude, as foreigners, those immigrants who had refused to join their ranks (Harries 1988:29).

After accepting the basic 'othering' name given to all the East Coast immigrants settled near the Zoutpansberg mountains of the Spelonken area - at least initially - Swiss missionaries proceeded to assume a single language for the Gwambas. This assumption soon proved to be problematic on various counts. To begin with, the missionaries had actually hoped and assumed that the people amongst whom they would work would either speak or understand a dialect of Sesotho, namely, Pedi. During their brief stay in Lesotho, Creux and Berthoud had taken lessons in Sesotho. Furthermore, their 1873 expedition to the Transvaal included Basotho evangelists who were Sotho speakers: Eliakim (Matlanyane) Jeremie and Bethuel (Raditau); as well as the Pedi speakers Jonathan and Josias (Molepo) (van Butselaar 1984:25, cf. Rejoice/Dzunisani 1975:3). These men were to play a crucial role in both the initial evangelising and in helping the missionaries to cross the bridge between *Sotho* and the 'Gwamba' language, as Tsonga/Shangaan was known then. The problem was that these men, being Basotho and Bapedi, were themselves not fluent in Xitsonga. For the first two to three years, therefore, the mission had a communication problem with the would-be converts.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the missionaries relied on interpreters for their evangelising (Harries 1988:31). Even after the crucial crossing from Sesotho to the *Gwamba* language, the latter was to

---

<sup>29</sup> This was probably responsible for the introduction of some Sotho words into today's Tsonga language. As late as 1965 the Sotho word *tlapa* (stone) was still used at the Valdezia Mission school to refer to the flat stones used for writing at the school. Similarly, an important period in the school curriculum was working in the 'garden', rendered as *xirhapa*, once again a derivation from the Sotho *Serapa*. The first book to be written in Tsonga, namely the *Buku Ya Tsikwembu tsinwe na Tisimo ta Hlengelletano*, is the classical example of the strength and influence of Sotho in the first written Tsonga.

present its own set of problems. There was simply no unified, single Gwamba language. Henri Berthoud, brother to Paul, a man who was to do a lot more in the writing down of the *Gwamba* language, recognised the diversity of 'languages' and 'dialects' included under the generic name Gwamba.

The assumption of a single language to which we referred above must also be understood in a wider context. The missionaries regarded language to be a very important, if not the most important window into the Gwamba-Thonga tribe. This belief resonated well with their Protestant commitment to making the Bible available to all peoples of the world in their native language. In the case of the Swiss missionaries, this thought was expressed well by Henri Philippe Junod (1938:29) when he declared that there is 'no better means of understanding another man's mind than by studying his language thoroughly'<sup>30</sup>. From the earliest contact, therefore, the missionaries looked up to the language as a blueprint to the wider Tsonga culture. But first the missionaries had to engage in the 'classification of [linguistic] detail into manageable units' (Harries 1988:25) - the upshot of which was the *reduction* of Xitsonga into written form. In other words the missionaries were called upon to, amongst other things, construct 'linguistic borders' (:26) in the process of their 'delineation and codification of Tsonga as a written language'. Yet, as pointed out above, underlying the entire missionary endeavour to understand and reduce to writing the Xitsonga language, was the evangelistic motif. Essentially, the entire process was not only a prerequisite for authentic evangelism but was itself an important part of evangelism. For this reason, nothing took more time from the missionaries during the early period than the study of the Xitsonga language. In addition to the Basotho evangelists mentioned above, several Xitsonga speakers contributed valuable help as interpreters, evangelists, advisors and translators for the missionaries. One is thinking here of such people as: Gideon Mpapele, Timoteo Mandlati, Efraim Majokane, Hakamela Tlakula, Mehleketo Zebedia Mbhenyane, Yosefa Mhalthala and later Calvin Matsivi Maphophe, Jonas

---

<sup>30</sup> While the use of language as a handle upon the Thonga culture is understandable and probably sensible, it is debatable whether language alone is enough to reveal the history, culture and identity of people. Without taking away from the importance of language, we must recognise that language is only one of different variables in the make-up of peoples. Apart from being limited, language is extremely flexible and, if need be, dispensable. The danger of an over-emphasis on the importance of language is therefore real.

Maphophe, Jonas Xilote, Stefan Furumele, Samuel Malale, Abraham Mavanyisi and others (mentioned in Grandjean 1917, Maphophe 1945, Cuendet 1950, Rejoice/Dzunisani 1975, van Butselaar 1984 ).

Once the written language started to take some form, linguistic and orthographic controversies notwithstanding<sup>31</sup>, the Swiss missionary establishment began to assume its role as 'creator' and guardian of the Xitsonga language - at least the written language. Although there was some competition from other missionary societies, the Swiss missionaries emerged as the undisputed custodians of the Xitsonga language and its 'dialects' for many years. Their possession of publishing facilities meant that they could determine what could and could not be published in Xitsonga. More importantly, they could influence the

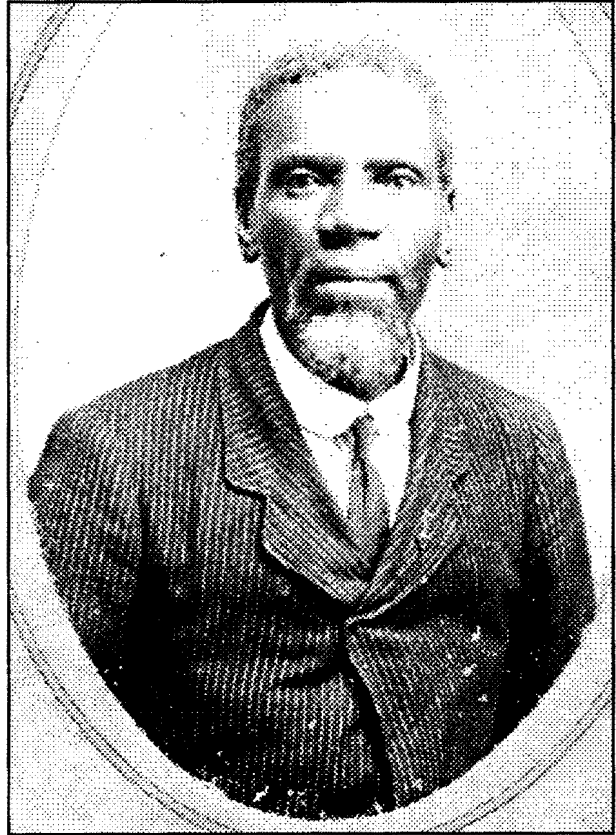


Figure 2 Samuel Malale

form, direction and themes of the 'new' and budding Tsonga literature. In fact, the first half century of Tsonga writing was dominated by the religious theme. In this period, "... white, European, and predominantly Swiss, writers and translators" (Bill, M 1983:17) ruled the roost.

However, since the vernacularisation of Christianity in general, and that of the Christian Bible in particular, was seen to be an integral part of mission, as well as an important step in the 'civilisation' of pagan peoples, Swiss missionaries regarded their custodianship of the Xitsonga language (and arguably the Tsonga people) mostly unproblematically and even positively. It is part of my aim in this thesis to *problematise* this custodianship of the

---

<sup>31</sup> See M. Bill (1983:69). It is noteworthy that a serious internal controversy between the Swiss missionaries working in Mozambique and those working in South Africa concerned the question of the independence of Ronga from Tsonga and vice versa. This controversy exposed the fallacy of initial suppositions that *Gwamba* referred to one people speaking one language.

Tsonga literate culture. This will be done by engaging in a specific *reading* of some selected Tsonga works written by native Xitsonga speakers with a view to the construction of what I will call an indigenous commentary on missionary activities.

#### 1.4.3 Can an Indigenous Commentary be Constructed?

The writing down of the Xitsonga language and the initiation of a literate culture amongst the Vatsonga people has proven to be the most celebrated achievement of missionary endeavour. In our times, the conviction has grown that, next to the proclamation of the gospel, the creation of a literate culture amongst the Vatsonga is the most valuable gift that Western Christian mission has given the Vatsonga. It is a conviction that has been shared both by missionaries and some native Xitsonga speakers. A minister of the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, fruit of Swiss missionary endeavours, summed up this sentiment when he chose to ``place on record the expression of our sincere gratitude to the Swiss people who loved us when we were still unlovable in 1875, who taught us to read and write, to pray and to praise God the creator'' (Rejoice/Dzunisani 1975:8). A group of mostly former Swiss missionary theologians (Blaser *et al.* 1994:197) appeal that the

dynamic release of the printed word might not be seen as ... a tool for limited evangelistic purpose, but rather as the offer of a crucial service to future generations of a specific Southern African community (Transvaal *and* Mozambique), over against the domination of the English, Afrikaans and Portuguese languages. This process successfully engineered a revolutionary empowerment; it virtually prepared three million Africans for the inevitable encounter with the literary and technical advances of the twentieth century.

Clearly, therefore, there is a strong conviction regarding the abiding value of the reduction of Tsonga into writing. In fact, the above quotation puts even less premium on the evangelistic motive of this process. The transformation of the spoken language into written form is described as a ``crucial service to future generations'' and a ``revolutionary empowerment'' far beyond the religious gains of the evangelisation motive. Even Bible

translation is viewed in terms of having given 'rise to a substantial literary corpus' (Blaser *et al.* 1994:197) - quite apart from (beyond?) the evangelistic significance of Bible translation.

In this study, I wish to move beyond the largely sterile issue of whether the writing down of the language was tantamount to the creation of a (new) language-culture or not (cf. Harries 1988 & 1989, Maluleke 1993a, 1995a & Blaser *et al.* 1994, Chimhundu 1992, Ranger 1989, Vail 1989). Whether a 'new' language was created or not, the fact is that we now have, amongst the Vatsonga, a literate culture which derives, in large part, from the intervention of the Swiss and other Western missionaries. I propose to move beyond either virtuous or critical pronouncements about the writing down of the Xitsonga language. I aim to begin to investigate the manner in which some Vatsonga have both appropriated and used this 'crucial service' and alleged 'revolutionary empowerment' that the 'printed word' is supposed to have provided. What I am proposing is this: beyond discussing the pros and cons of either missionary instrumentality or indigenous 'benefits' regarding the writing down of the Xitsonga language, let us stop and listen to Tsonga writers. What have native Tsonga speakers done with the power of the 'printed word'?

The real issue, for our purposes at least, consists of the examination of the manner in which native speakers have used the 'dynamic printed' word *vis-à-vis* the missionary intervention. This direction of enquiry has already been attempted by the missiologist Lamin Sanneh (1989, 1994). For Sanneh, translation is an abiding trait of Christian evangelisation. In the context of our discussion such translation includes the literalisation of the indigenous language - for Christianity is, like Islam, a religion of the book (cf. Sanneh 1989:29).

Yet Sanneh's 'translation' or 'vernacularisation' has often included the transformation of an oral culture into a literate culture - in most of Africa. My contention is that the transformation of an oral culture to a literary one evokes issues beyond the scenario of vernacularisation as painted by Sanneh. There is a difference between a process of mere vernacular adoption by Christian missionaries and a process where vernacular adoption includes such fundamental restructuring as the transformation of the host oral culture into

a literate one. In his enthusiasm for Christianity's logic of translation, I want to suggest that Sanneh overlooks this difference (cf. Maluleke 1993d). Sanneh's proposal can be turned on its head. He argues, for example:

...translation is a highly problematic enterprise. The original is assumed to be inadequate, or defective, or inappropriate, but at any rate ineffective for the task at hand. Thus a peripheral role comes to be assigned to the original mode. In addition, translation forces a distinction between the essence of the message, and its cultural presuppositions, with the assumption that such a separation enables us to affirm the primacy of the message over its cultural underpinnings (Sanneh 1989:31).

I would put it to Sanneh that given the context wherein a literate culture encounters an oral one - with the former always bent on transforming the latter, *the original has historically been in fact assumed to be adequate and appropriate* for the 'task at hand'. Nor is the distinction between 'the essence' and its 'cultural underpinnings' historically sustainable. The fact that 'missionaries accepted the indigenous culture as the final destination of the message' (Sanneh 1989:93) did not stop them 'creating' *that* culture and *that* medium which alone they considered capable of containing and spreading the gospel, i.e. the literate culture. Nor did it stop them from determining (often prolonging) the duration of the process of *transferring* from the 'original' to 'indigenous culture'. Similarly, the urge to prescribe the ultimate effect of the translation has been strong and long-lasting.

Ultimately, the credentials of Sanneh's thesis can only be explored (proven, disproven and/or problematised) by a focused, clearly delimited and contextual case study. This is what I intend to do in this study. The significant commentary on Christianity's 'history' of translation must be formulated, not from the point of view of the 'senders' but from the point of view of the 'recipients'. I have argued elsewhere that Sanneh's assessment of Christian translation is constructed mainly from the Western point of view (Maluleke 1993d).

We must confront the overdue task of constructing local and recipient *responses* to 'Christianisation' beyond the often circular and self-justifying



constructions cast in Western perspective. Such constructions, especially if and when they pose as local and indigenous, must always be considered inadequate. Yet we must recognise the possibility of various and even divergent local 'responses'; so that no single construction must be given the status of being either the only one, or necessarily the most fundamental. For this reason alone, the task must be approached with caution, humility and yet with appropriate scientific rigour.

Admittedly, the construction of a local commentary on Christian mission is a hazardous exercise. At the centre of most of the problems of the reconstruction of indigenous comments on Christian mission is the *lack of sources*. This matter is indicative of the hegemony of Western literate and enlightenment culture in reconstructive research. In this culture sources often mean written material either in archives or in published form. Furthermore, a *hierarchy* of 'sources' is also assumed, wherein some sources are primary, others secondary and yet others simply unacceptable. Since African peoples and their cultures are far too young to have a considerable body of own publications and archives on missionary Christianity - publications being dominated by missionaries and the relevant archives being in Europe and America. The emergence of empirical research, particularly in missiology (cf. Daneel 1987, Anderson 1992, 1993) with an emphasis on oral sources has been a welcome deviation from the tyranny of books and archives.

To return to written sources, the impression must not be created that only missionaries have written about mission. Missionaries have certainly dominated even vernacular writings - between 1875 and 1938 (dubbed the 'missionary era' by Bill, M 1983:11) only Swiss missionaries published in Xitsonga<sup>32</sup>! Yet as M. Bill (1983:18) points out:

In spite of the zeal and the linguistic insight which the early missionaries applied to their language studies, they still, for the most part, spoke a form of the Tsonga language to which its

---

<sup>32</sup> M. Bill (1983:14) refers to a work entitled 'How to write *Shitronga* (*Shangaan*) under phonetic system, by Hudson Ephraim Ntsanwisi [which was] printed by the Lovedale Institution' in 1929. This then would be the first 'scientific' publication by a Tsonga speaker.

mother-tongue speakers gave a special name, 'Xineri', the language spoken by the 'vamuneri'<sup>33</sup>, i.e. the missionaries.

Even when Africans began to write themselves, albeit under the 'tutelage' of missionaries, much of their works served to praise missionary efforts and/or the Christian culture they had ushered in. Alternatively, much local writing would simply be quiet on the missionary phenomenon. In the area of mission for example, although local people had participated actively in mission since its inception in 1873, direct published reflective works on the Swiss mission by local people are few and far between (e.g. Baloyi 1965, Maphophe 1945, Maluleke 1993a, 1994a and 1995a). Since Tsonga literature was a direct product of missionary activities, the religious theme was prominent in the early publications. Although many Tsonga works today are not as markedly religious and moralistic, the theme itself has not completely disappeared.

## 1.5 Sources

### 1.5.1. Tsonga Newspapers<sup>34</sup>

Prior to D.C. Marivate (1938), some recognition must be granted to native contributors to the missionary Tsonga newspapers such as the *Valdezia Bulletin*, and *Nyeleti Ya Mixo* which was later to be known as *Mahlahle* (which is the appropriate Tsonga word for 'Morning Star'). These newspapers were both precursors and important fora for the development of creative (Xitsonga) writing. The main aim of the newspapers, especially *Nyeleti* and *Mahlahle*, was Christian propaganda and the fostering of national unity amongst the Vatsonga clans. The first editors of the *Nyeleti* were A.A. Jaques in the Transvaal and H. Guye in Mozambique. In the first edition of *Nyeleti* (January 1921 Vol 1 No. 1) its aims are outlined in the following manner (my translation):

---

<sup>33</sup> M. Bill (1983:18) regards the word 'muneri' as a derivative of the Afrikaans 'meneer', a widespread designation of a White missionary..

<sup>34</sup> The much older *Nanga ya Bathonga* is not mentioned because of its very short life and the fact that it was totally a missionary venture with little if any native input. Information on these newspapers and perusal of copies of these newspapers was obtained by the researcher, at the UNISA Documentation Centre for African Studies (*Valdezia Bulletin*), William Cullen Library and the Giyani Archives (*Mahlahle* and *Nyeleti ya Mixo*).

1. To announce that night is coming to an end, old customs of darkness must come to an end because the sun of the Lord which causes old customs of darkness to perish is here. This newspaper will combat all evil things, beer drinking, malice, deceit, theft and agitation.
2. To proclaim the deeds of the Lord in the country of the Vatsonga as well as in other countries.
3. To try and unite the Vatsonga clans; those of Khosen, Hlengwe, Gaza, Spelonken, Nkuna, Mpfumu, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Shilubana and Maputo. These people are members of the same body, it is therefore necessary that they know and help one another.
4. To teach about better living, health, housing, agriculture, clothing and primary health. The writers will no longer be the missionaries and other Whites only, native teachers and other people with something constructive will be invited to write.
5. The main aim of *Nyeletu Ya Mixo* will be to explain the Word of God. The root of all misfortune and all suffering is this: We have neglected God and spiritual matters, concentrating only on worldly things and things of the flesh.

The *Valdezia Bulletin* stands out because it was, unlike the *Nyeletu*, a venture that was largely independent of the missionary establishment - an indigenous initiative. The first issues were hand-written, cyclo-styled, and sold at one penny a copy. Nor was Christian propaganda an important item on its agenda. It was founded in 1931 by D.C. Marivate, in 1931 and he was later joined by Etienne Tlakula. For some reason the *Valdezia Bulletin* later changed its name to *The Light: Ku Vonakala ka Vatsonga*. Frequent contributors were Marivate himself, Abel Mpapele and Etienne Tlakula. The contents of the newspaper included news items on, education, farm labour, political issues such as poll-tax, African Independence, land issues, etc. Clearly, therefore, D.C. Marivate and his colleagues found useful 'practice' and 'freedom' as writers in this newspaper. Due to financial, technical and political problems, the newspaper lasted for only seven years.

### 1.5.2 Published Sources to be Considered

My study will confine itself mainly to creative published works by Tsonga writers. Grammars, school readers and scientific works will be left out. In the second chapter, which deals with historical and biographical literature, I will analyse the works of Baloyi (1965), Maphophe (1945), Sihlangu (1975) and Shilubana & Ntsanwisi (1958). Three Tsonga novels, by Mtombeni (1967), Nkondo (1973) and Thuketana (1968) will be the subject of chapter three. In chapter four, the plays of Nkondo (1974) and Mtombeni (1974b) as well as a selected number of poems will be considered. The poems will be loosely categorised in the following manner: (a) children's poems, (b) poems in praise of missionaries and their legacies, (c) Poems that comment on the Christian life-style and (d) those that comment on religion and politics. In the fifth chapter broad conclusions yielded by the entire study will be drawn. In that chapter, I shall suggest ways in which our findings may contribute to the creation of a Black missiology of liberation.

Each work or category of literature to be considered will be read with a consistent (though not inflexible) grid of questions in mind. First, I give a summary of the work, quoting extensively to highlight significant themes or features of the publication. Secondly, pertinent issues raised by the author(s) in question are picked up. Other important considerations in each review will be: (a) elements of the author's depiction of and attitude towards cited African customs, (b) the attitude of the author towards Christianity and Western Culture with (c) the drawing of some conclusions at the end. As much as possible, the literature under review will be allowed to coin the terms and delineate the categories instead of the imposition of a rigid grid.

## 1.6 The question of legitimacy

How legitimate, or how valid is the *voice* of a literate African middle class? On the basis of my choice of methodology and focus in this study, this question is a very real one. It is an ideological question. Those who can read, especially those who can engage in so-called 'creative' writing, are often part of the local *petite bourgeoisie*. How free are members of this 'class' from the hegemony of the dominant Western culture for them to be truly indigenous in their writing? Having 'earned' their right to membership of the 'educated elite' club, aren't they likely to be unduly critical of the culture and life-style of the lower classes? Doesn't the very fact that the African educated elite are a minority, disqualify their 'voice'? If our answers to these and other questions were an unqualified 'yes', then the only alternative route to go would be one of conducting interviews with 'the people' at the grass-roots rather than 'listen' to the voices of an educated elite.

The reality of an African middle class must be readily accepted. This is a problematic phenomenon. It can be viewed positively as a noble end-result of economic development in South Africa - part of the process of empowerment. Yet it could equally be pointed out that the creation of a 'Black middle class' is divisive to the Black community and that it leads to self-hate. Some South African Black theologians have long recognised the problem in their search for appropriate interlocutors (cf. Mofokeng 1989, Maluleke 1995b).

It is no longer enough to speak of the Black community in a general and a glib fashion. Who, within the Black community, are the *subjects* of Black Theology? For Black theologians like Mofokeng (1989) and Mosala (1989b), the *Black workers* are the legitimate interlocutors of Black Theology. However, for this important theoretical stance to bear fruit, Black Theology would need to connect to the struggles of Black workers. Furthermore, whereas it had been vogue to assume that all black-skinned theologians did Black Theology, it has since been recognised that not "all black people [can] do Black theology" and therefore Black Theology does not amount to "any theology done by any group of black people" (Mosala 1989b:143).

In defence, let me briefly submit the following. I have already indicated my recognition of the valid and desirable possibility of a variety of local

voices. In saying this, however, I must not be understood to be posing a situation where a limitless, equal and criteria-less array of constructions is possible in Black Theology. The very fact that I insist on the creation of a local or indigenous response demonstrates my resolve. The variety I am envisaging is still circumscribed by the local and the indigenous. Failure to grant and recognise variety can easily lead to the creation of closed systems in which our theological discussion degenerates and becomes 'less and less a dialogue about the most important questions and more and more a power struggle about who is to be allowed to speak' (Stackhouse 1988:22).

Firstly, it is true that not everything in the praxis of African people can provide us with meaningful response to missionary intervention. Equally not all African people have taken a critical distance from Western Christendom. In reality, the wretchedness of the African situation means that even where glimpses of such appropriation exist, they must still be carefully pieced together, owing to their fragmentary nature. This must be done through a principled and careful reading - a reading that listens to the silences as well as the pronouncements. Such a procedure is required whether one has chosen the grassroots people or African writers as one's interlocutors. In other words, the fact that people can be described as belonging to the grassroots does not, in and of itself, mean that these people are immune from the 'corrupting' influences of 'ruling classes'.

Secondly, the tendency of Black people to despise themselves as personified by the culture of the lower classes - which could be variously described as 'heathen', 'backward', 'uncivilised', 'under-developed', the 'working class' or even 'barbaric' - exists amongst some learned Africans. As recently as 1994, a learned African (Sono 1994:xviii) pours scorn on African culture, describing it, amongst other things, as 'rigid', 'past-orientated', 'anti-intellectual', 'non-literate' (:1), 'resistant to conceptualisation' (:4), etc. Since this may be a common tendency amongst the learned African middle class, due to many years of Christian and Western socialisation, is my choice of focus for this study not unconstructive, with predictable conclusions? To begin with, I believe that the tendency of self-hate amongst learned Africans must first be exposed if and where it exists, so that we may be able to deal with it. Whereas the debate about the social location and subsequent choices of the 'Black middle class' may have started in the case of theological and

social studies, it has not reached the same level in respect of vernacular works.

Part of the reason for the strong dose of 'self-hate'<sup>35</sup> is the Christian and Western socialisation process that the learned African has undergone. In confronting vernacular literature, I as an intellectual am confronting my own self - having been socialised in very similar ways. Therefore, a 'listening into' the issues, constructive and not-so-constructive, raised by vernacular writers offers me a priceless opportunity for self-criticism. Furthermore, whilst it is true that learned Africans form a class of their own, we must recognise that members of this class are seldom accepted as equals by their White European counterparts - certainly not by the missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The racist exclusion mechanisms used to keep learned Africans out were numerous. Within the church context, I have referred above to the differentiation between a *Muneri* and an Evangelist or minister. The first meant White and the other two mean Black. And there were ecclesiastical, social and economic ramifications to these distinctions (cf. Maluleke 1994a). Within the South African context of Apartheid, we need not belabour this point. What is meaningful is to note the different ways in which members of the African learned class responded to this exclusion. Some responded by trying harder and harder to be acceptable in the 'European league'. This was often done by way of repeated demonstrations of the worthlessness of African culture (as in Sono 1994). Yet others gave up trying, reverting to an affirmation of their culture and the conscious *possession* of such Western initiated institutions as churches, Christianity and schools. Often this had to be done subtly and carefully, for fear of unfavourable recriminations. It is such divergences of response to 'exclusion' that I wish to explore by means of my suggested methodology.

However, something else is happening simultaneously. In the very act of taking vernacular writings seriously, the vernacular is being 'destigmatized'- to borrow a term from Sanneh (1989:1). For it is not only the voices of the African workers or masses that are often ignored; even the *written voices* of Africans - especially if written in the vernacular - have not been taken

---

<sup>35</sup> See my review (Maluleke 1995c) of Sono (1994) for an explanation why I describe Sono as being engaged in an act of self-hate whilst being imprisoned by the European paradigm of modernity.

seriously. Missiological pronouncements about the virtues of local culture, languages, and contextualisation have not always translated into a healthy respect for the local, vernacular, written word. This is quite different from the issue of the content of these vernacular works. After all, missionary archives contain much defamatory and unfounded information about indigenous peoples, their cultures and their religions. Nor are these always readily accessible to local researchers, many of them remaining in European universities and denominational archives<sup>36</sup>. Yet missiology in general and mission historiography in particular continues to regard these as *bona fide primary sources*.

An important step in the construction of a Third-World, local, indigenous, contextual, African and Black response is the destigmatisation of local sources. Lastly, to put it crudely, we cannot break the Western stranglehold on theology, simply by competing with the Westerners on their own turf. Yet, in order to shift turf, we must elevate local resources and local resourcefulness to the level of equality with Western sources. In other words, only we can grant theological and scientific status to local vernacular works. Such granting of status is one of the central aims of the present study.

---

<sup>36</sup> In the case of the SMSA one must point out that a substantial volume of their archival material is to be found at the William Cullen Library at the University of Witwatersrand, the Giyani archives and at the University of South Africa's 'Documentation Centre for African Studies'. However, a considerable volume of archival material still remains difficult to access being situated at Lausanne and Neuchatel in Switzerland. In addition, the bulk of this material is in French and German, the languages of the missionaries. It is notable that the Swiss missionaries, having laboured so long and hard to master the Tsonga language, never developed a programme whereby local Tsonga speakers would be equipped with either French or German. For this reason, many Tsongas regard French as the language which missionaries employed to discuss 'sensitive' and 'confidential' issues. Church ministers and elders tell of many occasions when, in the heat of debate and argument, the missionaries would resort to French - thereby excluding the native speakers. However, I am aware of at least two Tsonga speakers who acquired at least a working knowledge of French, having learnt French mostly by the ear, as it were; these are: the late Revd D.C. Marivate and the late Prof H.W.E. Ntsanwisi.



### 1.6.1 Broader Historical and Missiological Issues

I have argued above that, for local indigenous theological interpretations to emerge, and not merely be wished for - something that has been done for a long time - we must begin to shatter, in concrete ways, the barriers that have stigmatised aspects of local cultural resources. Such a project is at once literary, historical and missiological.

According to Kalu (1988), African churches have begun to show a greater interest in church history. This has occurred at the level of academic institutions but also significantly at the denominational and parish level. However, as Kalu (1988b:10) points out, most of the burgeoning histories 'betray the uncomfortable fact that there has been little reflection on historiography'. He explains further:

...the proliferation of parish histories is not marked by high quality. As centenaries of various hues are celebrated, church bodies churn out self-justificatory, confessional histories which are myopic and churchy. These works pay no regard to the canons of historiography and ignore both secular history and the realities of cultural contexts. They are so narrative that they lack interpretation welded to larger issues of significance. For example, the challenges of imperialism, youth, women, and the domestication of Christian values are often ignored (Kalu 1988:10).

I want to depart from Kalu's obviously well considered opinion. Although clearly irritating to a historian, a lack of conscious and overt reflection on historiography does not necessarily mean an absence of historiographical awareness and bias. Without the necessary training and given some of the obstacles cited above, vernacular writers can hardly be expected to display the kind of sophistication that Kalu expects of them. Furthermore, with specific reference to indigenous and vernacular 'histories', I would not go so far as to charge that 'they lack interpretation welded into larger issues of significance'. Most of these works are pregnant with interpretation. But their *issues of significance* are not always what I or Kalu would perceive to be issues of significance. Kalu's well-meaning caution can very easily

'dismiss' valuable primary texts written by indigenous people in the vernacular.

Another important consideration is the various *uses* different historians and cultures make of history<sup>37</sup>. *Church history* is especially problematic because of the width of meaning both in the Biblical concept of 'church' as well as in the practical manifestation of the church phenomenon in the world. That problem must be appreciated conceptually apart from the equally momentous problem of the relation between church history and general history. It is the former problem that is being tackled by the suggestion of an 'ecumenical perspective' to church history<sup>38</sup>. In the case of the latter problem, the 'solution' has been sought around the suggestion that while there can be no feasible demarcation of 'church' from 'general' history, ''Christian historiography is a means of showing the unique Christian perception of reality''. However, even this is not a total solution<sup>39</sup>, since it does depend, to some extent, on one's theological stance *vis-à-vis* ''the particularist, unique claims of Christianity'' (Kalu 1988:12)<sup>40</sup>. However, once Christian historians have admitted their faith bias as well as the historiographical tradition within Christianity, their interpretation of all events in the world become *understandable*, though not necessarily *acceptable* to all. From an African point of view, Kalu (1988) debunks both the

---

<sup>37</sup> For example, Kalu (1988:11) argues that in traditional African societies history was used *ideologically and purposefully*.

<sup>38</sup> Kalu (1988) lists three (unsatisfactory) models of church history (and their various manifestations) namely, the *institutional* (:13f) approach, *missionary historiography* (:14f) and the sub-model of *nationalist historiography* (:16) which seeks to close the gaps in some types of missionary historiographies.

<sup>39</sup> Even after making the decision to abandon a rigid demarcation between general and secular history, the question of balance of concern between factors 'internal' to Christianity and those 'external' to it has also been raised. One of the most basic premises upon which the historiographies of Sanneh (1989, 1993), Stanley (1990) and Kool (1993) are built is the conviction that factors 'internal' to Christianity (theologically and existentially) must take priority over 'external' factors. The question is: Is this valid, or does the concern arise mainly because the question of the relationship between general and church history has not been properly resolved, at least in the minds of these authors?

<sup>40</sup> Depending on where and how one is theologically inserted in the raging interreligious dialogue debate, one's approach to the unique claims of Christianity can greatly affect the slant of one's historiography.

institutional and the missionary historiographical traditions. ``The story begins among African communities which had viable structures for existence. It delineates the permeation of Christian influences, values and structures and the varieties of the reactions, however ambiguous, of the communities to the Christian change agent'' (Kalu 1988:19). From a perspectival point of view, Kalu (1988:19f) totally embraces the 'ecumenical perspective'. However, his understanding of this perspective is significant:

(a) *Ecumenism calls for a wider understanding of the church.* By this, Kalu means more than interdenominational awareness and respect but also the manner in which the church is viewed *vis-à-vis* the world.

Church history is, therefore, *not* the story of the role of white missionaries in cross-cultural mission. Missionary incursion into a living African context must be put in its proper perspective. The church is *not* the denominations transferred from Europe to Africa. ... African history must be the history of African peoples and not merely the history of invaders (Kalu 1988:19).

(b) *The study of church history must eschew elitism* : ``Every period, every aspect of culture, every community, every class of people is an ingredient in a holistic approach to history'' (Kalu 1988:20).

(c) *Since Christ came for the poor, the task of the historian is to trace out the history of the gospel in relation to the poor and the oppressed.* For this reason, the commentary of the poor, Black and marginalised must be especially sought after.

(d) *An ecumenical approach calls for a dialogical methodology.* Condemnation and denigration of other religions is therefore completely rejected in an African historiography. This must be done, not only because Africa has always been religiously plural, but also because African religions have been generally open and tolerant to other religious systems, especially Christianity and Islam. The historical problem to which I have alluded above, has long been acknowledged in the efforts of contemporary church historians, especially Latin American and African church historians. Enrique Dussel (1992:3) and other Latin American historians have voted to reject established

church historical meta-structures because of their ideological and thematic bias. The Latin Americans have discovered that it is not enough - in the case of sectional, national or continental histories - simply to reformulate and revise local history, without revising the established super-structures of so-called global history. Regarding the ``bringing of good news to the poor'' [as the] ``absolute and primary criterion of a *Christian* interpretation of (the) history ...'' (:1) Dussel<sup>41</sup> (1992:3) clarifies his position as follows:

We need a *complete* re-reading of the history of the church as a whole and from its beginnings in order to understand the history of Latin America. In effect, the ability of historians of the Latin American church to interpret the Christianity that ``reached us'' from Europe in the fifteenth century *critically* depends largely on their particular view - starting from the criterion of ``bringing the good news to the poor'' - of the overall course of the Christian event in world history. So a complete re-reading of the history of Christianity is a task - facing Christian historians in the Third world.

An important element is the resolve to *revise* and thereby *own* ``the overall course of the Christian event in world history''. In this Dussel touches on a very important problematic. Third World interpretations of the Christian and/or missionary event are often restricted to the so-called missionary era. It is as if Third World Christian analysts and interpreters are not 'allowed' to venture beyond the now established 'truth' of Medieval, Constantinian and Reformation periods, for example<sup>42</sup>. As highlighted in a few different ways above, there are several dangers in a pre-occupation with missionary sources and missionary discourse. Sectional revisionist 'histories' written in 'resistance' (cf. Cooper 1994) to an 'evil' yet domineering past are unlikely to move beyond the confines determined by that past. This has been a painful discovery for those amongst us, who have called for the writing of a Black

---

<sup>41</sup> Although largely chronological, important themes and categories in Dussel's periodisation are; colonialism, Christendom, good news to the poor (1992:1), the church of the poor (:7), mercantile protestantism (:8) and neo-colonial dependency (:9).

<sup>42</sup> Bediako's work (1992) is an original and encouraging departure from this.

mission history (cf. Kpobi 1993). Often, such Black history depended so heavily on White history that it could be safely concluded that it was comparable to White history in inverse form.

Writing specifically, within our context, Pillay (1992) tackles this very problem. He implies that we cannot employ ethnocentrism to extinguish ethnocentrism<sup>43</sup>. In church and mission history, ethnocentrism<sup>44</sup> has also led to the view that God is on the side of one's group (Pillay 1992:132). However, various types of 'ethnocentrism' must not be regarded either as being exactly the same or equal. The ethnocentrism of the Bushmen in the Kalahari desert does not carry the same weight as that of Americans, for example. This is the problem that still confronts us. The 'victims' and 'recipients' must still make sense of the senseless racism and ethnic genocide they suffered at the hands of others. Therefore, contrary to what Pillay (1992:134) says, it is often not only possible but necessary 'to tease White history from Black history' without denying 'our past'. The ethnocentrism of the past must be confronted head on. Those who are considered to be 'outside history' - to borrow a phrase from Dussel (1976:12) - cannot be catapulted into history without dealing with the devices that were used to keep them out.

What Dussel is reminding us of above is that the missionaries of the so-called 'great missionary era' did not invent Christian mission. They cannot therefore be regarded as 'inventors' or even 'pioneers' in the generic sense of the words. It is necessary to understand the 'Christian event' quite apart from them, both diachronically and synchronically. Not only must we wrest the missionary era discourse from the missionaries, but we must do so with the events preceding and following that era. Lastly, there is an important element that we can glean from Dussel's criterion for a Christian interpretation of history. Firstly, apart from whether we agree with Dussel's particular criterion or not - bringing of the good news to the poor - Dussel still helps us to recognise the importance of theological orientation in the

---

<sup>43</sup> In church historiography this phenomenon has manifested itself in ideologically-based church classifications (Pillay 1992:122) and the proliferation of denominational histories (Pillay 1992:123).

<sup>44</sup> Pillay (1992:122) argues, for example, that the well established classifications of churches in South African church historiography are neither theologically based nor historically accurate - but rather, they are ethnocentric fabrications.

interpretation of the 'Christian event' as he likes to put it. Not that it is possible to interpret without any theological lenses, but rather that it is possible to be unconscious of the lenses that one may be using. In this study, Dussel's criterion of 'bringing the good news to the poor' will be an important, across-the-board undercurrent in all the elements of the grid with which I shall read Tsonga literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE COMMENTARY OF TSONGA HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS

#### 2.1 General Introduction

In this chapter, I shall consider Tsonga works that attempt a history of the SMSA or provide information on aspects thereof. There is a serious lack of this type of works - i.e. works that engage in direct and conscious reflection on either missionary Christianity or the SMSA. For this reason, in the four works to be considered in this chapter, we will have virtually covered all that indigenous Tsonga literature has so far produced in this broad category<sup>1</sup>. Needless to say, this is a valuable group of books for the purposes of this study.

There are two types of historical works which I shall consider, namely (a) histories of the SMSA, (b) national histories of the Vatsonga {often combined with (a)} and (c) biographical works. In the first category, I shall consider the work of S.J. Baloyi (1965) and those of Sihlangu (1975) and Shilubana & Ntsanwisi (1958)<sup>2</sup> in the second category. The work of Maphophe (1945) is the only autobiographical work by a Tsonga who was personally connected with missionary Christianity<sup>3</sup> and with Creux and Berthoud.

This genre of literature requires some courage to write since the author cannot hide behind his characters, fictitious plots and resolutions. Given missionary control over Tsonga publications, it is not inconceivable that this 'control' partly explains the scarcity of works in this genre. Here the author must construct and evaluate. Of course, even in this genre, the author may

---

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with my declared aim of considering only indigenous Tsonga literature, I exclude Cuendet (1950), Junod H.P. (1977, 1960) and Terrisse (1954), although they technically fall within the same genre. I shall however use these as points of reference.

<sup>2</sup> This work is part biography and part national history, as we shall see in the discussion below.

<sup>3</sup> The biography of John Mboweni (Junod H.P. 1960) is the only other published biographical work on a local 'missionary'. For the rest, we have D.C. Marivate's (1941) biography of David Livingstone, and that of Aggrey of Africa by Maboko (1956).

still use linguistic and ideological devices to avoid blatant construction and evaluation. People writing under missionary tutelage would naturally find it hard to be overtly and overly critical of the missionary enterprise. My thesis however, is that even the hagiographies of local writers are stamped with a commentary that cannot be simply equated with Western missionary opinion and bias. Even more significantly, I suggest that - for those of us who seek to 'hear' local voices in and about mission - vernacular works by indigenous people constitute a fundamental 'category of primary texts' in the same league with other established 'primary sources'. Although these works were often written under the 'guidance' of missionaries, the target readership was local rather than international. This fact had the effect of allowing vernacular authors to speak from the depth of their hearts to their kith and kin in spite of whatever strictures missionary tutelage imposed.

Biographies have long been viewed as being 'not quite history'<sup>4</sup>. As stated in the previous chapter, this genre of works can reveal aspects of indigenous commentary that 'established' historical sources might not. In any case, these works fit in with my conviction that the endeavour to hear the various local and indigenous *voices* can only succeed if we change turf with regards to 'sources'. Whilst the identified literary and historical problems with regard to these genres are very important, they are not critical for our purposes - which is to look beyond and behind the superficial and 'factual' literary and historical problems. A missiologically relevant history is interested not primarily in all of the historical detail, but the 'heart' of the matter, i.e. the dynamic of interaction between African communities and Western Christian missions.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Starfield (1988).



## 2.2 In Praise of our Heroes and Pioneers

### 2.2.1 *Rhuma Mina*<sup>5</sup> (Baloyi 1965) - Summary and Overview

The significance of this book is that it was the first and only attempt by a local Tsonga person to write a conscious and comprehensive history of the 'church'<sup>6</sup>. Until today, Baloyi's is the only monograph on the work of the Swiss by a local person. For this reason, I shall treat this book at some length. Secondly, it is a book whose whole content is a 'story' of the SMSA, at least of its first seventy-five years (1875-1950). According to C.T.D. Marivate (1985:22), Baloyi was commissioned (probably by the SMSA) to write this book as an improvement of the quality of Xitsonga in a work covering the same theme and period (75 years) by Cuendet (1950). Although it was meant as an *improvement* of an earlier work, Baloyi put his own stamp on it in several ways. For example, he adopted a strange and somewhat irritating style of omitting to refer to the 'characters' by name.



Figure 1 S.J. Baloyi

This book is an aesthetic piece of 'flowing Xitsonga' in which 'beautiful' Switzerland - a country likened to a white flower amongst the countries of Europe - is portrayed as having contributed her own sons and daughters to South Africa in general and to the Tsonga in particular. It is a country whose beauty defied linguistic skills (:6). The book is primarily about 'our heroes' (:6 *tinhenha*) and 'pioneers' (:7 *vamabulandlela*). They were compelled by the Word of God to leave their beautiful country and come to '... a country of great and frightening darkness'<sup>7</sup> (:6). We are given here

<sup>5</sup> The title means 'Send Me!'

<sup>6</sup> Mathebula (1989) is an historical study of the SMSA, with specific reference to ecumenical relations. M. Bill (1983:24) is correct in saying that Calvin Maphophe (1945), in his autobiography, (cf. 2.3 below) 'gives for the first time the black view of missionary history'. However, only Baloyi (1965) attempted a conscious history of the church.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere he speaks (:8) of countries which 'groped in darkness with regard to life in general and religion in particular.'

a narrative of the call of our (two) heroes as well as a window into their family circumstances. Baloyi (:9) gives us a good picture of their preparations; acquisition of elementary knowledge in medicine, English, cooking, building and marksmanship. Their painstaking journeys first from Switzerland to Cape Town, second from Cape Town to Lesotho, and thirdly from Lesotho to the Transvaal are recounted graphically. Sekhukhune's rejection of the missionary delegation is described briefly and depicted brutally: 'I have [enough] White missionaries, I require no more dogs' (:14) is Sekhukhune's answer to their request for permission to evangelise his people<sup>8</sup>. A black convert of Stefanus Hofmeyr's (although both names are not mentioned) is reported to have greatly discouraged the missionaries from proceeding; described the Vatsonga, to whom the missionaries were destined, as a people of 'hardened hearts, with an uncontrollable love for things of darkness' (:15).

Batho ba gona ba na le sehlare se sengwe se ba reng ke 'mondo'<sup>9</sup>,  
sehlare seewe ga se go dira gore batho ba bolawe<sup>10</sup> (:15).

However, according to Baloyi, this description of the Tsonga served to strengthen the resolve of the missionaries. Baloyi also describes Joao Albasini in a bad light<sup>11</sup>. He describes him as:

... mulungu loyi a nga ta a tifambela hi vuxumbadzi, kutani a sukela tiko ra ka vona ni vanhu va rona. Hi ku kuma Vatsonga va

---

<sup>8</sup> Sekhukhune himself is briefly described as a chief who had the ability to fight and defeat the Boers (Mabunu).

<sup>9</sup> The Tsonga word and spelling is *mhondzo*. It refers to a liquid, foul and intoxicating substance which people accused (especially of witchcraft and sorcery) were made to drink. It was believed that this drink would cause the culprit to betray him/herself sometimes causing culprits to go as far as confessing. The drink was served on the culprits only by a Mungoma who rationed it out to the accused. Invariably, the one who is strongly suspected would be given the largest dose. The belief was that only the culprit(s) would get intoxicated by the *mhondzo*.

<sup>10</sup> These people have a certain medicine called 'mondo' - a medicine responsible for the murder of many people.

<sup>11</sup> In this Baloyi departs from Cuendet (1950:11), Bill J-F (1965), and van Butselaar (1984:24), whose descriptions of Albasini are neutral and matter-of-fact.

nga si xa emahlweni, mulungu loyi u fikile a va xavisela swibamu, kutani hi nkarhi-nyana a va a fumile a kondza a tiveka hosi ya vanhu lava. Loko vuhosi bya Mabunu byi fika etikweni ra le N'walungwini wa Transvaal, byi kumile nuna loyi a tivula hosi ya Vatsonga, a tshama le kusuhi ni ntshava ya Riyondze<sup>12</sup> (Baloyi 1965:16).

Furthermore, Baloyi charges that Albasini did little to improve the lot of the Vatsonga, especially in religious and cultural matters, only deriving taxes from them<sup>13</sup>.

U ringetile ku va ni tihuvo to tenga timhaka, ni ku humesa tinyimpi ti ya hlasela. Ta mikhuva ya vona, yena a nga tisivelanga. A va ya engomeni a pfumela. A va tirhisa Vangoma a pfumelela. Loko va nwise vanhu mhondzo yena a a pfumelela leswaku swi endliwa. Ku biha ka swilo leswi ku nga tshinyiwi hi mulungu loyi yena wan'wini a ku hi yena hosi ya Vatsonga<sup>14</sup>.

According to Baloyi, the missionaries' arrival at Joao's fort at Piesangskop coincided with a witchcraft dispute. In this dispute, Joao clearly took the side of the accusers and sanctioned the decision that the accused be made to drink the 'mhondzo' - a practice which Baloyi clearly detests and regards as unchristian. Baloyi reveals that the missionaries confronted Albasini and

---

<sup>12</sup> ... (this) white who ended up here on treacherous pretexts, having left his country and his people. Since the Tsonga were still in darkness, this white man sold guns to them, rapidly enriching himself to the extent of declaring himself king over these peoples. When the Boer authorities arrived in the northern Transvaal, they found this man calling himself the chief of the Tsongas, and he stayed near the Piesangskop mountain.

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Sihlangu (1975:14-15) who traces Albasini back to his short sojourn at the Madras farm in Bushbuckridge, prior to his settlement in the Northern Transvaal, views him in better light. 'He taught, agriculture, [the dignity of] labour, harmonious living, the value of education and development to the Tsonga people (:15)''.

<sup>14</sup> He tried to establish courts to settle disputes and to send out regiments into war. He did not forbid the cultural practices of the Tsonga. They made use of circumcision schools, he obliged. They relied on Vangoma, he still obliged. He even allowed the practice of forcing people to drink the 'mhondzo'. Although all these practices were evil, this White man - who regarded himself as the chief of the Tsonga - did not intervene.

managed to save the three culprits who, having been affected by the *mhondzo*, were sentenced to death. This unidentified group of three who were saved from death became, according to Baloyi, the first three converts of the missionaries<sup>15</sup>.

Baloyi (:21) tells of an incident where one of the missionary wives was bitten by a scorpion. The Vatsonga suggested that she goes to an old man (by the name of Xidzinga) for the Tsonga believed that rubbing the beards of an old man against the wound would heal it quickly. Many of the difficulties that the missionaries encountered are then described - disease, unfamiliar weather conditions, wild animals, drought, plagues and mediation in inter-tribal and other disputes .

The missionaries spoke against the drinking of alcohol (:25) right away but ``people continued with their drinking, including the converts, the majority of whom continued to drink''. The Basotho evangelists receive scant and brief attention (:25). Two Vatsonga chiefs, Xinyami (meaning darkness) and N'wa-Dzinginya are said to have resisted conversion, though they did not discourage their people from adopting the new religion. The arrest of Creux and Berthoud by the Boer authorities is described and condemned by Baloyi (:25f). According to Baloyi (:27) the reason the Boers arrested ``our heroes'' was their fear that the Blacks would be corrupted and misled by foreigners. For three months, the missionaries were incarcerated. Meanwhile the Vatsonga looked after their wives, protected them and treated them very kindly. Yet, Baloyi is at pains to show that the missionaries still loved the Boers and prayed for their forgiveness<sup>16</sup>. The missionaries even went to the extent of facilitating the

---

<sup>15</sup> Other published histories, e.g. Cuendet (1950), van Butselaar (1984), Grandjean (1917), do not confirm this piece of information.

<sup>16</sup> Baloyi's negative view of the 'Mabunu', (Boers) is very transparent. ``...from a long time ago, the [Black] people of the Transvaal despised the 'Mabunu' '', he writes (:40). The fact that they arrested the missionaries did not help things. Baloyi ridicules the claims of the Transvaal Republic to be a Christian country with their authorities claiming the same (:26). He also criticises their negative attitude against the Uitlanders: ``How nice it is when you dispossess other people of their country, yet; when yours is under threat, you do not like it at all'' (:27), says Baloyi in derision of the Boers. He also points out that the 'Mabunu' would ``not allow a Black person even to peep into their worship service, let alone worship with them'' (:33). In contrast, ``in Switzerland, [White] people are so advanced that it was no longer an issue to worship with Blacks''. Equally, Creux's wife is commended

payment of 'swibalo' (taxes) to the Boer authorities - a practice that effected a softening of attitudes in the Boers (:33). He refers to the fact that some locals sought shelter and refuge with the missionaries during internecine wars - probably the wars between some Venda chiefs and the war between the Vhavenda and the Boers. But the missionaries were brave in accepting refugees because they had guns, says Baloyi.

The Tsonga chief, Njhaka-Njhaka (again not mentioned by name) who lived with his people at the place presently called Elim is introduced as 'the chief who had many wives' (:30). This chief refused conversion resolutely, but some of his wives accepted the new faith<sup>17</sup>. Baloyi gives lengthy and touching comment on the death of the missionaries' children and of the wife of one of the missionaries (:31, cf. :34f). He emphasises the fact that these people died in a country which was backward in Western medicinal knowledge (:31), implying that, had they stayed in Switzerland, they might not have died. Baloyi likens the first missionary's death to Abraham's offered child, Isaac. 'Why does the church of the Vatsonga build a chapel at the site of the grave, as a reminder of the very first Swiss flesh which became dust in the Spelonken area because of the Word?' (:31), asks Baloyi rhetorically. The missionaries also taught the Vatsonga modern methods of farming (:32). From Baloyi, we also get a glimpse of one of the missionaries' furlough in Switzerland (Paul Berthoud). Whilst in Switzerland he had, amongst other things, the task of convincing, his compatriots that Blacks were human, religious and not cannibalistic (:37). Whilst in Switzerland, Berthoud also expressed his dismay over the racism of the 'Mabunu' who disallowed Blacks and dogs from their churches: 'It was inconceivable for Berthoud that a people with souls could be equated to dogs by a people who claimed to be Christians of the Calvinist ilk' (:38). A missionary artisan, brought to Elim to explore the possibilities of building a dam and a canal, was sought from Switzerland. On his arrival he noticed the manner in which Tsonga women were responsible for physically crushing maize.

---

for 'loving Black women as befits other human beings ... unlike the 'Mabunu' who despised Black women' (:33). But the missionaries were yet to play an even more crucial role as peacemakers in the war between the Venda chief Makhado and the Boers (:40, cf. 42f).

<sup>17</sup> Mijen (1979:1) tells how after Njhaka-Njhaka had refused even to allow the missionaries Creux and Berthoud, the day was saved by one of Njhaka-Njhaka's indunas by the name of Hlanganisa who proposed that they be accepted because they possessed a form of 'witchcraft' which could prove beneficial.

He wondered why such a physical chore was not done by men (:39). Soon a hydro-powered maize-mill was installed.

Baloyi's description of the conflict between Makhathu the Venda chief and the 'Mabunu' is enlightening (:42f). On seeing that Blacks were less developed, the Boers thought that Blacks should be at their command and service - being forced to pay taxes. Yet, the Vhavenda were in their own country, Baloyi points out. He outlines the causes of the conflict. The 'Mabunu' required that Makhathu should move from his castle in the Zoutpansberg mountains (:43). The Boers also required every Venda household to pay taxes to them. Also, the Boers issued an instruction requiring all Blacks to hand in their guns to the Veldcornet, 'so that only Whites could possess guns' (:43). When Makhathu refused to comply, the Boers attacked his kraal but they were defeated. On their second attempt, Baloyi reveals that the Boers sought Black reinforcements, who like slaves had to do as told<sup>18</sup>. This time the outcome of the war was undecided. Then the Veldcornet appealed for one of the missionaries to intervene (:44f). This the missionary did so well that he was given some money by Makhathu as a token of thanks (:44).

The missionaries realised that the place of origin of the Vatsonga people was on the East Coast, and soon one of them (Paul Berthoud) went there. Although Cuendet (1950:31) gave space to the story of Yosefa Mhala-Mhala, Lois Xintomane and Eliachib Mandlakusasa, (cf. van Butselaar 1984:26), Baloyi only makes a brief and vague reference to this (:46) or any other participation in the mission by locals. Baloyi relates an incident witnessed by Paul Berthoud and his crew at Lydenburg whilst on their way to Mozambique. They found a White man savagely beating up a Black man, who was not fighting back (:47). Meanwhile this White man's wife watched unperturbed. Berthoud's wife intervened on behalf of the Black man. But this earned her scorn and ridicule from these Whites. We hear again that although the Tsonga chiefs in Mozambique did not embrace Christianity, they fortunately did not forbid their subjects (:52). Baloyi sees clear connections between education, development and Christianity. He concludes by painting broad pictures of the width of the mission of the Swiss, urban ministry, Mozambique ministry, ministry to the

---

<sup>18</sup> In his account of the same conflict, Cuendet (1950:27) reveals that the Black re-enforcements were the Magwamba (Tsonga). It appears that the Boers were able to strike a deal with Albasini, the chief of the Tsongas.

jailed, the lepers in Pretoria, the mentally disturbed and those on death row.

### 2.2.2 Of no Historiographical Use?

According to C.T.D. Marivate (1985:22), Baloyi was commissioned<sup>19</sup> not so much to write an independent history but to re-write Cuendet's *Rivoningo Emunyameni* (Light in darkness) for 'the Tsonga in this work did not flow properly'. Accordingly C.T.D. Marivate (:22) finds Baloyi's omission of names greatly irritating, so his evaluation of Baloyi - at least with regard to historiography - is swift and harsh:

Loko i ngi ku lo ololoxiwa ririmi ra *Rivoningo emunyameni* a swi ta va swi antswile. Buku ya *Rhuma mina* (1965), hambi leswi yi nga ni Xitsonga xo khuluka, a yi pfuni nchumu hi tlhelo ra matimu hikuva mavito ya vafundhisi ya susiwile. Loko munhu a yi hlaya, a nga swi tivi leswaku i mani a nga endla yini<sup>20</sup>.

Is Marivate justified in describing Baloyi's work as being of 'no historiographical use'? For our purposes, we would answer that question in the negative. Moreover, Baloyi's work sticks very closely and faithfully to the 'historical facts' as recorded in Cuendet (1950) and others. In other words, it is possible to *verify* the factual content of history by reference to the missionary sources - almost on a one to one basis. Not only does Baloyi compare well with missionary sources in terms of 'factual content', he writes from the same disposition and approach. The Swiss, especially Creux and Berthoud, are 'heroes' and 'spiritual giants'. They bring *light* to a country and a people in dreadful *darkness*.

---

<sup>19</sup> Although, C.T.D. Marivate (1985) does not specify who commissioned Baloyi, it is fair to assume that it was either the Swiss Mission in South Africa, then known as the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, or some individual missionaries. In his translation of Washington (1901), Baloyi (1953) thanks the late Samuel H. Eberhardt, Elisabeth Eberhardt and Jeanne Borle for 'they made me a translator and an author'.

<sup>20</sup> It would have been better to embark on an improvement of the quality of language in *Rivoningo Emunyameni*. Although the book *Rhuma Mina* is written in flowing Tsonga, it contributes nothing in terms of history because the names of missionaries have been removed. As a result, upon reading it, one never knows who did what.

However, one point must be granted; if Baloyi's commissioners expected him to re-write Cuendet sentence for sentence and paragraph for paragraph, he certainly 'over-stepped his terms of reference'. He uses the occasion very effectively to add his very own voice, not in contradistinction to Cuendet but his own voice, all the same. Baloyi sometimes adds information that is lacking in Cuendet, e.g. about Albasini, and he adds a little more detail on the war between the Venda and the *Mabunu*. For this reason, we must conclude that Baloyi had access to sources other than those used by Cuendet.

Historians would inevitably raise other problems with both the work of Cuendet and Baloyi. Kalu (1988:10) laments the poor quality of many 'parish histories', which tend to be myopic, churchy, self-justifying and confessional. There is no doubt that it is possible to regard Baloyi's as such a confessional history. However, the 'canons of historiography' which Kalu (1988:10) would like historians to observe are, as he himself was well aware, a matter for debate. As is the case with biographies, there are perspectives and angles which only such 'confessional histories' can uncover.

Another problem can be stated thus: Not all missionary works fail to observe the 'canons of historiography', but virtually all indigenous vernacular works would fail to satisfy that criterion. This thrusts dominant Western 'sources' and their 'canons of historiography' back into the centre. The danger of Kalu's line of argument therefore, is that if we accepted the criteria he proposes, namely, the following of the 'canons of historiography', only works written by professional historians - the overwhelming majority of whom - are Western, would qualify.

### 2.2.3 The *Mabunu* vs *Vaneri* dialectic

Baloyi changes Cuendet's title and replaces it with his own *Rhuma Mina* (Send Me!) and yet he still operates, by and large, with the missionary dialectic of light versus darkness, development versus backwardness (etc) which dovetails with Cuendet's title. Can we read into his change of title a suppressed and elementary discomfort with the light versus darkness dialectic? Can we detect here a shift of emphasis? As one of the learned amongst the Vatsonga, it is not inconceivable that he had become somewhat uncomfortable with too *black and white* a picture of this history. He gives in this book a



clear indication of his political views, especially in assessment of the 'Mabunu' in their war with the Venda under Makhathu<sup>21</sup>: 'Because they were White, they thought it was their right to be feared and obeyed by the [Black] people whom they called 'skepsels' (Baloyi 1965:42). Yet, in their war against the Venda, Baloyi (:43) points out that 'the skin-colour of the Whites did not give them [magical] power to defeat Blacks''. Nor is Joao Albasini spared Baloyi's sharp evaluation simply because he was White. Albasini is censured heavily and ridiculed. He is described as a White man of 'crooked habits' (:16) who did nothing for the Tsonga, electing instead to exploit them.

In his repeated contrasts of the 'Mabunu' against the Swiss missionaries, Baloyi underscores a conviction that skin colour, in and of itself, is immaterial. Nor is mere verbal assent to Christianity of any significance. For him, therefore, the main difference between the *Mabunu* and the *Vaneri*, despite the sameness of their skin colour, common ecclesiastical ancestry, as well as their blood relations (:38), was that the latter obeyed the Word of God and answered; send us! whilst the former used the Word of God as an occasion for discrimination and dispossession. On this Baloyi has such strong feelings that he even paints the Swiss in glowing colours, as people who were so advanced that skin colour was of no consequence to them<sup>22</sup>. In the *Vaneri vs Mabunu*

---

<sup>21</sup> It is probably indicative of his belief in the value and abilities of Blacks that Baloyi chose to translate the work of a former slave, Booker T Washington (1901), and to adapt the story of Shaka the Zulu king into a play (1960) - the very first play to be written in Tsonga. It seems that he found great inspiration in these works and wanted to share this inspiration with other Tsonga speakers. Therefore, while he concurred with the *Vaneri* on the backwardness of the Tsonga before the former's intervention, he clearly believed that, with teaching, the Tsonga had the same capabilities. A few times in his 'disputations' against the 'Mabunu' he points to the fact that Blacks were human (too), that they could become Christian and that they had souls. His translation of the title of Washington's book *Up From Slavery* into *Ku Hluvuka ku huma eVuhlongeni* (Progress/Development [comes] out of Slavery) may also be taken as an indication of his belief that slavery can be overcome.

<sup>22</sup> In this Baloyi was probably overstating his case because tradition amongst the Tsonga tells of many discriminatory practices by the Swiss against their Tsonga converts. Nor were there such numbers of Blacks in Switzerland as to test their race attitudes. In his autobiography, Maphophe (1945:42), which we shall discuss in full below, described one occasion whilst he was in Switzerland, where he felt, 'like a fly fallen into a milk container'. He also tells of an incident, whilst in Switzerland, where H.A. Junod took him to an anthropologist, who measured his eyes and lips to verify that indeed he was an African (Maphophe 1945:41)! See also my articles (Maluleke 1993a,

dialectic Baloyi betrays an important 'personal agenda' beyond the concerns of Cuendet or even the missionaries whose story he is relating. Whether Baloyi deliberately intended it or not, the *Vaneri vs Mabunu* dialectic has the effect of diluting the strong light versus darkness dialectic which is so prominent in Cuendet (1950).

#### 2.2.4 Missionaries: Noble Heroes Amidst People in Darkness

A striking feature of Baloyi's work, in common with other missionary histories, is its hagiographical nature with regards to missionaries. His censure of native people and their beliefs and practices is strong. This tendency can both be criticised (Kalu 1988) and explained. Often the aim of such histories is to accompany centenary celebrations. The books of Cuendet (1950), and by implication those of Baloyi (1965) and of Terrisse (1954) were all part of the celebration and remembrance of seventy-five years of missionary work. Such an occasion is hardly suited for either rigorous scientific interpretation or self-critical evaluation. The impulse to reminisce in self-satisfaction is often stronger than that of critical appraisal. Alternatively, the aim may be one of touching the consciences of potential contributors so as to raise funds for further missionary work. Since most of these works were either written by missionaries themselves or under their tutelage, there is little wonder that missionaries tend to be glorified in them.

Baloyi surpasses Cuendet in his *verbal* glorification of the missionaries, calling them heroes and spiritual giants, advanced far ahead of both the *Mabunu* and the *Vantima* (Blacks) in every imaginable way. The nobleness of their decision to forfeit the comforts of their most beautiful country - their magnificently built churches, their privileged culture and background in which coffee, tea, sugar and cheese were abundant (:7) - is paraded again and again. Their journey to Africa and those undertaken within are given with lengthy detail. The extremely negative response they received from Sekhukhune, who apparently called them dogs, did not discourage them (:14). Their illogical and unfair incarceration by the Boer authorities did not stop them from loving the Boers. So noble were the hearts of the missionaries that they encouraged

the Blacks to pay taxes to the same Boer authorities who had jailed them. Their hospital at Elim, once established, served both Black and White, for there was no hospital in Louis Trichardt (:54). Moreover, the missionaries were still prepared to intervene as mediators in the conflict between the Vhavenda and the Boers (:44).

The deaths of missionaries and/or their children are for Baloyi, an important illustration of their sacrifices and their spiritual maturity. The first child's death he likens to the story of Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice his child in order to please God. The Vatsonga of his day, are chastised for neglecting the grave of this child. The fact that during his return to Switzerland, Berthoud lost two other children and his wife, is told in minute detail (:37f). The advanced state of the missionaries is demonstrated by their introduction of modern farming methods, their knowledge of medicine as well as the building of a water canal and a maize mill (cf. Terrisse 1954:17).

#### 2.2.5 The Vatsonga: Backward and in Darkness

Whilst the one side of Baloyi's account is 'our noble heroes', the other is the backwardness of the 'people in darkness'. We are indeed called upon to appreciate the sacrifices of the Swiss because they could have saved themselves much unnecessary experiences - some of which cost Swiss lives. Apart from the fact that Albasini is said to have exploited the Vatsonga, Baloyi criticises him, especially for allowing and even joining the Vatsonga in their heathen practices (:17f). He allowed them to send their children to circumcision schools, consult Vangoma and use the drinking of *mhondzo* as a way of identifying witches and sorcerers. For Baloyi, the badness of these practises is so self-evident that he does not even engage in disputation arguments against them. In the case of Albasini, it was not that he did not know and realise that these practises were heathen, backward and bad; rather, Baloyi believed that Albasini deliberately chose to keep these poor souls in darkness, so that he could exploit their ignorance. Another backward thing cited is the fact that the Vatsonga believed that rubbing an old man's beard on a scorpion-bite wound would heal it and stop the pain. Their chiefs, such as Xinyami, N'wa-Dzinginya, Njhaka-njhaka etc., were the most hard-headed when it came to accepting Christ (:25, 52). One chief is identified as 'the chief who had many wives' (:30). Other sources, as we shall see in Shilubana &

Ntsanwisi (1958) below, point to polygamy as an important source of conflict between the Vatsonga and the missionaries. Baloyi also hints at the 'hard labour' that African women suffered at the hands of their husbands (:39) though he seems to attribute this particular case to underdevelopment rather than seeing it as an intrinsic cultural trait. Beer-drinking is also pointed out as another bad habit, which was made worse by urbanisation (:59). Although Baloyi does not discuss the unchristian habits in any detail, save in the case of the incident in Albasini's kraal, he leaves no doubt in the mind of readers about his own view of these. However, it seems that his main concern was more to tell the story of missionary sacrifices and successes (:59f) than to discuss the details of the backwardness of the Vatsonga.

Notwithstanding detail and historiographical finesse, the style, content, bias and perceivable intentions of Baloyi's work are typical of missionary histories of the SMSA and the Vatsonga people (cf. Grandjean 1917, Junod 1927, Cuendet 1950)<sup>23</sup>. However, as demonstrated above, Baloyi puts his own personal stamp on the history.

## 2.3 The Fly Fallen into a Bowl Full of Milk<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3.1 *Ta Vutomi bya Mina* (Maphophe 1945) - Summary and Overview

Calvin Madzivi Maphophe (1864-1955) and his brother, Jonas Maphophe were two of numerous young students at the new school started by the missionaries and the Sotho evangelists at Valdezia. Later they became domestic servants to Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux (cf. van Butselaar 1984:25). Eventually, both were to become part of the very first crop of qualified teachers, evangelists and

---

<sup>23</sup> A notable exception in this regard is van Butselaar (1984). In his study of the work of the SMSA in Mozambique van Butselaar explores the basic thesis that the mission was initiated by Africans who were only later joined by missionaries. He also departs from classical Swiss missionary writings in his assessment of local culture. Jean-Francois Bill (1965), in his assessment of the progress towards autonomy of the Tsonga Presbyterian Church under the tutelage of Swiss missionaries, is also atypical. As we shall show in the last chapter, J-F Bill departs in several fundamental ways from previous Swiss assessments of local Tsonga culture.

<sup>24</sup> This is an expression used by Calvin Maphophe to describe how he felt, on an occasion where he was delivering a speech to a hall full of Whites in Switzerland. We shall return to this expression later.

ministers of the new church. In 1909, Jonas Maphophe and Samuel Malale became the first Blacks to be ordained ministers in the SMSA (Bill, J-F 1965:137). Calvin Maphophe was ordained two years later, on 26th April 1911, in Lourenzo Marques.



Figure 2 Calvin Maphophe

Maphophe starts his story entitled, *Ta Vutomi Bya Mina* (The story of my life) by telling a brief and speculative history of his clan (:3-8).

Although he was born in the Zari area, which was later to become part of Southern Rhodesia, his father came to the Transvaal due to the succession wars of Muzila and Mawewe, the children of chief Manukosi. Maphophe's father, whom he describes as 'a man of many wives, having eight wives' (:9) was one of numerous Gwambas settled near Albasini's fort at the Piesangskop (Riyonde) mountain. Here the young Maphophe grew up, looking after his father's goats and cattle, until he was thirteen years old.

In 1877, he and his brother Jonas started attending the school at Valdezia. This disturbed his father and other elders who summarily prevented them from going to school<sup>25</sup>. So the two brothers escaped from their home and went to live at Valdezia 'where the missionaries would protect them' (:9)<sup>26</sup>. Maphophe tells the story of their escape-journey in some detail. It was a journey undertaken at midnight, when it was dark and fearful. The two brothers took courage, held hands and swam through the Levubu river. On reaching the other side, they shouted 'We are safe! (:10)'. At day-break, they arrived

<sup>25</sup> Maphophe does not explain precisely why his father was so opposed to their school attendance.

<sup>26</sup> It seems that a few of the first young Christians had to run away and stay with the missionaries for protection. Cuendet (1950:17) in a section on the first Christians, describes how Xihlomulo, the first Christian convert sought protection from the missionaries: 'She had suffered at the hands of Vangoma, dismissed by her husband, had lost all her children, her brothers tormented her. They wanted her to be remarried, so when she refused, they beat her up. Xihlomulo fled to the missionaries, and they protected her ...'.

at Valdezia<sup>27</sup>. After telling their story to the missionaries, they concluded that Creux would take Jonas, whilst Berthoud took Calvin, the autobiographer (:10). After a few days their father arrived, in pursuit of his children. Paul Berthoud persuaded the old man that his children were very safe with the missionaries. This seems to have satisfied the old man. Staying with the missionaries was, according to Maphophe, very worthwhile: 'My job at the Berthoud household was to play with the children'. However, although by now Maphophe knew quite a lot about God, he was still to be converted. So he started, whenever he got a chance to be alone, to pray for conversion.

On kneeling down I would pray, God 'change my evil heart'. That is how I always prayed. One day, whilst kneeling, saying that prayer, my heart became very sore, and I felt as if the Lord Jesus who was crucified because of my sins, was there with me. This caused me much agony. Then I started to cry. I tried to stop myself from crying. But I could not. (:11)

Later, in a conversation with Berthoud, Calvin's conversion was completed. It was on a clear moonlit evening and Berthoud pointed at the moon and said: 'All right my child, see how clear the moon is, similarly the Lord Jesus is able to clear your heart of all sins' (:11). Maphophe also recounts an occasion when the Swiss missionaries visited, (with him) the Berlin missionary Schwellnus, who worked at Tshakuma amongst the Venda. It was on the occasion of the birth of Paul Schwellnus who was later to become a minister himself. Maphophe also recalls the visit of Coillard, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society missionary (:12). He also tells of another journey to Saulspoor in 1878, where Henri Gonin, a Swiss missionary working in the Dutch Reformed Church lived. Two Blacks 'chauffeured' the missionaries's cattle-cart, namely Jacob Mabulele and a Hlayisi. Whilst at Saulspoor, Maphophe got a chance to attend the school there, although the language of instruction was Pedi.

Maphophe also reports that it was in 1878 that the missionaries started to preach in Tsonga, having used Sotho with interpreters since 1875. The Maphophe

---

<sup>27</sup> At the risk of reading too much into the narrative, it seems that the symbolism of the journey through the night, the crossing of the river, and the daybreak arrival portrays a movement out of darkness into light - the kind of 'crossing' a Tsonga 'heathen' was expected to undertake.

brothers were baptised towards the end of 1878. During the sickness of the Berthoud children, of which Baloyi had much to say, Maphophe reveals that ``...I had to tend to these children day and night, for nearly a month (:13)``. In 1879, Maphophe reports of four Black youths who were sent to school at Morija, namely Stefan Furumele, Jonas Maphophe, Samuel Malale and the biographer himself. (At least three other Vatsonga had already been sent to Lesotho - Gregory, Gideon and Mukoki (:14). This journey was led by Coillard. Berthoud (whose wife had died by then) and Creux accompanied the entourage as far as Pretoria, where they met his brother Samuel Berthoud and a ``Miss`` ``who had been sent to come and look after the motherless children of Paul Berthoud`` (:14). During the journey to Pretoria, Calvin Maphophe had the responsibility of ``looking after the [Berthoud] children who were now without a mother`` (:13). The journey to Basotholand went via Kimberley and Bloemfontein where Coillard needed to report on his expedition to the Zambezi.

Adolphe Mabilie took charge of their education at Morija. But when war between the Basotho and the English broke out, school was closed and the 'foreign students' were put under the care of Dr Casalis and the missionary Dyke. Casalis had medical responsibilities for those wounded in the war. ``Some died on arrival, and we had the duty of digging the graves and burying the dead`` (:14). Then disaster struck, when one of the Tsonga students, Mukoki, contracted a strange and fatal disease. He was buried at Morija. The remaining Tsonga students stayed on in Basotholand for seven years (:16). In 1886, they returned home as qualified teachers. On arrival at Valdezia, the missionaries gave each a chance to go home and visit with family.

The autobiographer recalls that on arrival at his home near the Riyonde mountain, he and his brother Jonas found a large group of people gathered to drink. He and his brother took the opportunity there and then, to preach to these people before they started drinking. The two brothers took turns to preach. They preached about ``Jesus who was crucified`` (:17). To the two brothers' surprise, their own father commented somewhat positively after their sermons: ``Have you heard what you are being told? About the mourning of the great king who will be mourned by all the countries of the earth?`` (:17), asked old man Maphophe. After this the two brothers, now fully trained teachers and evangelists, would be separated by duty. Jonas went to Shilubane, where the SMSA had just sent a missionary, Eugene Thomas, and a ``Miss`` by

the name of Jeanne Jacot.

As fate would have it, the autobiographer was paired with his former boss, Paul Berthoud, and sent to Mozambique in the Magudu area<sup>28</sup>. A matter of concern to the missionaries before setting off on this journey was the question of Maphophe's marriage (:18). But this did not happen because time was short and girls were scarce in the church (:18). The entourage to Mozambique included Timoteo Mandlati, Jonas Xilote (who was also the cart driver) and their families. Zakariya Mathye, who was to do the cooking for the missionaries as well as Mahlekete Mbhenyani who would lead the oxen. So on the 4th of May, 1887, they set off for Mozambique.

Maphophe tells a story of brutality which resembles that of Baloyi (1965:47). On the journey, a fight broke out between a White man and a Black man. Their cattle-cart was going through a very muddy patch, so their cattle were struggling. But the White man blamed and scolded the Black man for this. So they started fighting. But a group of other Blacks (servants) and Whites came to the rescue of the White man. Restraining the Black man, they tied him to the front wheel of the cart and allowed his White counterpart to beat him up savagely. Berthoud's wife intervened, but to no avail, for the Black man was beaten until his tormentors were tired. The convoy stopped for a few days at Lydenburg with the Berlin missionary, Bauling before resuming their journey. Bauling lent the entourage both an ox-wagon and its driver - Lucas Mbambo. Another incident which Maphophe relates concerns the White man who approached the convoy whilst they were resting. He asked the missionaries where they were going and what they were going to do. Upon hearing their answer the White man said:

Oh, poor souls, these people [Blacks] were very happy until now, but now you are going to introduce fear and doubt in their hearts. (:21)

This remark causes Maphophe to conclude that 'not all Whites want Blacks to be taught the gospel'. Once they had entered Mozambique, Maphophe recalls an

---

<sup>28</sup> Here, Yosefa Mhala-Mhala, his sister Lois and her husband Eliachib had already started work and had in fact asked for re-inforcements (van Butselaar 1984:26f).



incident where they met a large group of people carrying big bottles, full of White-man's liquor. These people were led by a Robert Mashaba of the Methodist Church<sup>29</sup>. At Rikatla, they found that Mhala-Mhala, Eliachib, Lois and Zebedia Mbhenyane had been doing good evangelising and educational work. When the 'loaned' driver (Lucas Mbambo) returned to Lydenburg, Berthoud gave him a letter in which he requested Bauling to assist in finding a suitable Tsonga girl for Calvin. Later, a young girl came to Rikatla from Lydenburg, accompanying her blind grandfather who had come for consultation with Berthoud. Bauling's attempts to find Maphophe a wife having failed, Berthoud arranged with the parents of this young girl for her to be married to Calvin. She



Figure 3 Robert Mashaba

started off as one of his students at the school. In 1890, their marriage was blessed at church. Maphophe was then transferred to Lourenzo Marques where he took charge of a school. Maphophe also gives a brief account of the war between the Portuguese and the local chiefs in 1894 (:30). It was this conflict that led to H.A. Junod being deported to South Africa via Natal. Before Calvin Maphophe's father died, he held both his Christian sons in high esteem, and had expressed a wish for them to come back to preach the gospel amongst their 'own people' (:32).

Around 1907 the SMSA decided to create a Black indigenous clergy (:33). The

<sup>29</sup> This brief introduction of Mashaba is harsh. Maphophe even implies that Mashaba only started a school of the Methodists in competition with the SMSA (:28). In this, Maphophe was clearly influenced by Paul and Henri Berthoud who resented Mashaba's independent missionary initiative in the same area, and amongst the same people where Berthoud was working in Mozambique (van Butseelaar 1984:167f)

first indigenous candidates for the clergy were Calvin and Jonas Maphophe and Samuel Malale. So these three were sent back to Lesotho with their families, for theological training. In 1909 they completed their training. On the 26th April, Calvin Maphophe was ordained as a minister at Lourenzo Marques and dispatched to his first charge, in the Xixongi area. On arrival at Xixongi, Maphophe perceived that 'the presence of only a church without a school would not be constructive' (:34). So he set about erecting a school in 'true missionary style'. Maphophe stayed on at Xixongi for nine and half years before he was sent to Lourenzo Marques at Hlamankulu. Here he worked with the missionary Pierre Loze.

In 1925 a Jubilee celebrating fifty years of SMSA work amongst the Vatsonga was scheduled to take place both in Switzerland and here. A significant event in Maphophe's life was the decision by the SMSA to send him to Lausanne on occasion of the Jubilee (:36). On the ship to Europe, Maphophe remarks that he was the only Black on it. 'I was surprised that these Whites on the ship did not discriminate against me ... I saw then that the Portuguese were different from other Whites'. Yet at Lobito, Maphophe was surprised to see another ship which was being navigated by a non-White. Their next stop was Luanda. Luanda, like Lourenzo Marques, was under Portuguese rule. Maphophe remembered that serious offenders against Portuguese laws at Lourenzo Marques were sent to Luanda for severe punishment. At Sao Tomé, the autobiographer was even more astonished to see Blacks managing the offices.

In Switzerland, Maphophe stayed first at Lausanne with the missionary de Meuron, then at Geneva where H.A. Junod lived. He spoke at a church function, with Junod translating. Maphophe was touched by a public hug he received from a Rev Frank Thomas after the speech. It was whilst he was still in Geneva that H.A. Junod took Maphophe to,

a man of outstanding knowledge regarding the differences between races [probably an anthropologist]. After I was seated on a chair, he started to measure my eyes and lips, and at the end he said: 'He is a true African'<sup>30</sup> (:33)

---

<sup>30</sup> Harries (1981) discusses the 'conversion' of Junod to anthropology as well as the manner in which Junod applied and modified some established theories of anthropology in his ethnographical studies of the Tsonga people.

After this, it was back to Lausanne where Maphophe was scheduled to address the people on the day of the Jubilee celebrations. That happened on the 22nd April 1925.

Siku leri a ku tile vanhu lava humaka matlhelo hinkwawo ya Swisa, vavanuna, vavasati ni masocha. Yindlu leyi ni vukulu bya yona a yi tele hi vanhu. Ndzi va ndzi ku embilwini ya mina, ndzi fana ni nhongani leyi weleke mbiteni ya ntswamba. Na swona ndzi va byela leswi, va hleka. Kwala xikarhi ka vona a ku ri ni tihosi timbirhi, un'wana a a ri ambassador ya Manghezi, un'wana Ambassador ya Portugal. A ndzi byeriwile hi vafundzhisi ndzi nga si vula-vula leswaku ndzi ta rhanga ndzi vula-vula ndzi kongoma tihosi leti<sup>31</sup> (:42).

Other aspects of Maphophe's speech on this occasion are noteworthy. To the Portuguese ambassador he expressed appreciation for the manner in which the Portuguese governed Black people. He also thanked them for allowing missionaries to preach the gospel to the Black peoples in their territories and added 'other words to demonstrate the goodness of the Portuguese' (:43). To the English ambassador, he expressed special thanks for their contribution in bringing education to Black peoples. However, he also indicated to the British ambassador that some British subjects were not kind to Blacks. But he also expressed his trust that the ambassadors and other British leaders would always intervene on behalf of the Blacks. Unfortunately that is all that Maphophe reports of his speech.

On another occasion during the visit, another missionary, Grandjean, gave Maphophe a few watches as presents to other Black ministers at home. In motivation of the gifts, Grandjean expressed his wish that the recipients would stop looking up at the position of the sun to tell the time and that instead they would look at the sun in their pockets. Maphophe stayed for two

---

<sup>31</sup> In attendance on this day were people from all parts of Switzerland, men, women and soldiers. Although the hall was big, it was completely full. And I thought in my heart, I am like a fly fallen into a calabash full of milk. So I told them this, and they laughed. Amongst them, were two 'chiefs', the one being the British ambassador, and the other was the Portuguese ambassador. The missionaries had told me that, before I speak [any further], I should first direct my words to the ambassadors.

months in Switzerland, travelling extensively and speaking at many places. After returning home, Maphophe had to tell of his journey to Switzerland at the local Jubilee celebrations held at Valdezia in July 1925.

However, after 1926 the health of Maphophe and his wife deteriorated. She passed away in 1939. By the time Maphophe retired, he had rendered about fifty-years of service to the church.

### 2.3.2 Some Historiographical Issues

There is no doubt that Maphophe provides a very significant indigenous voice. Of the seven young Vatsonga who were sent to Basotholand for teacher training (the very first crop of teachers) a decade before the close of the nineteenth century, he alone leaves us a considerable body of text. Equally, of the three who ushered in the era of indigenous ministry in the SMSA, namely Calvin Maphophe, Jonas Maphophe and Samuel Malale, only Calvin left us a heritage of self-reflection<sup>32</sup>. A significant thing to note is the fact that Maphophe writes 'first-hand', as it were, about an era when Black status was low in the church. Also, writing shortly after D.C. Marivate (1938, 1941) but before Ndhambi (1949), Maphophe's autobiography is one of the first three books in Xitsonga written by Tsonga speakers.

There is no doubt that he wrote this work under the tutelage of missionaries. Moreover, one reads between the lines that Maphophe had the deepest respect for missionaries and their teachings. Yet one can read, also between the lines, that Maphophe took himself, his new found faith and his people very seriously. This is therefore a story of a sincere man reflecting upon his activities and experiences in the work of Christian mission, at the sunset of his life. I suppose that his story could be 'dismissed' for being too narrow, personal and inward-looking - as many autobiographies tend to be. Yet Maphophe does not dwell so much on his emotions and inner experiences that he eliminates all other events. He refers to events 'outside' of his immediate surroundings with frequency and amazing accuracy. He recorded the dates, places and names very accurately. Because of this, many of the events to which

---

<sup>32</sup> One notes that H.P. Junod (1960) wrote a biography of John Mboweni, a man of a younger generation to Maphophe's. Yet this work is not really comparable to Maphophe, who speaks about himself.

he refers can be cross-checked. In fact, often his somewhat more 'personal' perspective adds a dimension that would otherwise have been lost.

Maphophe's work is imbued with a considerable amount of appreciation for the missionary cause, restraint in evaluation and a style of measured commentary. It is a story about himself and his experiences, but certainly not merely or exclusively about him. More importantly, he strove for historical accuracy with regards to dates, names and times - much more so than Baloyi. I therefore conclude quite confidently that we have in Maphophe an authentic, historical, and highly significant comment on missionary Christianity. This, not just in what he says, but especially in terms of how he comes across - the 'after-taste' he leaves in one's mind after reading his story, as it were.

There are many questions that Maphophe evokes in our minds. How exactly did the missionary Paul Berthoud treat him whilst he was a nanny in their house? We would have appreciated more snippets of life inside the Berthoud household, through the eyes of Maphophe. Similarly, it would be interesting to know the precise reasons why old man Maphophe and his community objected to the two Maphophe boys going to school<sup>33</sup>. But, that is *our* agenda, not Maphophe's. Nevertheless, we will continue to explore these and other questions in forthcoming chapters.

### 2.3.3 The Black Male 'Mother' to Paul Berthoud's Children

When the Maphophe brothers joined other children in the Valdezia area and its environs, in going to the new school started first by the Basotho evangelists and later headed by Creux and Berthoud, little did they realise how fundamentally the course of their lives would be altered. Soon they not only attended school, but lived with the missionaries in their own houses.

---

<sup>33</sup> In a book that tells the story of the internecine wars between the African clans in Mozambique and Transvaal - especially the clashes between the Tsongas and the Vendas, Masuluke (1966:53) gives the following reason why a Tsonga chief would not allow his children to go to school. "... he thought that school would teach witchcraft to his children. A witch would always flee to the school so as to escape death. Also the school prohibited the consultation of those who have died, teaching instead that ancestors should be looked down upon and rejected." This reasoning is likely to have been similar to the old man Maphophe's.

Maphophe states his job description at the Berthoud household in a matter of fact way; and with a touch of pride too (:10). In those days, it was probably a very 'respectable' job for a Black to be working inside the house of a White person. Being entrusted with the job of playing with the children of one's White master must have been an especially 'satisfying' responsibility. This responsibility gave Maphophe a rare insight into the lives of the missionaries. It also ensured him a space inside their ox-wagon during their varied journeys. This was because he was needed to play with the children during the journey. However, it is not inconceivable that the missionaries could still find ways to 'exclude' Maphophe even as he lived inside their household. Apart from many possible mechanisms of physical 'exclusion', one powerful method of exclusion was language. As late as 1925, during his brief stay in Switzerland, Maphophe reports that he could not speak French (:41).

Cuendet (1950:10), Brookes (1925) and especially Baloyi (1965:34-37) make much of the agony of the missionaries when sickness and death struck their households, as proof of their true calling and sacrifices. Yet no one acknowledges the role of the teenage Maphophe who was often called upon to 'take care of these children day and night' (Maphophe 1945:13), especially after the death of their mother when Maphophe 'had to look after the motherless children'.

#### **2.3.4 Calvin Maphophe - a Missionary who Sacrificed much**

It is significant that Maphophe was himself later to make 'sacrifices' of no less proportions to those of Berthoud who, amongst other things, 'planted their children in the Spelonken soil' (Baloyi 1965:37). He too was to leave his familiar surroundings, his family and people under the constraint of 'The Word'. Maphophe spent a total of ten years in Basotholand, the first seven training as a teacher and the other three in theological training. Whilst there, he had to learn, like all missionaries, yet another language. He witnessed the horrors of the war between the Basotho and the English first hand as assistant to Dr Casalis, who attended to the wounded and the dying.

He was to become, alongside Robert Mashaba of the Methodist church, one of the first qualified Black teachers in Mozambique. For many years he worked very hard as both a minister and a school teacher. All of his working life, he

spent as a 'missionary' in Mozambique, strictly speaking, a foreign country, where different languages were being spoken (Maphophe 1945:22). Judging from the number of Portuguese words he uses in his autobiography, it is clear that Maphophe had acquired, over the years, at least a working knowledge of Portuguese. Above all, like his Swiss missionary counterparts, Maphophe suffered personal misfortune. In characteristic restraint he summarises:

Loko ndzi komisa timhaka, ndzi nga ku nsati wa mina o ve mana wa khume ra vana, kambe lavotala xikarhi ka vona va hundzile misaveni va ha ri vantsongo, hambu swi ri tano hi twarisile Xikwembu hi tintswalo ta xona<sup>34</sup>. (:22)

In fact, before his 1925 trip to Switzerland, he had indicated that two of his children and their mother were very sick. But the missionaries persuaded him to go to Switzerland by saying: ''God knows everything and I had to go where He sends me'' (:36). One of the sick children died on the 9th of February 1927 (:46). Yet two years before his retirement, after forty-eight odd years of service to the SMSA, Maphophe knew neither what he would do after retirement nor where he would stay, having no place to call his own. It seems that no retirement arrangements, formal or informal, had been made for Maphophe and his kind. When Maphophe approached Berthoud, his former master, about this, Berthoud was shocked because ''he thought that I should work until death'' (:46). Maphophe's further motivation to Berthoud is impressive in its diplomacy, inspiring in its sense of initiative and touching in its sincerity:

A swi ta saseka loko ndzi fela ntirhweni. Kambe loko ndzi nga dyuhala ndzi ri kona ntirhweni, ndzi nga ha pfuni nchumu, ndzi ta hundzuka ndhwalo wa ku tika eka kereke, kasi loko ndzi ri ni xivandla xa mina kun'wana, ndzi ta suka ndzi ya tshama kona<sup>35</sup>.

The point is not to show up that Maphophe suffered more than White

---

<sup>34</sup> To cut matters short, let me say that my wife became the mother of ten children, but many of them died at a very young age. Nevertheless we thanked God for his kindness.

<sup>35</sup> It would be ideal if I were to work until death. But if I work until I become very old, so that I am of no use, I will become a burden to the church, but if I have my own place somewhere, I will go and live there.

missionaries, though it is possible to argue thus. Rather the point I am making is one I have made elsewhere before (Maluleke 1995a:20), namely that the themes of true calling and heroic sacrifices (cf. Bosch 1991b) in Christian mission tend to be considered in a racist manner. The impression is often created that White missionaries suffered much because they left their countries, suffered at the hands of a hostile foreign environment, learnt difficult languages, reduced those languages to writing, suffered diverse personal disasters, etc. In Maphophe, we have one missionary who 'suffered' all of the above, without having a white skin<sup>36</sup>.

Nor can we take away from the authenticity of Maphophe's Christian convictions. Like his European counterparts he believed very strongly in progress through education and Christianity. His Christian faith, greatly nourished by the great King Jesus Christ who was crucified, made him cry, not only for himself (:11) but for his father's people. In their teachings, the Swiss missionaries had created in Maphophe a 'great sense of sin' so that his daily prayer was 'Lord, change my evil heart'. Once converted, he put all his energies to preaching and teaching his people so that their 'evil hearts may be changed'. Like his European colleagues, Maphophe believed in the essential badness of Black cultural customs - in other words he developed a low view of African culture (cf. van Butselaar 1984:79f). In fact, whilst teaching at Rikatla in Mozambique, he became something of an expert on the evil nature of certain Black customs. His surprises at seeing Black people doing such things as navigating a ship and working in offices (:37, 38) may indicate either that he had begun to believe that whilst all human beings may have been created in the image of God, human races were not equal, or that he was starting to realise that Black people have the same capabilities, once given a chance. The optimism with which he approached mission work up to his very last days may indicate that he regarded both Black and White as equal in the eyes of God.

The true missionary spirit in Maphophe comes out very clearly in the fact that he put on record that his wish would be to see, before his death, the SMSA

---

<sup>36</sup> Sihlangu (1975) in his account of the beginning and growth of the Masana mission station, reports that the missionary A.A. Jaques, had in the early 1930s a Ford car which he used for his pastoral travels, while his assistant and Evangelist Elijah Mbowana travelled by horse.



extending to Southern Rhodesia, where his father's people lived. During his few retirement years at Valdezia, he tried to bring together his relatives who 'were scattered like sheep without a shepherd' (:50). He encouraged them to come and settle in his small plot with the aim that he would go to preach to them on a weekly basis. He had also planned to start a school on this farm. Yet old age had overtaken Maphophe and he could no longer realise many of his evangelistic intentions. Rather he left them as a heritage and 'homework' to 'the church of the Vatsonga', as he liked to call the SMSA.

We have in Maphophe, therefore, an embodiment of local appropriation of the Christian mission and a pioneer of the Black clergy in the SMSA. Yet it is not so much what he says - most of which can be 'dismissed' as typical missionary pietism and hagiography - but what his life, his faith, and his sense of calling exudes that which we ought to 'hear' from Maphophe. In his confident assumption of duties as teacher, evangelist and missionary, he *defied* in his actions those who regarded Christian mission as something that Whites do to Blacks. In other words, through his life he deconstructed the myth that Europeans owned Christian mission. Calvin Maphophe, Jonas Maphophe, Gideon Mpapele, Gregory, Mukoki, Mahleketo Mbhenyane, Yosefa Mhala-Mhala, Eliachib, Lois, Hakamela Tlakula, Eliakim Matlanyane, Bethuel Raditau and many others, demonstrated right from the beginning of the SMSA, that Africans were both ready and capable of becoming missionaries in their own right. As the missionaries struggled to learn the local language and reduce it to writing, these pioneer African missionaries alongside of them 'learnt' a new faith, new languages and new skills as well as sharing in the suffering.

## 2.4 National Histories

### 2.4.1 Introduction

Unlike Maphophe and Baloyi, who wrote 'church history', Sihlangu (1975) and like Masuluke (1966) wrote 'national' history. Sihlangu attempts to commit to writing an oral history of the Shangaans with specific reference to those who settled in the Bushbuckridge area under the leadership of chief Mpisana. It is surprising that H.P. Junod (1977), whose 'national' history is the more 'academic' and meticulous of the three, ignores both Masuluke (1966) and Sihlangu (1975) altogether and connects instead only to the works of his own

father, H.A. Junod, and other White scholars. Do we sense an implicit dismissal of the works of Sihlangu and Masuluke, both of which Junod most certainly knew about? For a person who has been regarded as a 'Tsonga', and who regarded himself as such - due to his love for the Vatsonga people - it is surprising that he would totally ignore two indigenous attempts at a national history, however elementary he might have considered them to be. Significantly, all three books appeared at the height of the homeland ideology. It is not too far fetched to surmise that they were meant to galvanise the Tsonga identity, through the construction of 'coherent' histories. The inclusion of the story of the SMSA in 'these stories of the Tsonga nation' (Junod 1977:97, Masuluke 1966:52f, especially Sihlangu<sup>37</sup> 1975:35f and Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:74f), confirm the close connection between the (perceived) nation and the church (cf. Maluleke 1993a, 1995a). After all, by the 1960s the SMSA was no longer the only church working amongst the Vatsonga peoples.

#### 2.4.2 *Ta ka Mpisana* (Sihlangu 1975) - Summary and Overview

The first national history I am going to discuss is that of Sihlangu (1975) which is titled *Ta ka Mpisana* (Events at Mpisana). The book starts with an overview of the history of the Zulus and how some of Shaka's generals and indunas ended up in Mozambique. After this background has been given, Sihlangu tells of the conflict between Muzila and Mawewe as well as how the former even stayed with Albasini for a while before eventually re-establishing himself firmly in Mozambique.

Midway through the book, Sihlangu changes tack and tells of the coming of the Gospel to the Bushbuckridge area. His account reveals that Bushbuckridge received the attention of the SMSA long after Mozambique, Shiluvane and Spelonken. According to Sihlangu, an old man by the name of Bethuel Matinye, whom he interviewed and quoted verbatim, was instrumental in getting the SMSA to start work in these parts (:35). The story of how various denominations started then becomes one long uninterrupted quotation (:40-42) from Matinye. Next we hear the story of Matinye himself. Matinye was born just at the time

---

<sup>37</sup> Sihlangu's work is liberally illustrated with historic photographs of significant players in both the histories of 'church' and 'state'. Most of these photographs were taken by missionaries, notably Dr George Liengme.

when Mhala-Mhala, Eliachib and Lois were starting missionary work in Mozambique, in the Magudu area.

So far as the church history part of this booklet is concerned, Matinye is the 'main character'. After working as a 'kitchen boy' at a gold mine compound at Sabie, Matinye proceeded to Pilgrim's Rest to do the same job in 1906. Here, he started to attend a night school. But he had not been exposed to Christianity because ministers (missionaries?) were 'as scarce as a fig during a drought' (:43). Matinye's exposure to the gospel started when he moved to Waterval Boven in 1907. There he found both a thriving school and a lively compound congregation. Both the school and the church were under the auspices of the SMSA. The SMSA

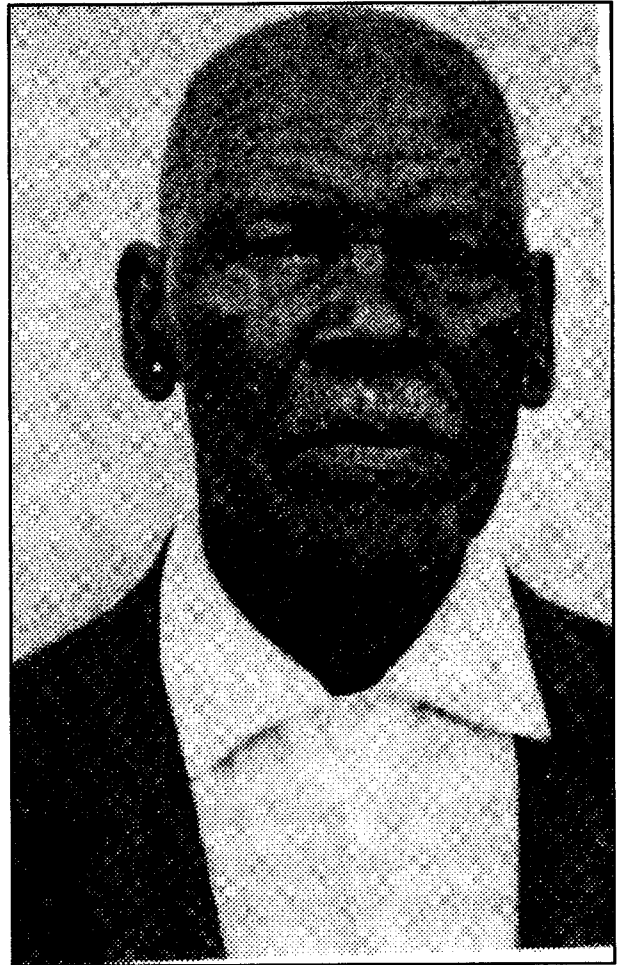


Figure 4 Bethuel Matinye

missionary who visited the congregation periodically was Samuel Bovet who was stationed at Doornfontein, Johannesburg. His very able assistants and teachers, trained in Mozambique but stationed at Waterval Boven, were Thomas Sithole and Daniel Ngoveni. The students were taught Xitsonga, Zulu, English, reading and writing (:43).

All along, Matinye had a concern for his people back at the Mpisana area. He knew that his people 'persisted in their old ways, worshipping their ancestors' (:43). In 1911, Matinye was baptised by Bovet and experienced it as follows:

Ndhwalo wa mbilu yanga a wu susiwile a ndza ha saleriwe hi ku rhwala mahungu layo saseka ndzi ya byela va ka hina ka Mpisana. Ekaya ka Mpisana, kereke ya Swiss Mission a yi nga ri kona. Vanhu a va hanya hi ntumbuluko, va hanya hi ku phahla, va ha landzela

swikwembu swa vona swa le hansi. A va hanya hi ku nwa mabyala ... a ri nga peli munhu a nga ti titimetanga minkolo tikweni ra ka Mpisana<sup>38</sup>. (:44).

In 1912, Matinye went back to his people, 'armed' with the Gospel. Strategically, he went first to see the chiefs Mpisana and Thulamahashe with presents. He also took the opportunity to share the gospel with them. But he became useful to them in other ways. He became their letter writer and reader. The chief Thulamahashe always gave him an opportunity to preach to the 'nation', and he would then preach in Nguni and later explain in Shangaan. The chief would ask people not to come drunk - they should rather drink after the services.

Once back at Waterval Boven, Matinye reported to Bovet, of 'the darkness at Mpisana' (:45). In 1914, after obtaining permission from the chiefs, Matinye built a school at Mpisana. At the school, Matinye could only teach boys, for parents would not allow girls to go to school for fear that they may lose their morals (:46). He maintained strict discipline at the school:

A ndzi va ba ngopfu, ndzi nga rhandzi va tlanga hi dyondzo. Va panichiwa va kondza va vuya endleleni hikuva loko u tsona n'wana wa wena nhonga a wu n'wi rhandzi. Wa n'wi dlaya ni ku n'wi landzula leswaku a wu n'wi lavi<sup>39</sup>. (:46)

As his assistants, Matinye had Mahlakuye Nxumayo<sup>40</sup> and Gaba Dlamini. In this school project, Matinye was confident that he was 'doing the will of God for he was using his talents to good profit' (:46). In 1914, he wrote a letter

---

<sup>38</sup> The burden was removed from my heart. But I still had to take the Good News to my people at Mpisana. Here the Swiss Mission church did not exist. People lived according to their natural culture, worshipping their gods. They liked drinking beer ... Not a day would pass without an individual taking a drink.

<sup>39</sup> I used to spank the children very much. I did not want them to take education lightly. Therefore, I would punish them until they cooperated. If you spare the rod, you spoil the child - indeed you disown and kill the child.

<sup>40</sup> This is the spelling that corresponds to the Tsonga dialect spoken in the Bushbuckridge area as recorded by Sihlangu for the more familiar, 'Nxumalo'.

to Bovet asking for a minister to be sent to Mpisana. He also assured the missionary of the cooperation of the chiefs. During 1915, the SMSA sent the missionary R. Cuenod to Mpisana to investigate the possibility of starting a 'mission'. Matinye welcomed Cuenod and introduced him to Chief Mpisana. The chief was very impressed with the missionary because he could speak Shangaan<sup>41</sup>.

Before the end of 1915, the SMSA synod decided to send them a minister, Jonas Maphophe (the brother of Calvin). Matinye went to meet him at the Rolle train station. Matinye likened the arrival of Maphophe at Mpisana to the sending of Moses to Egypt (:48). Before that he informed both chief Thulamahashe and Mpisana about the imminent arrival of



Figure 5 Jonas Maphophe and Wife

Maphophe. For their part, the chiefs informed all their subjects of the date of Maphophe's arrival. This created so much excitement that Matinye could not sleep the night before. In fact he had left his home by bicycle to go and sleep with a family situated near the train station.

On meeting Maphophe at the station, Matinye took him straight to the chiefs' kraals. Matinye remarks that one thing that helped to make Maphophe acceptable to the chiefs was the fact that his ears were pierced - seemingly an accepted custom amongst male Ngunis at that time. Later, Matinye took Maphophe to the White man who owned the Mpisana farm, nicknamed Mathikithi by the local inhabitants. But this was an exploratory visit by Maphophe. He only returned for good with his family in 1916. He immediately embarked on the building of a church and a school. Maphophe's son, Noel, who had just completed his teacher training at Lemana (Elim), became the principal of the school. Other teachers were Florah Maphophe<sup>42</sup>, (Noel's sister), Mack Maluleke and Samuel Shilubane.

<sup>41</sup> Note must be taken of the fact that Shangaan is the general name given to the Tsonga dialect spoken in the Bushbuckridge area. Sihlangu's work therefore uses it in place of Tsonga.

<sup>42</sup> There is today a school named after Florah Maphophe in that area.

According to Matinye, Jonas Maphophe was the first Tsonga person to own a cattle-drawn plough. In order to raise money for the church he ploughed a huge field and planted maize. He then sold the maize and raised money for the church. The required church contributions per member was fifty cents a year. Noel, the principal, also did the same in order to raise funds for the school. Of Jonas Maphophe, Matinye says; ``he did not come to work for money, but had come to liberate Israel from slavery'' (:56)<sup>43</sup>. Maphophe's very first sermon, reports Matinye, ``was based on the story of Noah and the flood'' (:58). Maphophe also managed to train some evangelists. Matinye mentions them by name<sup>44</sup>. After retirement, Maphophe was succeeded by other Black ministers such as Ozias Magadzi, A. Tlhavela, J. Thuketana and E. Mabyalane.

It was only in 1927 that a White missionary, in the person of A.A. Jaques, arrived in the greater Bushbuckridge area, namely Graskop. Here, Jaques was assisted by the evangelist, Joseph Mawelele. Jaques also started another congregation at Sabie with the assistance of Titus Chabangu. One of the evangelists trained by Jonas Maphophe, Elijah Mbowana, used to visit Jaques at Graskop, ``telling him that there were many Shangaans at Bushbuckridge'' (:63). When Jaques came down to Bushbuckridge and saw the work he moved house from Graskop and came to Bushbuckridge where he started the Masana Mission station in 1933. By 1936, a school was established. Later, when Jaques was transferred to Elim, he was replaced by the missionary B uchler who was instrumental in the establishment of a hospital - initially called Masana Hospital, but now called the Mapulaneng Hospital.

---

<sup>43</sup> Jonas Maphophe, after starting off at N'wamitwa and Shiluvane in the Tzaneen area, ministered at Bushbuckridge until the days of his retirement. Some letters in the Giyani Archives indicate that bitter disagreements between him and the White Swiss missionaries developed. It seems that he resented the preferential treatment i.e. salaries, that the Swiss missionaries enjoyed. Attempts were made both to transfer and to disown him. As the pioneer missionary in that area, it is probable that Maphophe resented the *Johnny-come-late supervision* of the White Swiss missionaries who joined him only after 1926 - ten years after he had started working in that area. For a while, Jonas Maphophe and his congregation actually broke away from the SMSA, only to be re-incorporated later.

<sup>44</sup> These were, Elijah Mbowana, Johannes Mkhombo, Charlie Mbowana, John Xitimela, Andreas Muzinyane, Samuel Nkosi, Josmec Nkosi John Mnisi and Josiah Sithole.

### 2.4.3 Historiographical Issues

This is a two-part booklet. The first part attempts to account for the Shangaans, Ngunis and Hlanganus who settled in the Bushbuckridge area at the turn of this century. The author wishes to show the developments of events, starting with Shaka and ending with Nghunghunyane, as the essential background to the Shangaan/Nguni settlement in the Bushbuckridge area. His thesis seems to be that the Zulu/Nguni invasion affected the Vatsonga people of Mozambique fundamentally (:14). For example, men were barred from speaking Xitsonga, instead they were required to speak 'Nguni', especially in the courts. Xitsonga then became a woman's language. The second part of the book is a narrative and largely oral 'church history'. It appears that apart from the fact that the author himself seems to have had first hand knowledge of most of what he accounts, he relied extensively on interviews, especially in the second part. Although the book is not written in strict academic and historical style, it comes across as a well researched piece of work. The first 'national history' part corresponds well with the accounts of Junod (1977) and van Butselaar (1984:126f) on the conflict between the Portuguese and the local chiefs in Mozambique.

Without attributing minute-detail accuracy to every piece of information in the booklet, one must nevertheless say this booklet is a product of 'research' although its narrative style does not stand it in good stead - especially in the eyes of those who want 'hard' evidence through frequent references to sources. All shortcomings notwithstanding, Sihlangu manages to tell the story of the beginning of the SMSA mission in Bushbuckridge which only he, with the help of Bethuel Matinye, could tell. The likely 'official' line would have been one in which Bovet was portrayed as the initiator of the mission, being the person who eventually requested synod to send a minister. Yet Sihlangu, through the use of lengthy verbatim quotations from Matinye, manages to thrust local actors such as Matinye to centre stage. In fact, many 'histories' of the SMSA concentrate on Valdezia, Elim, Shilubane and Mozambique, with very little information on the Bushbuckridge area. Sihlangu therefore, presents a welcome and neglected focus.

#### 2.4.4 Bushbuckridge mission - A local Initiative

Yet again, we see in Sihlangu how Black vernacular writers manage to subvert the official line of mission history. What is remarkable is that they achieve this without being offensive to the 'mission'. On the contrary, they subvert even as they praise and applaud the mission who gave them the essential 'ammunition' for the task at hand. I am not aware of any 'history' or reflection on the SMSA that elevates Black participation and initiative to the extent that Sihlangu does in his account of what happened in Bushbuckridge<sup>45</sup>.

There is no doubt in Sihlangu's mind that, prior to the arrival of an ordained Black clergyperson, and certainly prior to White missionary presence, the migrant worker Bethuel Matinye is the 'hero' and 'pioneer' (to borrow Baloyi's words) of the SMSA in Bushbuckridge. It is for this reason that Sihlangu allows Matinye to tell the story of his life. It is as if we have, in the middle of this book, a full biography of one character. Such was the 'thirst' of Bethuel Matinye that he attended adult literacy classes at his work place. Nor did he care that the 'ulterior motive' of these classes was to enable people to read the Bible and sing Christian hymns. On the contrary, Matinye regarded education and Christianity to go hand in hand. He was equally persuaded that 'church and school would bring progress to our people' (:48). The courage of this 'half-baked' educand to start a school and a little chapel (:46) is admirable. Yet, he was very much aware of his shortcomings. So whilst he preached the Gospel and taught his people to read and write whenever he took a break from work, he continued to pursue his own studies. Moreover, he pestered Bovet to petition synod for a minister in the Mpisana area. His appreciation of Maphophe is genuine and deep-felt - as is his appreciation of the work of the SMSA as a whole. There is no trace here of the feeling that since Maphophe was Black he might not be as good as Bovet, who was White and

---

<sup>45</sup> Writing on developments in Mozambique, van Butselaar (1984) attempts a similar position. He argues that the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, usually regarded as fruit of the SMSA, is an African initiated church, started by Africans and run in an African way until missionary assistance came later. However, the fact that van Butselaar relied almost exclusively on 'missionary' sources weakens his welcome and valid thesis. It is also revealing that van Butselaar published his findings neither in Dutch (which is his language) nor in Tsonga, Rhonga or Portuguese (which are languages spoken in Mozambique). Instead he published his work in French (which is the language spoken in that part of Switzerland from which many missionaries came). This raises the question: Who were van Butselaar's target audience and why?



also his 'spiritual father'<sup>46</sup>. Matinye remained loyal to Maphophe until his death - describing him as one who came not for money but to serve. Given the clashes that later developed between Jonas Maphophe and the SMSA, Matinye's loyalty is all the more remarkable. Lastly, Matinye was vital in introducing Maphophe to the authorities and ensuring that he settled into his job as quickly as possible.

Maphophe's work, once he had settled at the Mpisana area, was simply monumental<sup>47</sup>. One senses the writer struggling to choose which of Maphophe's activities and 'achievements' to report. In typical SMSA style, Maphophe combined education, religion and the dignity of labour. After a short stay, the local people discovered an economic power that they did not know they possessed - the power of agriculture. They also discovered the power of 'the written word'. Needless to say they also discovered the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Maphophe's three children (Florah, Noel who became teachers and Seth who was later to become a minister in his own right) combined very well with their father in his mission to evangelise and to educate<sup>48</sup>. Clearly, therefore, Maphophe's impact on the Mpisana community went much further and much wider than his immediate congregation. From the point of view of the ministry, Maphophe's biggest achievement was in the training of evangelists, whom he posted in each new satellite outstation. In this way, it could be argued that he had started the Masana 'mission station', via the services of evangelist Elijah Mbowana, long before Jaques arrived.

---

<sup>46</sup> Many Black clergy in the EPCSA/SMSA tell of parishes, especially mission stations, where the parishioners would resist a Black clergyperson, preferring instead a 'Muneri'. There are several possible reasons for this. Almost all mission stations were either started or served by missionaries or both. This meant that mission station inhabitants would simply be too used to a Muneri. The other possible reason could be the financial and material implications of having a Muneri as opposed to a Black clergyperson. Invariably the Muneri, with connections in Switzerland, would be a 'better' fund-raiser. He would also cost the parishioners less, since his/her salary was paid from Switzerland.

<sup>47</sup> Since Jonas Maphophe was obviously very successful in his missionary work, the possibility of jealousy between him and the SMSA missionaries in that area, contributing to strained relations is not too far-fetched.

<sup>48</sup> In an almost identical manner, at Mhinga, Samuel Malale combined his missionary skills with the educational skills of his children Hamilton and Ella who started and headed the local school there. Ella was herself later to be married to a minister of the SMSA - Rev Samuel George Khosa.

Sihlangu also introduces us to more than a dozen Black evangelists, nurses and teachers. And it is perhaps these people, more than any missionary or clergy, who initiated the SMSA and ensured its growth in the Bushbuckridge area. It was these men and women who, together with local lay leaders (many of whom Sihlangu mentions by name), spread the Good News and planted the church in the villages of Bushbuckridge area.

#### 2.4.5 The 'darkness' at Mpisana

Sihlangu steers away from offering too grim a picture of that which constituted the 'darkness' out of which the inhabitants of the Mpisana area needed to be rescued. The little that is said in terms of the bad customs - such as drinking and ancestor veneration - he puts into the mouth of Matinye, his chief informant. We may deduct from the fact that Sihlangu chooses to tell this history in some detail rather than start with the story of Christian irruption, is indicative that he does not regard the traditional background as 'unholy' and unredeemable *per se*. It is perhaps through the mouth of Matinye, that we gain some idea of the content of the 'darkness' in which the people of Mpisana found themselves.

'Ignorant and without faith' (:42), a phrase that Matinye uses to describe his state when he set off initially to look for work, gives some form to the 'darkness' in question. He points out that the people of Mpisana lived according to their old traditions (*a va hanya xikhale* :43). Examples of such a life-style were, veneration of ancestors and excessive beer drinking (:44) as well as general underdevelopment. On closer scrutiny, Sihlangu is quite restrained in his identification of bad customs that need to be eradicated. It seems that 'ignorance' was the chief 'sin' according to him. In his restraint, he departs considerably from Junod (1977:52-60), who, writing after Sihlangu, devotes considerable space to such customs and portrays them in a negative light.

## 2.5 The Morula Tree<sup>49</sup> on the Boundary between Two Fields<sup>50</sup>,

### 2.5.1 *Muhlaba* (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958) - Summary and Overview

The book, titled *Muhlaba - Hosi ya va ka Nkuna - Nkanyi wa le Ndzilakaneni*, by Shilubana and Ntsanwisi is a biography of Chief Muhlaba of the Nkuna tribe 'the most famous chief of the Vatsonga who was well liked by the White authorities' (Junod, H.P. 1958:10). A striking feature of this book is that it was written, as far as possible, in the Nkuna dialect of Xitsonga - a rare dialect in written Xitsonga except perhaps for the works of the Tsonga novelist F.A. Thuketana. Apart from being liked by the White authorities, Muhlaba was a very good friend of the missionaries - and dubbed a 'Christian chief' by some missionaries.

The first chapter traces the origins of the Nkuna tribe back to Natal. The actual biography of the chief starts in the second chapter. Issues such as polygamy, recourse to witchcraft and *Vangoma*, attendance of traditional circumcision school - which are normally problematic, are told as a matter of course in the story of internecine skirmishes and territorial wars.

We are told that Paul Berthoud, on one of his trips from Mozambique to the northern Transvaal, accompanied by a man called Hlayisi Xitsunge, made a stop at the Muhlaba area (:57). He was seeking out Vatsonga amongst whom he could start missionary work. Both the Pedi Bokgakga chief and Muhlaba agreed. As a result, the missionary Eugene Thomas was sent to the Muhlaba area in 1886. But in the meantime, the Bakgakga retracted their earlier consent, fearing that the White missionaries had hidden intentions of dispossessing them of their

---

<sup>49</sup> Junod and Jaques (1936:164/165) define the 'nkanyi' as the 'Slezocarya cafra, the great tree of the Vatsonga'.

<sup>50</sup> This is how chief Muhlaba described himself in a speech to his people upon his return from school in Thaba Nchu. He explained that he considered himself thus because he was a high profile person on whom all eyes look and forever wonder whether he will be consistently Christian or heathen (:84). With this metaphor the chief expressed the difficulty of ruling over Christians and non-Christians (:89) as well as the difficulty he experienced in trying to belong to the two 'worlds' - so he considered himself a Morula tree situated right on the border trying to be of benefit to both worlds. It seems that Muhlaba adapted a Tsonga proverb which says : *Nkanyi wa le ndzilakaneni a wu na n'winyi* (The 'nkanyi' tree which is on the boundary has no owner) (cf Junod & Jaques 1936:164).

country. It was only after the intervention of the White commissioner, Captain Dahl, that the SMSA missionaries were welcome.

Outwardly, chief Muhlaba took to Christianity very quickly. Shilubana and Ntsanwisi (:59) liken him to Moshoeshoe of Basotholand and Khama of Bechuanaland . The authors conclude that the countries of these three chiefs earned God's blessings because they accepted the missionaries. In the case of Muhlaba however, I suggest that we must differentiate between the acceptance of missionaries, which could have been a political and economic matter, and the acceptance of Christianity.

We learn also that Jonas Maphophe started off his ministry at Shilubane (which was part of the Muhlaba area). Jonas Maphophe worked closely with the chief. He actually taught the chief to read and write. Later, when the chief was sent to school at Thaba Nchu, he continued to correspond frequently with Jonas Maphophe.

Our authors recount an interesting incident, where a circumcision school session was declared, the first under the leadership of the Christian chief. We are told of a woman (N'wa-

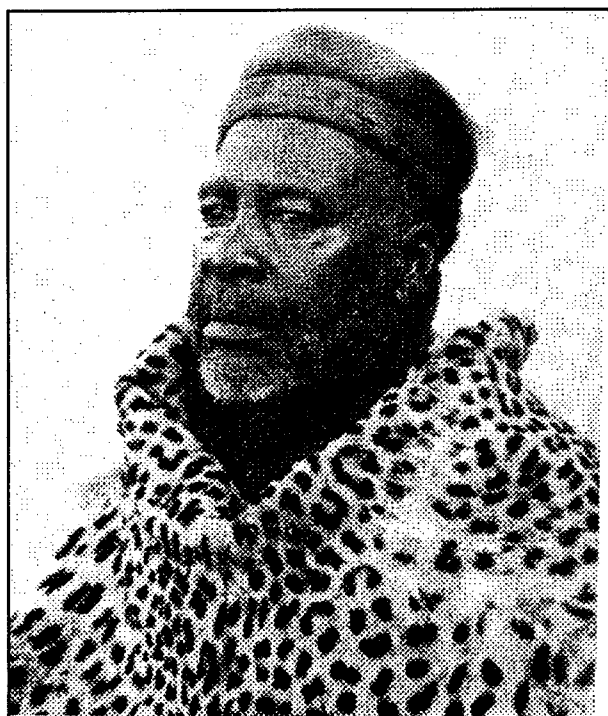


Figure 6 Chief Muhlaba Shilubana

Mundzini) who went to the Shilubane mission station school to fetch her son whom she wanted to send to the circumcision school (:62). The missionary, Eugene Thomas, felt strongly that circumcision schools were one of the evils that he had come to eradicate, so he refused. In anger, the woman went to the missionary's residence to voice her objections. It was later claimed that she had assaulted the missionary's wife. Eugene Thomas took the matter seriously enough to report the case to the local commissioner. We are further told that on the first day of the circumcision school, many people gathered who were very happy, and singing in happiness. In the midst of this, White policemen arrived. They asked the chief to bring the accused and the accuser to Leydsdorp where the commissioner

resided *after* the circumcision school period. When the circumcision school was over, the matter was discussed and the accused, N'wa-mundzini, was found guilty and fined eight cattle. These cattle were given to Eugene Thomas.

However, the authors reveal that when the matter was completed, the commissioner said to chief Muhlaba: ``I know that N'wa-Mundzini did not assault the missionary's wife, but if I do not act against her, the local White people may report to the central government that I am not looking after their interests<sup>51</sup>'' (:63). Jonas Maphophe and Timothy Mandlati received the cattle on behalf of Thomas. But they warned him that his acceptance of the cattle would jeopardise his relations with the local population. So the missionary sold the cattle and used the money to buy two guns for Maphophe and Mandlati.

When a severe drought and rinderpest epidemic broke out between 1896 and 1897, the missionaries, especially Dr Liengme, helped the community very much. Amongst the evangelists who had come from the Spelonken area, were Pondo Ntsanwisi and Viguet Shihangule. The discovery of gold at the Muhlaba area not only brought an influx of White people, but all people came to seek employment. But ``the mines became more attractive than the Word of God, because at the mines was to be found drink and fornication in abundance, but that is precisely what the Word of God is against...'' (:73).

During the war between the Boers and the Pedi chief Makgoba, who lived in the present-day Haenertsberg area, Muhlaba was advised by the missionaries to oppose those who were fighting against the Whites. Therefore, chief Muhlaba entered the war on the side of the Boers (:74). In 1898, the chief volunteered to go to school in order to learn the language of his rulers, namely Afrikaans (:75). He therefore went to Thaba Nchu in the Free state. He stayed in Thaba Nchu for slightly more than a year. During his time at Thaba Nchu, the chief found time to visit Morija, where Creux and Berthoud had first arrived. Muhlaba's wife took much longer to convert to Christianity than her husband (:76).

An interesting feature of the Shiluvane mission was the fact that it was not

---

<sup>51</sup> Shilubane & Ntsanwisi (1958:73) reveal that gold was discovered at Leydsdorp, bringing a great influx of Whites into the area at that time.

exclusively a Vatsonga affair<sup>52</sup>. The SMSA served both the Vatsonga and the Pedi of the Bokgakga clan. In fact, the two chiefs felt that the work of the missionaries had brought their people together (:81). The stay at Thaba Nchu instilled great zeal in the chief. In his first speech after returning from Thaba Nchu (:84), the chief spoke strongly against 'attachment to worldly and temporary things', polygamy, beer and traditional customs - all these the chief likened to the old rotten clothes which must be cast away. He also proposed a 'national' collection of funds to build a chapel. During the Christmas service in 1898, Muhlaba was baptised by the missionary H.A. Junod. Junod took the occasion to point out to the king that his baptism spelt blessings for his people, but if he backslid it would equally cause his people great misfortune. In his response, the chief pointed out that he still had responsibility to serve both Christian and non-Christian (:89).

During 1905, a second circumcision school was declared. This time, the Christian chief objected to his relatives going. He threatened that he would disown those who went against his will. And he carried out his threat. When the time came for the chief's daughter to get married, he instructed that no lobolo should be paid. Instead, his daughter was to be married in a Christian ceremony.

However, in 1911, the 'tree between two fields' grew more in one direction (:107). He married again. So he wrote to the missionaries to inform them. This resulted in his removal from the eldership of the church as well as the Holy Communion. But, say the authors, he continued, where he could, to help the church. It is significant that the authors refrain from judgemental comment on the chief's polygamous marriage. The chief later married two more wives. During the First World War, Muhlaba sent a few regiments to take part. The participation of Muhlaba's people culminated in a thanksgiving and report-back ceremony at Letaba in 1919. The occasion was convened by a Colonel Godley, whose speech at the ceremony is recounted in full.

The last three chapters of the book draw some conclusions and discuss the

---

<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, due to the rigid imposition of ethnic divisions due to the Homeland ideology, the Tsongas were separated from the Pedis (Bakgakga) with the result that many of the latter joined the Dutch Reformed and Lutheran churches.

events leading to Muhlaba's death. In one section (:123f), Muhlaba's beliefs about native customs and governance are described, e.g. his opinion on such diverse issues as lobolo, the declaration of a circumcision school (*ku ba ngoma*), the *khoba*<sup>53</sup>, and marriage. There is also a section on the chief and the church. Despite his 'backsliding', Muhlaba appreciated and understood Christian principles. To show his loyalty to the Swiss missionaries, Muhlaba did not allow any other denomination in his area of jurisdiction. He called his country 'the field of the Swiss' (:135). Furthermore, Muhlaba did not force Christians to bring beer to his court as was sometimes custom (*Xirhwala*). Similarly, he did not discriminate between those who drank beer and those who did not. He is described by the authors as a diplomatic chief who could be 'all things to all men' (:136). His good relations with both the Boer and English authorities are cited as proof of his diplomacy. In 1935, the chief's first wife, Gavaza, died and was buried by the Rev. R.H. Bill. We are also told of an occasion when a Black man murdered a white shop owner in 1937. His name was John Mashala (:147) and he was known as the 'Tzaneen Killer'. Chief Muhlaba sent out a regiment to look for the killer. Although they did not find him, they found the gun he used in the murder. As a reward chief Muhlaba was given a chair, table and a watch by the White authorities. We are also told of the successful mediation by chief Muhlaba in an industrial dispute at the J.C.I. mines. Chief Muhlaba died on the 30th November 1944.

### 2.5.2 Historiographical Issues

There is no doubt that this is a 'royal history', written by royalist insiders who are sympathetic to the chief. The fact that the book was first published by the Nkuna Tribal authorities, and only later by the SMSA, may be of some significance. This reality might have granted the authors freedom from missionary editorial constraints. The authors, both of whom were important actors in the chief's courts, held the chief in very high esteem. Right through the book, the authors make no secret of this. The question is whether

---

<sup>53</sup> This is the female counterpart to the male circumcision. One should be careful not to simply call it the female circumcision school since it is unclear whether any form of 'circumcision' did in fact take place. Even in the case of the *ngoma* it is not entirely accurate to call it a circumcision school as if that was the primary reason that boys went there. The occasion was more about 'school' than it was about 'circumcision', which was done promptly and right at the beginning of the period.

their loyalty and enthusiasm for Chief Muhlaba did not cause them to produce a piece of hagiography with little historical content. Poetic licence notwithstanding, the book comes across as a solid product of both research and 'participant observation'. Most names and dates are reliable and can be cross-checked. The book is well illustrated with pictures of Muhlaba, his wives and his numerous contacts with White authorities and White missionaries. In the last part of the book, copies and translations of correspondence between Muhlaba and various people are supplied.

This work is therefore both a royalist history and a community history in the sense that it is a history written from within. From the point of view of the church (SMSA) the importance of this work cannot be overemphasised. For one, the story of Muhlaba is also the story of the Shilubane mission. Until a direct monograph focusing on this mission is written by a local person, this work remains the only reflection on this mission that is conscious and local. Secondly, while biographies are narrow by definition, the biography of a chief cannot be narrow. The chief embodies the tribe, so his story is the story of the tribe. In the chief's experiences all cultural issues come to a head, for the chief is the ultimate authority around which tribal life revolves.

Therefore, the biography of chief Muhlaba is important in several ways. The period of his reign roughly coincided with the beginnings of the SMSA in both Mozambique and the Transvaal. His contact with the SMSA caused him to, amongst other things, 'flirt' with Christianity. He was also taught to read and write - and even sent to Thaba Nchu to learn Afrikaans. His self-definition - a Morula tree between two fields - expresses the deep-felt duality involved in becoming a Christian as required by the missionaries, and to become a good chief as required by his people. Apart from providing specific information on the Shilubane mission of the SMSA, the Muhlaba saga reveals many issues of controversy and negotiation between the missionary teachings, local politics, and various aspects of local life<sup>54</sup>. Though typically restrained, our authors

---

<sup>54</sup> It is significant that the missionaries H.A. Junod and Dr George Liengme, both of whom were involved in the debacle between local chiefs and the Portuguese authorities (van Butselaar 1984:120f), worked with chief Muhlaba at the time of his conversion. The two missionaries, together with Loze (who had remained in Mozambique), knew more than any other missionary the importance of a chief in tribal life. During the war in Mozambique, Junod had called a meeting of all Christians to decide on what course of action to take - basically a choice between loyalty to their chiefs or loyalty to the



are forced to *comment* on these issues of controversy and negotiation. Chief Muhlaba's own life and words provide us, I want to suggest, with a valid local comment on the work of the SMSA.

### 2.5.3 Was Muhlaba Converted?

This is a speculative question whose answer cannot be derived from reading of this biography alone. The context of Muhlaba's public confession of faith, namely a drought-relief ceremony, casts doubt over his conversion:

Ripfalo ra mina ra ndzi karhata, hikuva a ndzi si tivula emahlweni ka vanhu va mina leswaku ndzi tinyiketa eka Xikwembu. Sweswi ndzi vula sweswo emahlweni ka n'wina tiko ra mina ndzi ri: Ndzi pfumela eka Xikwembu, ndzi tinyiketa eka Xona, Ndzi rhandza eku Xi tirhela<sup>55</sup> (:71).

The impression we get from this quotation is that Muhlaba had long been converted. He had perhaps made a 'private' confession to one of the missionaries or their assistants. One could adopt either a cynical or a trusting attitude to the Muhlaba conversion story. Both perspectives are valid. From the cynical perspective many questions could be raised. Why did he suddenly feel the need to 'go public' on this occasion? Was he suddenly overcome with emotion on seeing the hungry masses of his people 'at the mercy' of the missionaries and their assistants for food? What sort of pressures was Chief Muhlaba under? Was there direct and concerted pressure from the missionaries for him to make a public confession - especially since H.A. Junod and Liengme knew the positive implications of such a confession?

The question becomes one of the precise meaning of conversion. There is no doubt that, in the eyes of the missionaries, the fruit of true conversion was manifested by monogamy, no more drinking of beer, rejection of lobolo and

---

Portuguese authorities (van Butselaar 1984:128). The Christians chose to stand by their chiefs.

<sup>55</sup> My conscience is troubling me, because I have not yet made a public confession before my people that I believe in God. I now take this opportunity to publicly declare to you my people: I believe in God, I commit myself to Him and I like to serve Him.

circumcision schools, rejection of witchcraft and the renunciation of such things as ancestor-veneration. In short, conversion meant the disavowal of a large chunk of one's cultural customs. Chief Muhlaba's consistent self-definition as 'the Morula tree in-between' is instructive. It reveals his appreciation of the implications of conversion.

He understood that, to the missionaries, conversion meant the complete abandonment of the 'one field' and the complete embracing of the 'other field'. Yet he understood himself as the tree in between, feeding people from both fields. Was this self-definition of Muhlaba not an intelligent refusal to be *converted* in the missionary sense of the word? It seems that Chief Muhlaba was saying that for him to be converted in that sense meant a new and dual existence. Rather than reject or deny this dual existence, Muhlaba recognises it and embraces the built-in tension. Looked at this way, Muhlaba's self-definition applies to many African Christians who have the courage to recognise and embrace the *contradiction* of being both African and Christian. Muhlaba's response to Junod's warnings about backsliding on occasion of his baptism is instructive. He reiterated: 'I am a Morula tree, planted at the border between two territories, whose fruit must be enjoyed by people from both sides' (:89). Even in the moment of his baptism, Muhlaba defied the missionary notion of conversion being an either/or and he disputed it publicly.

#### 2.5.4 Muhlaba and his Culture

As suggested in the preceding section, Muhlaba rejected the simplistic either/or model of conversion. For him conversion meant the painful and tense process of being situated at the border between two 'worlds'. In this way Muhlaba would neither abandon his 'heathen' people nor his tribal customs. Instead he propagated a kind of 'religious tolerance'. For example, after one of Muhlaba's pro-Christian speeches, two of his advisors (Mankhelu Shilubana and Xihoza Shilubana) indicated their rejection of Christianity without any fear of recrimination. The first one's rejection was mild but the second one's was vehement:

I disagree with all that has been said. I am heathen and I shall die a heathen. After all, I was not responsible for the sending

of the Chief to school (:86).

The implication here was that the chief's stay at Thaba Nchu had been responsible for his conversion. Furthermore, Muhlaba refused to coerce any of his subjects to become Christians. He therefore exempted the Christians from 'offensive' tribal customs (:135). Whilst he did not require lobolo in the marriage of one of his daughters (:99), he did not banish lobolo from his country. Instead he continued to advise the White courts on the proper meaning of lobolo. He himself later married three more wives and accepted missionary reproach rather magnanimously. Nor did he banish circumcision schools - only requiring that these must be declared when the missionary schools were closed (:125). His concern was with matters of hygiene and health since death and disease sometimes followed circumcision. He never seems to have questioned the pedagogical ethos of the circumcision school phenomenon. Missionary zeal against the circumcision school is revealed sharply in the story of N'wa-Mundzina who, upon demanding the release of her son from the missionary's school in order that he might go to the circumcision school, was wrongly accused of having assaulted the missionary's wife.

#### 2.5.5 Muhlaba the Diplomat

Because Muhlaba possessed considerable diplomatic skills of making friends with the powerful and 'choosing' his enemies carefully, it is possible to understand both his conversion and his loyalty to the Swiss as part of his diplomacy. So that whilst his conversion and loyalty to the Swiss were real, it nevertheless bolstered his stature and enhanced the safety of his people who were, after all, at the mercy of both the White authorities and the Pedi chiefs in the surrounding areas.

Missionary advice on his political choices cannot be ruled out. After all, both Liengme and H.A. Junod had had useful experiences in Mozambique which they would be only too eager to share with Chief Muhlaba. The authors tell us that Muhlaba was a very good friend of Maake, his neighbour, the chief of the Bakgakga. In reality the Bakgakga were the historical owners of the area. That is why their objection to Swiss missionary presence could only be vetoed by the Native Commissioner. It is not inconceivable that Muhlaba's friendship with Maake, whilst genuine, was a diplomatic calculation. Muhlaba's friendship

with the Swiss missionaries also enhanced his status in relation to Maake. Similarly, his cooperation with the powers that be (be they Boers or English), probably with missionary backing and advice, was a tactic of survival. So, Muhlaba had much to gain in his association with the Swiss even as the Swiss had much to gain from his conversion. All in all, Muhlaba 'negotiated' and 'traded' well with the missionaries, the White authorities and his neighbouring chiefs.

## 2.6 Conclusions

Having *read* four vernacular works by indigenous authors of the genre of history, we must now draw some general conclusions.

### 2.6.1 Genuine Appreciation for Missionary Christianity

In all the four works studied, we detect a genuine appreciation for missionary Christianity. It is this appreciation that sometimes leads to excessive hagiography on the one hand, and a strident review of local customs on the other. These tendencies are not always expressed in words. The space and attitude given to 'stories' outside of - and especially those covering the period *before* - the missionary irruption can, for example, be an important indicator. Nevertheless we are still faced with the challenge of meaning - even the meaning of hagiography. In other words, we must go behind the flattering words, rash statements, positive yet inaccurate evaluation and even incorrect factual records used to describe the missionary phenomenon.

It may be possible and 'ideologically correct'<sup>56</sup>, to dismiss hagiographical works by missionaries and colonialists. Such works can be described as transparent self-justifying pieces of work. But can we cast essentially the same 'stone' at local and vernacular works like these four? Admittedly, all of the four works we considered were written in conditions wherein missionaries had much influence. Missionaries owned the publishing houses and they would therefore edit the final product. Are we not, therefore, in these four works, merely reading the works of anonymous missionaries under the names of Africans? If this question can be answered in the affirmative, then even

---

<sup>56</sup> Especially for those engaged in so-called 'missionary-bashing'.

the appreciation of missionary Christianity in these books cannot be authentic. Yet to take that line of argument would be to deny the people who experienced the shortcomings of missionaries first hand the right to an opinion about them, simply because they say what we do not want to hear.

All four of the works that we have considered generally display a positive disposition towards missionary Christianity. It is possible to argue that the disposition in question is not exclusively positive; but there is no denying that it is positive nevertheless. All of the four writers perceived that missionary Christianity did in fact bring 'light' in a situation of 'darkness'. Unlike the Mabunu, the missionaries are perceived to have loved Black people truly. In a situation where White-Black relations were marked by conflict, discrimination, dispossession, exploitation and savage brutality, Baloyi argues that missionaries provided a *different* model of both White-Black and Black-Black relations. In sharing the gifts of the Gospel and of education with Blacks, missionaries equipped Blacks for both earth and heaven. It is therefore not just a case of hagiography, it is indeed a genuine sense of gratitude - a well-considered evaluation of missionary contribution to local people. Such an assessment should not surprise us, since like many local people, the authors had first hand experience of the missionary intervention. All of them were converted Christian people who had also benefited from missionary education. Missionary Christianity was for them no longer something foreign, but something that they had appropriated. The conviction that missionary Christianity was good is a genuine one. Nor were the writers, and the Black people about whom they write, unaware of the tensions. Significantly, they tended to blame *Xilungu* (White life-style) and not missionary Christianity for the loss of those cultural traits that were good.

## 2.6.2 The Fly versus the Morula Tree

### 2.6.2.1 Fly in a Milk Bowl Christianity

Although the general verdict on missionary Christianity is positive, we must still make the differentiation which I cited above, namely between acceptance of missionaries and a wholesale acceptance of their version of Christianity. Nor should we mistake this appreciation for a docile acceptance of missionary supremacy in the definition of local Christianity. Chief Muhlaba's conscious and consistent self-definition - a tree on the borderline between two fields and Calvin Maphophe's off the cuff self-definition - a fly fallen into a bowl of milk - offer two interesting perspectives on conversion and local appropriation of Christianity. Although the ultimate aim of becoming Christian is eschatological, the general reason people become Christian relates to what Christianity does to their image and outlook on day-to-day life.

It is surprising that such a learned, vastly experienced and 'saved' man as Calvin Maphophe could describe himself, even for a minute, as a *fly*. A fly is small, insignificant, irritating, dirty and therefore undesirable. Was this just an unfortunate turn of phrase or was it a so-called Freudian slip? Again and again in his autobiography, Maphophe expressed surprise whenever he saw Black people doing something that he thought only White people could do. It is possible that deep down he felt small, insignificant and evil. Perhaps he was often in doubt whether his pre-conversion prayer 'Lord change my evil heart' was really answered. Had he perhaps often been made to feel like an unwelcome irritant in the church? Perhaps he was only verbalising his experiences in Switzerland. After all, H.A. Junod had taken him to an anthropologist who had confirmed that Calvin *was different* from the people he was about to address at Lausanne. So he likens himself to a fly and his white audience to milk.

Surely, Calvin Maphophe did not believe this about himself all the time. Yet his self-definition does point to a *type* of local Christian appropriation. Steve Biko expressed the genesis and implications of this type of Christian appropriation thus:

Whereas Christianity had gone through rigorous cultural

adaptation from ancient Judea through Rome, through London, through Brussels and Lisbon, somehow when it landed in the Cape, it was made to look fairly rigid. Christianity was made the central point of a culture which brought with it, new styles of clothing, new customs, new forms of etiquette, new medical approaches and perhaps new armaments. The people amongst whom Christianity was spread had to cast away their indigenous clothing, their customs, their beliefs which were all described as being pagan and barbaric ... all too soon the people were divided into two camps - the converted (*amaqhoboka*) and the pagans (*amaqaba*) (Biko 1978:70).

Just because people's appreciation of missionary Christianity was genuine, that did not prevent them from adopting the 'fly in a milk bowl' type of Christianity. In this type of Christianity, Blacks and Whites were created by God, but these two 'races' were not equal, for the one was more advanced than the other. Christianity was therefore a component and an appendage of Western civilisation as propagated by the missionaries. An acceptance of Christianity not only meant the wholesale adoption of this new broader culture, but even more significantly a total and complete rejection of essential aspects of one's own culture. Yet, because of racism and cultural differences, the new Black Christians could not become full beneficiaries and participants in the new 'culture'. Therefore every day of being a Christian meant experiencing that deep feeling of estrangement, which caused Maphophe to consider himself a fly. This metaphor only makes sense in a mind-set where Christian is equal to White and Black must strive for the impossible, namely to become White in order to become Christian. In this way Black Christians become perpetual flies in a lily White bowl of religion. However, in their seemingly neutral and narrative description of Tsonga history and some Tsonga customs, Sihlangu (1975), Masuluke (1966), and Shilubana & Ntsanwisi (1958), I discern a challenge to this type of Christianity.

### 2.6.2.2 The Morula Tree In Between Two worlds

Muhlaba's self-definition has anticipated the dilemma of many African Christians: How can one be both African and Christian at the same time? This is the question with which Muhlaba was grappling when he decided to define himself in this way. Because he understands himself as standing in between, there is no risk of Muhlaba understanding himself as a fly. Perhaps the most important point to make is that he *recognises* the existence of two *valid* worlds. Rather than turn his back on the one so as to embrace the other totally, he chooses to face the dilemma head on. When an African adopts missionary Christianity s(he) adopts a dual culture. But Muhlaba would not be bulldozed into making an either/or choice. In fact he tried hard to do that, but discovered that his brand of Christianity must be constructed 'at the border'. So Muhlaba tried to find a compromise between the missionaries' school and that of his people. When a woman was wrongly accused of assault after demanding her son from the missionary school in order that the boy may go to the *Ngoma*, Muhlaba handles the matter with good humour. He asks no lobolo for his own daughter, but would not banish lobolo. In various ways, he creates 'space' for his people to 'negotiate' and 'trade' with the new faith without coercion.

Absent in the four works I have considered is the zealous tirade, so typical of missionary writings, against African cultural customs<sup>57</sup>. When they do criticise some customs - it is often at a practical rather than an ideological level. All four of them work on the light vs darkness scheme. But all this is done with considerable restraint and an air of ambiguity. Their main aim is to show the benefits of the new faith for Africans rather than an attack on African customs. In short, they all - directly and indirectly - gravitate more towards Muhlaba's 'Morula tree Christianity' than towards Maphophe's 'fly in a milk bowl' Christianity.

---

<sup>57</sup> We shall consider some such missionary views in the last chapter.



### 2.6.3 Tremendous Local Input

All of the four works considered virtually speak with one voice regarding the contribution of indigenous people in mission in general and that of the SMSA in particular. Even Baloyi, who is slightly more harsh regarding local customs, can be included here; himself being a confident indigenous interpreter of missionary activities. Right from the beginning, Creux and Berthoud came with several Sotho evangelists, Eliakim Matlanyane, Asser Sekgakgabane, Bethuel Raditau, Josiah Molepo and David Phukedi. In fact these evangelists worked alone at the Klipfontein farm for two and half years (July 1873 - 1875) whilst the White missionaries were still in Basotholand. When the missionaries returned in 1875 (now taken as the official year of commencement of the SMSA) they were soon joined by numerous local evangelists, interpreters, students and trainee teachers, such as: Timothy Mandlati, Gideon Mpapele, Hakamela Tlakula (the only one who could read and write), Mahlekete Mbhenyani, Mukoki, Gregory, Jonas Xilote, Stefan Furumele, Hlayisi, Mabulele etc.

The names of indigenous missionaries, evangelists, teachers and ministers are legion. Yosefa Mhala-Mhala and Lois Xintomane are the founders of the Mozambique mission. Maphophe's (1945) unassuming and lean booklet reveals a pioneer and a deserving missionary. He spent more than thirty years as a missionary in Mozambique and a total of ten years in training at Morija. He had to learn several new languages. He incurred much suffering and personal losses. His faith in Jesus Christ as well as his sense of mission was unshakeable until death. It is a shame that no pension arrangements seem to have been made for him at the time of his retirement, for it was expected that he would "work until death"! Bethuel Matinye is the pioneer in the Bushbuckridge area, not Alexander Jaques who - though credited with the founding of the Masana mission station - came much later, and certainly not Samuel Bovet, whose valuable contribution was the elementary training he imparted to Matinye. Jonas Maphophe, Calvin's brother, was the teacher and friend of chief Muhlaba and pioneer of SMSA mission amongst the Bapedi of the Bokgakga clan near Chief Muhlaba's village. It was Jonas who, together with a host of evangelists and his three children, started the Mpisana mission, doing his visiting on horseback. He taught the local communities to work and to farm. He encouraged them to build schools and to go to school. Yet he, too,

was at one time abandoned and disowned by the SMSA. Chief Muhlaba's own witness as a Christian and an African at the same time, we have already recounted above. It is not possible to gauge now what effect Muhlaba's Christian witness had, both on the missionaries and his subjects.

Although the names of these local 'pioneers' are often mentioned, though regrettably some surnames have been lost, they are often presented as 'aides' to Creux, Berthoud and other missionaries. In this manner the local appropriation of Christian mission and local input in the start and spread of the Gospel in the North-Eastern Transvaal and Mozambique is grossly underestimated.

#### 2.6.4 Political Undertones

Since Tsonga writing by Tsonga speakers only started in 1938, two constrictions would confront any Tsonga author writing on mission related issues. The one would be governmental political sensitivity, and the other would be missionary sensitivity to criticism. For this reason, we cannot expect to find in vernacular writings clear and unambiguous comment on political and missionary issues. It is for this reason that we shall consider other Tsonga works, novels to be precise, in the next chapter. Yet, with careful reading, I want to suggest that we are able to catch glimpses of such comment even in these historical and biographical works.

Baloyi's political views are, surprisingly, the clearest. He virtually uses the goodness of the Swiss as a literary smoke-screen from within which he shoots, in guerilla-war style, at the Boers who 'exclude Blacks and dogs' from their worship services. In his assessment of the war between the Boers and Makhathu the Venda chief, he openly accuses the Boers of having dispossessed Blacks of their land. He ridicules the claim of Boers to be Christian. At the base of his numerous 'attacks' on the Boers is a conviction that skin colour is immaterial, for we all have souls, and are equal in the eyes of God. Baloyi was probably aware that the Swiss were not entirely free of discrimination. But the bigger score he wanted to settle was with the Boers and not with the Swiss. Whiteness gave one no magical powers. Thus he pointed out that Whites like Albasini could still be sinful and selfish.

Calvin Maphophe is a little more restrained. Yet even he seems to have made his mind up with regards to the badness of the Portuguese. Having gone through the Portuguese vs local chiefs clashes, which resulted in the expulsion of Liengme and H.A. Junod, he knew their 'badness' first hand. On his way to Switzerland, he remembers whilst at Luanda, that that was the place where the worst offenders against Portuguese authorities in Mozambique were sent for punishment and incarceration. The acceptance he experiences from the Whites on board the ship to Switzerland makes him realise that 'not all Whites are like the Portuguese'. He believed that the ultimate salvation of Black people was in education and the acceptance of the gospel. So even Calvin Maphophe clearly detested White supremacist ideals, at least as practised by the Portuguese.

Shilubana and Ntsanwisi seem to propagate a moderate 'all things to all men' political policy. 'The powers of the day must be accepted and obeyed' seems to be their belief. Yet in their account of the woman falsely accused of assaulting the missionary's wife they reveal some discomfort with unchecked White supremacist ideals. They quote the commissioner's explanation that he had to fine the accused - even though he knew that she was innocent - for the sake of the Whites living in the area. Here, too, they come very close to a direct critique of missionary practice. All in all, however, they regard Whites as people with whom one must seek peace and cooperation at all times. So this is how they depict Muhlaba.

## 2.7 Summary

Indigenous Tsonga historical and biographical works reveal a clear independence of thought. As a result of this, we can safely conclude that a big part of their appreciation of missionary presence amongst the Vatsonga is genuine. Similarly their telling critique of missionary Christianity is authentic. Their commentary on missionary Christianity is deep and multi-faceted. The two metaphors of a fly and a Morula tree indicate a keen awareness of the demands of becoming Christians. Not only do these sources reveal a tremendous local initiative in mission; they also do not portray the Vatsonga as passive 'receivers'. Although they do not always make connections between politics and missionary Christianity, political comment is not totally absent from these works. Whilst we do not find in historical works such

unambiguous celebrations of Tsonga culture as we will find in novels, plays and poems, we nevertheless do not encounter the kind of zeal against local culture found in the writings of missionaries themselves.

In the next chapter, we shall consider a less restrained genre of Tsonga works, namely novels. In them, we will find bolder and more aggressive comment on both politics and missionary Christianity.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE COMMENTARY OF SELECTED TSONGA NOVELISTS

#### 3.1 General Introduction

In this chapter, my focus will be on selected Tsonga novels<sup>1</sup>. Between 1938 (when D.C. Marivate's pioneering novel titled *Sasavona* was published) and 1980, a total of twenty-three Tsonga novels were published (Marivate, C.T.D. 1985:8-9). Although it would be interesting to conduct a survey of all these novels, such an approach could hardly be realistic for this project. Not all Tsonga novels would be relevant for the theme of this study. Nor would it be practical to attempt a comprehensive review of either Tsonga novels or Tsonga literature in general. Because Tsonga literature in general and Tsonga novels in particular, are not accessible to the English-reading theological academia, for whom this study will be relevant, I will offer lengthy descriptions and translations of the contents. For questions of economy alone, therefore, it would not be possible to discuss many novels. Therefore, I will select only three: Mtombeni (1967), Nkondo E.M. (1973) and Thuketana (1968). The two main criteria for selection are, (a) the standing of the authors in the world of Tsonga literature, and (b) thematic relevance to this study.

These criteria are not exhaustive and therefore need to be explained. Various approaches can be used to classify and analyse Tsonga novels. Two customary approaches are chronological and thematic, e.g. Marivate (1985)<sup>2</sup>. The approach which I will use, as indicated by the two criteria cited above, is dictated by the basic objective of this study. It is not the purpose of this study to make a detailed diachronic survey of Tsonga literature. This study

---

<sup>1</sup> Short stories not included.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, C.T.D. Marivate's work (1985) is very brief, so that many of his proposals and evaluations are not adequately argued, discussed or illustrated. For example, although an identified theme may be prominent only during a particular period, authors often *handle* and *use* the same theme in other periods as well, but in different ways. However, in agreement with Marivate's general argument, one must point out that, whilst rich in the description of local culture, the 'earliest' Tsonga novels (e.g. Marivate D.C. (1938), Baloyi (1949), Ndhambi (1950) and Chauke (1965)) lack the kind of depth analysis and reflection on missionary Christianity that would be useful for this study.

focuses not on quantitative exhaustiveness, but on the qualitative contribution that Tsonga novels can make to highlight the dynamics of Tsonga responses to missionary Christianity. It is on this basis that I have chosen thematic relevance (to this study) and the standing of authors as my basic criteria of selection. I have depended on the views of such leading Tsonga literature scholars such as, M. Bill (1983), C.T.D. Marivate (1985), Mathumba (1993) and C.P.N. Nkondo (1982) in my evaluation of both the quality of Tsonga works as well as the relative standing of Tsonga authors.

### 3.1.1 Eminent Tsonga Authors

Although there are more than fifteen Tsonga authors who have published novels, some of them have become established owing to both the quality of their work and the frequency with which they put pen to paper.

Certain authors have put their stamp on Tsonga literature over the years<sup>3</sup>. One of these is the late Hudson Ephraim Ntsanwisi (1929, 1966, co-author 1958), uncle of the now better known H.W.E. Ntsanwisi. However, apart from one novel (Ntsanwisi H.E. 1966), which (Bill, M 1983:24), describes as a 'rambling novel' which is 'probably partly autobiographical' (Bill, M 1983:119), the great contributions of H.E. Ntsanwisi are his co-authorship of the biography of Muhlaba which we considered in the previous chapter and his pioneering *How to Write Shitronga* (1929). Although he is clearly both a pioneer and an author of stature in Tsonga, none of his works are selectable in this chapter.

Similarly, the name of Hudson William Edison (H.W.E.) Ntsanwisi has loomed large in Tsonga literature. However, with only one novel to his credit (1954), his acclaim owes more to his scientific contributions to the Xitsonga (1965, 1961-1971 [series], 1970) than for writing novels.

Whilst they have by no means confined themselves to novels, the three novelists I have chosen are undisputed leaders in Tsonga creative literature. The first of these is Bennet Keats Mpilele Mtombeni (B.K.M.), whose works have

---

<sup>3</sup> Although D.C. Marivate edited the first Tsonga newspaper (*The Valdezia Bulletin*) and wrote the first Tsonga novel (1938) and other religious works, he has won more acclaim as a song-writer and church leader than as a novelist.

linguistic and philosophical depth as well as complex plots (Marivate, C.T.D. 1985:16). Apart from the two novels (1967, 1973b), Mtombeni has published three collections of short stories (1973a, 1974a, 1977), three plays (1966, 1973, 1974b) and several poems. Therefore in a ten year period (1967-1977), Mtombeni published eight books and several poems. Unfortunately, Mtombeni's 'untimely death in 1976 cut short a very promising literary career' (Bill, M. 1983:20).

Eric Mashangu Nkondo, the second author, has written, two novels (1973, 1975), two plays (1974, 1979) and two anthologies of poems (1969a, 1969b). Nkondo has, perhaps more than any other Tsonga writer, demonstrated the courage to tackle contentious political and ecclesiastical issues head on. His play (1974) is one of the most openly political amongst Tsonga publications. My third novelist in this chapter is Felix Alois Thuketana, a teacher, former journalist and cartoonist, hailing from the Muhlaba area in Tzaneen. In terms of technique, he is arguably one of the most accomplished novelists in Tsonga literature. He has written two novels (1968, 1978) and translated some devotional manuals into Tsonga.

### 3.2 *Mibya Ya NyekaNyeka*<sup>4</sup> (Mtombeni 1967) - Summary and Overview

#### 3.2.1 An Urban Setting

This is Mtombeni's first published work. For his efforts, he won a prize in the literary competition organised by the Department of Bantu Education in 1966. Unlike the pioneering work of D.C. Marivate (1938), which was set in rural surroundings, this novel is set in *Joni*<sup>5</sup>. This dynamic, mobile and densely populated setting is painted graphically in the preface. The densely

---

<sup>4</sup> Loosely translated the title means 'The sling skin used for carrying the baby has become loose'. This is an adaptation of the Tsonga Proverb 'Mbeleko yi tsemile mubya' (The womb has broken the sling skin) (cf Junod H.P. & Jaques (1936:164). Mtombeni uses his adapted proverb to describe traumatic relations and expectations between children and their parents, society and its young, the new and the old, etc. (cf. Mtombeni 1967:9). The word *mubya*, is difficult to translate. It refers to a baby carrier bag made out of the 'hide' of a goat which after being softened, is used to secure a baby on its mother's back.

<sup>5</sup> This is the Tsonga equivalent for the Zulu *Egoli*, and the Sotho *Gauteng*, meaning the Johannesburg-Pretoria area.

populated metropolis is likened to a 'living forest' which is constantly on the move. Soweto and Joni have become a 'sea of people'. The streets are the veins and human beings have become the life-blood of this enormous organism.

### 3.2.2 Characters and Plot

This is the story of Reverend Tlhomandloti, a fifty-six year old man, his eventful family life and his interaction with the hectic urban context - as 'a man of God'. It is told in deep, idiomatic and philosophical Tsonga with poetic bouts bursting into the story again and again. Apart from the philosophical, the author has a liking for the aesthetic. Consider the following passage in which Mtombeni describes the opening scene at Reverend Tlhomandloti's manse:

Swimoyana a swi karhi swi hunganyana swi tuvikisa swintshudyana, swi ba makamba ni byanyi lahaya kulenyana, ya tsekatseka hi ku xonga wonge a ku ri kona tinsimu leti a ti ta na swimoyana, leti a to twa ntsena hi byanyi ni makamba. Ku tsekatseka ka byanyi a wonge byo khananyana hi ku twa ku nandziha ka tinsimu leti taka ni swimoyana<sup>6</sup>.

Yet this 'calm, purity and unity of nature' (:9) perceived by Tlhomandloti is contrasted with the 'unrest' in Joni which caused 'whirlwinds in the hearts of modern people'. Something we must add is Mtombeni's sense of detail. His description of Reverend Tlhomandloti and his wife (:8) Nwa-Basana<sup>7</sup>, contains amazing detail. The Reverend's eyes are said to have contained 'a fading fury' and his wife owned a beautiful pair of eyes that were 'situated near each other'. Husband and wife kept short hair which was always properly combed.

---

<sup>6</sup> There was a gentle breeze, which caused a little dust, and beat against the dry leaves and the grass, causing these to vibrate beautifully, as if they were dancing to beautiful music brought by the breeze.

<sup>7</sup> N'wa-Basana literally means 'the daughter of [a man called] Basana'. It could also mean the one who is good/clean since the verb *basa* means clean or white. In Madambi's letter to his father (:35) we see Mtombeni 'exploiting' the name to describe N'wa-Basana's character; '...xikoxa xa hina N'wa-Basana; xi tlhela xi basa mbilu hi vunene'; which means 'our old woman N'wa-Basana, the appropriate owner of a clean heart'.



The two Tlhomandloti children are introduced in contrasts. Madambi<sup>8</sup>, the elder, is introduced as 'an extremely untidy fellow, always disgustingly dirty' yet he possessed an amazing intellect. Nyiko<sup>9</sup>, the younger one, is introduced as person who 'was always clean, doing everything gently and respectfully', yet couldn't 'get anything into his head'. Herein lies the central *problem* in the Tlhomandloti household. Several related issues complicate the problem, chief of which is Tlhomandloti's inability to accept (a) the differences between his children, and (b) anything less than what he perceived to be the ideal and perfect Christian behaviour from either of his children. For Tlhomandloti, his entire household must be exemplary. He explains it thus to his two children:

... muti wa hina wu hundzukile rivoni exikarhi ka vusiku leri voniwaka hi vanhu va ha ta hi le kule. Hi hina timboni ta munyama wa vanhu va ka hina; hi hina hi faneleke ku va rhangela emahlweni eka hinkwaswo leswo lulama ni leswi akaka mikhuva leyinene, vumunhu ni nhluvuko wa vanhu varikwerhu<sup>10</sup> (:18).

This considerable and noble responsibility, Tlhomandloti believes, is borne out by the fact that people frequented his house to seek his help on problems as diverse as child delinquency and truancy, family conflicts, advice on those in jails as well as legal advice. Mtombeni reveals that people perceived the Tlhomandloti family to be 'as solidly founded as the earth itself' (:35). Nyiko, whom Mtombeni describes as 'the flower of the household' (:14), asks his father a telling question: 'Must the Tlhomandloti household know everything that many other people do not know?' (:18). Tlhomandloti's answer reveals another of his deep-seated beliefs: 'no country can progress without ministers of religion and the learned'. This he said because Nyiko was the dull one at school. Next Tlhomandloti reminds his intellectually gifted but very untidy son, Madambi, that 'education and intelligence must be accompanied by good tidy habits' (:19). Madambi's untidy habits are said to

---

<sup>8</sup> Madambi means, 'terrible misfortunes'.

<sup>9</sup> Nyiko means 'gift'.

<sup>10</sup> ...our household has become a light amidst the night, a light which can be seen from far. We are the lights in the darkness of our people; we must lead them in all things that are good, constructive, good habits, humaneness and progress in general.

contradict his membership of a Christian and educated household. His defence smacks of satire; for Madambi argues that his strenuous efforts in education leave him with little time for anything else: 'Since I am far ahead of my class, shouldn't I be equally different from my peers in all other ways?' he asks. Mtombeni summarises Tlhomandloti's dilemma in relation to his children thus:

Loko wena Madambi a wu kota ku tisasa tani he leswi Nyiko a ti rhandzisaka swona; Nyiko na yena loko o kota ku landzela tidyondzo ta yena, a tlhela a twisisa tani hi wena hi swa xikolo, a ndzi ta tidzuna hi n'wina vana va nga. Loko a mo tshama mi ri karhi mi tsundzuka leswaku vanhu hinkwavo va Machangana va languta muti lowu wa hina wu ri na vuleteri bya vutomi lebyi nga heriki, a mi nga ta swi endla leswi mi swi tirhaka. Kutani mina ndzi ta swi kotisa ku yini ku lerisa van'wana, ni ku va tshembisa leswo ndzi va letela etindleleni leto basa kasi swa muti wa mina a swi nyawuli ...<sup>11</sup> (:20).

The first pastoral problem that is brought to Tlhomandloti (by a woman named Cheyeza Baloyi) is a parent-child problem (:10). The Baloyi child, Celela<sup>12</sup> (literally meaning to bury), has stopped going to school and joined bad company. The minister gives two pieces of predictable advice; first on how parents must deal strictly with their children and secondly how parents must cultivate a love for education and wisdom. Cheyeza Baloyi reveals that Celela frequently brings presumably stolen goods home (:16). N'wa-Basana brings coffee to Cheyeza and Tlhomandloti. As the two speak seated on the verandah of the Tlhomandloti manse, they witness a fatal stabbing in the street just in front of them.

---

<sup>11</sup> As for you, Madambi, if only you were as tidy as Nyiko is. If only Nyiko was able to do better at school, with the same kind of comprehension that you (Madambi) have shown, I would be very proud of you my dear children. I wish you would always remember that all the Machangana people look up to our family as a family that should lead them to eternal life; then you would not do what you are doing. How then, shall I be able to guide and advise others, whilst I am failing dismally inside my own household ...

<sup>12</sup> Literally, the name means 'to bury'. This meaning, as with the meanings of other names, seem to have significance since Mtombeni (:34) 'plays' with the meaning of the name in relation to the fate that Celela was to meet.

In typical Mtombeni detail the gruesome condition of the man who has been stabbed just above the left breast is described (:12). This scene is occasion for a bit of Mtombeni's poetic prose, because a woman, presumably the wife of the stabbed man, holds him in her arms, crying:

Solani, Solani, Solani, ndza ku kombela nkatanga, u nga ndzi siyi na maxangu ya misava na Joni ndzexe. Ndzi hlamule Solani; Solani u nga ndzi feli, hanyela mina ntsena nkatanga. Tsundzuka n'wana wa hina a ri yexe - Xikwembu xi hi endlile leswo hi ta va na vana vo tala mina na wena. Ndzi tshembise leswaku a wu nga ndzi siyi ndzi ri swanga<sup>13</sup> (:12).

The indifference of Joni to such incidents as this is highlighted by Mtombeni. The paramedics approach the deceased without emotion for ``they were very used to collecting corpses''. The people of Joni were no longer ``able to see'' incidents as these, they ``feel nothing'' when a person gets killed. Even the ministers are reluctant to pray over incidents like these. Tlhomandloti and his visitor simply stood by the fence and watched until the corpse was taken away. Cheyeza Baloyi pleads with Tlhomandloti to visit the Baloyis so that he may speak to Celela directly. But alas, both the invitation and its acceptance were too late.

On her return home from the minister's manse, Cheyeza found many people at her home. As she approached the door she heard someone cry out: ``Mangava ya celela mbuya'' (Poor Celela). Celela was lying in a pool of blood oozing out of a gun wound just above his right breast. Cheyeza took Celela's bloodied body onto her lap and inquires the cause of all this: ``Whose evil hand did this to you? Who is the witch, who bewitches in daylight where even ministers are watching?'' (:22). As his power leaves him, Celela produces from his pockets containers of banknotes and gives these to his mother. Describing these bank notes as a monument (*xihondzo*), he regrets his wayward ways and asks his mother to look after the money. Celela also confesses having killed two people in pursuit of this money. In this scene, we are given yet another

---

<sup>13</sup> Solani, Solani, Solani, I beg you dear spouse, do not leave me to experience the hardships of life and Joni by myself. Speak to me, Solani; Solani don't die on me, live for me alone, darling. Remember our only child. God had planned for me and you to have many children. Promise that you will not leave me alone.

taste of Mtombeni's powers of prose and detail. Using deep untranslatable metaphors from Tsonga traditional worship and healing, Mtombeni describes the pain, despair and oneness of mother and child as the latter approaches death.

Miri wa mana wa yena a wu sungula ku rhurhumela hi vusindza ni xivitwana ni mbitsi yo pfumala ntamu wo boha vutomi bya Celela byi nga ha humi exivirini xa yena. ... Mihloti ya Cheyeza a yi hundzukile mhamba ya rirhandzu leyi humaka etinhunguvanini ta ngati yin'we leyi a yi ri misiheni ya vona ha vambirhi, ku bohana ka mutswari ni n'wana wa yena hi nkava wa mbeleko ni mafundzu ya mibya ya ntehe<sup>14</sup> (:23).

Someone was sent immediately to go and call Rev Tlhomandloti. We are told that the minister put on his gown and fetched his Bible. Fortunately the minister found the fading Celela still alive, and he says to the minister, `` I am thankful that my mother called you. I will tell you everything so that you may be able to talk to God (on my behalf) knowing the whole story'' (:27). Then follows a long confession and a description of the robbery in which Celela was shot. Tlhomandloti gave a long and typically mission-church prayer<sup>15</sup> which included a petition for God to forgive the self-confessed killer:

Hambi leswi n'wana loyi a nga tsandza vatswari vakwe, ku n'wi nghenisa etindleleni to tenga ni ku rhula. Wena a wu tsandzi hi nchumu. Wena a wu kohli hi nchumu. Leswi a swi endliwa hi miri wa yena a swi hele no wona. Moya wa yena wu kuma ku kutsuriwa wu kuma ku tshamiseka ... Hi kombela leswaku ku hundza a ha ri xihlangi wu va wona nkhavi lowu U n'wi baka hi wona ntsena<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> His mother's body was starting to quiver and shake in spasms owing to agony and frustration because she had no power to stop Celela's life from escaping. Like a libation of love issueing from the same blood that flowed in their veins, Cheyeza's [dripping] tears symbolised the knottedness of mother and son as if through the umbilical cord [that once joined them together as one].

<sup>15</sup> The prayer is rational and offered in good flowing Tsonga - the kind that you find in the Tsonga liturgies of the EPCSA.

<sup>16</sup> Although this child has failed his parents in their attempts to show him ways of righteousness, nothing is impossible for you; nothing is hidden from you. That which his flesh did, may it perish with the flesh. And may his soul be redeemed and accommodated ... We ask that his untimely death at so

(29). ...

In the end Celela dies and is buried. The two Tlhomandloti children later leave home for higher education. Madambi goes to the University College of the North while Nyiko goes to a seminary for training as a minister. The letters between Madambi and his father (:34-43) are an occasion for Mtombeni to delve into the complex and philosophical issues of life. In these letters deep philosophical questions regarding knowledge, life and humanity are raised. Once again, Mtombeni contrasts this set of letters with those between Nyiko and Tlhomandloti (:44-49). Most of Nyiko's letters are described by Mtombeni as boyish. However, the one letter from Nyiko that Mtombeni reveals (:45) is far from boyish. Through the mouth of Nyiko, Mtombeni unleashes some powerful criticisms of the church and its theology. Essentially, he argues that 'ecclesiasticism has destroyed the essence of the Word of God'. Tlhomandloti's response is unable either to answer or to match Nyiko's letter.

Then Mtombeni jumps from college to the adult life of Tlhomandloti's children. Now the plot thickens and the old tension between Tlhomandloti and his children, which was artificially relaxed during their college days, resumes with greater intensity. The story enters its final lap, as it were. Madambi falls in love with a beautiful girl (Soluka) belonging to a Christian family - *but* she is Xhosa. The fifth chapter of the book, wherein Mtombeni reveals the romance between Soluka and Madambi, must rate as one of the most romantic pieces of Tsonga ever written. Yet amidst the flowery language Mtombeni reveals the problem, which Soluka anticipates; whether the strong-willed Tlhomandloti would accept Soluka. When Madambi finally broaches the subject, he makes sure that he emphasizes that Soluka comes from a Christian family (:56). Tlhomandloti rejects the whole idea outright:

Madambi, xana a wu swi tsakeli loko hi tshamile hi bula hi Xitsonga, hi ri vatukulu va Manchangana, ku nga ri na rimuntsu rimbe exikarhi ka hina? U tsakela leswaku xihlovo lexi tengeke hi mati ya Vutsonga ya fanela ya vindlusiwa hi ritiho ra Madambi wa ka Tlhomandloti, n'wana wa mufundhisi loyi a chaviwaka matlhelo

---

young an age, be the only punishment You mete out to him.

hinkwawo<sup>17</sup> ... (:56)?

Admonishing his son not to ``obey flesh and blood'', Tlhomandloti cannot be persuaded to change his mind:

Ndza ku alela Madambi, ndza ala ku amukela n'wingi wa Muxhosa vatukulu va mina va va vatukulu va Maxhosa hi tlhelo - ndza ala. Lava nhwana wa Mutsonga, va tele ngopfu; teka un'we wa vona; a nga ri nhwana wa Muxhosa. E-e ndza ala<sup>18</sup> (:57).

So in pain and in tears, Mtombeni's Madambi, as per tribal custom, is forced to cancel his plans with Soluka, *but* he adds a rider, he shall marry no one else. So this promising and perfect romance is brought to a brutal and abrupt end. Here Mtombeni forces the reader to ask many questions and even to be angry. What principle is so sacred as to cancel so promising and so genuine a love?

What about Nyiko? He is now a minister ``amongst the Vatsonga of Meadowlands''. As far as marriage is concerned, he did the right thing - he married a Tsonga and their family was blessed with four children. His '*huis-besoek*' skills were such that his parishioners called him ``the good shepherd''. *But* there was amongst his Christians a widow (N'wa-Mdanisi) whom Mtombeni depicts as someone bent on luring Nyiko into an adulterous relationship. And she succeeds. This eventually becomes a scandal. Worse still, she becomes pregnant. The upshot is that, despite his father's intervention, Nyiko loses his status as a minister. In bitterness, he commits suicide. His father's words at the funeral are stinging and unforgiving to the church court which stripped Nyiko of his ministry. Shortly after Tlhomandloti

---

<sup>17</sup> Madambi, doesn't it please you that when we relax, we converse in Tsonga, all of us being the descendants of Shangaans with no foreign blood amongst us? Do you rather prefer that the clean and pure fountain, full of the water of Tsongahood, must be muddied by the finger of Madambi Tlhomandloti, the child of a highly respected minister ...?

<sup>18</sup> I forbid you, Madambi, I refuse to accept a Xhosa daughter-in-law, so that my grand-children may become in part, Xhosa grand-children also - I refuse. Look for a Tsonga girl; they are so many; marry one of them, not a Xhosa girl. No. I forbid.

himself dies - Mtombeni portrays him as someone who simply could not cope with his son's death.

However, life goes on in Soweto. Madambi, we are told, took to heavy drinking (:79). Mtombeni's resolution of all the major conflicts in his plot are tragic - very tragic. But Mtombeni makes up somewhat for the tragic resolution. Madambi returns to Soluka. His mother, of whose liking for Soluka we are told rather belatedly, advises Madambi to inform his father of his renewed intentions to marry Soluka. Very early in the morning, one day, with some flowers and a bowl of water, Madambi goes to his father's grave. And here he says a prayer, not to God, but to his father and his father's fathers. Through this prayer, he informs his father and asks for his blessings. As he turns to walk away from the grave, guess who was standing behind him all along? Soluka. From the graveyard, Soluka and Madambi emerge, hand in hand, presumably to live as happily ever after as possible. This is the best Mtombeni can provide in mitigation of the gruesome deaths of Nyiko and Tlhomandloti and several other minor characters as well as of the thoughtless veto that Tlhomandloti had earlier exercised over Madambi's marriage.

### 3.2.3 Christian Commitment and Tribal Loyalty

The central setting of Mtombeni's book is the church, with Tlhomandloti (the minister) as the main character. The fact that the church belongs to the Shangaans is stated as a matter of fact, with little hint that it may be a problem. After Nyiko had finished his training, we are told that 'he was given a parish amongst the Vatsonga of Meadowlands' (:60). The nearest that this loyalty comes to being a problem is when Tlhomandloti refuses Madambi permission to marry a girl, not because she was unchristian - for she came from a Christian family of clean habits (:56) - but because she was Xhosa. The vehemence and thoughtlessness of Tlhomandloti's veto is contrasted with the authenticity and wholesomeness of the romance between Madambi and Soluka. Tlhomandloti could simply not comprehend the possibility that his prohibition of Madambi's proposed marriage could be wrong:

Tlhomandloti na yena u sele a tivutisa loko a hoxile hi ku lava  
leswaku muti wa yena wu tshama wu ri wa Vatsonga. Swi sarile swi  
n'wi karhata moya wa yena, a nga swi tivi leswi swi nga swona

evutomini bya munhu. U ringetile ku vona xihoxo xa yena eka leswi a nga swi byela n'wana wa kwe, kambe ko fana ni kwala<sup>19</sup>. (:58).

Yet the sheer brutality of Tlhomandloti forces the reader to wonder whether the preservation of the Tsonganess of the Tlhomandloti family is worth the price. Shouldn't love overrule ethnic and tribal ties? Madambi, in fact, tries this line of argument to persuade his father (:57), but to no avail. Is Mtombeni deliberately casting doubts over the sanctity and purity of tribe and ethnic group? Is he questioning the authenticity of Christian commitment which succumbs to the demands of ethnic loyalty? Whichever way we answer these questions, Mtombeni succeeds in shattering the myth of Tlhomandloti's strong, confident, domineering Christian life-style. How does a person so strong and motivated in the Christian faith handle the issue of his son's marriage so ruthlessly and so poorly?

#### 3.2.4 The ideal Christian Family

The desire of Reverend Tlhomandloti is to make and keep his family an ideal Christian family. Nothing else is approached as single-mindedly by Tlhomandloti as this ideal. He has decided that his family is meant to be a 'light'.

On closer scrutiny, Tlhomandloti's concern for his two children to improve their respective behaviour is closely connected to the view that his is and must be the ideal Christian family. The specific improvements that Madambi and Nyiko are required to enact are to tidy up and to perform better at school respectively. These 'improvements', in Tlhomandloti's view, are relevant to and indicative of good Christian behaviour. Jealously guarding his job of counselling and giving advice to his parishioners, Tlhomandloti wishes the habits of his family members not only to be in tune with his role, but actually to enhance it.

Tlhomandloti's ideal Christian family is characterised by (a) neatness (b) respectable educational pursuits and qualifications (c) obedient, neat and

---

<sup>19</sup> Tlhomandloti remained and asked himself whether he had erred in choosing to keep his family Tsonga. It troubled him. He tried to find fault with all that he said to his son; but he could not.



school-loving children, (d) the father having the last word. Yet all of these qualities do not automatically reveal a Christian character<sup>20</sup>. But even if they did, it would be debatable if the manner in which Tlhomandloti not only upholds them, but goes about enforcing them on his family would qualify as Christian. We are forced to conclude that Mtombeni is raising fundamental questions about (a) Tlhomandloti's view of the ideal Christian family, (b) the manner in which he upholds and enforces his supposedly Christian views; and (c) the general idea of a Christian family.

### 3.2.5 Church, Mission and Ministry

Although this issue of the mission and ministry of the church is not dealt with directly and exhaustively in the book, it is nevertheless a strong undercurrent. Rev Tlhomandloti comes across as a clerical, formal and mission-station-bound minister. People come to him with their problems. They look up to him to solve their problems. He only goes out when required and requested to do so. His family and his house are the proverbial 'light upon the hill' unto whom the people in darkness look. His understanding of ministry and mission includes the perception that the minister is at the centre.

Significantly, Tlhomandloti is often too late when he arrives where he is wanted. So he settles for saying the last prayer before someone dies. In the safety of the manse he perceives nature's harmony, something that is difficult for the people out there to perceive. When someone gets killed a few yards from his house, he simply joins the spectators. Nyiko's letter to his father (:45) contains seminal issues on the church, mission and ministry. It is perhaps this letter that reveals Mtombeni's acute understanding of the challenges facing ministers in general and the Christian church in particular. Nyiko's letter identifies several issues for the church and its mission: (a) The suggestion that the Word of God must be taken to people instead of expecting people to come to the church to hear the Word of God, (b) Obsession with care for those already inside the church, while necessary, cannot exhaust

---

<sup>20</sup> These characteristics are an apt description of an ideal *Majagani* family as was normative in the SMSA. The word *Mujagani* singular; *Majagani*, plural, refers to the converted and 'civilised' as opposed to the unconverted *Vahedeni*. While the latter is a direct transliteration from the English, heathen, the etymological roots of the former are unclear. It is nevertheless, a widely used word in indigenous Tsonga literature.

the task for which the church is called, (c) Preoccupation with the mistakes and omissions of those already in the church instead of concentrating on those who do not know the Word of God (d) clericalism, i.e. the fact that the minister is pulpit-bound, from whence he talks down at the people (e) the double-life of the minister, being one type of person on the pulpit and quite another in the street.

Mtombeni does not explore or discuss these issues at length. Nevertheless in raising them he reveals a deep awareness of the challenges facing the church and its ministers. On the basis of this, we can safely conclude that Tlhomandloti and his family are offered as an illustration of some of these challenges.

### **3.2.6 Church in an Urban Setting**

Both of Mtombeni's novels (1967, 1973) are set in an urban environment. This is a deliberate choice and Mtombeni uses his powers of description to make the urban setting an important yet slippery backdrop to the story. The happenings of the urban centre, i.e. the violent deaths, the lack of feelings, the ruthless culture, the generation-gap problems in the families, increased incidence of widows and the multi-ethnic population present the church with serious challenges. If old man Tlhomandloti and his son Nyiko's performance in this setting is used as yardstick, we must conclude that they coped very poorly in the urban setting. Mtombeni introduces totally new problems to the church as opposed to the traditional challenges that the church faces in a rural area. The proposed marriage between Soluka and Madambi is a typical urban phenomenon, and so are the violent deaths.

### **3.2.7 Culture and Traditional Customs**

Mtombeni displays a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Tsonga culture. Tlhomandloti's flat refusal for his son to marry a Xhosa woman could be interpreted as a cultural matter. Similarly, Tlhomandloti's preoccupation with neatness and a love for school and knowledge may be interpreted as implied critiques of a culture wherein such hygienic tidiness and intellectual pursuit are not so significant.

It is however in the Madambi-Soluka affair that cultural issues and contradictions come up. Soluka is judged and dismissed not on the basis of anything she has done or said. Her fault is simply that she is Xhosa. Madambi's obedient submission to his father is a cultural custom, according to which the father's word must be respected. However, the most fascinating comment on culture is contained in the episode where Madambi decides to visit his father's grave to re-propose his intention to marry Soluka. He says a very long prayer, not to God, but to his father. The prayer is told in typical African worship style. Yet Mtombeni makes no direct suggestion that this is in conflict with Christianity.

### 3.2.8 Which Sling-skin Has Become Loose?

In conclusion, I want to point out that, Mtombeni evokes deep issues around the Christian life, the Christian church and Tsonga culture. He evokes, raises and identifies these issues sharply rather than merely describe them. Nor does he care to 'resolve' them for the reader. For this reason the metaphor of the loosened sling skin (*Mubya*) is even deeper than one may suspect at first glance. *What* precisely does the sling-skin stand for? Mtombeni refuses to give this question either a singular or a definitive answer. According to my interpretation, the leather sling stands for missionary Christianity as attempted and enforced by Tlhomandloti on his family. Such Christianity is, according to Mtombeni, under attack. It is under the attack of the young who simply fail to satisfy its demand. It is also under attack from the ruthless and mobile urban environment. The leather sling stands for an inward-looking church, seeking to care only for its own and obsessed with matters of internal discipline. This is a tribal church, in which tribal belonging overrides Christian belonging. Things are no longer secure for such a church. The leather sling stands for such customs in Tsonga culture as the prohibition of marriage outside one's own kith and kin. Contrary to the teachings of both missionary Christianity and Tsonga culture, life's deepest questions cannot be answered in a clear-cut manner. It is not, however, inconceivable for someone brought up in a Christian family, to visit the grave of his father to offer a traditional prayer. Nor is it unimaginable that a deceased minister of religion, turned 'ancestor', may be the object of such a prayer!

### 3.3 *Tinhlolo Ti be Mitsatsu*<sup>21</sup> (Nkondo 1973) - Summary and Overview

This is a novel about the cultural and religious dilemmas of a learned Christian couple, Joe and Maria Machavi, set in a rural area called Mtititi in the Northern Transvaal.

After working for a while as a teacher in Orlando (Soweto), Joe and Maria decide to settle in the Mtititi area, Joe's place of birth. Lacking in Mtombeni's philosophical depth, Nkondo (1973) is nevertheless bolder and more explicit in the definition of issues. Mtombeni's sombre approach to life and his taste for the tragic (especially in *Ndzi Tshikeni* (1973)) is not as prominent in Nkondo. Whilst Nkondo does not possess the descriptive powers and the philosophical depth of Mtombeni, he has his own gifts. His chief tools of narration are humour, dialogue and satire. However, like Mtombeni,



Figure 1 Eric Mashangu Nkondo

Nkondo paints his characters with a clear and visible brush. He tells his story in leaps that return to a 'past' again and again - the so-called flash-back technique. Through this style he is able to raise issues and questions first, and only later clarify and explain them. In this way the reader's attention is kept by a clever and systematic rationing of information. For example, several times, Nkondo takes leave of Mtititi, to return to Orlando in Soweto where Joe and Maria used to live. In this way he keeps adding more features and lines to the characters, Joe and Maria.

Joe and Maria are graduates from the SMSA-initiated educational institution, Lemana College, situated at the Elim mission station near Louis Trichardt. Whilst at Lemana, Joe became very close to the local Mureri, by the name of

<sup>21</sup> Meaning 'The divining bones have erred'.

Lenoir. Similarly, Maria is said to have learnt a lot from a 'Miss' Agatha, also stationed at Lemana. Joe and Maria are therefore typical 'products' of missionary teaching and piety. When the couple decided to leave Soweto to return to Joe's place of birth, the Mtititi area in the northern Transvaal, the scene is set for the clash between their 'new selves' and their 'old selves'. The rest of the story is set at the Pfukani Mission station in the Mtititi area. It is a story of continuities and discontinuities. The characters, Joe Machavi and his wife Maria, become a lens through which Nkondo explores the clashes, contradictions and follies of the new and the old, the *Majagani*<sup>22</sup> and the *Vahedeni* (cf Maluleke 1995a), the church and the traditional community, the *Muneri* and the *Mungoma* as well as the topic of Black liberation.

Because of his almost excessive use of dialogue, Nkondo is able to speak mostly through his characters. The personalities he imparts to his characters also enable him to explore issues creatively. While Joe and Maria are the 'civilised Christians', Marhengwe (Joe's cousin) is the political loud-mouth, who hates all Whites (including the missionaries) with all his heart. Dayimani, another relative of Joe, is equally a *misfit*, for he is long past the marriageable age. A Reverend George is the missionary and his intolerance for local culture is displayed in graphic if at times humorous terms. Jerome, nicknamed (*Phuphu*<sup>23</sup>) is the overzealous church elder, eager to please the *Muneri*, but equally eager to humiliate both the *Mujagani* and the *Muhedeni* - the former for threatening his position and the latter simply for being 'lost'. All these characters are employed to explore the two camps into which the people of Mtititi are divided. Several other minor characters serve to add colour to each camp and to the border between the two camps. But Joe Machavi and his wife Maria are *misfits* in a more fundamental way than any other *Mujagani*. After more than six years (:75) of marriage, they have no child. The 'scandal' of this 'lack' was to visit them, through the views and voices of various characters and situations, again and again throughout the book. One of the more grave and serious *visits* this 'lack' was to make to Joe was when

---

<sup>22</sup> This word does not seem to have an etymological Tsonga origin. It may be one of those words which Xitsonga inherited from Sesotho in the process of literalisation. It means the converted, as in *Amaqhoboka* in Xhosa. Its opposite is *Vahedeni* (*Amaqaba* in Xhosa), meaning the heathen.

<sup>23</sup> *Phuphu* means pillar.

virtually all the senior women from his entire extended family, who had been helping him build a bigger house, paid Joe a solemn call:

Wa vona, hi rholerile maribye, hi ma hlengeleta hi tlhela hi ma ngengemisa hi ma tisa la, leswaku u ta aka yindlu hi wona. Ndhawu yi hlakuriwile, se yi lulamile. Yi yimele vavanuna. Hi twa leswaku vaaki va le kusuhi ni ku sungula ntirho wa vona ... kambe ku ta sala mani endlwini leyi loko swikwembu swi ku tekile? Xana u tshama u swi ehleketa sweswo na? Ku ta sala mani<sup>24</sup> (:74)?

With these words, the family representative, Vutamani, expressed the collective views of the family about Joe's predicament. To make matters worse, the spokeswoman goes on to express mock appreciation for Joe's 'extremely beautiful wife', Maria - but 'What sort of a wild grape tree is it that will not yield any grapes?' asks Vutamani. The upshot was that they were proposing that Joe should marry a second wife, one who would bear children. His blunt refusal of their proposition on the basis of his Christian commitments, which Joe claims account for his better material conditions, evoke derision from the women. Examples of other Christians who have married second, third and even fourth wives are thrown at him. One even suggests that he joins one of the independent churches, where he can stay Christian even after marrying a second wife.

Eventually, Joe and Maria, with the help of one of Joe's brothers, Mafemani, begin to think seriously of going to see a *Mungoma*, by the name of *Mafamba-hikhwiri* (one who walks on his stomach). With much hesitation, they decide to pay the *Mungoma* an 'exploratory' visit. The manner in which Nkondo projects the *Mungoma's* self-understanding is noteworthy:

Ndzo va mupfuni wa swikwembu. Ndzi nga ka ndzi nga vuli leswaku ndzi ta swi kota. Kambe, loko swikwembu swi swi rhandza, hinkwaswo swi ta endleka. Lexi ndzi nga xi vulaka hi lexi: i khale ndzi ongola vanhu vo fana na wena. A hi kan'we, kumbe

---

<sup>24</sup> You see, we have picked up the stones, and carried them here, so that you would use them to build your house. The spot has been cleared and it is ready. It is just waiting for the men. We understand that the builders will start their work soon. ... But, who will remain in this house after the gods have taken you? Have you ever thought of that? Who will remain?

kambirhi, kambe i ko tala. Kambe a swi na mhaka, a hi khongeleni swikwembu<sup>25</sup> (:81).

What Joe and Maria realised in the process is that many prominent Christians in this and other communities frequently consulted people like Mafamba-hikhwiri. Nkondo reveals that Joe had always believed that witches and sorcerers have much power, but he also believed that witchcraft could not work on those who did not put their trust in it.

Another source of conflict was Joe's independent and individualist streak. Soon after settling back at Mtititi, he wanted the fields divided between him and his brother Mafemani so that everyone knew what belonged to whom (:90, 97). But the extended family squashed Joe's idea. The fields belonged to both of them, became the official extended family ruling (:99). When finally both Joe's house and his shop were built, it did not affect the esteem in which Joe was held by those in his family who were looking for a child from him.

There is a sense in which Nkondo over-emphasises the issue of Joe's lack of child, repeating himself several times over without introducing any new angle. The matter eventually takes a creative turn, when the suggestion is made that Joe and not Maria may be the culprit of the infertility problem (:116). Maria eventually flees from all of it and returns to her home in Soweto. In the meantime, Joe gets himself into real trouble - after his brother's wife made a nasty comment about his childlessness, he loses his temper and beats her (:142). She falls into a coma for several days and dies later at the hands of a Mungoma (:157). Technically, it could be argued that she died not due to Joe's fault but due to that of the Mungoma. But the extended family decrees that Joe and Maria must leave the Mtititi area, if only for the sake of peace. As they discuss their departure, and in conclusion to the book, Nkondo reveals one positive development, namely that Maria is finally pregnant.

---

<sup>25</sup> I am only an aid to the gods. I cannot say that I will be able to help you, but if it is the will of the gods, you will be helped. What I can say is this: For long I have cured people like you. Not once, and not twice, but many times. Let us pray to the gods.

### 3.3.1 The New and the Old<sup>26</sup>

The overarching theme of Nkondo's book is the encounter and clash between the new and the old. The new is represented by a myriad of symbols such as the school, the church and the urban environment. At a micro level, in the context of Nkondo's book, the new is illustrated by ministers, various denominations, the missionary character, the zealous church elder, the political activist and the teacher. Similarly, the old is to be seen in the extended family, the pull and authority of the gods, the wrath of the ancestors, the power of the Mungoma, and a strong belief in both taboos and witchcraft. In this entire book, Nkondo depicts various encounters, negotiations and controversies between the new and the old. He also depicts built-in contradictions in elements of both the old and the new. While his novel is not only about the church and the Christian faith, the church is a significant 'player' in his scheme. Next to the school, Nkondo treats it as being in the forefront of the 'war' between the old and the new.

### 3.3.2 *Vujagani* and *Xihina* (our traditions)

The troubled and often humorous relationship between the *Majagani* and the *Vahedeni* is an important sub-theme in Nkondo's work. The *Majagani* looked down upon the *Vahedeni*, who dressed up in traditional clothes (:6). According to Nkondo most of the *Majagani* belonged to the Swiss Mission Church - but he adds that new Zionist churches have also emerged at Mtititi. This development deepened the conflict somewhat, since the *Majagani* competed and fought amongst themselves. Joe and Maria are fully-blown and proper *Majagani*. Jerome, the over-zealous but also jealous and ambitious church elder, is yet another type of a *Mujagani*. To prove his commitment to the church, Jerome had divorced 'four of his five wives, remaining with the first one who was the ugliest of all his wives' (:12). The *Majagani* also had 'special' and 'strange' names such as, Daniel, George, Saul (:27), Silas, Mack, Phanuel, Sarah, Agnes (:39) etc. In one episode, Jerome's dress is described as truly *Xijagana*: white silk shirt and a black tie (:105). However, some times the *Majagani* 'forgot themselves'. Once when there was a big African feast at the chief's kraal, many *Majagani* got excited and joined in the 'heathen' dances and the drinking

---

<sup>26</sup> Nkondo's other novel (1975) handles essentially the same overarching theme.



(:39, 58). This was a traditional wedding celebration in which the chief was marrying his tenth wife. Many *Majagani* led dual lives. On Sunday, they would occupy front seats and look very pious, yet still held many beliefs of the traditional religions dearly (:85f). Even Joe accepted that witches had much power (:87), only he believed that this power would not work on a person who did not believe in it.

Nkondo depicts the *Vahedeni* as the opposite of the *Majagani*. Some *Vahedeni* of high status such as Vangoma are described as being extremely untidy. They respected and even feared their gods. They would not climb onto the local mountain of Muvenje because they believed that it was the mountain of the gods. Their lifestyle is characterised by drinking, adherence to the authority of the extended family, belief in marriage (especially polygamous marriage), veneration and consultation of ancestors and Vangoma, as well as an undying belief in witchcraft. But Nkondo depicts the *Vahedeni* as the more honest and straightforward group in spite of their ignorance. They belonged to one and not two worlds so the incidence of hypocrisy was lower amongst them. At every corner the heathen demonstrate their simplicity of faith, their harmony with and sensitivity to nature, as well as their basic goodness. Unlike the *Majagani*, their lives are not fraught with too many contradictions. According to Nkondo, the Zionists were closer and more sympathetic to them (:123).

### 3.3.3 The characterisation of the Muneri

In including the Muneri as a character in his book, Nkondo displays his bravery. Because of the missionary stranglehold on Tsonga publications, Tsonga authors might be forced to avoid including the missionary amongst the characters. It is one thing to depict the missionary as the saviour (e.g. in Thuketana (1968), cf. 3.4 below), it is quite another to cast missionaries critically and even negatively. Nkondo does the latter with amazing boldness. The missionary has no 'special place' in Nkondo's scheme. There is no wall of protective devices surrounding the missionary character. Like the Mungoma character, to whom Nkondo often shows no mercy, the missionary and his trade are the object of much derision and criticism.

People would say of the Lemana-based missionary, Miss Agatha, who was extremely over-weight: 'We are not surprised that she is not married. She is

like two people in one, and Christians are not allowed to marry two wives'' (:2). So unattractive was Miss Agatha that ``even the heathens would not be interested in her'' (:2). One missionary, called Lenoir is said to have sent schoolboys to preach the gospel to a dangerous and hostile Venda chief instead of going himself (:15). One of Nkondo's characters, Marhengwe, attacks missionaries frequently. He accuses them of having come to Africa to enjoy chicken thighs and eggs and to spread 'dagga' (:37).

One short tempered missionary, George, burnt down a church building because the Christians had attended and participated in a heathen occasion (:40). Of this missionary it is said that he hated noise at church more than heathendom itself (:44). Whenever George was preaching the church elders had to run around the gathered worshippers making sure that there was absolute silence. No noise was allowed even from the infants in attendance with their mothers. Unbeknown to the missionary, people often poked fun at him, sometimes right under his nose. For example, his cheek was said to resemble a chicken thigh. George became known as 'Reverend Polygamy' because he always preached about and against it (:47).

The missionaries are also under attack because ``they forbid us to pray to our gods. They also teach us to look down upon our culture. Is this the way they lost their own culture?'' (:95). George, the missionary, even resorted to primary school punishment tactics for noise-makers during church services. Several noise-makers, including a woman who was breast-feeding her infant, were instructed to kneel in the front of the church facing the missionary throughout the service. In his act of preaching, the physical appearance of George the missionary is described in very ugly and unsympathetic terms:

... a huwelela a ri karhi a va komba hi rintihlo, a honokile mahlo, a vonaka a fana ni xinana lexi nga kusuhi ni ku baleka, hikuva hambileswi a komile, a a ri munhu wa miri<sup>27</sup> ... (:45)

Nor was George, the missionary, above personal prejudice and unforgiving grudge-harboring. His feelings for a Black evangelist and colleague by the

---

<sup>27</sup> ... he yelled, wagging his finger at them, his eyes popping out, so that he looked like a little frog about to burst, for although he was short, he was a very fat man ... .

name of Baloyi who criticized him in public, were very hostile (:40). So much so that once when evangelist Baloyi was stranded, George the missionary flatly refused to help. George is portrayed not as the typically sweet and long-suffering missionary type, but as a very physical, strongly built, aggressive and extremely short-tempered fellow. This is what earned him, according to Nkondo, the nickname, *Magimagimani-xa-matimba-ya-ndlopfu* (:39) [the forceful one with the strength of an elephant].

### 3.3.4 Political undertones

Once again, Nkondo sets himself apart from the majority of Tsonga novelists in his generation by his direct approach to politics<sup>28</sup>. As crucial as the religio-cultural dilemma that Tsonga people faced after the arrival of Whites in their midst, was the political dilemma that Black people found themselves in. Black political power evaporated simultaneously with the disappearance of their gods (:102). Although Nkondo himself, and various other characters, make several 'political comments' and evaluations, the character Marhengwe is the chief vehicle through which political comment is made. Marhengwe is introduced as a 'person who liked telling people that the Whites must go back to their home and leave Blacks alone to rule over themselves' (:13). There is also a hint that Marhengwe belonged to a secret resistance organisation, for he disappeared frequently. Upon being asked where he had been, he once answered thus: 'We are working on your deliverance from slavery. If we win, you will rejoice' (:13). When Joe tells of the dangerous and fatal missionary expedition in which he participated, which expedition was a form of punishment meted out against Joe and his friends by the missionary Lenoir, Marhengwe's feelings are immediately apparent: 'Why did the missionary not go himself? He deliberately sent you in order that you may get killed' (:16). Nor was Marhengwe sympathetic towards the missionaries: 'I do not worship a White man's god, I am Black. Worship a God imported from overseas? Never. I want a Black man's church, which worships in accordance with Black customs' (:17). Marhengwe also refers to religion as 'dagga (an opium) to our people' (:37). For him the missionaries came to exploit the wealth of Africa because their

---

<sup>28</sup> His play, *Muhlupheki Ngwanazi* (Nkondo 1974) is perhaps the most openly political piece of literature in Tsonga during the Apartheid era. It is a story of the valiant resistance of farm workers against their oppressive White master.

own countries lack much.

However, in order to protect himself from the censor's scissors (presumably), Nkondo 'taints' the character of Marhengwe considerably. Marhengwe drinks the White man's liquor a little too much. He is also portrayed as a boring personality whose only topic for all occasions was politics. His listeners never take him seriously. Nor can he answer some of the rebuttals he gets from his own listeners. His perception of Whites as skilled exploiters is construed by his listeners to mean an irrational hatred for Whites. Nor does his bundling together of all Whites, including the missionaries, for the same type of criticism help his cause. At the end of the day, Marhengwe comes across as an unauthentic and insincere character. He gave the Whites no credit whatsoever, even for creating the clothes which he was wearing (:14). When he eventually lands in jail, he has no one else to blame but his own recklessness.

Yet, through Marhengwe, Nkondo is still able to give vent to a credible political comment at a time when Apartheid was fully in place.

### 3.3.5 The Dilemmas of well-meaning *Majagani*

At the centre of Nkondo's book are the characters Joe and his wife Maria. They are presented as belonging to the more sincere and more authentic breed of *Majagani*. They are the 'living proof' of the 'goodness' of conversion to missionary Christianity and missionary education. Joe was a successful teacher and Maria was very skilled with her sewing machine. Their adherence to the orthodox teachings of the missionaries, being themselves 'children' of the missionaries: Lenoir in the case of Joe and Miss Agatha in the case of Maria. This is a couple who had much to show as benefits of their 'missionary upbringing'.

Nkondo uses the moving of the couple from urban Soweto to rural Mtititi to enhance the dilemma they faced as *Majagani*, beyond the clearly visible benefits they had individually reaped. Soon they find out that there are various types of *Majagani*, and not all of them are sincerely converted. But Joe likes his gin too. He resorts to it again and again without any hint that he views this habit as being in conflict with his Christian beliefs. The

couple's rampant individualism is rudely checked by the routine, control and authority of the extended family. Suddenly there is a whole group of people wishing to know and influence the finer details of their lives. The great Achilles heel of the couple however is their infertility problem. In many ways this is the problem that brings them down from their elevated *Vujagani* position to mother earth. The extended family is rude, unforgiving and unapologetic about the scandal of being a rich *Mujagani*, who has a beautiful house and a beautiful wife, and yet without a child. Even fellow *Majagani* consider it scandalous. Eventually the couple succumbs and consults a Mungoma, but with no luck. Eventually Joe's calm, controlled, learned and long-suffering disposition cracks up. In a violent rage, after enduring endless insults of his manhood, he beats his cousin brother's wife so hard, that she later dies from the injuries sustained.

### 3.3.6 Which bones have erred and how?

The idiom, *Tinhlolo ti be mitsatsu*, which Nkondo uses as the title of his book, seldom refers to the literal divining bones. It is often a manner of speech designed to indicate either that things have not worked according to plan, or that the diagnosis of the problem has been hopelessly inaccurate - or both. Yet in a culture where the divining bones are the 'final court of appeal', where can people go after having been disappointed by these? Presumably, as it was common practice, the inquirers could move on to another Mungoma if they were not satisfied with the diagnosis of one set of divining bones. But Nkondo is raising an even more fundamental principle; namely that the divining bones are not infallible.

However, after establishing the principle of infallibility, Nkondo does not provide a clear-cut answer as to *what* and/or *which* diviner bones he is referring to. If we take an obvious line of inquiry, it is probably Mafambahi-Khwiri's diviner bones which have erred. After all, the Mungoma failed to find a 'cure' for Maria's alleged infertility - this being the deepest source of 'conflict' in the novel. But we must deepen our line of interpretation. Since the Mtititi community in general and Joe's extended family in particular were so convinced that Maria (and not Joe) was infertile, their confident diagnosis is erroneous because the book ends with the announcement that Maria is pregnant. Although Nkondo does not say this in so many words, the fact that

Maria only falls pregnant after separating from Joe, strengthens the suspicion that it was in fact Joe who had the problem. In this case therefore, the diviner bones refer to the collective judgement of the Mtititi community. All of them, Joe's family, fellow *Majagani*, *Vahedeni* as well as members of the Independent Zionist church are convinced that Maria is at fault. Although the Mtititi community is replete with deep-seated differences of class and religion, they are all in agreement about Maria's infertility. But this entire community, *Majagani* and *Vahedeni* alike, have erred terribly.

Their error runs deeper than the individual case of Maria. The 'error' encompasses the very superficial 'differences' as well as the confident 'pretences' that the Mtititi community imposes upon itself. The Mungoma's confident but empty antics are exposed. So are the missionary's. The hypocrisy of the *Majagani* is made very transparent. Joe and Maria's perfect Christian life is turned inside out. Nkondo also evokes feminist issues. It is simply because of her gender that Maria is assumed by every stake-holder, to be the guilty one. Even the women with power - the senior women in Joe's extended family - join in the condemnation of Maria. All these illustrate the *error* which Nkondo wishes to highlight.

#### 3.4 *Xisomisana*<sup>29</sup> (Thuketana 1968) - Summary and Overview

The next novel I am going to analyse comes from the pen of Thuketana whom I introduced as being one of the most accomplished Tsonga novelists above (3.1.1). This is the story of a little Tsonga girl's journey through life, from her teens to adulthood. By the end of the story, however, we will realise that it is also a journey from 'heathendom' to missionary Christianity. Like Shilubana & Ntsan'wisi, whom we considered in the previous chapter, Thuketana's Tsonga has a strong Nkuna dialect. The first thing the reader notices is the fact that Thuketana elects to make the main character, *Xisomisana*, the narrator. In most situations in the book, *Xisomisana* is the underdog. This underdog status is greatly enhanced by the fact that she is

---

<sup>29</sup> Somisa is a very popular Tsonga name and *Xisomisana* is its diminutive form, depicting both affection and youth. The precise meaning of Somisa is unclear. It is probably, like several other Tsonga names 'inherited' from the various far-reaching encounters between the Vatsonga and the Zulus. If this be the case, Somisa would probably be derived from the Zulu, *isomiso*, meaning drought.

young, female and alone. By making her the narrator as well as granting her an overwhelming underdog status, Thuketana succeeds in creating trust, solidarity and even empathy between the reader and the story-teller.

Right from the first page, where we find Xisomisana in pain after being beaten by a male peer out in the veld where they together look after their parents's cattle, the reader is invited both to *enter* the story and to take sides. The opening pages reveal the somewhat odd situation in which a young and beautiful (:13) girl finds herself amongst herdboys, herself a herdgirl out in the veld. More than that, we are immediately introduced to the trying and unfair conditions in which Xisomisana finds herself (:10). The bully-boys of the veld, the most prominent of which was Maboko, required the weak ones to perform all sorts of delinquent duties, such as stealing eggs from home, fighting amongst themselves, dagga-smoking etc. Xisomisana reveals that her gender offered her no protection in all these. Xisomisana is an orphan, whose parents died when she was too young to remember (:14). In fact, she was not even born when her father died. She was now left in the care of her grandmother on her mother's side. Thuketana outlines very effectively, in the first few pages, the distressing circumstances surrounding Xisomisana. At the burial of her mother, she reveals, her ailing and very old grandmother on her father's side had attempted to throw her into the grave, seeing that there would be no one to look after her (:15). Xisomisana was the last out of three children, one boy and two girls. Nor did the grandmother, in whose care Xisomisana now was, have a husband. He had died a long time ago (:15). Since her grandmother had no other children, the task of tending the goats fell first to Xisomisana's sister, Fahlamela, and now to Xisomisana herself.

In this rural community at Xindzhewule, Sundays were cultural days. On this day, various festivities such as drum dancing (*swigubu*), traditional singing and beer drinking took place (:33). Xisomisana confesses her obsessive love for *swigubu*. Xisomisana's life takes a significant turn when one evening on her return from searching for a lost goat, she finds an injured woman lying by the wayside (:36). Her good-natured grandmother decides to take in this injured woman, Moyasi, who had a gaping and stinking wound on her thigh - a wound which, Thuketana later reveals, was caused by a crocodile bite (:47). She even got a local Mungoma to come and attend to the injured woman. Moyasi spoke a 'strange' Tsonga dialect, probably one that was still spoken in

Mozambique, but no longer in South Africa. It turns out that Moyasi is herself a talkative and colourful character.

Moyasi is in pursuit of her daughter who has fled her husband and taken off with another man; or so says Moyasi. The traditional authorities had given Moyasi two choices, either to repay the lobolo or find her daughter. Moyasi recounts one incident in her fateful travels in pursuit of her daughter. After having been treated very hospitably and being allowed to spend two days in one family, she wakes up in the middle of the night to hear men talking outside. They were discussing the finer points of how to kill a woman as a sacrifice to the gods of rain (:46). She knew immediately who the woman in question was, so she escaped. Moyasi stays for months with Xisomisana's grandmother, showing little anxiety to move on. In the meantime she even develops a romantic relationship with a *Riburantana* (Malawian) at the local compound. But this relationship ends violently when the Malawian discovers that Moyasi has eyes for another man.

Moyasi's entrance into Xisomisana life is made more complex when Xisomisana's long lost brother, Yingwana, returns in great sickness. Neither the Mungoma consultations nor the numerous libations to the ancestors managed to break the stranglehold of Yingwana's sickness. This sets the scene for Moyasi's suggestion, for she knows a better Mungoma far away from Xidzhewule at a place called Muzephula. This Mungoma is Moyasi's own husband. Casually, Moyasi asks for permission to go with Xisomisana for company (:70). Once a decision was taken, the ancestors are informed, and off go Xisomisana and Moyasi. But Moyasi soon shows Xisomisana a side she had not seen - an uncaring and unfriendly side. Nor does it seem that Moyasi ever had a genuine intention of going to seek her Mungoma husband. The experiences of the journey create much scope for Thuketana's able storytelling to blossom. When they meet an ugly man (both physically and in terms of character), Hodova, who abducts them, Moyasi tries to escape by offering Xisomisana to this man (:82). They ended up staying with this man, who had turned Moyasi into his wife, for more than a month. Finally, they make their escape one day when their abductor drank a little too much and smoked too much dagga. Next, they stop to stay with a strange man, Vuputsu, who lived in a compound consisting of workers who were building a canal - so the place was called Emugerhweni (place of the canal).



Thuketana describes the compound as an unbecoming place. There was much fighting, men fighting over women and women fighting over men. Most of the women, reveals Thuketana, made their livelihood from selling liquor and prostitution (:106). Here Xisomisana herself learns to drink and even gets used to life in the compound (:107). Her main occupation was to sell beer on Moyasi's behalf. Business was booming. But soon, Xisomisana herself was to become part of the business when Moyasi and Vuputsu sold her to man called Xitapita. Xisomisana did not love this man, but she hated Moyasi and the treatment she was receiving from her. In order to part with Moyasi she became the wife of Xitapita. The marriage produced a son, Mangele (:121). But, Xisomisana loses both child and husband later. Xitapita was killed by a lion and Mangele accidentally fell into a lake. In the meantime Moyasi disappears, leaving Xisomisana in the lurch.

The misfortune of being considered for an offering to appease the gods to release the skies befalls Xisomisana when she is captured by three men who were under instruction from their chief to capture a 'hen'. The Mungoma by the name of Xinyamatanga, who is set to officiate in this 'offering', ties Xisomisana up and puts her in front of the place of worship and sacrifice before saying a traditional prayer:

Ha losa vakokwana, ha ``khuyeka'' n'wina swikwembu swa le ntshaveni ya tamba ro fana ni nhloko ya munhu. N'wina swikwembu pfulani matihlo ya n'wina layo vona ekule ni le kusuhi mi vona etiko ra n'wina ... Vana va n'wina va tise mbuti leyi mi nge te ma yi lava hi leyi. Ndza yi dlaya vakokwana ndzi mi chelela ngati ya yona mi siyerisana mi tsaka<sup>30</sup> (:144).

Fortunately, for Xisomisana, the gods responded by saying that they needed the 'hen' to be sacrificed simultaneously with a 'cock'. But the acquisition of the cock took longer than Xinyamatanga had anticipated. Xisomisana's captor is bitten by a poisonous snake and this gives her a golden chance to escape.

---

<sup>30</sup> We humbly announce ourselves to you dear ancestors. You, the gods of the mountain on whose top there is a boulder shaped like a man's head. We beseech you to open your eyes which are able to see both far and near; behold your country, open your eyes and hearken to the cries of your people. ... Your children bring before you, the goat which you requested. I am about to kill this 'goat', so that you may take turns to drink its blood.

Xisomisana marries for a second time, to a man called Majuvana, this time as a second wife. Majuvana's first wife's name is N'wa-Mbaso. In this time Moyasi reappears, suffering from an extreme type of venereal disease (: 178), and she dies shortly afterwards. But Xisomisana's second marriage is also short-lived. Majuvana dies in an accident at the mine where he worked. His first wife loses her first-born daughter.

With that event, Thuketana's plot reaches its highest point. N'wa-Mbaso accuses Xisomisana of having bewitched the daughter. A decision is taken to consult a Mungoma (*ku huma mungoma*) for the identification and verification of the witch who is responsible. Xisomisana is pointed out by the Mungoma as the witch. This is the climax of the story. In punishment she had to be killed at a place where two ways meet.

It is at the scene of execution that the punch-line of the entire book is delivered. Just at the moment of execution, with the large crowd baying for Xisomisana's blood, an ox-wagon arrives carrying two Whites and a Black man, led by another Black man. The one White man approaches the gathering and speaks to them in very good Tsonga and not in the usual *xithathalapha* (*fanakalo*). An interesting discourse starts between the crowd gathered to witness the execution and the White men. One of the White men asks if the accusing crowd had witnessed Xisomisana killing the deceased child. Even the black man with the Whites told the crowd that no such thing as witchcraft existed and that it was a mistake still to believe in it. This black man explained that he no longer believed in witchcraft because he had been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. But the crowd would hear nothing of that. The debate between the crowd and the White men reveal deep-seated differences. When one of the White men declares that human beings have been created by God, the crowd retorts by pointing out that human beings came out of a reed. Another source of dispute is on the question of what happens after death. The White men indicate that our souls go to heaven where they stand to be judged by God. The crowd responds by saying that after death, we are buried and we join the gods of our forefathers. When the crowd grew in confidence and became less and less tolerant, one of the White men produces a gun and threatens force to free the accused Xisomisana. One gunshot in the air was enough to convince the crowd the White man was serious, so they fled.

Approaching Xisomisana, the White man says: "Let us go my child, your suffering has ended". This way she joins the White men and their black assistants. Thuketana finally introduces the White men; they are missionaries *en route* from Mozambique back to Spelonken where they have already started missionary work. The missionaries tell Xisomisana of Jesus Christ, who was wrongly accused, charged and crucified. This story stuck in her mind and reminded Xisomisana of her own experience. One night she saw Jesus upon Calvary in her dreams. And Jesus said to her: "Do you see my blood flowing? It was shed so that your sins may be forgiven" (:218). In her dreams she tried so hard to clean the flowing blood of Jesus' feet and body. But the more she tried, the more blood came. Until Jesus spoke again and instructed her to tell the missionaries of her dream. This she did. And the missionaries confirmed that Jesus had indeed visited her in her dreams. She was given a new name, Paseka, because the missionaries felt that Xisomisana was a long and difficult name.

While the missionaries were camping at one place on their journey back to Spelonken, Xisomisana (quite by accident) bumps into her brother Yingwana who, having recovered from his sickness, was now in search of her. Yingwana had been eventually healed, not by a Mungoma, but by a White doctor. A day before Yingwana and Xisomisana could part from the missionaries, she was baptised. Then the following day, they left. Yingwana and Xisomisana went back home.

### 3.4.2 Effectively told story

Eka *Xisomisana* mutsari u vonaka a hi tsalela novhele ntsena, kambe loko hi fika eka Kavanyisa ka 22 (Ndzi pona ri Ahlamile), swi va erivaleni leswaku a a ri ni xikongomelo xo karhi. ... Leswi swi endla leswaku hi lemuka leswaku numbenumbe wa makhombo la wa a ya landzelela Xisomisana a wu ri wa yini<sup>31</sup> (Nkondo, C.P.N. 1982:27).

From a literary point of view, Thuketana's is the most captivating of the

---

<sup>31</sup> In *Xisomisana*, it seems as if the author is just writing us a novel for no serious reason. But once we reach chapter 22 (titled "My Lucky escape") it becomes clear that the author had a specific objective. This makes it clear to us that the series of misfortunes which seemed to follow Xisomisana were building up to this.

three novels. The plot is complex and the suspense is sustained up to the last page. Nothing in between the first and last chapter betrays the author's 'secret agenda'. Xisomisana solicits and manages to win the confidence of the reader in various powerful ways. From the first page of the book she is portrayed as an underdog surrounded by unfair and cruel circumstances. Her biography is tragic right from the time of her birth. The 'series of misfortunes' she experiences serve to underscore how unjustly and inexplicably cruel her world was to her. But Thuketana does not want either to depress or alienate the reader completely. He punctuates the entire story with brilliant touches of humour. The horrible death of Hodova who fell off the very cliff where he had captured his prisoners (Moyasi and Xisomisana), is told with a touch of humour (:92f). The death of Musopole, Moyasi's lover, is a tragic affair. But the reader is forced to laugh at the antics of both the Malawian and Moyasi in the process (:51f). The same touch of humour can be detected in Moyasi's sharp tongue as she ill-treats Xisomisana all along their fruitless journey. It is mainly his ability to mix tragedy with humour that allows Thuketana to heap misfortune after misfortune on Xisomisana without the reader questioning the authenticity of the misfortunes or suspecting that he/she is being prepared to take the side of Xisomisana when the story comes to a head, i.e. when Xisomisana faces execution after being charged with witchcraft.

### 3.4.3 Xisomisana as a case study

Looking at the book as a whole, one cannot help but conclude that Xisomisana is offered to us as a case study. It is a case study disguised as a phoney autobiography. Thuketana presents us with a complete and comprehensive story of a Tsonga person's life right from the day of that person's birth. All the cultural, religious and social elements that impact on the life of the selected person, in this case Xisomisana, are explored. Significantly, Thuketana chooses a powerless and the lowliest possible Tsonga; a child and a woman, as both the main character and story-teller.

In this way, the story of Xisomisana becomes a microcosm of Tsonga life and culture. It is not simply the story of one insignificant woman, but it is the story of a tribe, a culture, a community and a nation in need of God. Thuketana attempts to present in the fictional story of one woman, what H.A. Junod (1927) presented in two volumes titled *The Life of a South African*

*Tribe*. On top of all these considerations, I must add that, *Xisomisana* is a story of a woman and her oppressive and 'heathen' culture. From her ill-treatment by herdboys to her dependence on marriage for survival, *Xisomisana's* story is pregnant with feminist issues. The bitter and yet understandable rivalry between *Xisomisana* and *N'wa-Mbaso* illustrate the 'evil' nature of polygamous marriages. It is this marriage that creates the context for *Xisomisana* to be accused of witchcraft.

The arbitrary way in which the destinies of Tsonga women could be decided is exposed not only in the story of *Xisomisana* herself but in the mini-stories of various supporting characters is instructive. A woman is no woman without marriage. *Moyasi* is forced to walk the earth in search of her escaped daughter because she could not pay back the lobolo with which her daughter was married. *Xisomisana* gets married not because of love, but because of pressure from *Moyasi* who needs the money. In her own words, she did not love *Xitapita*, she felt pity for him. Only later did she learn to love him. *Thuketana* indirectly prompts the reader to wonder how many other Tsonga women have got into marriage via this path. After the death of a husband, there is only one way forward for the widow, namely to get married again. The case of *N'wa-Mbaso*, *Majuvana's* first wife, is also noteworthy. The narrator is very unkind to her. She is depicted as a physically ugly woman who tormented her husband. But she had no power and no say in her husband's decision to marry a second and younger wife, *Xisomisana*. She is simply informed. Nor is she 'allowed' to show any feelings of jealousy. Belief in witchcraft and dependence on *Vangoma* is a given in *Xisomisana's* community. Drinking is one of the favourite pastimes. The men go away to work as migrant labourers somewhere far (e.g. *Yingwana*, *Xisomisana's* father, and *Majuvana*).

#### 3.4.4 An exhibition or denigration of rural Tsonga Culture?

Thuketana demonstrates considerable ability to withhold and/or suspend judgement, hide his agenda and to sustain suspense. A very large chunk of this book offers the reader an assortment of picturesque snippets of Tsonga culture. Yet his ability to suspend judgement cheats the reader and lets Thuketana off the hook. It is not always clear what his evaluation of various aspects of Tsonga customs is. The range of themes and issues Thuketana touches on is wide, uncompromising and uncensored; dagga-smoking, beer-drinking, prostitution, loose female morals, witch-hunting, African drum dances, singing, unquestioning belief in Vangoma and the gods, etc. Yet Thuketana relates most of these in a descriptive and even positive tone. One custom which Thuketana clearly evaluates negatively is belief in witchcraft as well as its consequences. He also takes a low view of the antics of Vangoma. His assessment of respect and veneration for the dead is however ambiguous. His confidence in White missionary education and Christianity is unmistakable. Yingwana's serious debilitating illness is apparently healed, within a week, by the medicine of a White doctor. Again, in the phenomenon of the death of Xitapita, Xisomisana's first husband, the only brave and able man amongst the lot is the White man with a gun. The dramatic rescue pulled off by the missionaries with regard to Xisomisana in the last chapter is used to demonstrate several things such as the rationality with which they view life and nature. Hence they ask if anyone witnessed Xisomisana killing N'wa-Mbaso's daughter. Unlike the Tsonga, who believed that human beings originated from a reed, they knew that God created all things. Their patience in trying to reason with the fanatical crowd who, under the sway of the Mungoma, were baying for Xisomisana's blood, is captivating. But so unreasonable was the crowd that even these 'reasonable' men had to resort to a gun shot into the air.

### 3.4.5 Misfortune as Justice and misfortune as Injustice

A reasonably helpful way in which to establish Thuketana's moral principles as well as his evaluation of people and customs is to study his view of justice. Xisomisana, the main character, gets a raw deal from life. All her misfortunes are both undeserved and unjustified. Her reward and proof of innocence is that she survives them and lives to see both her brother Yingwana and her beloved home in Xidzhewule. Musopole, one of Moyasi's lovers, who killed a man called Chauke out of jealousy, attempts to kill Moyasi by burning down a house belonging to Xisomisana's grandmother. He meets his death shortly thereafter, when, in an attempt to flee from the police, he jumps into a lake full of crocodiles. Similarly, Moyasi, a woman without scruples, feeling or morals receives her reward. She dies of venereal disease<sup>32</sup> at the wayside - note that it was at a way-side that Xisomisana 'met' her for the very first time. Both in the first and second incident, Xisomisana tries to rescue Moyasi from the way-side, but through her own actions, Moyasi returns to the wayside. Hodova the abductor, drunkard and rapist who had turned Moyasi into his wife meets his horrifying death at the very spot where he 'captured' Moyasi and Xisomisana. The man charged with keeping watch over Xisomisana - the 'hen' about to be offered to the gods meets his horrible death when, in search of honey, he is bitten by a deadly snake. From the manner in which these characters meet their deaths, we can tell what sort of habits and behaviours Thuketana considered negatively.

There are the deaths of the 'innocent' also. Most of these are 'illustrations' of the theme of Xisomisana's unjust suffering. I would include here the death of Xitapita, Xisomisana's first husband, the death of Majuvana, her second husband, as well as the death of Xisomisana's healthy baby boy, Mangele. We could include here the death of Xisomisana's grandmother, N'wa-Bvuma.

On the one hand, therefore, it would seem that Thuketana's belief was, 'you reap what you sow'. However, on the other, none of what Xisomisana 'reaped' was of her own sowing. The solution to the 'riddle' lies in the behaviours and habits of Xisomisana on the one hand and those of the bad characters on the other. Thuketana's moral is: Whilst well-behaved people may not always reap

---

<sup>32</sup> The Tsonga denotation, for venereal diseases is harsh: *Vuvabyi bya tingana*, literally, 'the diseases of shame'.

good rewards *now*, they, like Xisomisana are sure to reap these ultimately. This is one of the essential difference between being heathen and being Christian.

#### 3.4.6 Missionary Christianity as the answer

Thuketana projects missionary Christianity as the answer to the incredibly dark habits of Xisomisana's people; habits which included human sacrifice, drinking, polygamy, belief in witchcraft and the execution of witches. The missionary's words to Xisomisana at the moment of rescue betray Thuketana's bias: ``Let us go dear child, your suffering has come to an end'' (:216). What was Xisomisana's suffering and why did she suffer? She suffered at the mercy of such customs as drinking belief in human sacrifice, polygamous marriage customs and belief in witchcraft. Xisomisana's conversion is the answer to all her suffering. For once converted, she would bid farewell to all these customs and ignorant beliefs.

However, the missionaries do not adopt Xisomisana and her brother permanently. After baptising her, they let her and her brother to go back to their home. Xisomisana is asked to tell her brother of the good news. Are they being sent back into this very dark culture? What does this mean? It could be a display of the confidence that the missionaries had in the 'new' person that Xisomisana has become after conversion. It could be a statement that amounts to an indication that the culture of Xisomisana's people, though bad, ignorant and backward, was not altogether unredeemable. Finally it could be a statement of mission; Xisomisana has been saved both literally and spiritually, now she had the task of going to announce the good news to her own people.



### 3.5 General Conclusion

#### 3.5.1 Style and Plot Construction

Each of our chosen novelists, Mtombeni, Nkondo and Thuketana has his own distinctive style and strength. Apart from a love for tragedy, Mtombeni possesses great powers of description and deep philosophical reflection. However, Mtombeni's storyline is simple and straight forward. Nkondo delights in exposing the social contradictions between the old and the new, Christians and the 'heathens' etc. His storyline is a little more complicated than that of Mtombeni. He rations out information about situations and his characters selectively, proportionally with the effect of keeping the reader in suspense. But both his characterisation and storyline are fairly straightforward, i.e. after reading the first few pages the reader can reasonably work out the general direction the story will take. As a novelist, Thuketana combines the best of both Mtombeni and Nkondo. Without equating his powers of description to those of Mtombeni, one must grant that he is a formidable story-teller. It is in his construction of the plot, its tributaries, minor conflicts and presentation of the major conflict that Thuketana excels. His storyline is complex and yet captivating, for the narrator always keeps something up her sleeve - right up to the end of the book.

#### 3.5.2 Depictions of Missionary Christianity

Religion and missionary Christianity constitute an important theme in the novels we have considered - indeed, in many Tsonga literary works. Although he considers it as proof of the constricted nature of Tsonga literature, especially the first generation works, C.T.D. Marivate (1985:26) confirms this reality about Tsonga literature:

Ekusunguleni, Vatsonga a va voyamela ngopfu eka swa vukhongereri.  
 Hi mukhuva wolowo matsalwa yo sungula, ... ya ni nkucetelo wa  
 leswaku vutomi byinene byi kumiwa hi loko munhu a ri mukriste.  
 Sasavona u hela hi ku hundzuka Mukriste. Murhandziwani u onhaka  
 loko a tshika ku nghena kereke. Mahlasela-hundza u dyondzisa ta  
 vutomi lebyinene lebyi taka hi ku va mukriste. Xisomisana u

ponisiwa hi vafundhisi<sup>33</sup>.

Although C.T.D. Marivate is right in pointing out that it was only in the 1960s that Tsonga authors began to increase the number of themes in their works, it would be incorrect to suggest that the religious theme has since disappeared from Tsonga works. Nor would it be constructive to regard the theme of religion as a sign of literary underdevelopment. Religion, Christianity and related issues of culture remain an important variable in the plots of most Tsonga works. This reality puts into question the suggestion that the prominence of the religious theme is mainly a sign of constriction and 'backwardness' in some evolutionary assessment of Tsonga literature. Religion (traditional and Christian) has been and continues to be an important variable in the lives of Tsonga people, as clearly reflected in the novels studied.

### 3.5.2.1. Religious Issues Feature Prominently

A readily demonstrable feature in the novels we have considered above is that all the novelists consider religion significant, if not central, in the lives of the communities whose stories they tell. In the case of Mtombeni (1967), the whole story revolves around the strong character of the Reverend Tlhomandloti. The dilemma of Black people after the advent of both Christianity and the Whites into their lives is central to Nkondo (1973). The climax in Thuketana is the saving of Xisomisana to Christianity.

That 'fact' having been established, the task of characterising the manner in which Christianity *vis-a-vis* local culture and religions is portrayed is divergent and therefore more difficult. In Mtombeni (1966) there is no question that missionary Christianity and its after-effects are good and are here to stay. The fact that all the ministers in Mtombeni (1967) are black is proof that he considered missionary Christianity not only here to stay, but as something permanent. However, he raises significant questions in relation

---

<sup>33</sup> In the beginning Tsonga authors leaned heavily towards the theme of religion. In that way, the first publications, ... contain the moral that good life is to be found in Christianity. [Thus for example,] Sasavona ends up being converted to Christianity. Murhandziwani goes astray when he stops going to church. Mahlasela-hundza teaches about the good life which belongs only to Christians. Xisomisana is saved by the missionaries.

to the form that this permanent (though inherited) faith takes. He raises questions about the ministry: Its mission-station boundedness; the fruitless attempt by the minister to make him/herself and his/her family the ideal Christian; the pull of ethnic loyalty above Christian commitment as well as the inward-looking nature of the church. These issues are not only apt with regards to the church inherited from the SMSA, but they are real life issues. The books are fiction but the issues they evoke are real and still current. The boldness with which the novelists raise these issues, many of which are thorny, can only be explained by the fact that they do so under the protection of fiction.

Whereas Mtombeni considers the inherited church as being now in the hands of local ministers, Nkondo goes back to the 'missionary era'. In the safety of the literary devices of the novel, Nkondo departs from traditional hagiography - and he paints a normal and realistic picture of the missionary. The picture of a patient, long-suffering missionary, with which Thuketana (1968) operates, is shattered. Aggression, short temper, intolerance and inability to forgive are characteristics that even missionaries could have. The missionaries could also be physically ugly and overweight. It is not as if all missionaries were like that, but Nkondo is obviously 'responding' to the dominant picture. Essentially what he does is to remove missionaries from the pedestal on which the works of the likes of Baloyi (1965), Maphophe (1945) and Thuketana (1968) have placed them. He treats them in essentially the same way that he treats everyone else.

The preoccupation with orderliness and strict control that missionaries exercised over the lives of converts spill over somewhat comically into the Sunday hour of worship. Noise is strictly forbidden - even the noise of infants! The suppressed desires of the *Majagani* are a constant undercurrent threatening to explode at any time. In the case of Joe, one of the central characters in Nkondo (1973), such explosion comes when he assaults his brother's wife and thereby precipitates her premature death. So, time and again, the *Majagani* 'slip back', into the 'stupors' of traditional festivities and customs. The pull of their traditions is so strong that they often fail to control themselves (Nkondo 1973:58, 39). Such was the pull of traditional festivities that even the teenage Xisomisana lost her concentration as a shepherd in the forest when she heard the drum beat. She felt as if the drum

was saying: ``Come here, come here, I'll buy you some sweets, come here, I will buy you some beads ..'' (Thuketana 1968:34). In Nkondo's novel (1973) one missionary takes it upon himself to burn the whole church chapel in order to 'punish' back-slidden Christians.

These portrayals of both the missionary and the pull of the traditional life constitute an important comment which we must explore and highlight. Although Mtombeni and Thuketana do not mention the SMSA by name, the reader is left in no doubt that this mission is the model under discussion. The missionaries who saved Xisomisana, were travelling between Mozambique and Spelonken. It is a historical fact that Paul Berthoud, accompanied by some Tsonga assistants, undertook the initial journey between the two countries. It was in return from Mozambique that he stopped at the Muhlaba area near Tzaneen to make a proposal to chief Muhlaba for the SMSA to start work there.

### 3.5.3 Missionary Education

Our novelists, themselves products of missionary education and Christianity, do not write off either missionaries or missionary Christianity. However, they raise very critical questions about the use and effects of missionary education. Their attitude towards missionary education is both positive and ambivalent. It is perhaps in the 'division' of communities into the *Majagani* and the *Vahedeni* that overall missionary education is called into question most seriously by the novelists. Nkondo (1973) also exploits the further divisions and controversies between the converts, the mission *Majagani* and the Zionists. Both Nkondo and Mtombeni demonstrate very ably the heavy price that a *Mujagani* is required to pay for the Christian lifestyle. The notion of being exemplary visits both Tlhomandloti and Joe's family severely. Jerome, the over-zealous *Mujagani* in Nkondo (1973:12) demonstrated his conversion by 'dismissing' (*ku hlongola*) his three 'beautiful wives' and remained with the 'ugliest' of them all. Jerome's haughtiness causes him to look down upon both heathens and members of churches other than his own. If Jerome, as a model, can be dismissed on the grounds of his extremity, Joe and Maria cannot. Here are two educated Vatsonga who appreciate the benefits of both missionary education and missionary religion. Yet Joe's ideal of 'going back to his roots' at Mtititi exposes many discontinuities and contradictions in Joe's *Mujagani* image.

What Nkondo (1973) succeeds very well in doing is to expose the frivolity of some of the points of difference between the *Majagani* and the *Vahedeni*. Their most significant differences pertain to names, church-going, education and manner of dress. Otherwise both groups enjoy a drink, consult Vangoma, can have adulterous relationships and both are attracted to the drum-beat of the *Xincayi-ncayi* dance.

#### 3.5.4 Local Customs

One gets from these novels a very good and clear view of significant traditional customs, especially those that were the source of controversy in the encounter between Christianity and Tsonga culture. At a descriptive level, it is sometimes difficult to tell how the authors evaluate various African customs. Mostly, the descriptions are celebratory rather than condemnatory. Both Thuketana and Nkondo's description of traditional festivities are upbeat, enthusiastic and implicitly positive. However the central conflicts in the stories centre around those local customs that missionary Christianity and Western culture found most abhorrent. Polygamy features prominently in both Nkondo and Thuketana. Thuketana accentuates it by adding such bad practices as loose sexual morals, prostitution and rape. So central was the sin of polygamy that George the missionary declares that 'it would have been better for the polygamous person not to have been born',<sup>34</sup> (Nkondo 1973:45). Jerome, the over-zealous *Mujagani*, dismisses his four wives as testimony of his conversion. Joe's extended family torment him with the suggestion that he must marry a second wife (Nkondo 1973:107) who would bear him children since Maria had failed in that department. Nkondo skilfully casts doubt on the assumption that the fault lay with Maria when a prominent *Mujagani* advises Maria to try other men (Nkondo 1973:116). For Joe this would be unChristian. Yet the Zionists descend upon his house, uninvited, to offer him the possibility of being Christian and polygamous (Nkondo 1973:122). Similarly Xisomisana's problems with N'wa-Mbaso are essentially problems of rivalry and jealousy between wives of the same man. It is these problems that lead to Xisomisana being accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death.

The place of the Mungoma, belief in witchcraft, and recourse to the skills of

---

<sup>34</sup> It is perhaps significant that in this very instance, George's Tsonga interpreter 'refused' to interpret this harsh statement by George.

the Mungoma are also central local customs, which were pitted against missionary Christianity and education. Thuketana (1968:59) paints a picture of Phisana the Mungoma as a charlatan who made his money from telling lies. Yingwana was later healed quite quickly and simply by a White medical doctor. Similarly, Xinyamatanga, the Mungoma who had decreed that only human sacrifice would appease the gods, is portrayed as a cruel and blood-thirsty person (Thuketana 1968:142f). Moyasi's expedition in search of her great Mungoma husband is a cruel wild goose chase. In Nkondo, Joe and Maria get no help from Mafamba-hi-kwhiri. It is, however, Thuketana who best demonstrates the enormous power of the Mungoma over people's lives - literally. Not only is this character essential for the sustenance of beliefs in witchcraft, but this figure sentences and orders executions of witches. The power of the Mungoma must be broken if belief in witchcraft is to be eradicated. Yet, Nkondo mitigates somewhat for the Mungoma. The Mungoma does not claim to have powers; it is the gods, whose servant he is, who have the healing powers.

Nkondo is even more kindly disposed towards the gods or ancestors. They are portrayed as the guardians of the community, who have been angered by the advent of Whites and missionaries. The fact that Madambi, in Mtombeni (1967), ends up (a) at his father's grave, and (b) saying a prayer to his dead father and not to God reveals an ambivalence in Mtombeni vis-à-vis the place and status of ancestors.

### 3.5.5 Mission and Politics

Both Thuketana and Mtombeni seem to steer away from political issues. C.T.D. Marivate (1985:26) has pointed this out as a general tendency in Tsonga literature:

Lexi vonakaka leswaku vatsari va Vatsonga va xi papalata i timhaka ta vupolitiki bya tiko ni minkarhateko leyi tisiwaka hi milawu leyo tika etikweni leri, ngopfu milawu leyi kongomaka ku risa vutomi bya Vantima. Matsalwa yo komba nhlupheko lowu tisaka hi ku rhurhisiwa kumbe ku aleriwa ku ya tirha ni ku tshama ni vasati loko munhu a huma ematiko-xikaya, ta mapasi, ta ku aleriwa ku xava misava (mapurasi), sweswo-sweswo, minkongomelo yo phofula

tlhelo leri ra vutomi bya Vatsonga ya kala<sup>35</sup>.

However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, sometimes one must read between the lines to hear the political comment that comes from Tsonga authors. Mtombeni's graphic but grim description of the cold un-feeling urban atmosphere, the unfeeling police and paramedics, the high crime rate, the cheapness of Black life, is more than a mere description of a 'normal' urban situation. It is a description of the conditions in which Blacks find themselves. As a novelist, Mtombeni simply paints these images and invites the reader to complete the comment. Nkondo is the notable exception in much Tsonga literature. He manages to raise many pertinent political issues, such as the oppressed state of Blacks, the greed of the Whites, their dishonourable nature, the need for Blacks to do something about their oppression, etc. More than that, he manages to connect the political impotence of Blacks to both the cultural and the religious 'assault' waged by Whites. Some of the connections he makes are commonplace, e.g. he calls religion an opium. His political character denounces Christianity as the religion of Whites.

### 3.5.6 Conclusion

The three novels considered have demonstrated a rich commentary on religion in general and missionary Christianity in particular. Without rejecting it off-hand, they raise real and fundamental issues for missionary Christianity. More than the historical and biographical works we considered in the second chapter, the novelists are able to take the debate beyond the superficial. Both the *pretences* of missionary Christianity and those of Tsonga culture are exposed. In front of the novelists, the missionary is made to stand alongside the Mungoma to be evaluated by the same standards. Real life issues are brought to bear upon both missionary Christianity and traditional Tsonga life. Such issues include, drought, adultery, infertility, hypocrisy, death, violence, gender issues etc. Each in his own style, the authors manage to demonstrate that neither traditional culture nor missionary Christianity have

---

<sup>35</sup> What is most apparent is that Tsonga writers avoid issues of politics, suffering brought by adverse legislation, especially laws designed to control the movement and lives of Black people. Literature depicting the misery caused by forced removals, influx control, migratory labour system, pass book issues, laws against land ownership etc. plots that intend to vent out this side of Tsonga life are very rare.

'solved' these problems once and for all. However, what makes the commentary of the novelists so rich and radical is precisely the fact that they refrain from a total rejection of either Christianity or local culture. Instead, they point towards re-definitions, inter and intra-cultural negotiations and religious trading. Like chief Muhlaba, they look for a place on the border.

Before drawing out what I consider to be the essential commentary of our selection of indigenous Tsonga literature on missionary Christianity, we must 'listen' to two more literary genres. In the next chapter, I shall review two Tsonga plays and a number of poems.



## CHAPTER 4

### TSONGA PLAYS, RHYMES AND POEMS

#### 4.1 General Introduction

##### 4.1.1 Plays

Baloyi (1960) wrote the first play in Tsonga. As is the case with poetry, it was between 1970 and 1979 that the most plays were written - eighteen to be precise. Before 1970, only five plays were written. Commenting on Tsonga plays in general, C.T.D. Marivate (1985:18) cannot hide his disappointment:

Hambi leswi ku nga ni nkhindlimuko wukulu wa ku tsala mintlangu hi vini va ririmi, tsalwa ra nkoka ra ntlangu hi vini va ririmi a ri si va kona. Vatsari va Vatsonga va mintlangu a va si kuma vutshila byo tsala ntlangu leswaku wu tlangiwa exitejini hi mfanelo. A va si kota ku vumba n'wangulano lowu susumetaka kungu ra ntlangu hi ku hetiseka<sup>1</sup>.

Appropriately, Marivate's comment relates mainly to the literary credentials of the plays and not necessarily the issues in the play. In fact, Marivate argues that many manuscripts in this genre should have been submitted as novels. However, once again, in terms of the objective of our study, these valid shortcomings that Marivate points out are not forbidding.

Observations similar to Marivate's are made by M. Bill (1983:22). However, Bill points to some possible mitigating factors:

... the genre 'drama' has no counterpart in traditional Tsonga [oral] literature. The nearest one comes to drama in oral literature is the folktale telling session when the family and

---

<sup>1</sup> Although there is a great awakening in the writing of plays by Tsonga writers, there is yet to be a well-written and notable Tsonga play. Tsonga play writers have not yet acquired the skill to write a play in such a way that it can be performed on stage. They are not as yet able to construct such dialogue that is capable of influencing the purpose of a play meaningfully.

other members of the community gather around the village fire in the evening ... Here the 'stage' is the area around the fire and the 'actors' are the characters in the tale who come to life through the skill of the narrator of the tale.

For the above reasons, Bill (:23) suggests that it is 'inappropriate to apply standard literary criticism to this genre'. Marivate and Bill make helpful comments on Tsonga plays. However, the type of interest we have in Tsonga plays, as dictated by the objective of this study, means that these largely literary 'shortcomings' need not affect our project. If many Tsonga plays are written in such a way that they are difficult to perform on stage, then we must conclude with M. Bill (1983: 23) that they were 'written in order to be read, not performed'. In terms of the aims of this study, we intend to do no more than read and analyse these plays. Guided by the theme of the study, I shall consider the following two plays, Nkondo (1974) and Mtombeni (1974).

#### 4.1.2 Poetry

The first Tsonga poetry collection came from the pen of Ndhambi (1950). Ndhambi wrote in syllabic verse form, due to the strong influence of 'Wordsworth, Shelley and other masters of English literature in the mission-run schools' (Bill, M. 1983:21). However, the African style of praise-poetry is still prominent in Ndhambi's work. Since that time, many other poets have joined the fold. Between 1970 and 1979, the flood-gates opened, with more than twenty poetic collections being published. Apart from Ndhambi, we would count amongst the veterans, poets such as Rasengane (1963), Masebenza (1965) and Nkondo (1969a 1969b). In his brief assessment of Tsonga poetry, C.T.D. Marivate (1985:19) explains the numerical preponderance of poetical works in the following manner:

Leswi a swi hlamarisi. Xitlhokovotsele a xi lavi munhu a tipandzisa nhloko hi ku luka kungu loko a lava ku xi tsala. Munhu o tshama ehansi a phofula hi pene leswi a swi twaka embilwini ya yena. Kambe hambi leswi vatsari va Vatsonga va ngheneke ngopfu evutlhokovotseri, a hi vatlhokovotseri vo tala lava switlhokovotsele swa vona swi kombaka byento bya vuhleketi hi tlhelo ra tinhloko-mhaka ni matlhokovotselele. Yin'wana mhaka hi

leswaku vatlhokovotseri vo tala va papalata minkongometo ya xiyimo xa swilo etikweni leri. Hambi swi ri tano, vutlhokovotseri bya vatlhokovotseri vo tala va Vatsonga byi antswa ku tlula matswalwa laman'wana ya Xitsonga<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the constraints imposed by our limited project - namely to read selected pieces of Tsonga literature with a view to constructing an indigenous comment on missionary Christianity - we cannot delve into the literary qualities of Tsonga poetry. Neither shall we attempt to deal with specific collections nor specific scholars. To try to do this would be extremely hazardous since one collection of poetry contains poems on varied themes and topics. In fact poems dealing critically and creatively with political and missionary themes are few and far between. For this reason I will consider poems under the following categories: (a) children's poems, (b) poems in praise of missionaries and their legacies, (c) poems on the Christian life-style, and (d) poems on religion and politics. I start with the plays.

#### 4.2 *Muhlupheki Ngwanazi*<sup>3</sup> (Nkondo 1974) - Summary and Overview

This is a play about a Tsonga farm labourer and his community. It is set by the Levubu river, alongside the Zoutpansberg mountains, in the northern Transvaal. The play consists of four acts, with two, seven, three and one scene(s) respectively. The play opens with a discussion between two women labourers and residents on the farm of Van der Merwe, N'wa-Baji (the wife of Ndhwandhwe) and N'wa-Musapa (the wife of Muhlupheki). At issue in their discussion are the conditions of work in the forever expanding farm of Van der Merwe. They and their husbands work for very little payment on the farm and as a result hunger is seriously threatening their households. What these two women despise is the fact that their husbands 'plough the fields of Van der Merwe and not their own' (:8). N'wa-Baji and her daughter Vusiwana had seen

---

<sup>2</sup> This [the numerical preponderance] is not surprising. A poem requires no complicated plot. One simply commits to writing what one feels from the bottom of one's heart. Although many Tsonga writers prefer poetry, not all the Tsonga poets have demonstrated depth with regard to choice of themes and style of poetry. Also, many poets avoid dealing with socio-political issues. However, most Tsonga poems are better than all the other literature in Tsonga.

<sup>3</sup> The title is the name of the main character - Muhlupheki Ngwanazi. The name, Muhlupheki, however, means 'the suffering one'.

some smoke coming from N'wa-Musapa's house and had thought (hoped) that the latter had some food to share. However, the smoke was due to the fact that Muhlupheki (a Mungoma) had been burning sacrifices to his gods. For two weeks, N'wa-Musapa reveals, Muhlupheki has been inside his hut. N'wa-Baji also reports having met Muhlupheki by the riverside one day, but he was completely oblivious of his surroundings, peering instead into the water. After N'wa-Musapa's departure, N'wa-Baji still sends her daughter Vusiwana, a young teenager, to go and find out what Muhlupheki was cooking. But she comes back screaming and pointing to an imaginary snake that was chasing her.

We meet Ndhwandhwe, N'wa-Musapa's husband, after he has been so brutally assaulted at Van der Merwe's farm that he has to be helped to walk back home. Right before his wife's eyes, one of the 'Baasboys' assaults Ndhwandhwe further. It appears that Ndhwandhwe caused some political trouble on Van der Merwe's farm, for Nkondo soon portrays him as an important resistance leader. On the night of the day in which he was assaulted, Ndhwandhwe and his people hold a secret meeting. As expressed by a 'ring leader', Mkhacani of the Mkhomi area, there is a great deal of impatience in the meeting:

Hi mpfhuka ka nhlengeletano ya hina leyo sungula ku fika namuntlha, a ku si endliwa nchumu. A ku si endliwa na xintirhwana hambu xi ri xin'we. Mulungu wa ha ri kona la tikweni ra hina la. Ehenhla ka sweswo, u tirhisile matimba yakwe ku hi tekela tiko ra hina. Hina ... hina hi lo n'wi nhwii, tanihi vavasati. Sweswi u pfa no hi sindzisa ku n'wi rimela purasi ra kwe. Hina ho n'wi langutisa ntsena. Sweswi u hi hakerisa swibalo swakwe. Hina ... hina ho langutisa hi pfale na milomo. Xana swa twala leswaku hi barisiwa hi yena - ke? A a fanele ku hakela hina xibalo lexi, kambe mi ri yini na<sup>4</sup>? (Nkondo 1974:10)

Although those in attendance at the meeting were of one mind, namely that only

---

<sup>4</sup> Since our last meeting, nothing has been done. Not a single thing has been done. The White man is still here in our country. Furthermore, he has used his [military] power to dispossess us of our country. And we ... we just look at him, like women. Now he forces us to work on his farm. And we just look at him. Now he makes us pay tax to him. And we look on with closed mouths. Is it right that we pay tax to him? He should be paying tax to us, but what do you say?

military resistance could drive the White man out, great obstacles faced them. The White man had guns and they had none. One old man counsels that libations to ``the gods of our ancestors, the gods of Nchangana, Gwambe and Dzavani will help'' (:11). To the consternation of the old man, Ndhwandhwe responds by pointing out that ``Gwambe and Dzavani are genuine gods, true gods and good gods; but they have no power over life and death issues''. The disagreements over resistance strategies and the precise time when to begin resistance become fierce and even divisive. The character simply identified as Mukhalabye (old man) helps to bring order through his insistence that the White man can never be defeated by a divided people. Yet Ndhwandhwe points out that for such unity to be meaningful, it must include more than just the Shangaans:

... hi nga tshuki hi hleketa leswaku loko hina Machangana hi ri xilo xin'we hi nga hlula Mulungu. Sweswo ... A hi tivi. Hi ta vona hi swona. Hi fanele ku rhamba na letin'wana tinxaka. A hi ringeteni ku rhamba na Vhavenda<sup>5</sup> (:13).

This way, Nkondo identifies both a need and an awareness for greater unity amongst the dispossessed Black peoples. Apart from highlighting the fragile unity of the conspirers - which he illustrates through frequent outbursts of temper which lead to numerous fist-fights - Nkondo reveals that the Whites had an intricate network of well-paid informers who travelled between the outlying farms and Louis Trichardt (Xitandani). This created much suspicion amongst the farm workers of anyone who travelled to Xitandani. For example, Ndhwandhwe's call for patience, unity and thorough planning before any military offensive is waged, causes Thawuzeni to be suspicious of Ndhwandhwe's recent visit to Xitandani. As if to call into serious question the resolve of the conspirators, their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of the *Baasboy* Thuxeleni and an assistant who have come to abduct Ndhwandhwe's daughter, Vusiwana - she is to be given to Van der Merwe for sex (:17). But they do this only after assaulting both Ndhwandhwe and his wife N'wa-Baji. N'wa-Baji's cry for help at the side of her assaulted husband (after Vusiwana had been forcefully abducted) is stinging and heart-rending:

---

<sup>5</sup> ... we must never think that the unity of Shangaans only will defeat the White man. About that ... I do not know. We shall see. We must invite other nations. Let us try to invite the Vendas.

Humani Humaaaaani la, vavasati ndin'wina, n'wiina! Mi chava swivavanunani swimbirhi mi tarise leswi. Oho! Oho! Oho! a ka ha ri wanuna eNchangana, tshwu! Miri ya n'wina na moya wa n'wina swi endliwe mahlonga. Mi ri ma ha swi tiva leswaku ma ha ri vavanuna sweswi? ... N'wina mo va vavasati ntsena, n'wina! Mi sindzisiwa ku cela migerho - ina. Mi tekeriwa vana - ina. Mi hakeriwa zukwa hi siku - ina. Ma rhukaniwa - ina. Mi byeriwa vun'wa - ina. Hi n'wina va 'ina' n'wina. A mi tele ku ta endla yini la? Mi tumberile va ka va rhwala n'wananga va famba na yena. Sweswi mi nyavatela ku fana ni makhamba - ku ta pfuna mina. Tshamani na ku pfuna ka n'wina ka thyaka. Humani la<sup>6</sup> (:16)!

The men work so hard for Van der Merwe that the women complain that their husbands are so tired after work that they are unable to pay them any attention (:17). In the second scene, Nkondo reveals Muhlupheki Ngwanazi. Ngwanazi walks slowly out of his house, but he is in a trance. He walks around his house. Suddenly he starts to *giya* (dance) so hard that he is covered in dust. Then he walks towards the river. But Muhlupheki dives into the water of the Levubu river, and never re-emerges for a day. N'wa-Musapa, Muhlupheki's wife, is comforted with the words, "Do not cry. Crying will not help. This is the will of the gods" (:19). After more than 24 hours in the water, Muhlupheki mysteriously re-appears with a much needed message:

...Mulungu u ta hluriwa,  
U ta hlongoriwa etikweni leri.  
Ndzi tweni.  
Lawa i mati ndzi nga nyikiwa  
lawa i mati ya vutomi.

---

<sup>6</sup> Come out, Come out you miserable bunch of 'women'. The lot of you are so scared of two small men. Oho! Oho! Oho! There are no men left in Nchangana. Your very soul and flesh has been enslaved. Do you still remember your manhood? ... You are nothing but a bunch of women. They force you to dig canals - and you say yes. They take your children away from you - and you say yes. They pay you five cents a day - you say yes. They insult you - and still you say yes. They lie to you - and still you say yes. You are a bunch of 'yes men'. What did you come here for? You hid yourselves until they took my daughter away. Now, like thieves, you tread softly - to come and help me; keep your dirty help to yourselves. Get out!

Leti i tinsiva ta matimba.  
 La nga ta nwa mati lawa  
 A nga ka a nga humeleri hi xo biha.  
 A ku na qulu leri nga nghanaka  
 Emirini wa kwe  
 Leti i tinyiko ta swikwembu swa le Nchangana;  
 Yingisani la huma entsindza wa swikwembu  
 A rhwele mahungu ya vakokwana.  
 Herisani Mulungu<sup>7</sup> (:22).

This way Nkondo introduces the much needed element of unity and resolve amongst the well-meaning but timid and divided farm-workers; namely Muhlupheki Ngwanazi. Unlike any of the 'leaders' such as Ndhwandhwe, Thawuzeni and Mukhacani, Ngwanazi's authority rests, not with him, but with the gods of Nchangana whose messenger and mouth-piece he is. Ngwanazi immediately summons people to prepare for war. Firstly he sends messengers to spread the message. Nkondo lends deep religious and symbolic language to the Ngwanazi character as a means through which the masses are inspired:

Musi ... musu, musu a wu ri kona. Hunguva, a yi ri kona. Kambe endzhaku ka musu ku ta fika rivoningo. Endzhaku ka hunguva ku ta ta ku xonga ka mahlamba-ndlopfu. Musu na hunguva swi tise hi leswi a hi pfumala vutivi, na leswi a hi vengana. Swi dyile ku twanana ka hina, na matimba ya hina. Hunguva leyi na musu lowu swi dlele rirhandzu exikarhi ka hina; rirhandzu leri a ri ri kona exikarhi ka Muchangana, na Muvhenda, exikarhi ka Muzulu na Musuthu, exikarhi ka Mutswana nu Mupedi, na le xikarhi ka

7

The White man will be defeated,  
 He will be driven out of this country,  
 Listen to me.  
 Here is the water I have been given;  
 This is the water of life.  
 These are the feathers of strength.  
 Anyone who drinks of this water,  
 Will be immune from all misfortune.  
 No bullet will penetrate his body.  
 These are the gifts of the Nchangana gods.  
 Listen to me, for I come,  
 From the capital of the gods.  
 I carry news from our ancestors:  
 Destroy the White man

Muchangana na tinxaka ta van'wana. ... Lexi a xo va xinyami. Hi ta huma exinyamini hi nghena erivoningweni<sup>8</sup> (:23).

Ngwanazi promises the potential combatants that after drinking the water which has been given to him by the gods, their bodies will be bullet-proof. However, in a one-to-one dialogue with Ndhwandhwe, who wishes to establish the authority and authenticity of Ngwanazi's pronouncements, Muhlupheki appears unable to differentiate between his visions and reality. For example, he does not remember the details of the long speech he made upon coming out of the Levubu river.

But Ndhwandhwe proceeds with the training of soldiers, and new recruits swell their ranks daily (:27f). Nkondo manages to keep the Ngwanazi character shrouded in mystery. Like a typical 'medium' he is eccentric, unpredictable and mostly reclusive, except when he bursts into 'dialogue mode' and he discusses matters of strategy or addresses the masses. In one of his reclusive moments, he sits alone in darkness. When his wife brings a lamp into the hut his rejection of 'light' is profound:

U nga nghenisi rivoningo la. Ri humesi ... Va te ku ta va na rivoningo ... ku hlongola xinyami. Swa antswa hi tshama hi ri exinyamini. Xinyami xi antswa ngopfu. Vuhlonga bya miri byi tlula vuhlonga bya miehleketo, lebyi tisiwaka hi rivoningo<sup>9</sup> (:30).

When Ndhwandhwe confidently approaches Ngwanazi in order to suggest that the war must start, Ngwanazi is not enthusiastic. He is worried that in his 'medium' speech on returning from the river he had mentioned that once Black

---

<sup>8</sup> Smoke, ... smoke, there was smoke. There was mist. However, light will arrive. After the mist will come the beauty of dawn. Smoke and mist came because we were ignorant, and we hated one another. Our unity and strength was sapped by this mist and smoke. Smoke and mist destroyed love amongst us; the love that once existed between a Shangaan and a Venda, a Zulu and a Sotho, a Tswana and a Pedi ... This was darkness. We will march out of darkness into light.

<sup>9</sup> Do not bring light in here. Take it out ... They said there will be light ... to drive away darkness. It would be better for us to stay in darkness. Darkness is so much better. Physical slavery is better than mental slavery which is brought by the light.



people were united they would all become the children of Nhlonge-Ntima (the one with a black skin). Ngwanazi is not sure who this Nhlonge-Ntima is and he is worried that this Nhlonge-Ntima may make the Shangaans his slaves, just like the White man has done (:34). In his mind he is not sure of the relationship between Gwambe and Dzavani (who are the undisputable gods of the Shangaans) on the one hand, and Nhlonge-Ntima on the other. Because of this doubt, Ngwanazi must await a revelation and an explanation from Gwambe and Dzavani. But the 'soldiers' are impatient because they have all drunk the magic water that Ngwanazi has given them. Some of the new recruits from an area called Mphambu contribute to the confusion regarding which god(s) has issued the mandate for the war. They come to inquire from Ngwanazi whether Gwambe and Dzavani are one and the same god (:36). This they ask because their own god is Dzavani, a god found in water, and if Gwambe is the same as Dzavani they will not hesitate to join the war.

Eventually, against Ngwanazi's caution, who had suggested another session of prayers to the ancestors, the 'soldiers' go into war, under the indecisive leadership of Ndhwandhwe. Through the mouth of Ndhwandhwe (:44) Nkondo later casts doubt over the wisdom of launching out into war at this time. It started off in an attack on the trees and shops of the Whites. Some of the 'soldiers' died from the bullets of the White man. However, some of the 'generals' refused to believe this (:45). When Ndhwandhwe repeatedly pointed out that many who had drunk Ngwanazi's magic water had in fact died, those who did not want to face this fact, such as Chayamithi, misconstrue his statements to be an insult to the gods, Gwambe and Dzavani. Chayamithi even threatens to wrest the leadership from Ngwanazi. The arrival of yet more recruits under the leadership of Xikhambane saves the situation and it is decided to proceed with the war. The aim is to annex the Sibasa area, which is the White man's stronghold.

Through the mouth of Ndhwandhwe, Nkondo (:52) reveals that the entire war was disastrous for Ndhwandhwe's people. Trusting the power of the water, the reckless Chayamithi's 'regiment' challenged the might of the White man's machine gun with their bare hands. The resistance was effectively crushed and Muhlupheki Ngwanazi was arrested together with the rest of the 'ringleaders'. When Ndhwandhwe and other survivors, who are now in jail, catch a glimpse of Ngwanazi, they experience a mixture of anger and inspiration. Ngwanazi has

been brutally assaulted and tortured. The soldiers need to pour cold water on him in order to arouse him to consciousness. It turns out that the reason Ngwanazi was so brutally assaulted was that he would not agree to making a public confession to the effect that he lied in telling the people that the water he gave them came from the gods and that it could protect them from bullets. Right in the sight of Ndhwandhwe and others, the police (Black and White) continue to assault the half-unconscious Ngwanazi, but he refuses to confess. The release from jail of both Ngwanazi and all the captured 'soldiers' depend on Ngwanazi's confession. Some of the captured people implore Ngwanazi to tell the truth so that they may be released. Ngwanazi is unrepentant.

Ndhwandhwe requests permission to speak to him in confidence. He asks him to save the prisoners by telling the truth but Ngwanazi is only interested to hear if his instructions have been carried out faithfully. Upon hearing that they were not he replies "Let us harbour no regrets. No regrets. It has happened and it is finished" (:55). His reason for refusing to confess relates to a deeper and more long-term concern. This concern is revealed in Ngwanazi's last statement:

Valungu lava, va ta byela vana va hina leswaku hi hoxe ngopfu loko hi lwe na vona. Ndhwandhwe, Mulungu u ta byela vana va hina sweswo:leswaku ku lwa na yena i xihoxo! Leswaku ku lwela tiko ra wena i xihoxo! Sweswi, Mulungu u kombela mina ku n'wi pfuna leswaku a endla sweswo? U lava leswaku ndzi ku mati lawaya a ma nga ri na nchumu? Xana wa swi tiva leswaku sweswo swi vula yini? Loko ndzo vula sweswo, vanhu va ka hina va nga ka va nga ha lwi futhi. Va ta hela timbilu - va ta tinyiketa. Ndzi nga ka ndzi nga swi vuli sweswo! Rito ri tswariwile. Vana va hina va ta byela vana va vona rito rero. Switukulundhuwa swa hina ta ri twa rito leri. Siku rin'wana rito leri a ri nga ha vi norho, kambe ri ta humelela<sup>10</sup>! (:58)

---

<sup>10</sup> These Whites will tell our children that we made a mistake in fighting them. My dear Ndhwandhwe, that is what the White man will tell our children; that fighting him is a mistake. That to fight for your land is a sin. Now, does the White man require me to help him pass that message? Does he want me to say that the water was of no use? Do you really understand what that means? If I say that, our people will never fight again. They will lose hope - and

#### 4.2.1 Realistic and Openly Political

While the criticism of Marivate and Bill on Tsonga playwrights regarding the performability of Tsonga plays is generally true, Nkondo has been very mindful of the stage-performability of this work. I am convinced that, although Nkondo's characterisation is at times clumsy, this is a play that can be staged with minimal hurdles. As for the charge that many playwrights avoid socio-political issues, in this play Nkondo is an undisputable exception. In fact, it is remarkable that in the time when both missionary and governmental control made publishing anything remotely political impossible (cf. Bill, M. 1983:21, Marivate, C.T.D. 1985:25), Nkondo managed to slip this one through<sup>11</sup>.

The work was probably 'saved' by the fact that on the surface, it may appear like an attack on the 'backward' beliefs of Blacks, in this case the Shangaans. Viewed from that angle, this play 'demonstrates' the clear military advantage that Whites have over Blacks. In this sense the very teaching that Ngwanazi wants to avoid for his 'children' in the context of the play is made very possible in the mind of the reader. Such a line of reasoning may offer us an explanation for the amazing fact that this play was published at all in 1974.

Both the place-names and the issues dramatised are real. While the specific uprising depicted in this play may be fictitious, the Levubu area has been the scene of much fighting between the Venda and the Boers. To this day, the fertile crescent along the Levubu river is lined with farms owned by Whites. The farm-workers' experiences related in the play continue to be real for many farm-workers in the northern Transvaal. In the play, Nkondo's characters state the issues swiftly and in a straightforward manner. They work long and hard for almost no pay on the White man's farm. Also the size of the White man's farm keeps increasing by the day. A few scenes demonstrate that the farm-

---

they will surrender. That, I will never say. The Word has been born. Our children will tell their children. Our great grandchildren will hear this word. One day, this word will no longer be a dream; it will become a reality.

<sup>11</sup> Politics have continued, until very recently, to be avoided like a plague by Tsonga writers. Some of the notable and promising departures from this well-trodden path are, Mnisi (1988), Chauke (1991) Mayevu (1992) and Magaisa (1993).

dwellers were not 'workers' but 'slaves'. They are physically abused, their daughters can be 'requested' by the Whites and a sophisticated surveillance system is in place to monitor dissent. The reader or spectator of the play is left in no doubt about (a) the unjustness of the circumstances surrounding the 'farm-dwellers' and (b) the legitimacy of the decision of the farm-dwellers to drive the White man out. In the context of South Africa, especially in the 1970s when Nkondo wrote, these issues were very much alive. The scolding words of N'wa-Baji in calling all the men 'women' after her daughter has been abducted, are directed at every self-respecting Black reader.

The use of the singular *Mulungu* to refer to all Whites indicate a conviction that all Whites - farmers, police and perhaps missionaries - are grouped together as part of the enemy camp. In his first long speech, Ngwanazi says:

A hi pfariwile mahlo,  
 Hi loyi,  
 Hi tlhela hi xaviwa hi lowun'wani<sup>12</sup> (:21).

For Nkondo, the different roles of White people amongst Blacks is part of the oppressive strategy - some deceive whilst others dispossess.

#### 4.2.2 The gods under Siege

On the surface, the conflict in this play is between Blacks and Whites, the farm-dwellers and the farm owners. The issues are concrete and material: land dispossession, hard labour, various forms of physical abuse, etc. The potential solution, as the farm-dwellers soon establish, must be military. But, Nkondo reveals a deeper level of conflict. At this level the gods of the Shangaans are under siege. In the predicament of their children, their very claim to deity are under attack. Although Gwambe and Dzavani 'are genuine gods, true gods, and good gods' some of their worshippers doubted whether these gods 'have power over life and death issues (:11). It is these words uttered by Ndhwandhwe right at the first resistance meeting that reveal and introduce this *other* level of conflict. The farm-dwellers are well aware that

---

<sup>12</sup> Our eyes had been closed  
 By this *one*  
 Yet the *other one*, betrayed us.

their problem is not merely material and physical. Even their resolve to fight the White man is hollow until they receive a divine 'mandate' and 'assurance' to fight. It is as a medium of the gods that Ngwanazi is perceived to return from the river, where the gods live, to deliver this mandate. This then is a war not merely about tangible and material issues.

First, the actual beginning of fighting is delayed by the lack of unity amongst the farm-dwellers. Through Ngwanazi's connectedness to the gods, Gwambe and Dzavani, unity is speedily acquired. Yet when Ngwanazi begins to doubt the authenticity of his mandate, he requests the impatient 'soldiers' to wait. Note, however, that it is not the authenticity of Gwambe and Dzavani that he doubts, but whether he heard their mandate correctly and communicated it properly. Under the influence of the gods (*ku humeriwa hi swikwembu*) he has mentioned the name of another god, Nhlonge-Ntima, - whose children all Blacks will become after defeating the Whites. However, as a Shangaan, Ngwanazi knew only of Gwambe and Dzavani. This confusion caused him to wait for another word from Gwambe and Dzavani.

In much of the dialogue, Gwambe and Dzavani are discussed in much depth. In these discussions and portrayals, the following are some of the issues touched upon: (a) that Gwambe and Dzavani are the gods of the Shangaans (b) whether Gwambe and Dzavani have power over life and death (:11) (c) Gwambe and Dzavani sometimes overwhelm humans, e.g. Ngwanazi, and make them do and say what they wish (:18, 21) (d) in his speech from the river, Ngwanazi reveals that the message of Gwambe and Dzavani is: 'destroy the White man' (e) In facilitation of this task, the gods gave the water of life and the feathers of strength.

Nkondo, like Ngwanazi (his main character), 'protects' the integrity of Gwambe and Dzavani to the end. To do this, Nkondo first casts doubt over whether the instructions of the gods were carried out to the letter. Thus the war breaks out before and without the authorisation of the gods and against the advice of the messenger of the gods - Ngwanazi. Accordingly, when the resistance is crushed, Ngwanazi refuses to 'denounce' the gods by implying that they had lied. One thing is clear, though, whilst these gods may not have completely lost control, they are under siege. As long as their children are being enslaved, the freedom and divine status of these gods is under siege. Gwambe

and Dzavani themselves are therefore at war with the Whites - they want to drive the Whites out, in order that they (Gwambe and Dzavani) may occupy their rightful place. Beneath the surface conflicts therefore, Nkondo depicts a religious and spiritual war.

#### 4.2.3 Tribalism and Nationalism

Gwambe and Dzavani are introduced as the gods of the Shangaans. The farm community at the centre of this play is a community of Shangaans. This then is a story about Shangaans, their suffering as farm-dwellers as well as their attempt to ward off the White man. But Nkondo pierces some holes into this neat picture. He reveals divisions and prejudices, not only between the Shangaans and the Vhavenda - who are accused of bigotry and exclusivity (:13) - but also amongst the Shangaans themselves. Their very gods, Gwambe and Dzavani, are a source of division, with some sections recognising only one and not the other of the two deities (:36). Ngwanazi, himself a Shangaan, struggles with the notion of Nhlonge-Ntima, presumably the god of all Black people:

Loko mati lawa ma huma eka Gwambe na Dzavani, hi yini va ku endzhaku ka nyimpi hi ta va vana va Nhlonge-Ntima? I mani Nhlonge-Ntima? I hosi ya va mani? Se va hi pfunela yini? Swi hi pfuna yini ku hlula Mulungu, loko hi ta va ehansi ka hosi leyi nga ta hi fuma swin'we na Mazulu, Vavhenda, Maxhosa, Vasuthu, Vatswana, Vapedi, Maswazi, na Mandhevele? ... I hosi muni, hosi yo tano<sup>13</sup>?

In Ngwanazi's mind, the self-determination of the Tsonga nation is something inseparable from the autonomy of their gods, Gwambe and Dzavani. Like Ndhwandhwe, Ngwanazi recognised that "there were no other gods comparable to Gwambe and Dzavani amongst all the nations of the earth" (:32). By implication therefore, there was no other nation like the Shangaans on the

---

<sup>13</sup> If this water is indeed from Gwambe and Dzavani, how come we are supposed to become the children of Nhlonge-Ntima after the war? Who is Nhlonge-Ntima? Over which people is he chief? And why do these people wish to help us? Of what use is it for us to defeat the White man, only to be under the reign of the same chief who rules over the Zulus, Vendas, Xhosa, Sothos, Tswanas, Pedis, Swazis and Ndebeles? What sort of a chief is that?

face of the earth. If Black unity meant that Shangaans must 'trade in their gods' for a unifying nonentity called Nhlonge-Ntima, then Ngwanazi would have nothing to do with that. In fact, as he argues, such an 'exchange' would place the Shangaans in a situation that would be no different from the one they found themselves under the Whites. There is clear recognition of the need for a wider unity amongst all Black people (:13) but the obstacles against such a unity are many. For example, each Black nation has its own tribal gods. Is Nkondo mounting a critique here not only of tribalism but the often unmentioned religious basis of tribalism? Finally, it is as Shangaans that the war against the Whites is mounted, with disastrous results. Another hidden message about the folly of tribalism?

#### 4.2.4 Veiled attacks on Christian teachings

The most striking feature of *Muhlupheki Ngwanazi* is that although it is a work with a very strong religious undercurrent, no (direct) mention of Christianity, the 'White man's religion', the church, ministers or missionaries is made at all. The picture painted of the White man is one of material greed, ruthlessness and superior military power. The religious flavour is only on the side of the Shangaans. In fact the duel is between the Shangaan gods and the White man. Is this a hint that the Whites have moved beyond the religious, becoming themselves the very centre of religion, with no reference to an outside deity?

However, it is noteworthy that the area in the northern Transvaal where the play is set, is the same area where the Swiss missionaries settled and eventually established their first mission station - Valdezia. In fact, the old Valdezia mission station was on the other side of the Levubu river, i.e. North and not South of this river as it is today. Old Valdezia, therefore lay in the same general area where Van der Merwe would have been likely to own his farm. However, Nkondo makes no reference either to this missionary presence or to the religion of the White people. Nor does he introduce a single Shangaan who is a Christian, whereas he (like most Shangaans) certainly underwent a 'Christian education'.

The very fact that he is silent on these matters is a serious indictment on missionary Christianity. The Levubu river which has been important for both

the Boers and the missionaries, is referred to as the place where the Shangaan gods dwelled<sup>14</sup>. Nkondo also attributes typical missionary language to Ngwanazi. In his speeches, Ngwanazi relies heavily on the light against darkness dialectic. The time of domination by the Whites is depicted in the metaphors of darkness, clouds, smoke and mist (:21-23). Without revealing who the subjects of the message are, Ngwanazi makes the pregnant remark about those who had said that 'there will be a light which will drive away darkness' (:30). Yet, he submits that darkness was much better than such light as they had promised. This light brought with a form of slavery that was worse than physical slavery - mental slavery.

Nkondo does not reveal the identity of those who promised this light. Because of the prominence of the light-versus-darkness language in missionary literature, we may justifiably surmise that Nkondo was referring to the missionaries. More significantly, however, Nkondo turns the tables on missionary rhetoric. The sun and the beauty of dawn will only arrive after the Whites have been defeated. Real light will dawn amidst the darkness when Gwambe and Dzavani regain their power and dignity<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, the fact that the very strong religious undercurrent of the play ignores Christianity is itself an attack on Christianity. Instead of either a regurgitation of Christian teachings or disputation with these in the play, Nkondo gives the reader a 'lesson' on aspects of the religious beliefs of the Shangaan people - as if to say that there is a very substantial side to these people that is independent of the missionary intervention. This very fact may be a veiled but very substantial offensive against Christianity. Overt rejection is still a recognition of that which one rejects, but to ignore is to treat with contempt.

---

<sup>14</sup> It is the same river across which the Maphophe brothers, Jonas and Calvin, swam in the middle of the night in their 'escape' from their father who forbade them from going to school.

<sup>15</sup> In thus appropriating the light versus darkness language, Nkondo seems to be calling to question such missionary works as *Rivoningo Emunyameni* (light in darkness) by Cuendet (1950).



#### 4.3 *Mihizo Ya Kayivela*<sup>16</sup> (Mtombeni 1974) - Summary and Overview

This is a play consisting of five acts, with several scenes in each act. For at least two reasons, there is a Shakespearean touch to this play<sup>17</sup>. The 'lines' of many characters are very long pieces of flowery prose. Mtombeni, as we have already discovered in the previous chapter, has a liking for both complex philosophical reflections and tragedy.

The play opens with the burial of Etiyana Mathebula, a resident of Chiawelo (Soweto) at Doornkop cemetery. In the second scene we are served with a trilogy of long funeral speeches by the minister, N'wa-Bembe, secondly by Mbolovisa - a Mungoma - and lastly by Magwaza, a teacher by profession. The minister's speech contains elements of a typical sermon, admonishing people to prepare for their own journey and meeting with God. However, there is evidence of an African worldview in N'wa-Bembe's sermon. The deceased is implored to 'prepare the way for us, ... to make fire for us so that we may warm ourselves when we arrive frozen' (:6). Mbolovisa's<sup>18</sup> is an angry speech in which death is personified and bitterly attacked. The significant words in Mbolovisa's speech are perhaps to be found at the tail-end of his speech where death is advised to 'thank the folly of the book-worshipping, learned people who forgive witches and waste time crying before God instead of going to inquire of the Mungoma ...' (:9). In the final speech, Magwaza attempts to take a middle line between the two divergent views of N'wa-Bembe and Mbolovisa.

...hinkwerhu ha nkensa ni ku pfumela ku vumbiwa ka munhu hi Xikwembu, hambi van'wana va ku i swikwembu. Na ku kanetana hi swa rifu: van'wana va pumbana vuloyi, va ya mungomeni, van'wana va rila va ku Xikwembu xi hi tekerile. Loko hi pfumela leswaku Xikwembu kumbe swikwembu swi endla munhu, i xindzhuvu xa yini loko a muka-ke? Mina ndzi ri loko ku fa swi vula ku timeka ka

---

<sup>16</sup> The title means, 'the garments are too short'.

<sup>17</sup> In a poem in memory of Mtombeni entitled *B.K.M. Mthombeni*, Mnisi (1988:26) refers to Mtombeni as 'our own Shakespeare'. Another poem in memory of Mtombeni was written by Mtsetweni (1986:22).

<sup>18</sup> Mbolovisa means, 'the one who sows quarrels'.

vutomi, hi leswaku rifu a ri vavi - hi nga ri chavi<sup>19</sup> (:8).

In another scene, a group of educated friends, with Magwaza among them, discuss the eventful funeral of Etiyana Mathebula. One of the friends, Mkansi, likens the fact of diverse view-points expressed to a session of Mungoma consultation with the aim of identifying the witch. Revealing the meaning of the play title, another of the friends, Goya, views the differences expressed at the funeral as an indication that 'the Christian garments we have on are far too short, our thoughts and souls are yet to conform perfectly to true Christian ways' (:9). Magwaza suggests the problem that reared its ugly head at the grave, is essentially one caused by dual-commitments, being both Christian and traditional. The friends are all agreed that Mbolovisa's speech at the grave was out of order.

The same discussion is continued inside the bereaved Mathebula home. A somewhat new angle here is the attempt to discuss the meaning of death itself. The basic diagnosis of the problem that manifested itself at the grave is the shortness of the garment of Christianity. Goya puts it this way:

Vutomi bya hina Machangana i bya khale, a byi ambexiwile hi nkhanu ra munyama, hi gandzela emunyameni hi swa munyama. Vukriste byi hi ambexile nguvu ya ku vonakala, kambe nguvu leyi ya kayivela i mihizo yo koma. Nkayivelo lowu wu pfluxa dzolonga ra vunciki-nciki ni vudliti-dliti, ku kanakana ni mihoniso<sup>20</sup> (:11).

But, the 'shortness' does not apply only to the garments of Christianity, Matengo points out. The 'shortness' also includes the inadequacy of the garment of all human knowledge.

---

<sup>19</sup> ... we are all in agreement that human beings have been created either by God or the gods. About death, some blame witches and go to Vangoma while others cry and say, God has taken. If we agree that God or gods created human beings, why do we grieve when a human being dies? I would say that if death means the cessation of life, the death must be painless - therefore we should not be afraid of it.

<sup>20</sup> In our old life as Shangaans we were covered in a garment of darkness, worshipping the things of darkness in darkness. Christianity has clothed us in a garment of light, but this garment is too short. The shortness is the source of conflicts, inadequacy, restlessness, hesitancy and disobedience.

The second act begins with a scene in the Mathebula kitchen, where a group of women are making their feelings and thoughts known about the events at the graveyard. The women liken the happenings at the burial of their brother to a 'disgusting joke'. Next comes the scene when our educated friends visit Mbolovisa the Mungoma. The objective of their visit is poetically stated by Goya:

Vutlharhi bya Gwambe na Dzavana bya khapa-khapa laha kaya - la ndyangu; hina hi tinga-tingeka hi buku ni nhlayo, ndzhaka ya Gaza ya kurha, ya bola, vuhlavuteri bya nhlole ni nhungvana, mavonelo ya swihaha-vusiku ya hi tsandza. Kambe vutlharhi bya Gaza wa tolweni ni tolo i ndzalo ya vutshunguri enguleni ya Mbolovisa. Xikombelo xa hina xitsuke xa rifu ra tolweni, mhango ya mihloti - mihloti ya ka Mathebula<sup>21</sup> (:16).

However, this is merely a set-up and a 'way in', since the real purpose of the visit seems to be to engage Mbolovisa in a philosophical debate about witchcraft and death. At issue is the power of Vangoma over both witchcraft and death - which is the central theme of the play. One of the noteworthy scenes after this is one where Matengo, a brother to the deceased, proposes love to Hlupheka. Such is the depth and level of romantic philosophy in their conversation that it is difficult to unravel the meaning of all the ironies and metaphors that Mtombeni employs. A serious hurdle between Matengo and Hlupheka is that whilst Matengo is a *Mujagani*, Hlupheka is an 'ordinary person of no significance' (:24). Matengo's friends do not approve of this liaison (:27). But Magwaza wants Hlupheka for himself (:36). Pretending first to be seeking advice from her on how to propose to a girl, Magwaza skilfully reveals to Hlupheka that she is the girl of his dreams. Other girls such as Nkiyasi and Khombo-muni are very jealous of Hlupheka's attractiveness to boys (:38f).

In further development of the theme of the play, Matengo, his friends and his

---

<sup>21</sup> The wisdom of Gwambe and Dzavani overflows in this home; as for us, we suffocate in the noise of books and figures; [whilst], the Gaza heritage rusts and rots - the disclosure of the divining bones. We lack the ability to discern those who fly at night. However, the age-old wisdom of Gaza is in abundance in Mbolovisa's granary. We seek to know the cause of the recent death, the tearful event - the tears of the Mathebulas.

parents pay the minister N'wa-Bembe (:27f) a similar visit to the one that was paid to Mbolovisa. They seek to hear his views about God, life, death and witchcraft. In another scene Matengo reveals to his friends, Xirilele and Goya, his misery after discovering that Magwaza 'snatched' Hlupheka away from him (:41). A philosophical discussion ensues about the morality of the actions of Magwaza - in proposing to a woman who has already declared her love for someone else - and those of Hlupheka - for accepting the proposals of two men concurrently. Essentially the question is who is (more) to blame of the two. For Matengo, the 'wronged one', it is Magwaza who is to blame. When his friends suggest that he takes up the challenge that Magwaza is implicitly offering by confronting the girl with his love again, Matengo describes Magwaza's unfair advantage, or conversely, the source of his own inferiority complex:

Ndzi ya pfinyana ni tintshava ta ntivo, ndzi dodombisana ni mawa ya byongo byo enta, bya swidyondzi swo fana na Magwaza, ndzi ri xitsotso; swi fana ni ku ringeta ku tsuvula murhi hi mandla, ku tsema ximuwu hi xibangana, rihuhu ro ringeta ku pela lwandle hi ku hlambela<sup>22</sup> (:44).

These words of Matengo cause one of his friends, Xirilele, to suspect that Matengo lacks the kind of confidence that befits a 'man'. Coincidentally, both N'wa-Bembe and Mbolovisa pay a 'pastoral visit' to the Nkuna family whose infant is unwell (:45f). N'wa-Bembe arrived first and is in fact about to leave when Mbolovisa arrives. Predictably, the scene is a dream setting for a one-to-one dialogue between Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe about Christianity and traditional beliefs. Mbolovisa kicks off with a set of direct and confident questions:

Mufundhisi, rixaka ra Vatsonga, wa ri dlaya xana? U velekiwile kwihi wena; wena a wu na tinhlanga ke? Wu kwihi ndyangu wo biyiwa hi Bibelet? Ya kwihi matshanga yo xoperiwa eBibeleni? Hi hina vanyamisoro hi nga tiyisa miti leyi hinkwayo, hina a hi nwi ngati

---

<sup>22</sup> Shall I go and wrestle with the lofty hills of knowledge, scuffle with the deep valleys of well endowed brains, the brains of such learned people as Magwaza, whilst I am only a grasshopper? It would be like trying to uproot a tree with my bare hands, to chop down a Baobab tree with a knife. It would be like the madness of attempting to swim across the sea.

ya vanhu va ha hanya<sup>23</sup> (:46).

In his response, N'wa-Bembe attempts to caution Mbolovisa against commenting on subjects on which he is ignorant. However, Mbolovisa fights on:

N'wina vo khongelela muvabyi mi suka mi famba, handle ko n'wi khoma-khoma hi mavoko, swi pfuna yini? Ekerekeni mi dyondzisa rirhandu, mi rhandza mani? Rirhandzu ra kereke ku halaka ka mina timali, mi rhandza wa timali hambi a nga ngheni kereke masiku hinkwawo, hi yena nkulukumba wa kereke<sup>24</sup> (:47).

Tactically, N'wa-Bembe agrees with Mbolovisa on the fact of various abuses of the Christian faith. However, he disagrees with Mbolovisa's suggestion that the Christian God has long died. Finally, Matengo gets to confront Hlupheka for dropping him in favour of Magwaza (:52f). No amount of rhetoric manages to sway Hlupheka from her new and stronger commitment to Magwaza. But she feels torn and devastated.

Next, we are given the picture of Mbolovisa who is now critically ill. Xirilele and Matengo have come to visit Mbolovisa. Yet another scene is set for a Christianity-versus-traditional-beliefs debate. The fact that Mbolovisa is ill lends a sense of urgency to the discussion. Suggestions for a prayer is flatly refused because Mbolovisa is convinced that there is a herb which is the only thing which will heal him. So Sasa is sent to the mountain to look for this particular herb. By the time Sasa comes back, Mbolovisa's condition has deteriorated considerably. Matengo now takes it upon himself to call for an ambulance. Before the ambulance arrives, N'wa-Bembe (the minister) arrives. He offers a prayer in spite of Mbolovisa's periodic and vehement

---

<sup>23</sup> Minister, why are you destroying the Tsonga nation? Where were you born; does your body not bear some traditional tattoos? Show me a family which uses the Bible for protection against evil? Show me a cattle kraal which has been built upon the teachings of the Bible. We, the Vangoma, are the ones who provide spiritual protection for all the families. We do not drink the blood of human beings.

<sup>24</sup> You who deem it enough merely to pray for a sick person, without even touching the sick person. Of what use is that? In your church you teach about love, but who do you love? Yes, you love those who give lots of money to the church, such people you install as elders even though they are seldom at church.

protestations. In his prayer, N'wa-Bembe implies that Mbolovisa's illness is due to his intellectual and spiritual confusion. Mbolovisa's pains increase so much that he eventually accepts the god of N'wa-Bembe. He is speedily baptised and sees a vision of angels beckoning him. The play ends with two long 'speeches' of Hlupheka and Matengo respectively.

#### 4.3.1 As a Play

Most of the criticisms against Tsonga playwrights which we cited above apply squarely to Mtombeni's work. Although the number of characters is reasonable and controlled, this work might have been better presented either as a novel, a series of short stories or (better still) as an anthology of poems. The 'lines' of the actors are often long, (e.g. Hlupheka's lines :66-68), poetic, and somewhat convoluted. The Tsonga language employed is incredibly sublime, rich in metaphors, riddles, proverbs and other forms of originality in creative expression. It is as if all the actors are either philosophers or students in philosophy. At the level of expression and linguistic ability, therefore, there are no serious differences between the actors. They differ in opinion and bias, rather than in style. Is this a strength or a weakness? Insofar as Mtombeni clearly purported to submit a piece of aesthetically beautiful, deep and expressive Tsonga we may regard it a strength that he endows his characters with such depth. Yet, this also has the unhelpful effect of blurring distinctions of character and definition between the actors. As a result, few (if any) characters are so different from others that he/she makes a lasting impression on the mind of the reader.

Another shortcoming is the lack of a centralised and developing plot. There is little perceivable 'build up' in the succession of scenes. Comment on the 'debate' between Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe at the grave-side is drawn-out and repetitive. While the storyline revolves around the two divergent view-points of Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe, it is not clear how the episodes of Matengo, Hlupheka and Magwaza relate to this theme, which culminate in the conversion of N'wa-Bembe. It appears that the love triangle of Matengo-Hlupheka-Magwaza as well as the extensive issues it raises in the minds of the other actors is not properly inserted into the stem of the plot. In other words, it does not seem to deepen the conflict in the play; instead it appears to be a side-show alongside the other theme. This strengthens my suggestion that this work would

have made a better impact if it had been reworked as pieces of poetry rather than a play.

#### 4.3.2 Life and Death as Mystery

The above comments notwithstanding, Mtombeni's deep awareness of and fascination with the mystery of life is displayed right from Magwaza's opening eulogy as the funeral procession leaves the Mathebula house. In fact, the reason that Mtombeni's characters are prone to give long-winded philosophical speeches is because these characters, like their creator, have a keen awareness of the mysteries, contradictions and deeper questions relating to human living. In his opening speech, the Magwaza character creates, for example, a conceptual distance between himself and his life. In this way Mtombeni is able to look at life as if from a distance; i.e. talk of life as one talks of a valuable possession:

Hanya hi laha ku nga heriki, whe vutomi bya nga, chancha marhonge, u tlula, u khana; swihuhuri, swidzedze ni jujutsa swi va swo tlanga, vutomi ni rifu, mihloti ya nhlomulo ni fenywa swi gangana, vutomi bya mina a byi ve bya mpimo wa rinhi ro leha, tindlela ta mina ti kongoma miganga hinkwayo; ndzi nyike ntamu; ndzi tiya marhambu ni misiha<sup>25</sup> (:5).

Similarly, through the mouth of Mbolovisa, Mtombeni is able to personify death powerfully:

We xidzidzi, xibubula matshangava, rikhozana ro bvunga rihuku ra matabyana; whe gama ro haha vusiku na nhlikanhi, mbyana ya rithantswi, yo tsuvula chovo ra xipene; boboma ro rhwala swigungu, ri tsuvula ni minkuwa ... Yoloyi a ku rhumeke a fambe na wena, a ku tlhome tinsiva mi byisana, mi ncincimuka mi peta

---

<sup>25</sup> May you live forever my dear life; may you frolic, leap and dance and may whirlwinds, hurricanes and cold winds have no effect on you. May life and death, tears, anguish and gaiety converge; so that you may be of the size of a long rod and your paths be limitless. Lend strength to my veins and my bones.

dyambu, mi ya pela ni dyambu<sup>26</sup> ... (:7).

Because Mtombeni recognises life and death as such deep mysteries it is natural that the religious question of meaning (of both life and death) is important to him. N'wa-Bembe explains death as something decreed by God (:6). According to him, there is a place in heaven where the souls of the dead go and are welcome. Yet, for Mbolovisa, death is always the work of witches and it is folly to ascribe it to God (:7, 17). Mtombeni also defines death as that 'which connects heaven to earth. The heart, seed and skin of creation are all to be found in the pot of death' (:12). The question which Matengo puts to N'wa-Bembe illustrates the issue of theodicy which is an important variation of Mtombeni's storyline:

Ngopfu-ngopfu lexi dlayaka munhu laha misaveni, leswaku valoyi,  
kumbe Xikwembu lexi hi dlayaka? Loko va ri manyamisoro Xikwembu  
xi endla yini? Loko xi ri Xona hi Xoxe hi leswaku Xi ni mona laha  
misaveni ni le henhla ka vanhu va yona<sup>27</sup> (:30).

#### 4.3.3 Christianity and Traditional Tsonga Beliefs

Deep religious issues pertaining to the mission of the church and the meaning of life and death are at the centre of this work of Mtombeni. In relation to the theme of this play, Christianity is portrayed by Mtombeni as the religion that should bring an end to all questions, doubts, inconsistencies, double-living, and especially on questions concerning life and death. The fact that events such as the 'debate' between Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe at the grave still occur among people who are predominantly Christian illustrates the 'shortness' of the Christian garments that people are wearing.

---

<sup>26</sup> Like a musk-rat that unearths seeds in the fields, an eaglet that snatches a small chick, an eagle that flies day and night. You are like a ferocious dog which snatches the tail of a steenbok, a flood that uproots deep-rooted shrubs and fig-trees. May he who has sent you depart with you. Let him congratulate you and may the two of you accompany one another as you coast along till sunset, and may you set with the sun ...

<sup>27</sup> I want to understand this especially; who kills human beings, is it witches or is it God? If it is witches, what does God do? If it is God who puts an end to the lives of human beings then God is most cruel over the earth and its inhabitants.



What Mtombeni does not bring out clearly is precisely whose fault it is that the garments are short. Is it the fault of the converts or is it simply the inadequacy of the version of Christianity they received? If we take the contents of the debate between Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe (especially :46f) as central to the storyline, then we must conclude that the dispute ends in a draw. Mbolovisa is unable to account for the fact that people, including Vangoma, die despite the efforts of other Vangoma (:18). Similarly, N'wa-Bembe has no real answer to Mbolovisa' charge that the Bible makes assertions that cannot be proven outside of the Bible itself (:48):

Etikerekeni va ri Bibeledi tsariwile hi Xikwembu, sweswo va ri swi vuriwa hi Bibeledi. Bibeledi i rito ra Xikwembu, na swona ku vula Bibeledi. Hi ta helela kwihi xana - hi sirhiwa hi Bibeledi<sup>28</sup>?

Without disputing Mbolovisa's charge of the inadmissibility of the one-sided 'evidence' of the Bible, N'wa-Bembe responds by pointing to God as the Alpha and the Omega of all creatures. However, since Mbolovisa is the one who is eventually converted and baptised, we can tell where Mtombeni's sympathies are, but Mbolovisa leaves the reader with some valid and yet unanswered questions. Yet Mtombeni does not commit himself to spelling out from where the shortness of the garments emanate - from the side of the converts or the convertors? There is a level at which Mtombeni uses the metaphor of short garments not merely to illustrate an inadequate *appropriation* of Christianity, but more fundamentally, the inadequacy of the human creature, in terms of knowledge, life, education and religion (:32).

However, on the basis of the inconclusive debate between Mbolovisa and N'wa-Bembe and the group of young *Majagani*, we have good reason to conclude that - although Mtombeni is far from advocating a rejection of Christianity - the central assertions of this work present a serious critique of missionary Christianity.

---

<sup>28</sup> It is said in the churches that the Bible has been written by God, but that emanates from the Bible, we are told. It is further said that the Bible is the Word of God, yet that too comes from the Bible. Where will this line of reasoning end - for the Bible obstructs our view at every corner?

#### 4.3.4 Mbolovisa Challenges the Church

Whether Mtombeni did this consciously or not, Mbolovisa comes across as the most forceful and better defined character in the play. In his own way he cares deeply for community. He is a concerned leader of the Vatsonga (:59). The educated young men seem to recognise this when they refer to him as a representative of Gwambe and Dzavani (:16). As soon as he hears about the sickness of the child at the Nkunas, he pays them a visit (:45). Although he is much opposed to Christianity and education, he is nevertheless welcoming to educated Christians when they visit his family. He also enjoys open debate with both the learned young men as well as with the minister himself.

Mbolovisa challenges the practice of merely praying for the sick without 'touching them' (:46). He challenges church members to tell him whom they love, since they preach much about it. Whether it is true or not that the church prefers those with money to those without it (:47), Mbolovisa's charge is representative of a broad spectrum of views both within and outside the church. Mbolovisa also suggests that the Christian God has died and that churches are engaged in a search for new gods. What do we lack - we who do not go to church? asks Mbolovisa provocatively. Lastly Mbolovisa also questions the 'tyranny' of the Bible, which is assumed to have been written by God and therefore becomes the be-all and end-all of Christianity (cf. Mosala 1987). All these are valid and fundamental challenges to the church that Mtombeni raises through the mouth of Mbolovisa.

#### 4.4 Summary of Issues

Both the plays we have considered provide unambiguous comment on both missionary Christianity and the traditions of the Vatsonga. Nkondo gives a religious dimension to a seemingly material and political situation. However, he ignores Christianity completely. Instead the gods at the centre of his play are Gwambe and Dzavani. Not a single reference is made to (a) the Christian God, (b) missionaries and/or ministers, (c) Tsonga Christians and (d) churches. And yet Nkondo is well acquainted with established Christian manner of speech. Familiar metaphors of missionary Christianity abound in his work, but missionary Christianity itself is absent. It is the oppressed children of Gwambe and Dzavani who employ these metaphors. If Mtombeni does not reject

missionary Christianity, Nkondo ignores it contemptuously. But Mtombeni's central proposal is also momentous. Without questioning the usefulness and goodness of missionary Christianity, Mtombeni suggests that it is an inadequate garment. The deepest questions of the Vatsonga in particular and human beings in general are not answered adequately by missionary Christianity.

#### 4.5 Selected Poems

##### 4.5.1 Children's Poems

As is the case with Western nursery rhymes, children's poems are situated halfway between poems and songs. In the mission schools, there have been at least three noticeable sources of vernacular nursery rhymes, namely, (a) established Western rhymes whose words were translated without changing the melody, (b) those taken from traditional folklore and (c) those composed by the teachers in their interaction with children within the school environment. The first category is pretty straightforward since the 'message' is borrowed from the original poem/song. One has in mind here rhymes such as 'Three Blind Mice'. However, sometimes the melody was kept but new words were put in. The significance of the second category lies in the fact that it is perhaps in this category that the 'traditional' forced itself upon the school situation. This phenomenon became an arena for cultural negotiation, at a most delicate level, namely the level of forming the characters of the very young. Since the school was for a long time only an arm or extension of the church, it is significant that vibes from traditional folklore made their presence felt in the class-room situation. The third category points to the genius of teachers who, under the trees of the rural areas, had to devise means of grabbing the attention of children and making the learning an enjoyable occasion for them. Often these gifted teachers who composed little songs and short repetitive, rhyming poems, would use these to impart knowledge about God, hygiene, interpersonal relationships or basic writing skills. The following rhyme, designed to teach children the vowels, is a good example:

Hi dyondza A ku fana na xileyi

Hi dyondza E ku fana na joko

Hi dyondza I ku fana na rinhi

Hi dyondza O ku fana na tandza

Hi dyondza U ku fana na xihisu (Rasengane 1963:7)

The song likens each vowel to something that the children have experience of. The vowel E is likened to a cattle yoke and O to an egg. As well as enjoy the melody, the children would be internalising the basic visual shapes of the vowels. Some children's poems would teach morality subtly, e.g. *Bentsa Wee!* (Rasengane 1963:10)

Bentsa wee ...! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Bentsa wee ...! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Lomu tingomeni! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Vukundzu-kundzu! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Lomu mabyaleni! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Vudakwa-dakwa..! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Lomu tihunyini !Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?  
 Vukhwenu-khwenu! Bentsa! N'wa-Vuyani'kwihhi Bentsa?

This [dance] song with a gripping rhythm and easy-to-remember lines is a conversation between Bentsa and friend. The friend inquires from Bentsa where N'wa-Vuyani is. The answer is that N'wa-Vuyani is to be found at such places as Mungoma festivals, at places where there are lots to drink. Even when N'wa-Vuyani is at work, collecting wood, she/he is gossiping there. The subtle message is to caution the child against these bad habits. Similarly the poem, *Misisi Ya Mina* (Rasengane 1963:24) is a hygienic lesson on hair care. Other poems teach certain specific values to children. The following used to be a popular little song taught to lower primary children:

Hina hi vana lava ntsanana  
 Lava humaka eJerusalem  
 Vusiwana, Vusiwanaaa!  
 Vusiwanooo  
 Hina hi hava<sup>29</sup>!

---

29

We are young children  
 Who hail from Jerusalem  
 Poverty, crushing poverty,  
 Poverty,  
 We are needy

As is typical with many nursery rhymes, the logic and rational integrity of the song is not of the highest order. The suggestion that the children come from Jerusalem expresses their childish innocence. The troubling message of the song seems to be the 'joyous' confession of lack and inadequacy. Are the children being taught the virtues of poverty and material want? Some of the poems express pure wonderment of rapid industrialisation and technology. A good example of this is the poem, *Xitimeŀa* (the train) (Rasengane 1963:8). Yet even here the tired train is made to pronounce some bias regarding the Venda and the Shangaans.

Pfhu ... Pfu ...!  
 Chu ... chu ... chu ...!  
 Weee ... weee ... weee ...!  
 Ndzi karhele ndzi huma ekule, (2)  
 Machangana na Vavhenda susani vana, (2)  
 Weee ... weee ... weee ...  
 Tshika Muvhenda, u hlayisa Muchangana (2)  
 Weee ... weee ... wee ...!

The tired train asks the Shangaans and the Vhavenda to remove children out of its way. But the poet also adds: 'leave the Venda alone, look after the Shangaan'. The rivalry between the Vhavenda and the Vatsonga is probably rooted in the wars between the Vhavenda and the Boers - in which the Vatsonga under the leadership of Albasini were often on the side of the Boers.

Other children's poems are taken from traditional folklore. These comment on a variety of issues. The poem, *Mundzuku* (Rasengane 1963:9) tackles the dissatisfaction of women in traditional Tsonga culture.

Mundzuku leri xaka  
 Ri xela nhonga  
 Nhonga leyi  
 Yo lava tihunyi  
 To lava mati,  
 Yo sweka vuswa  
 Vuswa lebyi

Vo dya va ndzi tsona,  
Hayi Mbelengwana xi ku du<sup>30</sup>!

Another makes fun of a child who refuses to eat, probably due to anger. Mocking reference to the child's very big ears is made.

Vonani n'wana wa nga,  
Sekurendze, kurendze, kurendze ...,  
U ala na ku dya ha!  
Sekurendze, kurendze, kurendze, kurendze ... !  
N'wana wa nga hicho, hicho, hicho!  
Wa mandleve, hicho, hicho hicho!  
Si ya dlodlo, hicho, hicho, hicho (Rasengane 1963:9).!

Yet other children's poems are based on some traditional beliefs and taboos. The poem titled *Xikhongolotana* (Rasengane 1963:21) is a good example of this. It is a traditional children's song based on the belief that the small millipede helped to keep the fire burning (literally, that is).

#### 4.5.1.1 Conclusion

Next to Bible stories, children's rhymes were an important vehicle through which the young received elementary teachings in missionary Christianity. Through these, the young were also introduced to 'civilised' manners. For at least these two reasons, children's poems are very important. What is specifically noteworthy is the persistence of poems and rhymes based on traditional folk-lore. It is remarkable that these poems, most of which were set in traditional religious framework, still found their way into the classroom. It must be remembered that the classroom was in diametrical opposition to the circumcision school. The inclusion of traditional folk-lore-

---

30

This coming tomorrow  
Brings with it the rod  
Through this rod,  
Wood is sought  
Water is collected,  
Porridge is cooked,  
    Of this porridge,  
I get none,  
And as for me, poor Mbelengwana, I simply look on!

based children's poems transforms the classroom into a site for religio-cultural negotiation. These rhymes were foreign to missionary Christianity not only in content, but also in melody and rhythm.

#### 4.5.2 Poems in praise of missionaries and their legacies

In a poem, titled *Elim*, Makhuba (1972) takes the opportunity to paint a picture of the darkness out of which the Vatsonga were taken by the missionaries.

Loko Vatsonga va ha ri munyameni,  
 Loko Vatsonga va ha hanya hi comani,  
 Loko Vatsonga va ha gandzela eminkanyini,  
 Loko Vatsonga va ha n'wisiwa mhondzo,  
 Loko noyi a ha hisiwa hi ndzilo,  
 Wonge ndza swi vona hi mahlo ya nyama,  
 Ku tsundzuka swona swi ndzi tsema nhlana  
 Tiko ra Vatsonga a ri etlele emunyameni,  
 Tiko ra Vatsonga a ri chavisa swonghasi<sup>31</sup>!

The above picture of the darkness in which the Vatsonga were is familiar and common in much of the reading that we have done. Thanks and praise must be directed to God, says Makhuba, for God willed it that two young men (presumably Creux and Berthoud) would bring the light to the Vatsonga, thereby destroying belief in witchcraft. In fact, Makhuba (1972) has two other similar poems, titled *Lemana* and *Valdezia*. *Lemana*<sup>32</sup>, established in 1906, is described by Makhuba as the fountain of knowledge for the Vatsonga. *Lemana* is

---

<sup>31</sup> When the Vatsonga were still in darkness  
 When they still put their trust  
 In the drum of the diviner,  
 Worshipping under the morula tree,  
 When the Vatsonga were still forced to drink the mhondzo,  
 It is as if I see it now,  
 Its memory sends a chill up my spine,  
 Truly, the Vatsonga were in darkness,  
 And their country was a fearful place.

<sup>32</sup> *Lemana* is an educational institution named after lake Lemana in Switzerland. Makhuba is probably aware of these for he uses the metaphors of fountain and sweet water in reference to *Lemana*. An earlier poem on *Lemana* belongs to Ndhambi (1949), titled *Munti Wa Swikolo Swa Vatsonga*.

also described in this poem as a Christian witness amongst the Vatsonga. In the poem *Valdezia*, Makhuba paints the picture of an educational centre and a place where the first seed of Christianity was planted - the cradle of the 'Swiss gospel'. Switzerland is referred to as 'our loving grand-parent'. Amongst the fruit of *Valdezia*, Makhuba points to ministers, doctors, teachers and school inspectors. In a poem titled, *Juvili ya Elim: (1879-1954)*, Marolen (1972) renders a poetic history of the Elim mission. He also takes the opportunity to thank the Swiss. In this poem the Swiss are referred to as 'our spiritual fathers'. A similar poem from the pen of the same author is titled, *Kereke Ya Lemana*. In this poem, Marolen thanks the Swiss missionaries for bringing in a skilled builder, who built the Lemana church. Marolen exhorts the Vatsonga to show their thanks by being faithful Christians.

Similar types of praise-poems are the poems in praise of prominent and educated Tsonga leaders, most of whom were products of missionary education. In his anthology, Masebenza (1965) dedicates a few poems to Tsonga heroes, with the names of the heroes as titles. Included amongst these are D.C. Marivate, E.A. Tlakula, A.E. Mpapele<sup>33</sup>, S.J. Baloyi, C.K. Mageza, and D.D. Malongane. Aspects that are appreciated of these heroes are their education, their service to the Tsonga nation, their song-writing skills, and their Christian service and witness. Another common topic for Tsonga poets is the Vatsonga themselves. Often these are poems of praise aimed at encouraging unity and confidence amongst the Vatsonga<sup>34</sup>.

The sustenance of the Tsonga nation is one of the evident yet unspoken objectives of Tsonga literature, be they historical, novels, plays and even poetry. The examples are numerous: Thlomandloti prohibits his son to marry a Xhosa. Nyiko becomes a minister amongst the Vatsonga. Mbolovisa's house is said to overflow with the wisdom of Nchangana. Ngwanazi considers Nhlonge-Ntima to be a threat to Gwambe and Dzavani - the gods of the Vatsonga. On closer scrutiny, it appears that missionary Christianity is especially appreciated for its contribution in education.

---

<sup>33</sup> See also the poem by Mtsetweni (1986:42-43) on the same personality.

<sup>34</sup> One has in mind here poems such as *Mutsonga* (Makhuba 1975:6). *N'wina Vatsonga* (Makhuba 1972:34), *Hi Vana va Vatsonga* (Makhuba 1972:36). The 'archetype' in this topic is Ndhambi's *Vatsonga* (Ndhambi 1949:60). See also, Mnisi (1988:14-15 and 36-37).



#### 4.5.3 Poems on the Christian life-style

In his poem, titled *Majagani*, Nkondo (1969a:25) explores a sub-theme we have met many times in our reading of Tsonga works so far. Here the *Majagani* are described flatteringly as beautiful and strong people. And the reader is asked in the second stanza.

Xana a mi swi lavi ku fana na vona?  
 Tiburuku to leha?  
 Xihuku enhlokweni,  
 Tintanghu na masokisi emilengeni  
 Vanhu va xilungu,  
 Va rifuwo ro basa  
 Va miehleketo yo basa,  
 Vanhu vo tani?<sup>35</sup>

The state of being a *Mujagani* is illustrated by dress, the acquisition of Western culture, possession of guilt-free wealth and clean thoughts. So far the deceptive impression is given that the *Majagani* are good people. But that is only how they appear. Nkondo suddenly changes his tone:

E-e! kambe yimani nyana,  
 Byela jagani vusiwana bya wun'wana,  
 U kombela cheleni kumbe BibeLe,  
 U ri komba mahlomulo ya makwenu,  
 U ri kombela ku ehleketa vuntshwa  
 U ta ri vona jagani<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Don't you wish to be like them?  
 To wear long trousers?  
 and hat on the head,  
 With shoes and socks on your feet?  
 Westernised people  
 With clean wealth  
 Clean thoughts,  
 Don't you like to be like such people?

<sup>36</sup> No! Wait a minute  
 Speak to a Mujagani about somebody's poverty  
 Ask for a shilling or even a Bible,  
 Show the Mujagani the distress of your brother  
 Ask him to reconsider anything

The above then are things that show the *Mujagani* up for what he/she is. Beneath the veneer of nice dress there is no real love for others. The *Majagani* are concerned mostly about themselves, with little time for anyone else. Nor are they open-minded. To conclude his poem, Nkondo likens the *Majagani*, describing their numerical preponderance, to empty caves.

In a poem with the same title, Mayevu (1991) takes another look at the phenomenon of *Majagani*. The opening stanza introduces the *Majagani* within their natural habitat.

Hi le xitasini xa muganga  
 Hi le gumeni ra vabvani  
 Hi le kaya ra valungu-ntima  
 Hi le kaya ka tiya ni xinkwa  
 Hi le kaya ka lavo titiva<sup>37</sup>

In describing them as *Valungu-Ntima* (literally White-Blacks), Mayevu points to an important characteristic of the *Majagani*. They aspire to Whiteness. For this reason they are conceited and look down upon other people. However, in Mayevu's estimation, their condition is not altogether irredeemable.

Xana i Mukriste ke?  
 A nga va yena hakunene,  
 Kasi i munhu muni ke?  
 I n'wana wa Xikwembu;  
 O rhangisa mintirho<sup>38</sup>

---

Then you will see the *Mujagani*

<sup>37</sup> In the mission station  
 At the place of good clothing  
 This is the home of White-Blacks  
 The home of tea and bread  
 Where the proud and conceited live.

<sup>38</sup> Is a *Mujagani* a Christian?  
 He/She can be a true one,  
 What sort of a person is a *Mujagani*?  
 He/she is a child of God;  
 Only, he/she trusts in their own works.

In another poem titled *Maxangu*, Muyambo (1984) discusses Christian commitment and the role of such commitment as witness.

Wena, wena Mukriste,  
 Vonakarisa vukona bya Xikwembu,  
 Byi paluxe endzeni ka timbilu ta maribye  
 Maribye la tsandzeke ``dalameti''<sup>39</sup>.

This is a poem of Christian exhortation and admonition. Muyambo expresses concern at the poor quality of Christianity professed by many Christians. Such poverty is illustrated by the discrepancy between faith and works. It is also exemplified by a kind of exclusivity that hinders Christian evangelism:

Erendzweni ra mina,  
 Ku ya bobometa vutivi  
 Ndzi hlangene ni Vukriste-hava  
 Vamambala madzovo ya tinyimpfu  
 Va mpfilunganyi va timbilu ta vapfumari va rito

Eka vona Mukriste a nga na bulo ni muhedeni  
 Ku yima na Muhedeni i xidyoho  
 Xidyoho xo ka ndzivalelo  
 Ndzivalelo wa manguva lawa<sup>40</sup>.

Recently, an emerging Tsonga short-story writer, D.R. Maluleke (1991) has

---

<sup>39</sup> And you, you dear Christian,  
 Demonstrate the existence of God  
 Reveal His existence in the hearts of stone,  
 Hearts so hard that even dynamite has failed to crack them

<sup>40</sup> In my journey  
 In pursuit of knowledge  
 I have been confronted with the worthless Christianity,  
 Of those dressed in sheep skin  
 Those who create confusion in the hearts of the unconverted

According to them, there should be no contact between a Christian  
 and a heathen  
 Merely being seen with a heathen is sin  
 An unforgivable sin

written a poem titled *Vafundhisi* in which the life-style of ministers comes under the spot-light. He contrasts the colourful robes of ministers and their considerable verbal abilities with their lack of exemplary action.

Other poems, such as Makhuba's *Ndzi lava ku ya etilweni*, (I want to go to heaven) are straightforward Christian exhortations. In this poem, the author enjoins the reader to aspire to heaven, for there is no better place than heaven. Another poem which is written in a similar vein is by Marhanele (1975), titled *VaIala Va Vakriste* (the enemies of Christians). However, Marhanele's immediate object of discussion is hell rather than heaven.

#### 4.5.3.1 Conclusion

This group of poems is more critical of missionary Christianity. As it was the case with the novels, the *Majagani* are an important tool of analysis. However, the poems lack the radical depth of the novels. Most of them are primarily exhortative rather than critical. If they do come across as sharp at times, it is only so as to 'shock' the listener into good Christian behaviour. As a commentary on missionary Christianity, these group of poems are unambiguous.

#### 4.6 Poems on Religion and Politics

While negative comment on traditional religion is rife amongst Tsonga poets, political comment is scarce and mostly recent. The reasons for this tendency have already been cited and discussed. Once again, Nkondo is the notable exception. In a poem in praise of his grandmother, titled *N'wambhanyamatluka*, Nkondo (1969a) demonstrates how she has refused to be corrupted by the White people's habits.

A xi n'wi tivi Jesu, hambu Jehova,  
 Kambe xi rhandza vumunhu ni ntiyiso  
 Xi ta endla yini hi Jesu na Jehova  
 Leswi ku va N'wambhanyamatluka kumbe ku va mukriste swi fanaka?

Xi vone valungu va nghena Transvaal,  
 Xi vone ku hlundzuka ka ntimeni  
 Xi vone dzovo-ra-ntima

Ku fana na rimpfani,  
 Ku hundzuka muhlovo, ri va mulungu-ntima ...

Kambe xona xi yime ndzhawu yin'we  
 Ku fana ni gongomela;  
 Xi ongorile loko ri xa na loko ri pela,  
 Hi vukheta, hi xin'we-xin'we  
 Vumbhuri ni vumunhu bya ka Soshangane<sup>41</sup>

Of interest to us is the manner in which the old woman in discussion is defined; as someone who knows neither Jesus nor Jehovah. Yet she is someone who knows about truth and about being human. Unlike many who have been swept away by the White man's habits, she stands her ground. Are Jesus and Jehovah part of the White man's habits? Whatever our answer to that question is, Nkondo manages in this little poem to connect religion and politics with amazing ability. Nkondo achieves the same feat in his *Risimu Ra Hlonga* which is based on Psalm 137.

It was not until the late eighties that Tsonga poets started to deal with political issues. The collection edited by C.P.N. Nkondo (1988) with the basic criteria for inclusion being the theme of Africa presents perhaps the biggest

41

She knows neither Jesus nor Jehovah  
 But she adores truth and humanity  
 Of what use will Jesus and Jehovah be to her?  
 What is the difference between being N'wambhanyamatluka and being  
 a Christian?

She has seen the coming of Whites into the Transvaal  
 She witnessed the anger of Blacks,  
 She has also seen the black skin,  
 Like a chameleon,  
 Changing colour from Black into White-Black,

And yet she stands her ground  
 Like a lonely star,  
 From day-break to sun-set,  
 She cares and tenders,  
 With precision and love  
 The beauty of the humane humanity,  
 Of the children of Soshangane.

single collection of political poems in Tsonga<sup>42</sup>. In a poem titled, *Nandzu Wa Afrika*, Mnisi (1988) offers a prayer, but the names he uses for God are Allah and Jah. Is this an implicit rejection of the Christian God? Has he given up on this God? Or is Mnisi suggesting that Allah and Jah are the true Gods of Africa? In yet another poem titled *Tinhenha ta Afrika*, Mnisi praises the achievements of such African leaders and personalities as Haile Selassie, Rasta Fari, Mnamdi Azikiwe, Shehu Shagari, Gaddafi, Sadat, Kaunda, Jomo Kenyatta, Mondlane, Mashele, Mugabe and Nkomo. Mnisi even has a poem in which South Africa is referred to as Azania, titled *Azania Werhu*. In the first stanza of this poem, Mnisi bravely refers to Azania as 'our homeland'.

During the same period in which Mnisi wrote, another budding poet, Magaisa (1987), has given us a taste of what is coming from Tsonga poets during our own times. In an anthology titled *Xikolokolo nguvu ya Pitori*<sup>43</sup>, Magaisa tackles political issues with boldness and even impatience. His poem titled *Milawu* (laws) is daring and unambiguous - for the time in which it was written.

Ndzi ta swi kotisa ku yini ku yi landzelela?  
Ndzi famba bya mati ndzi nga hambuki?  
A hi khume; yi tele,  
Siku na siku ku tswariwa yintshwa,  
Yi hundzuke swirimana etshangaveni ra mina<sup>44</sup>.

In another poem, titled *A-E-I-O-U*, Magaisa makes fun of teachers who eschew socio-political involvement. Such a teacher only likes to hear the echo of

---

<sup>42</sup> Most of the poems in this collection are written by Joel M.N. Mnisi. Included in this collection are poems on such people as Eduardo Mondlane, Marsha; Samora Moses Mashele, etc.

<sup>43</sup> *Xikolokolo nguvu Ya Pitori*, is a Tsonga saying used to denote something enforced, or something that must be done against one's will. It probably emanates from the bitter experiences of conflict within the Transvaal, between the Tsonga, Swazi, Pedi and Venda on the one hand, and the Boers on the other.

<sup>44</sup> How on earth can I uphold these laws?  
How can I travel like water, never changing my path?  
These commandments are more than ten  
Everyday new ones are born  
They are like landmines in my field.

his/her own voice in the classroom. In an 'angry' poem titled *Mi Rhukane Swikwembu* (You have insulted the gods), he points the finger at Africans for despising things African. As a result, the gods of Africa have turned their backs on Africans. His words are stinging, his ridicule unbearable.

Ma ha rindze yini  
 Vutomi lebyi taka bya mundzuku?  
 I mani a nga mi tshembisa byona?  
 Swikhodo leswi, vusiwana a hi nyangwa wa byona,  
 Byi lo swi yini vumba lebyi nga vumba n'wina?

Ixi, a mo rila ngati?  
 Rilani hi vona ko huma mihloti ya ntima,  
 Mi ka mi tisunga swi sukela kwihl?i?  
 Nandzu wa n'wina ma wu tiva,  
 Mi rhukane swikwembu swa vatata wa n'wina<sup>45</sup>

In this poem, Africans are called into action against their oppression and challenged to begin to respect their culture, past and customs. In another poem, styled as a petition to God, titled *Hina ke Yehovha?* Magaisa requests the God of the Bible to confirm that Blacks are also made in His image.

#### 4.7 General Conclusion

The two plays reviewed in this chapter clearly belong in the same category as the novels considered in the third chapter. They raise essentially the same issues. Perhaps Nkondo (1974) goes furthest, by contemptuously ignoring Christianity. He also connects missionary Christianity to politics. In terms of the issues under investigation in this study, the poems are slightly

---

45

What are you waiting for?  
 Life hereafter?  
 Who promised you that life?  
 You fools,  
 Of what sort of clay have you been made?

You might as well cry, you cry tears not blood  
 Go ahead and cry let's see if your tears are black  
 Why do some of you need to commit suicide?  
 You know your sin  
 You have insulted the gods of your father

disappointing. However, even they are not entirely silent. Many children's poems stand in between the two traditions, missionary Christianity and local culture. Latter day poems have not only been openly political, but are beginning to make connections between religion and politics.

With this review of two Tsonga plays and several selected poems, my survey of indigenous Tsonga literature draws to a close. In the next chapter, I shall draw the essential conclusions that the entire study on historical and biographical works, novels, plays and poems, has yielded. In that chapter, I return to the basic thesis proposed at the beginning of the study, namely, that these groups of literary work constitute a valid and authentic commentary on missionary Christianity.



## CHAPTER 5

### A MORULA TREE IN BETWEEN - AT THE CUTTING EDGE

#### 5.1 Introduction

I have chosen Muhlaba as a reliable prototype of the 'torment', negotiation, appropriation and resistance that many Tsonga people experienced and mounted in the face of the onslaught of missionary Christianity and other related influences. In this chapter, I will draw together as well as deepen the issues and themes that our sample of Tsonga literature has yielded for missiology. In doing this, *firstly* (cf. 5.2), I will start by recapping and updating of my basic proposals in the first chapter. In this section, I will interact extensively with Swiss missionary views of Tsonga culture. In this way, the 'independence' of the commentary of indigenous Tsonga writers will be established more firmly. Because of the centrality of this matter in the entire study, this section will be dealt with at some length. *Secondly* (cf. 5.3), I shall highlight the essential commentary that our sampled literature submits on missionary Christianity. I will argue in this section that both those who 'converted' to missionary Christianity and those who did not; rejected, modified, and re-defined the dominant form of missionary Christianity. It is this realisation that makes Muhlaba's self-definition most profound.

*Thirdly* (cf. 5.4), because I regard the metaphor of the Nkanyi in between as an apt and profound depiction of Tsonga commentary on missionary Christianity, I will return to a discussion of this metaphor in context. *Lastly* (cf. 5.5 & 5.6), I shall seek to outline the value of the commentary of indigenous Tsonga writers to missiology as well as to the construction of a Black missiology of liberation.

#### 5.2 Revisiting the Basic Thesis

As outlined in the first chapter, my basic thesis consisted of a few cardinal points revolving around the conviction that *indigenous Tsonga literature constitute a valid, independent and an 'under-side' commentary on missionary Christianity*. More than that, this literature gives us a view into the manner in which the Vatsonga have appropriated and redefined Christianity. My study

demonstrates clearly the fact that, in the construction of a local missiology, vernacular works by vernacular authors are a neglected but invaluable source. To state the same somewhat differently, I am proposing that in neglecting vernacular works, Black and African theologians are impoverishing their contribution to global theology. In this section I return to the cardinal points that I proposed as part of the thesis of this study. They are four in number and I shall discuss them each below.

*(a) Though well-meaning, missionary works (published and archival) on the Vatsonga constitute a serious historiographical imbalance, (subtle) ideological distortion and a missiological disempowerment of the Vatsonga.*

Much missionary historical writings and those written under their tutelage, often give a *still* picture of the Vatsonga until the missionaries arrive. In this way Creux and Berthoud become the Adam and Eve of the 'significant' history of the Vatsonga. Tsonga 'actors' in this history are often mentioned and/or acknowledged. But this is often done clumsily and as anecdotes to the central storyline, which is the story of missionaries and their activities. Often either their native names or their surnames (or both) are not noted. Nor were these traced when it was still possible to find these out through oral tradition. Although some of the surnameless native actors (e.g. Lois Xintomane and Eliachib Mandlakusasa) played a crucial role both as evangelists and as informants of the missionaries, their surnames were still not noted. Missionary intervention is therefore presented as the catalyst that catapulted the Vatsonga into history (cf. Cuendet 1950). A common theological way of saying the same thing is to describe the life of the Vatsonga before missionary intervention in metaphors of darkness and barbarism. This casting of the picture of the Vatsonga in 'frozen frame' can be presented bluntly or subtly, but the net objective is the same.

At first glance, it appears that missionaries tried their best to present the case of the Vatsonga to the Whites of South Africa in an informed and sympathetic way. In this regard, H.A. Junod and his son Henri Philippe deserve special mention. The two have emerged as the leading missionary theoreticians about the origins, history and culture of the Vatsonga. H.A. Junod (1910), tried tentatively to attribute some 'religious' import to a tribal rite of reconciliation among the Ba-Ronga. His main argument in this article was that

although 'we cannot expect amongst those animist tribes anything like the spiritual morality of a theistic religion' (:182), we must nevertheless recognise the validity of 'their' narrower base for morality as suggested and accepted by the Ba-Ronga. Elsewhere, H.A. Junod (1908:362), referring to the treatment of widows by the Ba-Ronga and drawing parallels with the situation in India, declares that:

The natives of South Africa are not so hard and cruel on the poor women who had the misfortune of losing their master. The bantu of these parts are common-sense people; they form, after all, a cool-headed race, which does not go easily to such extremes. ... they correct their false and sometimes dangerous social principles by a wonderful indulgence in practice. ... In the same way one can say that the woman is the property of her husband; she is merely a 'thing bought'; nevertheless she knows quite well how to keep her own.

Clearly therefore, in some instances, H.A. Junod managed to see through the theoretical and verbal pronouncements of the people. Here, once again, H.A. Junod attempted to put the case of Ba-Ronga before a predominantly White audience. The younger Junod was even bolder in his 'defence' of the 'Bantu'<sup>1</sup>. In conclusion to his work, H.P. Junod (1938:138), proclaims that: 'the more one learns about the Bantu past, the more one feels that our encroachment on Bantu life is in many ways detrimental, although it is necessary and beneficial in other ways'. H.P. Junod (:139), perhaps more than his father, had come to recognise what he called the 'permanent elements of Bantu heritage'. These elements can be gleaned from Bantu language, folklore, proverbs, music, tribal organisation and 'the Bantu mind'. Because of the conviction that there was something of 'permanent' value in Tsonga/Ronga culture, Henri Berthoud, the Junods and A.A. Jaques laboured to study and preserve as much as was possible of what they considered to be valuable in Tsonga history and culture<sup>2</sup>. In the preface (not paginated) to the joint work

---

<sup>1</sup> For a positive appraisal of H.P. Junod's ministry see also, Ntsanwisi, H.W.E. (1961).

<sup>2</sup> One thinks here of the numerous ethnographical articles, two volumes by H.A. Junod (1927) as well as other publications in French, H.P. Junod's works (1938), (1940) (1977); the joint work of Junod, H.P. & Jaques (1936) as

of himself and Jaques (1936), Junod admonishes Europeans to

... stop using insulting words like ``savages''. The man of Africa has quite a lot to tell in matters of human relationships and - I would even dare to say - manners. We know that manners are fast disappearing in the turmoil of our industrial age.

However, upon closer scrutiny, several biases which are damning to the Vatsonga in particular and the 'Bantu' tribes in general are discernable, even in the most sympathetic missionary works on the indigenous peoples. In the same breath that H.P Junod chastises Europeans for referring to Africans as savages, he declares:

...the Bantus do not consider high-pressure work as an ideal; they are little inclined to consistent and strenuous effort; they do not share with us the urge to run all the time; having been cut away from all civilizing currents for centuries by oceans and deserts, (resisting) droughts and diseases ...

The sympathetic plea by missionaries on behalf of indigenous peoples before other 'less informed' and more 'ruthless' Whites must not be mistaken for either identification with the indigenous cause nor necessarily an approval of even those 'Bantu' features being described and earmarked for 'preservation'. Often these representations were rendered as a positivistic act documenting ``a civilisation about to disappear, to record what already existed and hence was 'normal' rather than that which was innovative and hence the exception'' (Harries 1981:40). Elsewhere, Harries (1981:42) describes H.A. Junod's view of science thus: ``...Science (that) had to be objective, unbiased and neutral''. In his assertion of ``permanent elements of Bantu heritage'' H.P. Junod (1938), explains his viewpoint as a departure from those

---

well as A.A. Jaques' own works, notably (1929,1938). Essentially these works meant well for the Vatsonga. They were mostly written from a position of patronage and sympathy. Even native students of the Tsonga language, history and culture, have found much information, insight and inspiration from some of these works. (In any case, there was nothing else available). The two studies by arguably the most senior native students of the Tsonga language, Ntsanwisi H.W.E. (1968) and Marivate CTD (1973) seems to indicate that they followed the lead of their missionary predecessors in considering proverbs, idioms and folklore to be very important aspects of the Tsonga language.

anthropologists who are more ``concerned [obsessed?] with culture contact than with the permanent elements of Bantu heritage'' (:139):

The true meaning of culture contact, with regard to the Bantu, is not found in the transitory forms of hybrid features of life, but in the manner in which Bantu heritage helps us to create a new era, a new Bantu society, where the valuable treasures of the Bantu tradition and folklore, where the positive elements of Bantu social and tribal life, where the spiritual forces of Bantu past will become part and parcel of a solid Bantu civilization. (:140).

Patrick Harries (1981) has argued that H.A. Junod (and I would add, H.P. Junod) has effectively left out socio-economic factors in his description of the Vatsonga peoples. According to Harries, H.A. Junod did this by excluding Tsonga migrant labourers (Harries 1994:xi), and avoiding ``the use of a wide range of documents'' (1981:44) which would have ``deepened his historical understanding''. Effectively, however, H.A. Junod neglected the whole area of social change, negotiation, trading and existence, even as he acknowledged that change was happening, seeking rather to contain it by way of evolutionism (belief that Africans were going through and had to go through phases of development), and romanticism<sup>3</sup> (a belief that the 'pure' African past harboured the answer to the ills of contemporary 'hybrid' African society). The Junods sought therefore to see beyond the impure hybrid culture that had emerged as the Vatsonga were affected by contact with Whites and other Black nations through wars, immigrancy and industrialisation. However, Junod's lamented neglect of economics, industrialisation, politics and colonialism is not his monopoly. It is a tendency with which we are very familiar in mission historiography.

During our own times, it was the advent of liberation theology, with its emphasis on praxis and not merely dogma, which brought a significant change in the writing of mission histories. The proliferation of various types of

---

<sup>3</sup> In his prize-winning article, H.A. Junod (1907:141) laments the fact that unlike twenty years previously, when the natives lived ``in their old and picturesque way, clad as children of nature ...[now] they all long for covering their body with gowns.''

contextual theologies (cf Bevens 1992)<sup>4</sup> has served to keep praxis and material conditions at the centre of theological reflection. In both his publications, Saayman (1991, 1995) has adopted contextual theology as his basic theological orientation. In this way, he avoids the bane of telling narrow, churchy, 'salvation-history type' stories<sup>5</sup>. South African Black Theology, has never, from its inception, been (merely) about dogma and orthodoxy, even before Marxist analysis became fashionable. Issues of social change, politics and culture have been central to Black Theology (cf Kritzinger (1988), Mosala (1987)). Beginning in the early eighties, Marxist historical materialism was to make its presence felt more and more in South African Black Theology (cf Maluleke 1995b). Yet Black theologians could never be accused of neglecting culture in the same way that hardened Marxists could be. On this issue South African Black theologians are distinguishable even from some of their fellow Latin American liberation theologians. Nor can the common accusation of having worked under and needing the assumption that 'European expansion [Apartheid] .. was all determining' (Cooper 1994:1517) be demonstrably sustained against Black Theology.

The concept of the equality of races was not only foreign, but unthinkable in the eyes of such missionaries as the Junods (cf van Butselaar 1984:131). The Africans were considered to be 'miles behind Europeans in many spheres of life' (Junod H.P., in preface to Junod H.P & Jaques A.A. 1936). It may be argued, in mitigation of the missionary stance, that they saw the 'backward state' of the Vatsonga as a phase, which would pass through a process of evolution<sup>6</sup>. However, such mitigation still leaves the Vatsonga 'at the mercy' of Europeans for their advancement. Only thus could H.P. Junod confidently talk of 'us' (himself included) creating a new 'Bantu society'.

---

<sup>4</sup> See also my review of Bevens (1992) in Maluleke (1994e).

<sup>5</sup> On the general South African church histories, Villa Vicencio (1988) and Cochrane (1987) through their socio-theological and marxist historical materialist approaches, respectively, have also succeeded in moving away from the old 'sacred' notions of church history. However, the honours for the earliest departure from narrow mission historiography must go to Majeke (1952).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the influences of scientific evolutionism and the dominant anthropological theories of the time on H.A. Junod, see Harries (1981).

Missionary efforts to document, classify and preserve native customs is often regarded as testimony of their love and even identification with native peoples. Such a perception is not necessarily valid since missionaries (like H.A. Junod) had other, often more important motives<sup>7</sup>. Earlier, H.A. Junod (1907:144) had indicated quite clearly how urgent was the task of studying and preserving (scientifically) the 'traditions and customs of the natives':

There is no time to lose. Let us devise the means to arrive at a full, precise, and intelligent description of the native life which is on the verge of disappearing. Only let these means, when pointed out, be used on a large scale, and our generation will have the honour of having done its work well. Science will be thankful to us as the material gathered will be of immense value

...

If H.A. Junod did not explore the impact of all outside factors upon the Vatsonga, he was by no means unaware of these:

The white man has penetrated everywhere, conquered it [Africa] entirely, and tried to impart his ideas and his religion, to the natives. Hence the change. The contact between him and his black brother is everyday more intimate, the influence already exercised will become more and more predominant. At present three principal agents are acting on the native tribe as a dissolvant, and are doomed to cause, in course of time, the entire disintegration of the old system of Kaffir life; *Christian ideals, scientific knowledge and the European political*

---

<sup>7</sup> Buthelezi (1976) refers to an inadequate, 'ethnographic approach' propagated by missionaries, in the construction of local indigenous theology. Such an approach, builds upon such assumptions as; (a) the existence of an epistemological gap between the Western church and the African church, (b) the importance of the 'soul' in the African world-view, (c) the existence of a static African world-view, etc. It is possible to regard the ideas of Junod (as Buthelezi indeed does explicitly) as belonging to this 'ethnographic approach'. However, my own view is that talk of an ethnographic approach in theology is one remove further from what H.A. Junod was doing, at least in his writings. Junod understood his task first and foremost in pure scientific rather than theological terms. If others used his ideas to build a semblance of a theological approach, he himself was rather concerned with the more basic and preliminary step, namely of devising means to classify, describe and thereby preserve native customs.

*domination* (Junod, H.A. 1907:141).

Clearly, therefore, Junod had formed an intelligible idea of the kind of change that the native races were undergoing as well as identifying the principal agents of this change. H.A. Junod's reluctance to explore issues of politics and industry was therefore a question of avoidance (perhaps priority) rather than ignorance<sup>8</sup>. While it is noble and admirable that H.A. Junod (1907) saw the need for the preservation of 'the traditions and customs of the various South African native races', the more interesting questions, as I have hinted above, relate to (a) Junod's evaluation of the role of Christian ideals and scientific knowledge on 'Kaffir life' (b) the end to which such change should be steered. Junod regarded '*the adoption of Christianity, which will be universal at least in the more advanced South African States before the end of this century, [as] the most powerful destroyer of heathenism*'<sup>9</sup>. Clearly therefore, he considered the Christian faith to be a positive and necessary agent of change amongst the Africans. Similarly, H.A. Junod (1907:143) was convinced that *scientific truth* would 'destroy the childish conceptions of *animism* which are the base of Kaffir philosophy'. Nor is he critical of the White political domination of the natives, saying rather; 'true friends of natives will recognise that it [the political domination] is an absolute necessity'<sup>10</sup>(:144).

---

<sup>8</sup> In his appraisal of H.A. Junod, Harries (1981:41) points out that 'Junod's sympathies lay largely with the exploited and his documentation of the evils of Portuguese and South African colonialism is to be found in his non-ethnographic and 'unscientific' works and his private correspondence'. Elsewhere, Junod himself (1920:77), whilst asserting that 'the white man has to rule and to educate the native population', nevertheless points out that White authority of the natives should be 'purely moral' rather than coercive. He also cautions; '... I think that even in the most loyal natives, in the background of their brains or in the bottom of their hearts, there always remains the dream of a Bantu Napoleon who will appear some day and reconquer the land of their fathers for them' (:77).

<sup>9</sup> For Junod (cf 1907:142-143), heathenism was illustrated by such beliefs and conduct as, 'ancestral beliefs', circumcision, lobolo, polygamy, animism, the power of the Mungoma.

<sup>10</sup> With a little more ambivalence and caution, H.A. Junod (1920:77) states a few years later that, 'whatever the future may be, there is no doubt that for the present the White race has to rule and guide the black race. I think that we [Whites] have courageously undertaken that task - perhaps more heartily than the natives themselves should wish'.



What sort of preservation of native customs did Junod envisage? It is certainly not one in which the natives are expected or encouraged to continue in their 'childish conceptions'. His call for the preservation of native customs does not derive from the attribution of moral value to these customs. That is a remotely secondary consideration. It is rather in the interest of science, for 'science wants a full account of the native life' (:145). Junod aimed therefore at creating a large scale 'museum' into which the 'educated South African aborigines [who] long to know something of their old status' (:144) will look. As a liberal, Junod realised that native customs, need not be 'despised altogether' since some of them contained 'some diffused rays of truth' (Junod, H.A. 1907:154). He also realised that 'Kaffir Christianity will be greatly influenced by the previous beliefs' (:154).

We see in Junod, the classical missionary ambivalence towards Africans, their religion and their culture. It is an ambivalence that resulted in ideological distortion of the image of Africans, in Junod's case the Vatsonga. Therefore, 'although he was saddened by the dissolution of the 'Thonga culture', he recognised its demise as progress' (Harries 1981:41). In Junod's eyes the 'purest' Tsonga was the rural and traditional one who was still steeped in the picturesque lifestyle, clad like a child of nature. This constituted a refusal to recognise the young, struggling, transforming and resisting aspects of Tsonga culture. It was against this anthropological anachronism (distortion) that Buthelezi (1976:64) protested:

Without actually saying it, the implicit suggestion they [the missionaries] seem to be making is that the old traditional insights represent more what is truly African than the insights of the modern Africans. The 'true African' is the one who is described in the books of ethnographers rather than the one whom we see in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town trying to make ends meet in the framework of Influx-Control legislation.

In terms of historiography, the projection of Africans, and the evaluation of many aspects and issues of African culture, the missionary voice cannot be trusted to speak alone. The Tsonga writers of novels, plays, poetry and history provide a valuable 'voice', not merely to counter the missionary account, but to initiate an entirely new perspective. Our sample of Tsonga

writers has vindicated this conviction.

(b) *Just because the impact of missionary intervention amongst the Vatsonga is abiding and irrefutable, this intervention did not and does not erode Tsonga creativity and initiative:*

The Bantu of the future will be more fortunate [than even Europeans]. If we educated white people do our duty, science will provide them with a full account of their former primitive stage (Junod, H.A. 1907:144).

As stated in the first chapter, there can be no doubt that missionary intervention has left an indelible mark on the lives of many Vatsonga. This mark is most evident in the events of the emergence of new Christian community, the creation of a literate culture as well as the quest for education. Whilst evangelisation was the primary aim of the missionaries, the creation of a literate culture as well as its implications, has had as profound an effect on the Vatsonga. This is not surprising because the missionary intervention was dogged, systematic and thorough:

...people emerging from the mists<sup>11</sup> of Animism [cannot] at once grasp the full meaning of Christianity. We must always remember that the Bantu creed does not establish any connection between religion and morality, whilst Christianity, at least under its pure form, is essentially a moral religion. It often happens that the converted natives pretend to enjoy religious privileges and cultivate religious emotions without leading the pure life which Christianity asks from its adepts. On account of this disposition, those who conduct native churches have to be constantly on the watch lest the high teaching of the Christian religion becomes deteriorated (Junod, H.A. 1920:76).

The evangelisation could not be conducted lightly. Extreme care had to be

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that *mist* (*hunguva*) is a favourite word of Nkondo (1974) often planted into the mouth of Ngwanazi the main character, to describe the period of White domination. According to Nkondo therefore, the *hunguva* is missionary Christianity and the White man's 'civilisation' and not the local religion.

taken not only to ascertain true conversion<sup>12</sup> as well as a reasonable intellectual grasp of the 'basic precepts' of Christianity, but on-going vigilance had to be sustained to curb apostasy<sup>13</sup>. Such vigilance would include a consistent check on such native beliefs as witchcraft. That is one of the beliefs which are "...slow to die [sticking] with the greatest obstinacy to (his) mind ...'" (Junod 1905:240). From the earliest possible times, evangelism was mounted on several fronts. Newspapers, education and literature were used as forums of evangelism. The young (e.g. the adoption of the Maphophe young brothers) seem to have been a deliberate target of evangelism so as to ensure that they are influenced from a young age.

Part of the result of this thorough-going approach to evangelism was an 'emphasis on a rational assimilation of the Christian faith' (Bill, J-F 1965:78). Even during the initial stages of the SMSA, a convert had to go through three stages before final acceptance and baptism. Those belonging to the first stage were the *Valavi* (seekers), namely "those who have communicated their intention to an elder, the evangelist or minister that they seek church membership" (Bill J-F 1965:78). The second stage consisted of the *Valavi* who have attested "to the sincerity of their intentions by their conduct" thus becoming the *Vapfumeri* (believing ones). These would then be admitted into "a two-year course of instruction [catechism] in the basic doctrines of the faith". Those who 'pass' the Consistory exam would then be baptised and become the *Vakhuvuriwa* (baptised ones). Those failing would have to repeat the course.

---

<sup>12</sup> Thus H.A. Junod had to warn chief Muhlaba, mid-way through a prayer, minutes before the latter was baptised, of the dangers of false conversion and apostasy (cf. 2.5.1).

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to see how Junod 'explains' the 'failure' of native converts to lead a 'pure life'. The basic reason is that Bantu creed knows no connection between religion and morality. Elsewhere, Junod (1910:182) moderates this view slightly and says, "the moral influence of the religious beliefs of Ancestrolatry is limited ... to the narrow sphere of the family". Yet, we may point out, that the African view of the (extended) family was by no means narrow. What strikes me in Junod's views is his refusal to attribute to the native apostates an intellectual and spiritual ability to assess as well as reject missionary Christianity. According to H.A. Junod (1920:78), even when natives, (such as pupils), join hands to resist the authority and instruction of their White teachers, it is "the fact that they are all of one mind ... [that constitutes] sufficient justification for the position they have taken". Thus Junod implies that such acts of insubordination are based not on rational reflection, but on the influence of the group.

For the evangelistic drive to be successful and comprehensive (in terms of affecting the greatest number of people), the missionaries recognised the need to convert or at least enlist the chiefs, knowing that after that the tribe should be easy to persuade. So wherever they went in pursuit of the Vatsonga, the missionaries would approach the chiefs first. They would also try to maintain very close contacts with the chiefs:

The chief was the very heart of the tribe. Now his influence has been greatly diminished. The fact that Native Commissioners are everywhere discussing and judging the more important matters, has lowered the position of the chief. In some places they have been removed because they had been troublesome. To remove a chief is to emasculate the tribe (Junod, H.A. 1907:143).

Although they did not like everything about the native chiefs, missionaries befriended Albasini, Njhaka-Njhaka, Muhlaba, N'wa-Matibyana, Mpisana, Thulamahashe and other chiefs of the Vatsonga<sup>14</sup>. Nor did the missionaries mourn the chiefs' loss of power as White rule increased. It is their 'thorough' methods of evangelism and the equally meticulous devices of control and sustenance that missionaries employed upon the converts that have given the Tsonga novelists and poets much material for their works. For example, the missionaries declared that ``... any apparition of the Valoyi superstition amongst those new congregations must be at once denounced as a sin of heathenism, and punished as such by those measures of ecclesiastical discipline which these young Churches cannot yet dispense with'' (Junod, H.A.

---

<sup>14</sup> In the political conflicts between the Portuguese and the native chiefs, Mandzule, Nghunghunyani and N'wa-Matibyani, missionaries (particularly H.A. Junod, Georges Liengme, and Pierre Loze) were involved (cf Van Butselaar 1984:120f, Maluleke 1995a:22, Chamango 1993:102f). However, it is noteworthy that Loze left Rikatla (where chief Mahandzule was based) on the advice of the Portuguese authorities, who had declared the area a war zone, to resettle in Lorenzo Marques. In this way he deserted his congregation, who had chosen to stay with their chief rather than flee with the missionary (van Butselaar 1984:127). However, when the Portuguese charged that the Swiss missionaries had incited the native revolt, Loze responded by pointing out that, as was the case with their country (Switzerland), the Swiss missionaries were neutral on these matters (:130). Similarly, H.A. Junod, refuting the reports of a Portuguese journalist by the name of Eduardo de Noronha, which linked the SMSA to the native revolt, argued that their evangelistic work was free of political thought and independent from the state (:131).

1905:240).

Nor was Tsonga 'animism' and related beliefs to be confronted with the Christian faith alone. '*Scientific truth* [which] rules the whole civilised world'' (Junod, H.A. 1907:142) was the other weapon. In this respect, the schools and hospitals were on the forefront. H.A. Junod was consistently convinced of the 'burden' of the White educated man to Christianise, civilise and to teach the 'natives'. Such education included the teaching of such things as hygiene and dress manners (Bill, J-F 1965:82):

Since it was part of their vocation to convert the Tsonga to that way [western culture], the [perceived] absence of clothing, personal cleanliness, hygienic facilities, furniture, and the inability to read, write and calculate, and also the apparent lax morality, these things were viewed ...[in terms of] moral inferiority (Bill, J-F 1965:84).

Side by side with the gospel therefore, the Vatsonga were taught various 'civilised' manners and lifestyles:

The wives of missionaries actually made clothes for the children who came to school, for it was not uncommon for children, particularly the boys, to be altogether naked. The clothes made by the wives of the missionaries were given for school and church use. In fact the children were not allowed to take them home for fear that they would become very dirty and soon be spoiled (Bill, J-F 1965:88).

As Harries (1983, 1994) has so ably demonstrated, these multi-faceted incursions into the lives of the Vatsonga were not the monopoly of missionary activities. Other 'agents of change', notably industrialisation and increasing White political domination were concurrently at work. The missionaries recognised this, and sought ways to *cooperate with* and *influence* the other agents of change<sup>15</sup> - albeit sometimes with a measure of ambivalence and self-

---

<sup>15</sup> Such cooperation must not necessarily be thought of as owing to the coercion of Apartheid; in a few instances, it predated (foreshadowed?) Apartheid. In his study, N'wandula (1987), has argued that Swiss missionary

contradiction. The influence of the missionaries on the piety of the Vatsonga, at least those within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, which is the fruit of the SMSA, is deeply ingrained. However, it is perhaps a phenomenon which has not been studied sufficiently. The novels and the plays that I have considered in this study do give us a few impressions of such a piety. But they do not do so in a docile manner, for such a piety was never accepted in a docile manner from the earliest times. Rather they present this piety in ways reminiscent of the manner in which it has been (and continues to be) appropriated: through the media of praise, questioning, ridicule, relativisation and down-right rejection.

As a historian, Harries (1988, 1989) has identified the twin 'creations' of the Tsonga *language* and *tribe* (at least conceptually) as *the* enduring stamp that the missionaries left on the Vatsonga. There is a sense in which those who, like Blaser *et al.* (1994:197), underscore the significance of Swiss efforts in 'reducing' the Tsonga language to writing, are in support of Harries' basic thesis. The essential difference between them and Harries is on the question of whether the writing down of Tsonga and the 'creation' of the Tsonga tribe was artificial and largely pre-conceived<sup>16</sup>. In reality, such a 'difference' is trivial, being a matter of nuance and detail and not of essence. Without taking away from their good intentions, Harries's sense is that the twin processes were mainly artificial and pre-conceived. In contrast, Blaser *et al.* (1994), whilst conceding that the missionaries were not perfect, argue that the language written and the tribe created relate very closely to the reality on the ground. However, since these two phenomena being researched and evaluated are past and dynamic, such differences as those between Harries and Blaser *et al.* are perhaps both unavoidable and necessary. On these matters, there can be as many opinions as there are ideological standpoints and interests. Yet, at base, all the participants are agreeing with Harries' basic hypothesis, namely that the missionaries contributed immensely in the 'creation' both language and tribe, and that this is most significant.

---

education, especially as it was conducted in the Lemana Training Institution, fore-shadowed several elements of Bantu Education, which was introduced only after 1953.

<sup>16</sup> 'Pre-conceived' is used here to mean that the missionaries assumed linguistic, national and ethnic boundaries to be comparable to a past situation in Europe.

Indirectly, I have argued above that, apart from language, tribe and culture (cf Harries 1988, 1989, 1994), missionary intervention has influenced the religious consciousness or piety of the Vatsonga - an aspect which is not prominent in Harries' analysis (perhaps understandably so, since he is not a theologian). If the issues about which Tsonga writers concern themselves are anything to go by, my 'amendment' to Harries' views to include religion, receives overwhelming confirmation.

A more significant matter is the fact that the 'creation' of language and tribe, as is the case with the piety introduced, the Vatsonga were no passive recipients. They were no clean slates upon which new ideas and new habits were written. In diverse ways, they sifted, evaluated, contributed, questioned, resisted, and rejected what was being foisted upon them. This fact does not receive any significant attention by either Harries (1988, 1989) or Blaser *et al.* (1994). This is what the literature we surveyed, so eminently reveals to us.

*(c) Indigenous Tsonga literature constitute a creative problematisation of the missionary custodianship of Tsonga literate culture. Lamin Sanneh's creative suggestion regarding the power of the vernacularisation of Christianity through 'translation' is equally problematised, explored and contextualised.*

Religion, particularly Christianity, is a common and abundant theme in Tsonga literature. It is more difficult to pick a Tsonga book without this theme than the opposite. Nor is there much proof that this is changing - although Tsonga writers are finding more creative and bolder ways of interacting with religious and other issues. As we have indicated in the first chapter, the reasons for the preponderance of the religious theme are not hard to find. As widely attested to (Marivate, C.T.D. 1985:2, Bill, M. 1983:15, Blaser *et al.*, 1994:197), Tsonga literature was born out of the womb of missionary Christianity. For more than fifty years, missionaries alone wrote in Tsonga - mainly on religious, educational and hygienic topics. For this reason alone, it is not surprising that missionary Christianity is often not only a sub-theme, but the central theme of many Tsonga works which need not ordinarily concern themselves with religious matters. In addition to this, missionaries literally owned the means of literature production, and continued to 'monopolise' this for a long time. Manuscripts that demonstrated the

superiority of Christian and Western ideals were therefore readily accepted for publication.

However, over and above this missionary control of language and publications, Tsonga writers have themselves demonstrated, well beyond the 1980s, that missionary Christianity is significant in the lives of the Vatsonga in its own right. The Tsonga literature sampled and cited in this study demonstrates that beyond any reasonable doubt. All the above explanations notwithstanding, the preponderance of religious themes in Tsonga literature is more than a *reaction*. Nor is it a sign of 'literary immaturity'. On the contrary it testifies to the continuing centrality of religion in the lives of local peoples in general and the Vatsonga in particular. Although so-called mission churches may not be growing (cf. Anderson 1993), African Independent Churches have experienced a dramatic growth in membership since the 1960s. Nor has the practice of traditional religions abated even amongst the members of both mission as well as independent churches. Religion remains therefore a legitimate and appropriate theme.

To move the discourse forward, discussion on missionary instrumentality in vernacular literature, whether it be appreciative (cf Blaser *et al.* 1994, Sanneh 1989) or critical (Harries 1988, 1989; Maluleke 1993a), must take into account what vernacular writers have done with this new-found tool. Such an undertaking would include a lot more than a head count of Vatsonga with degrees and professions, the number of churches, or the number of schools and hospitals<sup>17</sup>. Nor is it feasible to hold out either the qualitative or the quantitative growth of the resultant mission churches as proof of the 'success' of missionary instrumentality. Several problems attend to such a position. Such criteria apply readily only to what goes on inside the church without taking adequate account of the effects outside of and beyond the church. Besides, growth - either qualitative and especially quantitative - is something that many mission churches (at least the EPCSA) are not experiencing during our times. Instead, it is the African Independent Churches which are growing rapidly - at the expense of the mission churches (cf Anderson 1993).

In this study, I have begun to listen, not to the only voice of local people's

---

<sup>17</sup> These have been the standard criteria in missionary assessments of missionary Christianity (cf Cuendet 1950, Terrisse 1954).



evaluation of missionary Christianity, but a very significant one nevertheless. It is the voice of vernacular Tsonga writers. In 'listening' to the Tsonga writers we are breaking out of the self-justifying and circular logic of missionary evaluations. In general Tsonga writers present themselves and Tsonga people as active agents in the missionary intervention. Whilst appreciative of missionary activities, they do not bless everything that missionaries did. Indeed they level very critical questions at missionary Christianity. Nor do they 'abandon' their culture, in the manner in which H.A. Junod predicted they would. The ease with which they handle deep cultural issues alongside issues of missionary Christianity is something that South African Black Theology can benefit from. Besides recognising the need to deal with religio-cultural issues, Black Theology has tended to concern itself with material and political issues. Nor have Tsonga writers completely avoided politics. In fact they saw clear ideological connections between White political domination and the domination of missionary Christianity.

*(d) My adopted way of reading the selected Tsonga literature has been inspired by the insights of Liberation Theology in general, and South African Black Theology in particular. A basic principle in my approach has been the deliberate choice of the voices of the 'receivers' rather than the 'senders' of mission, as my chief interlocutors.*

For the past fifteen years, South African Black Theology has been deeply concerned with issues around sources and interlocutors (cf Maluleke 1995b). Prior to this, Black Theology had been engrossed with issues of identity and definition (cf. Ngcokovane 1989:35). The specific phraseology used has been one of 'deepening the sources' and searching for more appropriate interlocutors. These sentiments followed a growing *consensus*, on the one hand that the ideological base of Black theology needed to be *broadened*<sup>18</sup>, and that (therefore) ideology should no longer be taken for granted but *carefully* and *consciously chosen* (cf Mosala 1989a:4).

Unfortunately, set within the South African socio-political combustion chamber of the 1980s, the afore-mentioned consensus often assumed the form of sharp, internal, ideological controversy. These controversies related to 'shifts in

---

<sup>18</sup> This broadening is already evident in Chikane & Tsele (1984), Mosala & Tlhagale (1986).

political praxis ... [and] ideological divisions and conflicts'' (Chikane 1986:xv). Yet, essentially, these were controversies built around consensus rather than divergence. Besides, a good deal of the so-called differences were not, strictly speaking, theological, owing their origins to the United Democratic Front (UDF) and National Forum Committee (NFC) political formations:

Although the division on the surface seemed to be between the Black Consciousness Movement and the progressive democrats, a division based on a play between the class and race models or the combination of these models in trying to understand the South African society, it seems that the real divisive matter was the attitudes of these groups to the historical liberation movements, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC) which were banned in the early sixties (Chikane 1986:xv).

A good part of the 'controversies' degenerated to a virtual 'copy cat' reproduction of the age-old Marxist class versus race debate. With regard to the broadening of sources, suggestions have included the admittance of (Black-initiated) theologies other than those based only on the Black Consciousness philosophy. The irruption of feminist issues was also part of this broadening. Another proposal was that praxis and involvement with grass-root struggles of Black people - and not theological formulation - should take priority in the doing of Black theology. This sentiment was especially strong in Black Theology conferences of the 1980s. Still others suggested that some ''manifestations of Black Theology are found in the secessions of African Independent Churches from White mainline churches'' (Motlhabi 1986:49). On this basis, they argued that Black Theology had to begin to broaden its quest for authentic interlocutors beyond missionary Christianity to African Independentism (cf Ngubane 1986, Mosala 1985). Others declared that African Traditional Religion and Black culture must become sources of Black Theology's ''cultural hermeneutics of struggle'' (Mosala 1986:99).

Mosala (1987) has been in the forefront of the view that, in Black Theology, ideology cannot be side-stepped. For this reason, ideological choices must be made carefully and consciously. Whilst acknowledging the fact that ''black theology has made a vital contribution to the black struggle'', Mosala

(1987:14) ponders why Black Theology ``has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling black masses''. Instead, Black Theology seems content with remaining ``a weapon of criticism against white theology and white society''. His hunch is that the problem lies in the ideological choices and commitments that inform Black Theology:

...Black Theology must openly declare where it stands ideologically and theoretically. It is not enough to be on the opposition side in societal struggles. The very fact that a specifically black theology of liberation is needed, in spite of the existence of opposition theologies in traditional Christian circles, underscores this point. Existential commitments to the liberation struggles of the oppressed are inadequate because those who are committed in this way are often still ideologically and theoretically enslaved to the dominant discourses in the society (Mosala 1987:4).

I subscribe to the validity of the two poles in the 'consensus' that has developed in Black Theology over the past ten to fifteen years. I do so without fear that the broadening of sources and ideology may be in opposition to the sharpening of ideological choices. However, whilst theologians like Mosala, Tlhagale and Mofokeng may have done much with regard to the sharpening of ideological focus and the theoretical choice of interlocutors, little constructive progress has been made in the area of the broadening of the ideological base and the broadening of sources of Black Theology. It is not only African Independent Churches and African culture that Black Theology has neglected (cf. Motlhabi 1994); it has neglected focused and detailed case studies of missionary Christianity as it has been appropriated by Black people. My study, using Tsonga vernacular writers as sources of theology, has proven that vernacular literature can be a rich source of Black/African theology, when read from the point of view of the 'receivers' and not that of the 'senders'. However, as this last point implies, the question of ideological choices and commitments is important in such an undertaking. In suggesting the broadening of sources of Black Theology to include indigenous vernacular literature, I am also taking a clear ideological stance in terms of interlocutors.

### 5.3 The essential Commentary

The Tsonga literature that I have sampled, speaks unequivocally about missionary Christianity and the dilemma of religio-cultural negotiation. In this regard, the view of H.A. Junod (1907:154) that ''the more they [educated natives] get educated, the less interest they find in their old ideas'', has been disproven. J-F Bill (1965:83) reports that by 1952, educated Africans were making their presence felt in the church, by asking questions, refusing to accept uncritically what the missionary says and sometimes by being 'impertinent'.

Let me start this section by making reference to H.A. Junod's perception of the effects of conversion to missionary Christianity upon the 'native'. His view is widely representative of the missionary view of 'native' conversion as well as their conviction about the revolutionary effect of missionary Christianity on the 'native' world-view. This view also highlights the missionaries' dualistic either/or understanding of conversion:

When a native, in the dim, sometimes half-conscious act of believing (Kholwa) has adopted Christianity, he has put the axe at the root of an immense tree, and sooner or later, the tree will fall<sup>19</sup>. The adoption of the new creed, first of all ruins at once his own, old religious ideas, viz., the belief in the spirit of his ancestors as being his gods. This ancestrolatry is the first branch of the tree which falls. It falls so quickly that very soon after his conversion the black Christian laughs at the idea that he could have believed such absurdity (Junod, H.A. 1907:142).

Tsonga writers do not share either the optimism or testify to a radical break with the past which the adoption of missionary Christianity is supposed to initiate. Not only do they treat the entire event of conversion with caution, but they are also fundamentally critical of missionary Christianity. Muhlaba's

---

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that Junod uses the metaphor of a tree as representative of ''old religious ideas'' whereas Muhlaba appropriates the metaphor of a tree to symbolise his rootedness and fruitfulness in service of his people.

metaphoric description of his 'conversion', from which I have constructed the title of both this chapter and the entire study, offers the most creative if not the deepest indigenous comment and reappropriation of Christianity amongst the Tsonga:

As for me, I liken myself to a tree in between two fields, a conspicuous tree in the view of all at sundry. Am I a Christian, am I a heathen? This is what my life will show. I ask all who know how to pray, to pray day and night for me, so that God may guard me from temptations and I may endure in Christianity (Chief Muhlaba in Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:84)..

Missing in Muhlaba's verbalisation of his status as a 'convert' is the self-assured certainty of missionary Christianity. Muhlaba raises without even attempting to answer the tormenting question; 'Am I a Christian, Am I a heathen?'. Instead he acknowledges the reality of ever-lurking 'temptations' such as, famine, sickness, heavy burdens of taxation, polygamy, beer-drinking and other local customs (*mikhuva ya xi-hina*) (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi (1958:84)). These are, according to Muhlaba, some of the 'temptations' that are a constant threat to one's 'conversion' as understood by missionaries. Drought and sickness could easily steer one towards a Mungoma. The heavy burden of taxation could just as easily cause one to cheat and even to consider resisting authorities. As a chief, the pressure on Muhlaba to 'go polygamous' must have been great. But he himself seems to have refrained from a zealous and 'final' condemnation of not only polygamy, but other aspects of Tsonga culture which the missionaries found to be offensive. It was therefore with a reasonably 'clear conscience' that Muhlaba later married additional wives openly. One of his closest advisors, as we have seen in the second chapter, openly declared his opposition to Christianity - defiantly calling himself a 'heathen' and blaming those who sent Muhlaba to school for the chief's 'ill-advised' flirtation with Christianity. Nor did the chief abolish the circumcision school, despite missionary opposition to it. For Muhlaba therefore, being Christian consisted in the recognition of a borderline, non-aligned religious existence.

Calvin Maphophe, in an off-the-cuff remark, inadvertently expressed the dilemma of those converts who attempted a radical break with their past; an

abandonment of 'all the customs and beliefs of darkness':

And I thought in my heart, I am like a fly fallen into a calabash full of milk. So I told them this, and they laughed. Amongst them, were two 'chiefs', the one being the British ambassador, and the other the Portuguese ambassador. The missionaries had told me that, before I speak [any further], I should first direct my words to the ambassadors. (Maphophe 1945:42)

Having been brought up on the fringes of the missionary 'Christian' home of Paul Berthoud as a domestic servant, it is remarkable that Calvin Maphophe still felt overawed in the presence of White people. It may be precisely his experiences gleaned from this background that reinforced in Maphophe the abiding feeling of being a 'gentile'. Also, shortly before the occasion of the above quotation, Maphophe had been taken, by H.A. Junod, to 'an expert on the differences between races' (probably) and anthropologist, who had measured his facial and bodily features to establish the 'race' to which he belonged. The amassing and recording of measurements of the physical features of the natives - information which according to Junod was very scarce, was a perennial concern of H.A. Junod (1907:151):

The importance of that information is evident to anybody who has some idea of Anthropology, and science... Of course, there is some difficulty in obtaining from the natives their consent to being measured in a way which would be useful to science. But could not the compound managers of Johannesburg and the medical supervisors of the natives working in the mines have all their *boys* undergo this examination when they are hired (emphasis mine)?

Such was the interest of Junod in the acquisition of these records that he took opportunity to 'solicit' the 'consent' of an educated colleague, who was a guest in his own home - at least for the duration of Maphophe's brief stay in Geneva - to 'pose' for measurement. Maphophe probably regarded his host, H.A. Junod very highly. The absence of Black people in Switzerland must have made a deep impression on Maphophe. In common with such products of Swiss missionary education as S.J. Baloyi, Maphophe must have idealised Switzerland.

He was undoubtedly under considerable pressure to oblige with his host's request. Junod 'exploited' an occasion in which Maphophe was a dependent stranger to make this request. This incident may be used as a window into the level of relations between White and Black 'missionaries' within the SMSA. Since Junod was arguably one of the most liberal of his generation of Swiss missionaries his 'treatment' of Maphophe may simply be the tip of the iceberg. So Maphophe 'posed' before the expert. He was after all 'at the mercy' of Junod's hospitality.

In the above quotation, Junod indicates that natives were often unwilling to be measured in a way that would be 'useful to science'. So he suggests that the mine medical supervisors should do this as part of their pre-employment examinations. He also suggests that medical missionaries should do the same. What does this mean? Why were natives not keen to avail themselves for measurement? What manner of 'posing' by Africans would Junod consider as useful for science? It seems that these 'measurements' included (some form of) stripping, if not complete nakedness. This then would be the reason why it was difficult to 'obtain' the 'consent' of the natives. Was Maphophe asked to strip<sup>20</sup>? There is no greater insult to an adult person, be they White, Black, male of female than to request them to take off their clothes, especially in the view of a younger person. This was indeed the humiliation that Black miners suffered in their communal showers as well as in their pre-employment examinations.

There can be little doubt that this event, amongst others, helped to confirm, in Maphophe's mind, his difference from Whites, despite his education, his Christian faith and his track record of years as a missionary. This 'reminder' planted in Calvin Maphophe's mind the notion of being an unclean outsider whose sheer presence in the White Christian family constituted a form of pollution. Even so, it is still remarkable that an educated man like Calvin Maphophe, with an impressive (he probably did not think of it in those terms)

---

<sup>20</sup> Maphophe does not say that he was asked to strip. However, he does not give the exhaustive details of precisely *what* was measured on him. Instead, he uses a familiar Tsonga manner of speech used when a speaker does not want to give details, i.e. changing all nouns into plurals - *ndzi pima-pimiwa milomo, tinhloko na tinhomphu* ... (literally my mouths (lips), noses, heads ...). If Maphophe provides no objective evidence that he stripped, it is known that the mine medical superintendents to whom Junod refers did ask the newly employed to strip naked.

missionary record in Mozambique could still liken himself to a dirty and invading fly, and White Christians to the purity of milk. During his brief stay with H.A. Junod in Switzerland, Maphophe (1945:41) recalls an occasion when he addressed a well attended evening meeting in a Geneva church. Maphophe compares the eyes of his White audience to 'stars shining everywhere'.

Calvin Maphophe was a fierce opponent of local indigenous customs - at least in his writings. In a series of brief articles under the heading, *Bukriste ne sihila sa bahedene makari Ka Baronga Ni Bathonga* (Christianity and heathen taboos amongst the Baronga and Bathonga), published in the *Nyeleti* during 1921 and 1922, he wrote to describe the heathen basis of many local customs. The customs that Maphophe singled out as evil were beer drinking, lobolo, polygamy, laws regarding the inheritance of a deceased's estate (which often included the wife in the case of a man being the deceased), witchcraft, reliance of the Mungoma as well as ancestor veneration. As a teacher on a staff of four with missionaries P. Loze, H. Guye, and G. Henriod, Calvin Maphophe 'specialised' in traditional taboos. One wonders, therefore, whether through his educational training, missionary upbringing, and radical conversion to missionary Christianity, Calvin Maphophe was not, to some extent, a *Mulungu-Ntima* (a White-Black or 'House nigger'). Although he mentioned, in the first article of the series, that there were local customs which were not in conflict with Christianity, he does not name these; naming and discussing instead, those that he considered to be contrary to Christianity. His diagnosis is familiar; it is the usual litany of cultural 'sins' identified by missionaries.

This background makes his unguarded 'fly in milk' remark all the more significant. At the moment when he thought of himself as a fly, did it briefly dawn on him that all his efforts to experience and teach a true and thorough conversion; all the zeal with which he had identified, analyzed and disputed 'traditional taboos', had not rid him of feeling like, and being made to feel like, an impure and inadequate outsider in the presence of White Christians? Whether he was conscious of it or not, his 'fly in the milk' remark is both a critique of the missionary Christianity indiscriminately adopted by Blacks and of his own idealistic notion of conversion.

Nkondo (1973, 1974) turns the tables on missionary Christianity. He does this



by (a) reversing the roles, as it were, and (b) exposing the inadequacy, inconsistency and hypocrisy of the converts to missionary Christianity, namely, the *Majagani*:

They said there will be light ... to drive away darkness. It would be better for us to stay in darkness. Darkness is so much better. Physical slavery is better than mental slavery which is brought by the(ir) light (Mhlopheki Ngwanazi, the main character in Nkondo 1974:30).

In his play (1974), Nkondo deliberately eclipses missionary Christianity by making no pronounced reference either to it or its 'agents' - ministers or missionaries. Yet the play is set in an area where Swiss missionary work originated. He deliberately puts traditional Tsonga religion, rather than Christianity, at the centre of his play. Furthermore, he wrests typical missionary religious language from the mouths of missionaries and plants them into the mouth of a Mungoma by the name of Mhlopheki Ngwanazi. Darkness is the metaphor not of the period before the advent of Whites, but rather of the period after the arrival of Whites. Light dawns not when the White people arrive to dispossess and subjugate Blacks. Light dawns when Blacks unite and stand up to the Whites with a view to expelling them. The 'light' brought by Whites enslaves the mentality of Black people. White people are waging a war against the Blacks that is beyond the physical and the material. The dignity and integrity of the very gods of the Black people is at stake. In essence it is a combat between Whites and the deepest core of Black existence, namely their gods. In his other work (1973), Nkondo casts doubt on the cohesion, integrity and authenticity of missionary Christianity. The *Majagani* are displayed as schizophrenic personalities. But the *Majagani* are not even embarrassed by their double life:

Many people ... relied on herbs and oils to ward off evil from their houses. Many desired to protect themselves against human-manufactured misfortunes, and yet others longed for promotion at their places of employment. Nevertheless, their Christian faith was not defiled by this. They still went to church on Sunday and they still occupied their reserved seats at church. Nor did people stop calling them by their Christian names (Nkondo

1973:85).

It is therefore both possible and practical to be outwardly a Mujagani and yet engage in any and all so-called heathen practices. In his poetry Nkondo has even flirted with the idea that basically there is no difference between becoming a Christian or being a good humane African. In the poem about his grandmother, *N'wambhanyamatluka*, Nkondo (1969a) (cf. 4.5) says:

She knows neither Jesus nor Jehovah  
But she adores truth and humanity  
Of what use will Jesus and Jehovah be to her?  
What is the difference between being N'wambhanyamatluka  
and being a Christian?

Nkondo is basically questioning some of the strict codes of conduct of the *Majagani*. In his direct casting of missionaries as 'actors' in novels whose historical and geographical detail is accurate, Nkondo comes very close to direct reflection on missionary activities - even though he is a novelist. Departing from those who write under missionary tutelage, Nkondo presents the missionary as physically ugly, impatient, aggressive, ill-mannered and short-tempered. At a different level, Black theologians and other liberation theologians have been highlighting the aggressive nature of missionary invasions into indigenous cultures and peoples. Whilst 'appreciating', the 'light' of Christianity among the Shangaans, Mtombeni (1974) makes the audacious charge that, (missionary) Christianity was inadequate and therefore unable to answer the deepest questions that Shangaans have asked. These questions relate, amongst others, to issues of death and its cause. Mtombeni therefore describes missionary Christianity as garments that are too short:

In our old life as Shangaans we were covered in a garment of darkness, worshipping the things of darkness in darkness. Christianity has clothed us in a garment of light, but this garment is too short. The shortness is the source of conflicts, [feelings of] inadequacy, restlessness, hesitancy and [backsliding] disobedience (Goya, a character in Mtombeni's play 1974:11).

His characterisation of Mbolovisa the Mungoma is strong and sympathetic. The Mungoma accounts for himself very well before the minister, and only 'repents' on his death-bed. As it emerges in the debates between the Mungoma and the minister, it is not only the Western religious garments that are short, it is also the garments of their intellectual tradition that are inadequate for the Shangaan. Thuketana ends his captivating novel with an account of a pious dream of the about-to-be-converted young Tsonga woman, Xisomisana:

... I dreamt about this Jesus. In my dreams I saw him hanging on the cross with lots of blood oozing out of him. When I looked at him he said: 'Do you see my blood pouring out, it pours out for you; through it all your sin have been forgiven. Then I saw myself carrying a calabash (khuwana) full of water. And I approached the place where this man called Jesus was hanging. I started to wash the blood off his body. But I could not wipe the blood off completely. It kept coming out of his body. The more water I applied, the more blood gushed out of his body (Xisomisana, the main character in Thuketana (1969:219)).

The guilt and embarrassment that Xisomisana feels upon looking at the bleeding Jesus in her dream is overwhelming. The Jesus of her dreams adds to her agony by declaring that the blood comes out so that she can be forgiven. So she attempts to clean the blood off Jesus, but to no avail. Is this testimony of her desire to repent? Or is it testimony of her resistance from looking at her own sins? There are reminiscences of Calvin Maphophe's crying when in the middle of his prayer for conversion, he felt as if the crucified Jesus was standing next to him (Maphophe 1945:11). In both these events, the issues of guilt and fallenness are prominent. Is this the theological basis on which Calvin Maphophe could feel himself to be as insignificant as a fly? The enduring feeling of inadequacy and fallenness is illustrated by the fact that the more Xisomisana cleans the blood of Jesus' body, the more blood comes out. The image of a hanging Jesus whose body is covered in blood as a ransom for one's personal sins may have been a common theme in the teachings of the missionaries. When Calvin and Jonas Maphophe had the opportunity to preach at their place of birth, they 'preached about Jesus Christ who was crucified' (Maphophe 1945:17). The projection of a vulnerable, dying and bleeding Jesus is a powerful guilt-enducing device. Such guilt becomes the essential motive

for conversion. But it also becomes the basic ingredient of the resultant piety<sup>21</sup>. Yet even this piety has been turned on its head by Black and African theologians - instead of evoking guilt, the hanging Jesus becomes 'the crucified amongst the crossbearers'' (Mofokeng 1983). In a poem entitled *I am an African*, Setiloane (1975) interprets Jesus' crucifixion thus:

And yet for us it is when He is on the cross,  
 This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands  
     an open side, like a beast at sacrifice:  
 When He is stripped naked like us,  
 Browed and sweating waters and blood  
 In the heat of the sun,  
 Yet silent,  
 That we cannot resist Him.

How like us he is, this Jesus of Nazareth  
 Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned,  
 Denied by His own, and chased like a thief in the night.  
 Despised, and rejected like a dog that has fleas,  
 for NO REASON.

---

<sup>21</sup> Landman (1994) (see also my review of the same work Maluleke 1994b), in a study based on the diaries of some Afrikaans women (1749-1964) has argued that guilt has been and continues to be the central element in the piety of Afrikaans women. Yet, she points out that such guilt was mostly irrational, bearing no direct relation to the daily lives of the women. However, this piety was foisted upon the women both by themselves as a coping strategy and by the dominant male culture. It is possible to argue that missionaries relied on and desired this guilt-driven piety as a strategy of evangelism. However, Black and African theologies of liberation have used the symbol of Jesus hanging on the cross as proof of Jesus' solidarity with suffering Black people. There is no reason to suppose that this understanding of the cross is totally absent in Xisomisana's dream. According to van Butselaar (1984:190), in contrast to the narrative, every-day-life manner in which native evangelists (in this case Mhala-Mhala, Lois Xintomane and Eliakim Mandlakusasa) preached, the missionaries adopted a doctrinal approach. In this approach, teachings on death, original sin, the fire of hell and the last judgement were prominent (:190). As van Butselaar noted, these were common teachings in the individualistic, pietistic 19th century theology. Furthermore, van Butselaar sees the writing down of the *Buku* in 1883, the first book to be written in Tsonga, as the marking the beginning of the *doctrinalisation* of what was until then a liberating faith whose precepts were taught and contained in stories.

If Maphophe's life gives clear testimony of missionary commitment, Mtombeni, the Tsonga novelist presents the deepest missiological reflection of all the writers we have considered. Into the mouth of Nyiko, one of the characters in his novel (1966), Mtombeni plants one of the deepest critiques of the stationary church:

I have heard that the word of God is supposed to be taken to the masses instead of expecting people to come to church. The churchification (vukereke) of the word of God has caused the shepherds (ministers) to expect the livestock (people) to return to the kraal of their own volition. ... As for me, I think that the word of salvation is meant to redeem those whose souls are clearly at risk, because those who come to church are like tamed cattle ... . (Nyiko Tlhomandloti, a character in Mtombeni (1966:45)).

In the context of the book (Mtombeni 1967) these words from son to father are at once a critique of the ministry of the father, who appears to sit around in his house waiting for invitations and a critique of the church in general. Mtombeni challenges the church to go out to seek the lost and those outside of the church over and above caring for those who are inside. Even more fundamentally, he accuses the church of trying to domesticate the Word of God. Since Mtombeni is clearly working with a model of the church that is missionary and ethnic (kereke ya Vatsonga), his criticisms are clearly directed at missionary ecclesiology.

#### 5.4 The Morula Tree Metaphor in Context

It was the 25th of December 1899 and the young, first-generation congregation was full. The service was special, because the chief Muhlaba Shilubana of the Nkuna clan amongst the Vatsonga was being baptised. The missionaries recognised the gravity of the step that the chief was taking. For them, this was both a 'joyful as well as a frightening' occasion (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:88). So, in the middle of a prayer, the missionary H.A. Junod, switches and addresses his words, rather directly, to chief Muhlaba. So when later in the service, the chief had opportunity to speak, he 'replied' to Junod's words. Although I have referred to this 'dialogue' already in the second

chapter, I deem this dialogue significant enough to be worth repeating, this time in full. First, let us recall the words of Junod during his prayer.

You must know, chief, that your *conversion* and your *baptism* is a matter of much significance amongst your people. Your steadfastness and endeavour to follow the Lord Jesus, as you are committing yourself to do today; will bring *blessings, immense blessings*; however, if you slide back, and disown the Lord Jesus Christ and God, so that you disown the Christian life-style, you will have brought great misfortune upon your people. [Emphasis not mine] (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:88).

In reply, chief Muhlaba said the following:

I am [like] a Morula Tree (Nkanyi), the Morula tree on the border-line, whose fruit must be picked from both sides (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:88).

In an earlier speech, Muhlaba used the same metaphor but added the agonizing if rhetorical double-question: 'Am I Christian? Am I a heathen? ... I ask all who know how to pray to please pray for me day and night'' (Shilubana & Ntsanwisi 1958:84).

In describing himself as a *nkanyi* tree, Muhlaba was employing a Tsonga proverb to describe not only how it felt to be both a Christian and a chief, but also what it meant for him to be both a Christian and Tsonga. Therefore it was only in relation to missionary Christianity (and not in general) that Muhlaba defined himself thus<sup>22</sup>. This self-definition must be understood against the background of a situation of fierce cultural negotiation and trading between missionary Christianity on the one hand and local Tsonga culture on the other. It was a reality that was not only confined to the liaison between Muhlaba's people and the missionaries. The process characterised interactions between the Swiss missionaries and Tsonga peoples in the northern Transvaal,

---

<sup>22</sup> This observation must be kept clearly in mind. What it means is that Muhlaba did not, in describing himself as a tree in between two fields, normally hold a dualistic and dichotomous view of life. It was only in response to the challenge of missionaries who viewed life in terms of two fields, that Muhlaba appropriated this metaphor.

Mozambique and later Bushbuckridge. In these interactions, the Tsonga people were not 'passive' partners, 'receivers' or merely a 'missionary field' to be worked by the missionaries. On the contrary, Tsonga people relativised, questioned, slanted and even 'resisted' the missionary 'onslaught' in various ways. Both those who embraced the new faith (Christianity) and those who rejected it, were equally caught up in this process of negotiation, questioning and resisting.

Other agents of change, outside the missionary establishment, were also making their impact felt on the Tsonga peoples. The White authorities of the Transvaal, first the Boers and later the English, were one such an 'agent'. These authorities made their power felt in the lives of the Tsonga people. Their chiefs, Albasini and Njhaka-Njhaka in the northern Transvaal, Mpisana and Thulamahashe in the east, and Muhlaba in the Tzaneen area were reduced to vassals of the White powers of the day. In Mozambique, the Tsonga-Nguni-Ronga chiefs had been subdued by the Portuguese by the turn of the century. It was in their requirement of *swibalo* (taxes) that the White authorities touched the lives of ordinary Black individuals most fundamentally. The outbreak and growth of industrialisation since the late 1870s in Southern Africa was another powerful instrument of change that impacted on the scattered Tsonga clans, whom the Swiss chose as their 'mission field'. Whilst the initial cause of migration from Mozambique into Natal and the Transvaal may have been intra-tribal succession wars, the greater and longer lasting causes of migration were the pull of industrialisation centred around Natal's cane fields, Kimberley's diamond mines and later Johannesburg's gold mines. However, gold was soon discovered in the small towns of Leydsdorp and Gravelotte in the north eastern Transvaal. The clashes between the Makhado and the Boers on the one hand, and Sekhukhune and the Boers on the other also impacted on the Tsonga peoples. All these factors combined with the missionary incursion to subject the scattered Tsonga clans to serious 'pressure'. The evangelising efforts of the missionaries, while enormously significant, had no monopoly of influence on the Tsonga people. Local politics and the burgeoning mining industry in various parts of South Africa were also quite influential. These factors had influence over the pace, tone and even content of the process of negotiation, exchange and resistance between missionary Christianity and the Tsonga people.

On the missionary front, concerted efforts and devices were being put into place by missionaries and their assistants to ensure a thoroughgoing change of Tsonga people and their culture. The chief missionary tools of changing Tsonga culture were the school and the church. In describing himself as a *Nkanyi* between two fields Muhlaba alluded to this climate of exchange and negotiation. He took his cue from a Tsonga proverb *Nkanyi wa le ndzilakaneni a wu na n'winyi*, meaning no one can lay exclusive claim of ownership to that which stands at the border between two fields<sup>23</sup>. I suggest that this self-understanding of Muhlaba is applicable, not only to him, but to all his subjects who embraced the new faith, even if the latter did not verbalise their status in so many words. Moreover such a self-understanding continues to be an apt characterisation of what it means to be Christian. The non-aligned and dual status of the Morula tree on the border is an appropriate verbalisation of the state in which many Tsonga converts found themselves.

#### 5.4.1 Personally Torn

It is significant that Muhlaba used the metaphor of a morula tree between two fields to describe his position *vis-à-vis* Missionary Christianity and not as a general manner in which he always and generally understood himself. At one level, he was, through this proverb, describing his personal anxiety: 'Am I Christian? Am I a heathen?'. Other commentators, especially the missionaries, were eager to attach the label Christian to Muhlaba. There appeared to be enough empirical evidence of Muhlaba's conversion. He had demonstrated a thirst for missionary education - having taken time off his chiefly duties in

---

<sup>23</sup> Junod & Jaques (1936:165) render the meaning of the proverb *Nkanyi wa le ndzilakaneni a wu na n'winyi* thus: 'A son belongs to all who are his relatives. They will all send him on errands and use his services, although they may not be on good terms among themselves'. This interpretation of the proverb is too superficial, too specific and too limited. It highlights a problem that is basic to the entire approach of Junod & Jaques, namely the presentation of proverbs together with their 'meanings' - as if a proverb ever has one meaning. It seems to me that proverbs are highly flexible linguistic tools whose meaning can only be given with caution. To assign (one) meaning to a particular proverb, which is what Junod & Jaques tend to do is problematic, since any given proverb can have different and even conflicting *uses* as well as a variety of meanings. An underlying ideological problem with missionary interest and enthusiasm with African proverbs and other forms of native wisdom, is that these are supposed to be a window into the static and reified 'mind' or even 'soul' of the native.



order to go to school<sup>24</sup>. He had cultivated good and strong relations with the missionaries. Over and above that, he made an undertaking that he would allow no missionaries other than the Swiss to work amongst his people. In some of his public speeches he openly praised the missionaries and encouraged his people to become Christian. Once he made what appeared to be a confession of faith. But it is perhaps his baptism that settled, in the eyes of many observers, the question of Muhlaba's conversion. Yet Muhlaba continued to experience this sense of being non-aligned. Several of his actions demonstrated this. He eventually married more than one wife. As we have seen in our sampled Tsonga literature, polygamy was a hot issue on the agenda of the missionaries. Muhlaba could not have chosen a worse 'sin'. Muhlaba's 'tolerance' of his 'heathen' subjects was in effect a tolerance of himself. Deep down, he always knew that he could easily commit such 'sins' that would qualify him as a 'heathen'. Thus he continued to wonder, am I a Christian, or am I a heathen? He also appealed for constant prayers from all who knew how to. Apart from committing the 'abominable' sin of polygamy, Muhlaba continued to allow circumcision schools amongst his subjects. This he could have only done against the will of the missionary and against the grain of missionary Christianity<sup>25</sup>.

#### 5.4.2 On the Edge

It is tempting and easy to interpret the metaphoric language that Muhlaba used - the nkanyi in between two fields - to mean that two worlds existed. As usual the one world would be Black and the other would be White, *Majagani* against *Vahedeni*, the old vs the new etc. These are familiar schemes that have informed missionary praxis and evaluations for a long time. In merely pointing out that Muhlaba refused to be owned and rather insisted that he stood in between, we do not affect the dualism foisted by missionaries upon people like

---

<sup>24</sup> However, as indicated in a previous chapter, according to Shilubana & Ntsanwisi, Muhlaba's own reason for going to school was so that he could learn Afrikaans 'the language of his rulers', for he wanted to be able to negotiate directly with his rulers.

<sup>25</sup> In an exposition of native beliefs in witchcraft, H.A. Junod (1905:239) refers to a chief, probably Muhlaba, 'of great fame in the Nkuna tribe, Shiluvane [who] had issued a decree: 'I do not allow anybody dying in my country except on account of old age. Let the *valoyi* at once cease their enchantments or I will kill them all''. In all probability, the chief in question here is Muhlaba.

Muhlaba. In fact, we vindicate the missionary diagnosis and further strengthen it by lending it a potent African metaphor. And yet, to do that, would be to grossly misunderstand Muhlaba and his specific use of this metaphor.

What Muhlaba rejected was not merely the possibility of his being owned and 'monopolised' by one of the two fields, as it were. He rejected the very dualistic notion projected by missionaries. In speaking of himself as a tree standing between two fields, Muhlaba was deliberately speaking in terms that missionaries would understand since they projected the existence of two worlds between which Muhlaba was asked to make a clear choice. He continues to be a friend of the missionaries even after going polygamous. Alongside the missionary school, he allows the circumcision school to go on. When the English take over from the Boers in the Transvaal, he just as quickly becomes friends with the former as with the latter.

The Tsonga literature we have surveyed has, on the whole, tended to reject an either/or scheme. The stories of the novelists and playwrights are all set within the bubbling pot of local culture. Even in Thuketana, where missionary Christianity is meant to have the last say, local culture is the cradle within which the story is nurtured. Also, after her 'conversion', Xisomisana does not go away with the missionaries, but she returns to her home. The urban setting confronts Tlhomandloti (Mtombeni 1967) with a complex rather than a simple set of dualistic choices and possibilities. Nkondo demonstrates the 'unity' of Tsonga life beyond the facile divisions of missionary Christianity. Thus he makes fun of these divisions, *Majagani* versus *Vahedeni* as well as those divisions within the 'Christian family'. In some of his poetry and especially in *Mhlopheki Ngwanazi*, Nkondo charges that there is no difference between being a Christian and a good African. In short, therefore, on the whole, these Tsonga writers seem to problematise becoming a Christian beyond missionary conceptions and divisions. Becoming Christian for them is not to be excused from natural and cultural issues. Nor is it an abandonment of your 'past'. It is at once a return to your past and a moving into a new territory, but a territory in which even the missionaries do not have the automatic right to a last word. It is, quite literally, stepping on to the edge.

### 5.4.3 A Positive Metaphor

The point that Muhlaba uses the metaphor in order to be understood in the dualistic 'language' of the missionaries cannot be overemphasised. Nevertheless the metaphor of a Morula tree must be appreciated on its own terms. The Morula tree is a beautiful ever-green shade tree - the 'great tree of the Vatsonga' (Junod & Jaques 1936:165). It is a useful tree in the long summers of the northern Transvaal and Mozambique where the sun beats hard on the inhabitants. In addition, from this tree, the Vatsonga brewed a much-liked alcoholic beverage - *Vukanyi*. So well-liked was this tree that even in the late sixties when I grew up in the northern Transvaal, few Tsonga households did not have a Morula tree in the yard. Often, family traditional prayers and occasional communiques with the ancestors would be made under the family *Nkanyi* tree. This is a 'serving' tree. In describing himself as a Morula tree, Muhlaba is refusing to become individualistic as per missionary Christianity requirement. Rather than think of himself only, he considers himself to be both a shade and a source of nourishment to the people entrusted to his care.

### 5.5 Towards a Conclusion

The survey has yielded a number of insights and issues that are vital for the construction of a local missiology of liberation. Such a local missiology will enrich not only the local church and theological establishment, but the global church - for it is only when we become thoroughly local that we will have global relevance. With this understanding then, a local missiology is not the opposite of a global missiology. The relationship between the two is not that of parochiality versus universality.

The historiographical and ideological imbalance discussed above (cf. 5.5.2 (a)), can only be corrected if we begin to take 'indigenous voices in history' seriously. By that I mean not only the highlighting of neglected local names and actors in mission history (cf Kpobi 1993), for such historical 'revisionism' is often done without altering the fundamental ideological and theological presuppositions (cf my review of Kpobi in Maluleke 1994f). Mission histories written by missionaries and/or those under their tutelage do not altogether exclude black 'boys', evangelists, assistants and teachers - even if they 'forget' their actual names. Nor are Black cultural issues, such as

world-view, communal element, polygamy, witchcraft etc. 'excluded'. And yet, in these 'histories', local actors are portrayed as aides to, and students of the White missionaries. Issues pertaining to Black culture are either purely academic reminiscences or illustrative anecdotes in the story of Western Christendom's triumphant march through history. I demonstrated above that H.A. Junod sincerely wanted to preserve Tsonga customs; but not because these had intrinsic value beyond the 'archival' and the 'historical'. Thus, like other 'civilising' agents, Junod and his like wanted to see Tsonga customs - the 'tree of heathendom' chopped down. Unlike the other agents, Junod wanted the chopped up tree to be preserved in the 'museum' of 'science'.

No amount of new faces and forgotten local actors (the so-called unsung heroes) that are imported into mission history, however necessary and welcome that is, will of itself manage to tilt the missiological scales. In fact, the more this is done, the 'nobler' seems the face of Western Christendom *despite* all its decried 'shortcomings'. In any case, such endeavours of 'digging-up' forgotten heroes are mortally hampered by the fact that for a large part, the 'primary sources' out of which the 'forgotten stories' must be 're-constructed' were created by Western missionaries, through their letters, reports, ethnographic studies, etc.

### 5.5.1 An Ideological Break

What is required is an ideological break with the orthodoxy of missionary sources - the kind that Mosala (1987:13f) calls for in respect of Biblical hermeneutics. Commenting on the equating of the Bible to the 'revealed Word of God' (:15) by Black theologians, Mosala reminds us that there is no such a thing as a 'nonideological appropriation of Scripture' (:16). Similarly, he points out that the Bible contains more 'truths' than 'that God sides with the oppressed'. To equate the Bible to the Word of God is, according to Mosala, to exempt the Bible from being, like everything else, the 'object of criticism'. Mosala projects a 'battle' between 'Black experience' and the 'Word of God' for primacy as 'a hermeneutical starting point' (:17). What is needed, according to Mosala, is 'to take the materialist-hermeneutical significance of the black experience more seriously' (:24). Mere adherence to the principle that the Bible is the Word of God is to take sides even before reading a single verse from the Bible:

The insistence on the Bible as the Word of God must be seen for what it is: an ideological maneuver whereby ruling-class interests evident in the Bible are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions. In this way the Bible becomes an ahistorical, interclassist document (Mosala 1987:18).

Furthermore, to dispute the suggestion that the Bible is equal to the Word of God is to 'explode the myth of the inherent universality of the Word of God' (:24). Where is Mosala's 'materialist-hermeneutical starting point' (:26) to be found? It is to be found amongst 'the black working-class and poor peasant culture' (:26). To construct the necessary hermeneutic, Mosala (1987:67f) (re)views 'the historical and cultural struggles of the black people' in terms of various marxist modes of production.

Mosala's observation about the ideological and uncritical use of the Bible as the infallible Word of God is momentous. But the Bible-as-Word-of-God is only one element in a bigger package of an established ideological menu. Alongside the above-mentioned view of the Bible are other tyrannical 'sources' whose essential legitimacy and authority is taken for granted. In the quest for a local missiology of liberation, such sources include the sheer weight of missionary records, impressions and deductions about Africans. Just as a Black Theology's 'impotence' owes to 'useless sparring with a ghost' (Mosala 1987:28), the emergence of a Black missiology of liberation is hindered by the uncritical attribution of primacy to missionary 'sources'. There are many convenient 'excuses' for this. Not only did the missionaries reduce local languages to writing, they invariably wrote the first bunch of books in most local languages. They also put on record the 'basic' features of the past 'histories' and 'customs' of African people. Their hold on the 'history' of Christianity amongst Africans, in terms of recording and reflection, is firmly established. We may disagree with the records, we may even design new ways of reading and complementing these 'texts' or we may simply despise them. All of that does not affect the 'hermeneutical' primacy of missionary records and their reflections. Similarly, in spite of his vehement protestations, Mosala remains 'attached' to the very Bible whose 'tyranny' he detests (cf. Mosala 1994). Has Mosala not accepted the 'primacy' of the Bible - only with the proviso that it be 'read' in a specific way? My reading of Mosala persuades

me that this question can be answered in the affirmative. If I am correct then, Mosala takes us from one tyranny (the Bible as Word of God) to yet another (his particular reading of the Bible). A truly radical break with the hegemony of the Bible must therefore include the introduction and authorisation of other 'texts' outside, critical and even oblivious of, the Bible. In introducing vernacular literature as primary sources of missiology, I am proposing a fundamental and radical break with the hegemony of Western missionary sources.

In this thesis, I propose that such manoeuvres as proposed by Mosala and others are inadequate, what we need to do is to 'shift turf' with regard to both theological concepts and the 'sources' of theology. The local turf and local sources must become the arena and stuff of our missiology. The churches that missionaries are supposed to have initiated in our continent are not in Europe but are here with us. These churches are not to be found in the various missionary headquarters in Europe. Nor are they to be found in the 'rich' European archival resources on African churches. One is here not dismissing the immense value of the aforementioned resources and partnerships, but I am underscoring the priority of shifting turf.

We who are on this side of the fence, are left, for better or for worse, with the end-product as missionaries 'return home' in retirement, to lecture at European universities, tell the stories of their lives in Africa to dwindling European congregations and to devise new theologies. We are not allowed that 'luxury'. Those of us who truly love these churches (end-products of missionary endeavours) and have been caught up in God's mission for the world, must either watch these churches dwindle like their European forebears, or construct new missiologies. Without pouring scorn over solid historical recording, I nevertheless wish to point out that, from a missiological point of view, we must move away from pre-occupation with the creation of a 'historical facts' profile of our 'missions'.

In strict missiological terms, our historical concern should relate to central issues and themes at the cross-roads or 'on the border between the fields', at the 'marketplace' of religio-cultural trading that took place. It is here that new definitions, not only of being African, but also of being Christian are formed. It was in this 'territory' that Muhlaba realised that becoming a

Christian was tantamount to being on the edge, at the border. In this 'territory' Maphophe offered his damning 'critique' of a faith and a people who considered him a foreigner despite his determined effort to join them in faith and in missionary Christianity. In the vicinity of this territory, Mtombeni realised that the newly-found Christian garments were inadequate, despite verbal pronouncements to the contrary. At this 'market place' Tsonga customs and Tsonga gods were alive and well albeit in combat, as Nkondo has demonstrated.

### 5.5.2 Towards a Black Missiology of Liberation

The methodological contribution to missiology that this study makes is in the introduction of a new crop of sources<sup>26</sup>. Whereas missionary archives and lately oral research have been accepted as 'primary' sources of missiology, vernacular works have not been used extensively - that is not possible unless and until they are accepted as valid and authoritative sources. I have argued for their validity in the first chapter, and on the basis of what our sample in this study has yielded, my hypothesis has been sustained. The 'weaknesses' of these sources can at the same time be their strengths. In their overwhelmingly narrative leaning and in the imagery of poetic language, they often reveal perspectives that academic and archival sources miss. Novels, plays and poems are, strictly speaking, not 'historical'. However the issues with which they deal are. Because they do not have to be 'historical' and are written for 'local consumption', they display a refreshingly bold knack to confront issues that are taboo in 'academic' works, for lack of 'acceptable evidence' and 'export orientated' literature.

The construction of a local missiology within the ambit of the basic aims of Black and African Theologies is a multi-faceted project. It is in fact a project whose multi-faceted nature needs to be appreciated more and more. We who recognise the need for a Black missiology of liberation must multiply and vary the sources, approaches and methodologies it uses for such a construction. In saying this, one is not proposing the sheer proliferation of

---

<sup>26</sup> Van Niekerk (1980) and to a smaller extent Kritzinger (1988) already used Black poetry as a source of missiology. But both relied on those written in the English language. I go 'further' in the sense that I not only use vernacular poems, but include historical works, novels and plays in Tsonga as sources of missiology.

an infinite number of 'models of contextual theologies' (cf Maluleke 1994e) just so as to create an ever-growing super-market of 'models' in keeping with the growing liberal atmosphere. In this regard, Mosala's (1987:4) insistence on the adoption of conscious, carefully selected and committed ideological positions is in order. We must take heed of Mosala's pertinent warnings against ideological complacency instead of trusting the 'efficacy' of an oppositional (revisionist) orientation. Oppositional missiology and historical revisionism alone will not halt the tide of historical and thematic distortion. Paradoxically, until we give ideological issues the serious attention they deserve, we will continue to distort and cloud the issues even as we endeavour to 'correct' and create a 'balance'. As well as 'doing battle' with missionary and other Euro-Western sources, we must begin to introduce and valorise additional local sources. There exists a variety of such potential sources, many of which remain untapped; e.g. traditional folk-songs, local church songs, local theatre productions etc. . Vernacular literature by local authors is one such source. The choice of vernacular sources achieves the two objectives of (a) increasing the variety of sources and approaches to missiology and (b) effecting the ideological choice of elevating an indigenous voice over and above 'foreign' voices. Here, one is talking more of perspective than of 'facts' and detail, without implying that foreign voices have a monopoly on 'facts'. A fact is an event, real or unreal, which is considered significant enough to warrant either recording or comment (or both). After all, a lot more happens in any given 'historical' situation than what ends up either in the diaries or history books.

On the face of it, vernacular works introduce themes and issues similar to those that are prominent in missionary writings. One is thinking here of such established missionary themes as polygamy, African world-view, witchcraft, apostasy, education, evangelisation etc. However, we have in this circle of literature, especially the historical and biographical ones, some impressions, experiences and evaluations of missionary Christianity from the point of view of participating Africans. In terms of my methodology, the autobiography of Calvin Maphophe is worth as much as, if not more than, that of Paul Berthoud, his master, spiritual guide, and eventually fellow missionary. Whether it be in appreciation or in criticism, the 'voices' of indigenous 'actors', (so-called 'receivers') are a valuable source of missiology. Until we begin to regard local sources, *comments on* and *forms of* mission as valid and genuine,



the assertion that mission is no longer 'something which 'benevolent' white people [do] to 'backward' black people' (Kritzinger 1995:1) will register a hollow ring.

In their studies on African Independent Churches (AICs), Oosthuizen (1992), Daneel (1987) and Anderson (1992, 1993) have demonstrated the validity of African forms of Christianity. However, more than this, these students of African Independentism have, through their empirical, participant-observer research methodologies, - their shortcomings notwithstanding<sup>27</sup> - elevated Africans to a position where their comments on Christian mission are considered to be valid and worthwhile. It was this methodology that convinced Daneel (1987) that African Independent Churches should no longer be seen merely as reactions, but as genuine African initiatives. Insofar as participant-observer methods of research genuinely elevate African comments on and African initiatives in mission to the level of legitimacy, my present study is complementary. Yet to the extent that much participant-observer type research has lacked an explicit, material and consciously chosen ideological stance, I would draw a distinction between the manner in which I have used vernacular literature as sources from the manner in which AICs students have used members of these churches as sources. Even in these empirical studies, the framework of interpretation is always derived from outside the empirical data, and it is here where some empirical researchers have tended to *confuse* 'empirical data' with their interpretative (ideological) frameworks (see my reviews cited above).

Similarly, Black Theology's identification of the 'Black experience' as its main and basic source is an ideological choice in the same kind of order as the choice I have made in my present study. But I think that we need to keep broadening the base of that which we consider to be informative and constitutive of the Black experience. Black literature is an important window into the 'Black experience'. It is however a window that has not been used widely enough in Black and African theology circles, at least within South Africa. If the Tsonga literature we have sampled is anything to go by, Black and African theologies of liberation can only benefit from recourse to

---

<sup>27</sup> See my reviews of works by some of these authors, (Maluleke 1993b, 1993c, 1994c). See also, Philpott (1993) as well as my review of the same (Maluleke 1994c).

creative vernacular literature.

### 5.6 Challenge to Missiology

As a branch of theology, local missiology, like other local theologies of liberation, continues to 'struggle' under the sheer 'weight' of Euro-American intervention and presence. As is the case with all theology, missiology has benefited from the 'paradigm shifts' (cf Bosch 1991a) that all theology has 'benefited' from. However, as is palpable right through Bosch's book, mission is 'in crisis' and 'under attack' (:3-4, 518-519). With this theme, Bosch begins his book, and with it, he draws it to a close. But whose crisis is it and in what terms should it be understood? According to Bosch, the following are central to the crisis of, and attack on, mission.

- a. Advance in science and technology.
- b. The *dechristianization* of the West.
- c. Religious pluralism.
- d. The 'acute sense of guilt' of the West - and of all Christians, owing to their complicity in racism.
- e. The divisibility of the world into the rich and the poor - causing 'anger and frustration among the poor and, on the other, a reluctance among affluent Christians to share their faith' (:4).
- f. The advent of autonomous younger churches and Third-World theologies of liberation.

A careful reading of these 'causes' of the 'crisis of mission' reveals that it is primarily a crisis of the Western church and Western society. Only secondarily, by derivation as it were, does it become a crisis of the Third-World church. Indeed, in Bosch's scheme of things, the Third-World, with its 'younger churches' and its 'poverty' is part of the 'causes' of the West's broader problems of guilt and missionary loss of nerve, for example. The tyranny of science and technology is, at least in the long run, not be restricted to the West. To that extent it affects Third World Christians. However, the perspective of Third-World experience of technological advancement will be different if not simply more brutal. Several of the 'causes' of 'crisis' listed by Bosch may even strike Third-World Christians as positive developments. I am thinking here of such factors as the emergence

of autonomous local churches or even the West's 'acute sense of guilt'. The future of Christianity in Africa depends to a large extent on the creation of strong, autonomous and innovative local churches. Nor should we either be surprised or concerned if the West experiences an 'acute sense of guilt' over issues of entanglement between racism and mission, provided it leads to repentance and renewal. As regards the Western situation, Bosch's characterisation of the 'crisis' is probably, on the whole, accurate. However, if anything, Bosch's characterisation of the perceived crisis demonstrates the need for local, indigenous and Black missiologies. Once we begin to construct these we may find that we are required, not only to restate our 'mission crisis' in our own terms; but we may conclude that whilst classical Western missions may be in crisis, no such crisis exist in our own local context - at least not in the terms described above.

If Kritzinger (1995) is correct in his estimation of Christian mission having become the property of all Christians, Black and White alike, then we are challenged to 'turn up the volume' of indigenous 'voices' in mission. Bosch (1991a:519) seeks the 'solution' to the mission crisis in the notion of the *missio Dei*:

The critics of mission have usually proceeded from the supposition that mission was only what Western missionaries were doing by way of saving souls, planting churches, and imposing their ways and wills on others. We may, however, never limit mission exclusively to this empirical project; it has always been greater than the observable missionary enterprise. Neither should it be divorced from it. Rather, mission is *missio Dei*, which seeks to subsume into itself the *missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary programmes of the church.

For Bosch (1991a:393) therefore, owing to the 'giant leap' that missiology took through adopting the *missio Dei*, 'it is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission'. But what difference has the *missio Dei* made for the younger churches, victims of racist-colonialism - victims of 'Christianity's claim of absoluteness' Gollwitzer (1979:155)? To what extent has the *missio Dei* concept laid a foundation for those of us who seek an indigenous and local missiology of

liberation? Or has this celebrated concept further emasculated Third-World Christians? Referring to the 'revolution' of the Reformation and other celebrated events, Gollwitzer (1979:155) wrote, and I quote at length:

The Spanish and Portuguese established their colonial empires on 'Christian' grounds. The new understanding of the Gospel in the Reformation at first pulled out the rug from underneath this particular justification. But the replacement of sacramental piety by the inward piety of faith unflinchingly retained the consciousness of privilege. The Reformation did not change a thing in the fate white people prepared for the colored peoples of the world. Whether Rome, Wittenberg, or Geneva prevailed, whether justification before God occurred through works or through faith, whether *est* or *significat* was correct, whether the Canons of Dort or the declarations of the Remonstrants became accepted church doctrine, whether Cromwell or Charles I won - for the red, the yellow, and the black all this was irrelevant. It did not change their condition. For the white confessors of faith, regardless of their particular Christian hue, the people of color were all destined for bondage ...

I submit that there is a sense in which Gollwitzer's damning critique of doctrinal forward-leaps applies to missiology's own beloved *missio Dei*. Not that one can question its profound missiological significance or criticise the formulations by theologians who have ably expounded the concept (cf Bosch 1991a:389-393). However, 'theology and proclamation are not only responsible for that which they *mean*, but also for what they *effect*' (Gollwitzer 1979:154). The *missio Dei* concept, albeit not necessarily in that specific phraseology, first emerged after the First World War (Bosch 1991a:389). However, 'general acceptance of the concept came only after the second world war' (Saayman 1995:9). Apart from the issue of its *effect*, one cannot overlook the importance of the Western context within which the *missio Dei* concept gained ascendancy, i.e. post Second World War Europe. Though epistemologically creative, the concept emerged contextually out of the same milieu that manufactured the West's 'acute sense of guilt', which, in turn resulted in the loss of missionary nerve. Through the *missio Dei* concept the Western missionary enterprise could mitigate her complicity in racist-

colonialism - for that belonged to the old 'narrow ecclesiocentric view of mission' - namely, the *missiones ecclesiae*. In this way, what Saayman (1991:22) has called the 'entanglement' between mission and colonialism, amongst other things, can be theologially and thereby rationally explained in terms of a former and inadequate missiological paradigm. Even more seriously, by blotting out such memories as those of 'complicity' and 'entanglement', the *missio Dei* has had the effect of eradicating the initiative and contributions of the so-called younger churches who are the 'fruit' of the Western church's *missiones ecclesiae*. It is one thing for a church with a largely 'proud' centuries-old history of 'success' and 'conquest' to resort to the *missio Dei*; it is quite another to for a 'new', 'younger', 'receiving', and 'dependent' church to have the *missio Dei* concept thrust upon them. For the former, the *missio Dei* may provide solace and absolution, but for the latter, the *missio Dei* may serve to eradicate the unsung sense of initiative and instrumentality of the younger churches in Christian mission, thereby further sentencing them to a perpetual 'fly in a bowl full of milk' existence.

However, by offering a few critical points on the effects of the *missio Dei* concept, I am not arguing that this concept is totally unusable in the Third World situation. I am simply highlighting the fact that most uses of the concept harbour the kind of problems I have cited above. One third world theologian who works with the *missio Dei* concept is Muzorewa<sup>28</sup> (1990:vii). He 'uses' it to show that 'God's work of salvation is done through and in spite of (such) human weaknesses' (:vii):

The history of the colonization of Africa by European nations such as Portugal, France, Holland and Britain shows any careful student of theology (and history) that in many instances the Europeans did what could hurt, harm and exploit let alone oppress the natives, but because the 'hand of God' was in their midst, all worked out for good (Muzorewa 1991:vii).

---

<sup>28</sup> In his work, Mugambi (1989) is clearly dealing with issues in and for mission in Africa. However, he does not refer to the *missio Dei* - at least not in so many words. His view of mission tends to be the *missiones ecclesiae* - the 'unchangeable mission of the Christian Church' (Mugambi 1989:206). However, he recognises that it is a mission 'which Jesus has inaugurated'.

To illustrate how 'all worked out for good', Muzorewa cites the example of missionary educated Africans who have become political nationalist leaders of one sort or the other (:viii). He also cites the unifying power of European languages in Africa. For Muzorewa therefore, 'the hand of God [can be discerned] even in colonialism'. Because of this stance, he can declare that his 'book is not a rebellion against missionaries and all their treasured contributions' (xviii). However, 'mission is truly God's because it continues presently in Africa in the absence of the Europeans and the Americans' (:xiv). What about colonialism and the cultural insensitivity of missionaries? Using the *missio Dei* understanding of mission, Muzorewa answers; 'anything that would indicate any of these two undesirables is surely not part of God's saving word' (:13). Without denying the 'problems' of Western missions in Africa, Muzorewa explains each (away?) by reference to the *missio Dei*. However, contrary to what Muzorewa says, honesty requires us to admit that it is simply not self-evident that 'all has worked for good' in Christian mission in general and specifically in relation to the Third World. If all had worked for good there would be no 'crisis' of mission to speak of. Educated and 'converted' Africans are not an automatic 'advantage' for either the local church or the local community. The fact of the unifying power of European languages must also be judged against the denigration of local languages even as the latter were reduced to writing by Europeans. In short, Muzorewa's line of argument reveals the type of dangers that an uncritical reliance on the *missio Dei* concept can result in.

However, despite his use of the *missio Dei* concept to explain missiological problems away, one must grant that the biggest part of Muzorewa's book is devoted to issues around the search of tools and resources for a genuine African theology of mission - free of Western trappings. I propose that the *missio Dei*, which is so central to contemporary missiology, could easily be one such trapping. However, like Muzorewa, I too seek an indigenous missiology of liberation. But Euro-American sources, terms, concepts and intellectual traditions still dominate Black and African theologies. There is an extent to which that is understandable, permissible and even unavoidable. However, I do think that local voices, such as local vernacular literature, have in store a rich reservoir of creatively refreshing metaphors and concepts. Not only must we 'shift turf' in terms of sources, we must seek and construct new terms and concepts - in short, we are called upon to devise our own theological

vocabulary - and perhaps make more use of images and vivid metaphors rather than only concepts and abstractions. In this 'new' language, as the literature in this study has confirmed, the dynamic, resisting and changing African culture must be central. One of the leading theologians of French speaking Africa expounds the same thesis in the following manner:

In order to restore authenticity to Africa, great importance should be given to the cultural factors that inspired the initial resistance to foreign control. The supposition that the black world is incapable of popular mobilization is based on a naive vision of African reality. African forms of expression - images and songs, mocking words, attitudes born during peasant and worker struggles - refute the supposed passivity or resignation of the black peoples in the face of glaring injustices. The seeds of struggle and resistance that correspond to the genius of these peoples are concealed everywhere (Ela 1988:xv).

We must therefore, not be satisfied with re-statements of celebrated theological 'forward-leaps' and doctrines, however 'sound' they may appear theoretically. Dynamic African culture beckons us, offering itself as a source of theology, even as it is 'concealed everywhere'. The questions raised by the vernacular authors we considered in this study, and the refreshing manner in which they approach the whole subject of missionary Christianity has convinced me of this. Even so, it is not only what indigenous literature says but also what it does not say. The 'silences' are as important as the utterances. In referring to indigenous literature as a source of missiology, I have confronted and explored the absence and deafening silence of these sources in missiology as well as in mission historiography. In the quest for a liberating missiology, we are called upon to notice, hear, and explore these 'silences' and 'absences':

... in seeking to develop a hermeneutic of good news to the poor in the Third World, the question is no longer on which side God is. That was a good question for its time. Now, however, *the relevant question is how to interpret the eloquence with which the poor are silent and the absence through which they are present in the pages of the Bible.* It is in struggling with these

silences and absences that a new and creative reappropriation of the liberation of the gospel takes place (Mosala 1994:147) [Emphasis mine].

To conclude, I reproduce in full, a Tsonga poem by, Magaisa (1987:20), titled *Hina ke Jehovah?* 'What about us, Jehovah?'. This poem epitomises the anguish of all those who seek new and indigenous sources for missiology as well as a new missiological language.

#### WHAT ABOUT US JEHOVAH?

I have heard them speak of the origins of the earth,  
I recall the words: 'let us make a human being in our image'  
Is the Black person also created in your image?

Jehovah!

The Bible speaks of nations,  
Do Blacks also constitute a nation?

Jehovah!

The Bible speaks of tongues and languages,  
Is Tsonga also a language?

Jehovah!

I have heard them speak of the resurrection of the dead,  
Will Blacks be amongst those who rise from the dead?

Jehovah!

I have heard much talk about hell,  
Is hell only for Blacks?

Jehovah!

I have heard about the promise of heaven,  
Are we Blacks fit for heaven?

Jehovah!

If it be so, Jehovah; then,  
Praise be to your name. Amen.



## LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

- ANDERSON, Allan 1992. *Bazalwane. African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- ANDERSON, Allan 1993. Tumelo. *The Faith of African Pentecostals*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- ANDERSON, Gerald H. & STRANSKY, Thomas F. (eds) 1976. *Mission Trends No.3. Third World Theologies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- APPIAH-KUBI, Kofi & TORRES, Sergio (eds) 1979. *African Theology en route*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- BALIA, Daryl 1991. *Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa*. Durban: Madiba Publishers.
- BALOYI, J.S. 1953. *Ku Hluvuka Ku Huma Evuhlongeni*. Johannesburg: Central Mission Press
- BALOYI, S.J. 1949. *Murhandziwani*. Doornfontein: Central Mission Press.
- BALOYI, J.S. 1960. *Xaka*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in S.A.
- BALOYI, J.S. 1965. *Rhuma Mina*. Kensington: Swiss Mission in South Africa.
- BEDIAKO, Kwame 1992. *Theology & Identity. The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books.
- BEVANS, Stephen B. 1992. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- BIKO, Steve 1979. *I Write What I like*. London: Heinemann
- BILL, Mary Cameron (Assisted by Sarah Hlekani Masunga) 1983. *Mbita ya Vutivi. Tibuku ta Xitsonga 1883-1983*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.
- BILL, Jean-François. 1965. *The Responsible self-hood of the Church. A Study*

(Masters Thesis).

BLASER, Klauspeter, KELLER, Annette, SCHNEIDER, Théo, BIBER-SCHNEIDER, Vreni & STUKER, Ueli. 1994. The Ambivalence of Ethnic Identity. A response to T.S. Maluleke. *Missionalia*, 22:3 (November), 193-200.

BOESAK, A. A. 1981. Banning Black Theology in South Africa. *Theology Today*, 38:2 (July), 182-189.

BOSCH, David J. 1978. Towards True Mutuality: Exchanging the Same Commodities or Supplementing Each Other's Needs? *Missiology*, VI:3 (July), 283-296.

BOSCH, David J. 1980. *Witness To the World. The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott.

BOSCH, David J. 1984. Missionary Theology in Africa. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, No. 49 (December), 14-37.

BOSCH, David J. 1991a. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

BOSCH, David J. 1991b. *The vulnerability of mission*. (Occasional Paper No. 10), Birmingham: Selly Oak Colleges.

BROOKES, Edgar H. 1925. *Swiss Mission to Shangaan Tribes. A Retrospect and a Forecast*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

*Buku Ya Tsikwembo Tsin'we na Tisimo Ta Hlengeletano*. 1883. Lausanne: Bridel.

BUTHELEZI, Manas 1976. Towards Indigenous Theology in South Africa, in Torres, Sergio & Fabella, Virginia M.M. (eds) 1976. *The Emergent Gospel. Theology From The Developing World*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 56-75.

BUTSELAAR, Jan van 1984. *Africains, Missionnaires et Colonialistes. Les origines de l'Eglise Presbyterienne du Mozambique (Mission Suisse), 1880-1896*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

CHAMANGO, Simao 1993. The Role of Christianity in development, peace and reconstruction. *Conference Report on the theme: The role of Christianity in Development, Peace and Reconstruction*. Zomba: University of Malawi & Edinburgh: African Christian Project of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western world (University of Edinburgh), 100-105.

CHAUKE, M.S. 1965. *Nkatanga i Dlakuta*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

CHAUKE, W.R. 1991. *Ntlhontlho*. Pretoria: De Jager Haum.

CHIKANE, F. 1986. Foreword, in Mosala, Itumeleng J. & Tlhagale, Buti (eds) 1986. *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, xiv-xvi.

CHIKANE, F. & TSELE, M. 1984. Preface. *Black Theology and the Black Struggle. St Francis Xavier - Cape Town, 10th-14th September. Conference Report*. Braamfontein: Institute for Contextual Theology.

CHIMHUNDU, Hebert 1992. Early Missionaries and the Ethnolinguistic Factor During the Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe. *Journal of African History*, No. 33, 87-109.

COCHRANE, James 1987. *Servants of Power. The role of the English-speaking Churches. 1903-1930*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

COMAROFF, Jean & COMAROFF, John 1988. Through the Looking-glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:1 (March), 6-31.

COOPER, Frederick 1994. Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History. *American Historical Review*, 99:5 (December) 1516-1545.

COSTAS, Orlando 1982. *Christ Outside the Gate*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

CREUX, Ernest 1921. Ku sungula ka Ntirho Wa Hosi Hare Ka Magwamba. *Nyeleti Ya Mixo*, 1:2 (February), 2.

CREUX, Ernest. 1924. Ku Khomiwa ka Vaneri Vo Sungula. *Nyeletl Ya Mixo* 4:2 (February), 1.

CUENDET, F.A. 1950. *Rivoningo Emunyameni. Ntirho Wa Evangeli Exikarhi ka Vatsonga ni Varhonga*. Doornfontein: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

Daneel, M.L. 1987. *Quest for Belonging*. Gweru: Mambo.

DELIUS, P. 1983. *The land belongs to us. The Pedi polity, the Boers and the British in the nineteenth century Transvaal*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

DELIUS, P. 1984. *The Conversion*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

DU PLESSIS, J. 1911. *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.

DUSSEL, Enrique (ed) 1976. *History and Theology of Liberation. A Latin American perspective*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

DUSSEL, Enrique 1992. *The Church in Latin America 1492-1992*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

ELA, Jean-Marc. 1988. *My Faith as an African*. Maryknoll: Orbis

ELLENBERGER, V. 1938. *A century of Mission Work in Basutoland 1833-1933*. Morija: Sesuto Book Depot.

GERARD, Albert 1981. *African Language Literature*. Harlow Essex: Longman

GOBA, B. 1980. The church and the problem of racism in South Africa. A Black Christian Perspective, in *Report on Consultation of Church Representatives on Racism in South Africa*. Braamfontein: South African Council of Churches, 15-23.

GOLLWITZER, Helmut. 1979. Why Black Theology? in Wilmore, Gayraud S. & Cone, James H. (eds) 1979. *Black Theology. A Documentary History, 1966-1979*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 152-173.

GRANDJEAN, A. 1917. *La Mission Romande. Ses racines dans sol Suisse Romand. Son épanouissement dans la race thonga.* Georges Bridel: Lausanne.

GUTIÉRREZ, Gustavo 1993. *Las Casas. In search of the poor of Jesus Christ.* Maryknoll: Orbis.

HARRIES, Patrick. 1981. The Anthropologist as Historian and Liberal: H.A. Junod and the Thonga. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8:1 (October), 37-50.

HARRIES, Patrick. 1983. Labour Migration from Mozambique to South Africa; with special references to the Delagoa hinterland, c. 1862 to 1897. (Doctoral thesis) London: University of London.

HARRIES, Patrick 1988. The roots of ethnicity: discourse and the politics of language construction in South-East Africa. *African Affairs*, 87:46 (January), 25-50.

HARRIES, Patrick 1989. Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga Speakers of South Africa, in Vail, Leroy (ed), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey (Berkeley: University of California Press), 82-117.

HARRIES, Patrick 1994. *Work, Culture, and Identity. Migrant laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860-1910.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (London: James Currey, Portsmouth: Heinemann).

Jaques, A.A. 1929. Terms of Kinship and Corresponding Patterns of Behaviour among the Thonga. *Bantu Studies*, 111, 327-348.

Jaques, A.A. 1938. *Swivongo Swa Machangana (Vatsonga).* Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

JUNOD, H.A. 1905. The Theory of Witchcraft Amongst South African Natives. *South African Journal of Science*, 3, 230-241.

JUNOD, H.A. 1907. The Best Means of Preserving the Traditions and Customs of Various South African Native Races. *South African Journal of Science*, 4, 140-159.

JUNOD, H.A. 1908. The fate of the Widows Amongst the Ba-Ronga. *South African Journal of Science*, 5, 362-375.

JUNOD, H. A. 1910. The Sacrifice of Reconciliation Amongst the Ba-Ronga. *South African Journal of Science*, 7, 179-182.

JUNOD, H.A. 1920. The Magic Conception of Nature Amongst Bantus. *South African Journal of Science*, 17, 76-85.

JUNOD, H.A. 1927. *The Life of a South African Tribe*. (Volumes 1 & 11) London: MacMillan

JUNOD, H.P. & Jaques, A.A. 1936. *Vutlharhi Bya Vatsonga (Machangana). The Wisdom of the Tsonga-Shangana People*. Johannesburg: Central Mission Press/Swiss Mission in South Africa.

JUNOD, H.P. 1938. *Bantu Heritage*. Johannesburg: Hortors Limited & Transvaal Chamber of Mines.

JUNOD, H.P. 1958. PREFACE, in Shilubana, Regent P.M. & Ntsanwisi, H.E. 1958. *Muhlaba. Hosi ya va ka Nkuna. Nkanyi le ndzilakaneni*. Johannesburg: Sasavona, 8-11.

JUNOD, H.P. 1960. *Mufundhisi John Mboweni*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

JUNOD, H.P. 1977. *Matimu Ya Vatsonga*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

KALU, O.U. 1988. African Church historiography: An ecumenical perspective. in Kalu, O.U. (ed). *African Church Historiography: An ecumenical perspective*. Leiter: Lukas Vischer. 9-27.

- KGATLA, S.T. 1988. Dutch Reformed Mission in Northern Transvaal 1865-1964. A critical evaluation of motives, goals and methods. Pretoria: University of South Africa. (Masters thesis).
- KOOL, A.M. 1993. *God moves in a mysterious way. The Hungarian Protestant Foreign Mission Movement (1756-1951)*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- KPOBI, David Nii Anum 1993. *Mission in Chains. The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717-1747) with a translation of his major publications*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- KRITZINGER, J.N.J. 1988. Black Theology. Challenge To Mission. Pretoria: University of South Africa (Doctoral Thesis).
- KRITZINGER, J.N.J. 1995. Editorial. *Missionalia*, 23:1 (April), 1-3.
- LANDMAN, Christina. 1994. *The piety of Afrikaans Women. Diaries of Guilt*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- MABOKO, F. 1956. *Aggrey wa Africa*. Johannesburg: Central Mission Press.
- MAGAISA, J.M. 1987. *Xikolokolo nguvu ya Pitori*. Pretoria: Van Schaik
- MAJEKE, Nosipho. 1952. *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*. Johannesburg: Society for Young Africa.
- MAKHUBA, Noel Casper. 1972. *Byela Mina*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.
- MAKHUBA, Noel Casper. 1975. *Bandi ra Muchini*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.
- MALULEKE, D.R. 1991. *Xivoni*. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 17-18.
- MALULEKE, T.S. 1993a. Mission, Ethnicity and Homeland - The case of the EPCSA. *Missionalia*, 21:3 (November), 229-235.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1993b. A Review of Oosthuizen, Gerhardus C. 1992. *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. *Missionalia*, 21:2 (August 1993). 190-191.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1993c. A Review of Anderson, Allan 1993. *Bazalwane - African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. *Missionalia*, 21:2 (August), 186-187.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1993d. A Review of Sanneh, Lamin 1989. *Translating the Message. The missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll: Orbis. *Missionalia*, 21:2 (August), 192-193.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994a. North-South Partnerships - The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa and the Département Missionnaire in Lausanne. *International Review of Mission*, LXXXIII:328 (Jan), 93-100.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994b. A Review of Landman, Christina 1994. *The Piety of Afrikaans Women. Diaries of Guilt*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. *Missionalia*, 22:2 (August), 183-185.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994c. A Review of Philpot, Graham 1993. *Jesus is tricky and God is undemocratic. The kin-dom of God in Amawoti*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster. *Missionalia*, 22:1 (April), 82-84.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994d. A Review of Anderson, Allan. 1993. *Tumelo. The Faith of African Pentecostals*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. *Missionalia*, 22:1 (April), 61-62.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994e. A Review of Bevans, Stephen B. 1992. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis. *Missionalia*, 22:2 (August), 177-178.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1994f. A Review of Kpobi, David Nii Anum. 1993. *Mission in Chains. The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave Jacobus E. J. Capitein (1717-1747) with a translation of his major publications*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, *Missionalia*, 22:1 (April), 78-79.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1995a. Some Legacies of 19th Century Mission. The Swiss Mission



in South Africa. *Missionalia*. 23:1 (April), 9-29.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1995b. Black Theology Lives! On a Permanent Crisis! *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*. 9:1 (May 1995) Forthcoming.

MALULEKE, T.S. 1995c. A Review of Sono, Themba 1994. *Dilemmas of African Intellectuals in South Africa. Political and Cultural Constraints*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. *Missionalia* 23:1 (April), 136-137.

MAPHOPHE, Calvin 1945. *Ta Vutomi Bya Mina*. Johannesburg: Central Mission Press.

MAPHOPHE, Calvin. 1921. Bukriste ne sihila sa bahedene makari Ka baronga Ni Bathonga. *Nyeletu Ya Mixo*, 1:9 (October) 2.

MAREE, W. L. 1962. *Lig In Soutpansberg. Die Sendingwerk van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord-Transvaal 1863-1963*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.

MARHANELE, M.M. 1975. *Vumunhu Bya Phatiwa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

MARIVATE, C.T.D. 1973. Tsonga Folktales: form, content and delivery. Pretoria: University of South Africa (Masters Thesis).

MARIVATE, C.T.D. 1985. *Mbalango Wa Matsalwa Ya Xitsonga 1883-1983*. Pretoria: De Jager.

MARIVATE, D.C. 1950. Mahungu Lamanene. Hymn No 250. In *Tinsimu Ta Vakriste*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa, 291-297.

MARIVATE, D.C. *Sasavona*. 1938. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa

MARIVATE, D.C. 1941. *David Livingstone*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

MAROLEN, D.P.P. 1972. *Mkon'wana Wa Fika*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

MASEBENZA, B.J. 1965. *Chochele-Mandleni*. Pretoria: Van Schaik

MASULUKE, T.M. 1966. *N'wanghovelela Khujane*. Pretoria: Via Africa.

MATHEBULA, M.I. 1989. The relationship between some ecumenical bodies and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (Swiss Mission) (1904-1975) - A historical study. Masters Thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

MATHIVHA, R.N. 1985. The Berlin Missionary Venture In Education At Tshakhuma Venda (1872-1954). Pietersburg: University of the North. (Masters thesis)

MATHUMBA, I. 1993. A comparative Study of Selected Phonetic, Phonological and Lexical Aspects of some Major Dialects of Tsonga in the Republic of South Africa, and their Impact of the Standard Language. Pretoria: University of South Africa. (Doctor's Thesis).

MAYEVU, G.S. 1991. *Ndzalo wa Swidzwotelo*. Sasavona: Braamfontein.

MAYEVU, G.S. 1992. *Mafelatiko*. Pretoria: Kagiso Publishers.

MIYEN, E. Mc. 1979. *Makumu ya vutomi byebyo*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

MNISI, Joel, M.N. 1988. Mindzhumba ya Vutsonga, in C.P.N. Nkondo (ed), *Mindzhumba Ya Afrika*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

MOFOKENG, Takatso A. 1983. *The crucified among the Crossbearers. Towards a Black Christology*. Kampen: J.H. Kok.

MOFOKENG, Takatso A. 1989. Black Theological Perspectives, Past and present, in Maimela, Simon & Hopkins, Dwight (eds), *We are one Voice. Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 105-126.

MOSALA, Itumeleng 1985. African Independent Churches: a study in socio-theological protest, in Villa-Vicencio, Charles & De Gruchy, John W. (eds), *Resistance and Hope. South African Essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 103-111.

MOSALA, Itumeleng. 1986. The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and their Challenge to Black Theology, in Mosala, Itumeleng & Tlhagale, Buti (eds), *The unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Institute of Contextual Theology, 91-100.

MOSALA, Itumeleng & TLHAGALE, Buti (eds) 1986. *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Skotaville.

MOSALA, Itumeleng 1989a. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

MOSALA, Itumeleng 1989b. Prospects for the Future and Building Alliances, in Maimela, Simon & Hopkins, Dwight (eds), *We are one Voice. Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 139-148.

MOSALA, Itumeleng 1994. Jesus in the parables: Class and gender readings. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*. 8:2 (November) 142-147.

MOTLHABI, Mokgethi 1986. The Historical Origins of Black Theology, in Mosala, Itumeleng & Tlhagale, Buti (eds), *The unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Institute of Contextual Theology, 37-56.

MOTLHABI, Mokgethi 1994. African Theology or Black Theology? Toward an Integral African Theology. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 8:2 (November), 113-141.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1966. *Malangavi ya Mbilu*. Pretoria: Beter Books.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1967. *Mibya ya Nyeka-Nyeka*. Pretoria: Beter Books.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1973a. *Ndzhaka ya Vusiwana*. Pretoria: Via Afrika.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1973b. *Ndzi Tshikeni*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1973c. *Vuhlangi bya Vuhlangi*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1974a. *Mavala ya Yingwe*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

- MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1974b. *Mihizo ya Kayivela*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- MTOMBENI, B.K.M. 1977. *Matshopetana ya Tindzumulo*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- MTSETWENI, Lybon. 1986. *Miloti Ya Vutomi*. Braamfontein: Sasavona
- MUGAMBI, J.N.K. 1989. *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. Nairobi: Longman Kenya
- MUYAMBO, J.M. 1984. *Vuhiri*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.
- MUZOREWA, Henry Gwinyai 1990. *An African Theology of Mission*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- MUZWAYINE, H.S.V. 1982. *Jairus Jiri Siyandhani*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- NDHAMBANI, E.P. 1949. *Swiphato Swa Xitsonga*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.
- NDHAMBANI, E.P. 1950. *Mambuxu*. Doornfontein: Central Mission Press.
- NGCOKOVANE, Cecil Mzingisi 1989. The socio-cultural analysis of the origins and development of Black Theology, in Maimela, Simon & Hopkins, Dwight (eds), *We are one Voice. Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, 35-50.
- NGUBANE, J.B. 1986. Theological Roots of the African Independent Churches and Their Challenge to Black Theology, in Mosala, Itumeleng & Tlhagale, Buti (eds), *The unquestionable Right to be Free*. Braamfontein: Institute of Contextual Theology, 71-90.
- NIEKERK, A.S. van 1980. God, The Powers, And Man in The Works of Some Black South African Poets of The Seventies: A Theological Evaluation. Pretoria:University of Pretoria. (Doctoral thesis)
- NKONDO, C.P.N. 1982. *A hi twisiseni Matsalwa*. Pietersburg: Morester.

Nkondo, C.P.N. 1988. (ed), *Mindzhumba Ya Afrika*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

NKONDO C.P.N. & MARIVATE C.T.D. (eds) 1982. *Madaladala*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

NKONDO, E.M. 1969a *Emahosi*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

NKONDO, E.M. 1969b. *Nthavele ya Miehleketo*. Pretoria: Varia Books.

NKONDO, E.M. 1973. *Tinhlole ti be Mitsatsu*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

NKONDO, E.M. 1974. *Muhlupheki Ngwanazi*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

NKONDO, E.M. 1975. *Mabyala-Mfava*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

NKONDO, E.M. 1979. *Chovo ra Nhunguvana*. Pretoria: Van Schaik

NKONDO, W.Z. 1969. *Mbita ya Vulombe*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

NTSANWISI, H.E. 1929. *How to Write Shitronga (Shangaan) under Phonetic System*. Lovedale: Lovedale Press.

NTSANWISI, H.E. 1957. *Mahlasela-hundza*. Pretoria: Bona Press.

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1954. *Masungi Mfana ka Mashele*. Pretoria: Bona Press

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1961. N'wa-Mpfundla Maxisana. *Mahlahle*, 13:3 (September).

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1961 -1971. *Makomba-ndlela. Tsonga Readers*. Pretoria: Beter Boeke.

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1965. The idiom in Tsonga. A descriptive study. Pretoria: University of South Africa. (Masters thesis).

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1968. *Tsonga Idioms. A descriptive Study*. Braamfontein: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

NTSANWISI, H.W.E. 1970. *Xitsonga Xerhu*. Pretoria: Beter Boeke.

NTSANWISI, Patrick. 1957. *Vuluva Bya Switlhokovotsele*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

N'WANDULA, Charlie Zett. 1987. The Swiss Mission in South Africa. A critical Review of Educational Practices among the Tsonga people of the North-Eastern Transvaal. 1899-1954. Johannesburg: University of South Africa (Masters Thesis).

OOSTHUIZEN, Gerhardus C. 1992. *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

PHILPOT, Graham 1993. *Jesus is tricky and God is undemocratic. The kin-dom of God in Amawoti*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

PILLAY, Gerald J. 1992. The problem of interpreting the history of Black churches and writing the history of Christianity in South Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, XVIII:2 (December), 121-148.

RANGER, Terence 1989. Missionaries, migrants and the Manyika. The invention of ethnicity in Zimbabwe, in Vail, Leroy (ed), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey (Berkeley: University of California Press), 118-50.

RASENGANE, E.R.B. 1963. *Mitlhokovotsele ya Xitsonga. Nhlengeleto ya Mitlhokovotsele ya Tintangha A-11*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

REJOICE DZUNISANI 1875-1975. Morija: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

SAAYMAN, Willem 1991. *Christian Mission in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

SAAYMAN, Willem 1994. The Congregation of Marianhill Missionaries: A pioneering Roman Catholic contribution to Christian mission in South Africa. *Missionalia*, 22:1 (April), 36-41.

SAAYMAN, Willem 1995. *A Man with a Shadow. A missiological interpretation in context of the life and times of Prof Z.K. Matthews* (Forthcoming).

SANNEH, Lamin 1989. *Translating the Message. The missionary Impact on Culture*. London: Marshall Pickering.

SANNEH, Lamin 1994. *Encountering the West*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

SCHNEIDER, Théo 1983. Preface, in Bill, Mary Cameron (Assisted by Sarah Hlekani Masunga), *Mbita ya Vutivi. Tibuku ta Xitsonga 1883-1983*. Braamfontein: Sasavona, i-ii.

SETILOANE, Gabriel M. 1975. I am an African. *Risk Magazine*. 27, 128-131.

SHILUBANA, Regent P.M. & NTSANWISI, H.E. 1958. *Muhlaba. Hosi ya va ka Nkuna. Nkanyi le ndzilakaneni*. Shilubane: Nkuna Tribal Authorities.

SIHLANGU, Aram. 1975. *Ta Ka Mpisane*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

SONO, Themba 1994. *Dilemmas of African Intellectuals in South Africa. Political and Cultural Constraints*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

STACKHOUSE, Max 1988. *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

STANLEY, Brian 1990. *The Bible and the Flag. Protestant Missions & British imperialism in the nineteenth & twentieth centuries*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press.

STARFIELD, Jane 1988. 'Not Quite History': The Autobiographies of H. Selby Msimang and R.V. Selope Thema and the Writing of South African History. *Social Dynamics*, 14:2, 16-35.

Terrisse, B. (ed) 1954. *Xihlovo Xa Elim. Mati Ya Vutomi. Xitsundzuxo xa Jubilee ya 75 wa malembe*. Johannesburg: Swiss Mission in South Africa.

THUKETANA, F.A. 1968. *Xisomisana*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

THUKETANA, F.A. 1978. *N'waninginingi ma ka Tindleve*. Braamfontein: Sasavona.

TLHAGALE, Buti 1985. Towards a black theology of labour, in Villa-Vicencio, Charles & De Gruchy, John W. (eds), *Resistance and Hope. South African Essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 126-134.

TORRES, Sergio & FABELLA, Virginia M.M. (eds) 1976. *The Emergent Gospel. Theology from the under-side of history*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

VAIL, Leroy 1989. Introduction. Ethnicity in Southern African History, in Vail, Leroy (ed), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1-19.

VILLA-VICENCIO, Charles. 1988. *Trapped in Apartheid. A socio-theological history of the English-Speaking Churches*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

WASHINGTON, Booker T. 1901. *Up From Slavery. An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday & Company.