

# THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE ORAL AND THE WRITTEN: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS BY MQHAYI AND JOLOBE

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## ABSTRACT

This article sets out to examine the relationship between oral and written isiXhosa poetry, and the extent of the interface between the two forms. Little attention has been paid to this interesting phenomenon. The scope of the article is limited to selected oral and written poems by Samuel Mqhayi and James Jolobe. The methodology is an interdisciplinary approach that contextualises the poetry and locates it within the social and political reality of South Africa during the period under review. The article argues that the selected poems of Mqhayi and Jolobe demonstrate the dynamism of the oral and written literature, and the interface between the two forms. Mqhayi and Jolobe played the role of organic intellectuals, whose poetry, during the period 1932–1952, diffused the ideology of Africanism. The poetry of the above-mentioned artists, written or



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oral, directly or indirectly influenced the oral performances (music and oratory) of revolutionary musicians and orators of the subsequent generations.

## INTRODUCTION

The article supports the call made by Kaschula (1993, vii), in his introduction to *Foundations in southern African oral literature*:

The future of African oral literature lies, therefore, in comparative interdisciplinary approaches which will enable the study to come alive and take its rightful place in scholarly circles worldwide.

To elaborate further, Kaschula (ibid.) quotes Barber who states that ‘there is an obvious and very good reason for taking an interdisciplinary approach to African oral texts, and that is that the texts themselves can combine “literature”, “history”, “music”, “medicine”, “religion” and other things’ (ibid.). I add to Barber’s list: philosophy, political science and sociology, which enables us to study the relationship between oral and/or written literature, culture and ideology.

The article also supports Finnegan’s (1988, 110) observation:

Orality and literacy, far from being mutually contradictory poles, can interact and support each other. This is illustrated from the literature in the South Pacific, where the writing down and codification of their ‘myths’ or ‘legends’ was not neutral or merely technological procedure of capturing some exotic and impervious ‘old tradition’ but a social process influenced by familiar *political, ideological* and religious pressure. [emphasis added]

The article argues that Finnegan’s observation is also relevant to the South African situation, in particular to isiXhosa oral and/or written poetry.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Antonio Gramsci’s point of view regarding cultural construction constitutes the backdrop for this article. I shall briefly discuss the three notions that constitute the cornerstone of Gramsci’s theory: ideology, culture and organic intellectuals.

### Ideology

Gramsci asserts that the founders of the concept ‘ideology’, Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) and his colleagues, considered sensations to be the origin of ideas. The Marxist view which perceives ideology as false consciousness is, according to Gramsci (1971, 376), an unacceptable negative value judgement. Gramsci (ibid, 376–377) contends that a distinction should be drawn between ‘historically organic ideologies’, i.e., those that are ‘necessary to a given structure’ and ‘ideologies that are

arbitrary, rationalistic, or willed'. The former type of ideology is of great significance to him, while the latter is deemed insignificant:

To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary, they have a validity which is psychological; they 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual 'movements', polemics and so on .... [ibid, 377, emphasis added]

## Culture

The concept means 'the whole process' or whole ways of life (Williams 1977, 108). Culture and ideology, according to Gramsci (1971: 328), play a decisive role in the process of governance of people. The consent of the people to governance is realised through the creation by the rulers, of a 'historically organic ideology' or *Weltanschauung* (worldview), which becomes the public consciousness and outlines how people should make sense of the world. This public consciousness is created by means of a cultural struggle which implies the production of a vibrant and coherent meaning across the entirety of culture – a process that redefines cultural terrains and shapes people's worldview. Sense-giving institutions like religion, education and art play the indispensable role of reconstituting people into a new field of meaning. Culture and ideology also play a decisive role in the process of resistance to governance. Tomaselli (1989, 40) states that 'culture provides the mechanism through which encounter, resistance and counter-meanings are articulated'.

The selected poems are therefore relevant to the study as literature, and poetry in particular, is an aspect of culture. Mphahlele (1970, 11–12) argues that poetry is more deliberate and direct in its expression of ideology: 'I think it is because poetry is a state of mind and therefore the very poem becomes the attitude.'

## Organic intellectuals

Gramsci (1971, 3) makes a distinction between 'organic' intellectuals and 'traditional' professional intellectuals. In his view, the latter are distinguished by their profession, e.g., literary, scientific and so on, which is characteristic of their class. This category of intellectual is not the concern of the current study. A distinctive feature of 'organic' intellectuals is their function of facilitating the development of their aspirations:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which gives it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but in the social and political fields.

If not all entrepreneurs, at least an elite amongst them must have the capacity to be an organiser of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the

state organism, because of the need to create the condition most favourable to the expansion of their own class .... [ibid, emphasis added]

‘Organic’ intellectuals are the leaders in a class (social or organic group), comprising the think-tanks and organisers. They disseminate the ideology of the class with the aim of securing the consent of the people and their submission to the hegemony of the class. Gramsci (ibid, 10) declares: ‘School is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated.’

This explains why the apartheid regime paid serious attention to improving the quality of education for whites and introduced the inferior Bantu Education for Africans. Muller (cited in Tomaselli 1989, 25), is however, cautionary: ‘These institutions (i.e. intellectual) can of course work either for the dominant hegemony, or less commonly, *for an alternative hegemony ...*’ [emphasis added].

## MQHAYI, S.E.K.: DIFFUSION OF AFRICANISM THROUGH AN ORAL AND WRITTEN TEXT

Samuel Mqhayi performed for the British Broadcasting Corporation the *Izibongo zikaMakinana*, to emphasise his commitment to African customs and tradition, African values and the promotion of the ideology of Africanism. My submission is that this is an oral text that was reduced into chirography and typography. But the shift from one register (oral) to another (aural or written record) has not shifted the content and the context. Opland and Mtuze (1994, 51–53) describe Mqhayi’s recorded live performance as that of a poem he had published in *Umteteli wabantu* on November 2, 1929. The poem is located at the SABC Archives in Port Elizabeth (Colombia AE 61; WEA 1826). A detailed analysis thereof by Opland ‘Two unpublished poems by S.E.K Mqhayi’, was first delivered at a symposium on Contemporary South African Literature at Austin, Texas, in March 1975, and published in *Research in African literatures* in 1977 (Qangule 1979, 22). I argue that the poem is also ideologically laden, as Mqhayi used it as a vehicle for disseminating the Africanist ideology. I furthermore argue that the oral poem was reduced to a written text and transformed into a fixed text.

### *A! Silimela! (1932)*

*Bizan’ izizwe kuza kwabiw’ iinkwenkwezi!*

*Iinkwenkwezi ezi mazabiwe*

*Nina beSuthu, Thathan’ uCanzibe,*

*Niyakwabelana nabaTshwana nabaTshopi*

*Nazo zonk’ eziny’ intlang’ ezinezishuba.*

*Nina bakwaZulu, Thathan’ amakroza,*

*Niya kwabelana namaSwazi namaTshopi namaTshangana*

*Neziny’ intlang’ ezingamarha.*

Nina baseBritani, Thathan' iKhwezi,  
 Niya kubambana namaJamani namaBhulu  
 Noko nibantu bangakwazi' ukwabelana:  
 Nisuke nenz' imfazwe yamaBhulu neyamaJamani.  
 Sizakubambana ngeSilimela thina mabandla kaPhalo,  
*Yona nkwenkwez' inkulu,*  
*Kuba yinkwenkwezi yokubal' iminyaka,*  
*Yokubal' iminyaka yobudoda,*  
*Iminyaka yobudoda.*

'Invite the nations for allocation of stars  
 The stars must be allocated  
 You Sotho's receive the Canopus  
 You will share with the Tshwana and Tshopi  
 And all other nations with aprons.  
 You Zulus receive the orion's belt  
 You will share with the Swazi, Tshopi and Shangans.

And other nations that do not undergo initiation  
 You Britons receive the morning star,  
 You will share with Germans and Boers.  
 Though you do not like sharing.  
 You rather start a war of Boers and that of Germans.  
 We the house of Phalo shall hold onto the Pleiades.  
 The greatest star,  
 Because it is a star for counting the years,  
 For counting the years of manhood,  
 The years of manhood.'

The structure of the poem is that of an oral composition and performance, that has been reduced to writing. The fundamental characteristics of an oral poem – rhythm, final and initial linking, parallelism and repetition – are the hallmarks of this work, which demonstrates an interface between oral and written literature.

The poem furthermore illustrates that Mqhayi had profound respect for the African custom of initiation. This comes through in the last stanza, which is the core and climax of the poem, where Mqhayi acknowledges the importance of Pleiades to amaXhosa who venerate the custom or tradition and subsequently the associated star and month. The month of June (*Isilimela*) is also esteemed in the poem, as it is when amaXhosa boys are taken to the mountain for initiation. The initiation custom requires females to go for female initiation (*intonjane*) and males to go for circumcision (*ulwaluko*). The significance is not on the actual physical operation but the symbolic meaning of the rite of passage, from one stage to another in terms of

adulthood. Mqhayi's high regard for *ulwaluko* is demonstrated by his undergoing this cultural practice against the will of the missionaries at Lovedale Institution. In a follow-up he wrote a manuscript *Ulwaluko*, where he argued for the acceptance of the custom by the church. The manuscript has unfortunately been lost (Opland 2009, 14). His second attempt at publishing a manuscript dealing with cultural issues was not accepted for publication by Lovedale Press which was represented by W.G. Bennie (Correspondence from Bennie to SEK Mqhayi, October 23, 1931, in the Lovedale archives). One of the topics of the manuscript focused on *ulwaluko*. The argument submitted is that Mqhayi regarded this custom as a critical symbol of Africanism, yet literary critics have overlooked this very significant aspect of his poem. The argument of this article is that Mqhayi's poem on Makinana goes beyond a eulogy to his chief – it is a vehicle for articulating a discourse, the discourse of Africanism.

### Mqhayi's influence on the next generation of revolutionary orators

Mqhayi spent his last years, 1935–1945, writing journalistic articles, poetry and prose and continued to play the critical role of *Imbongi yesizwe* ('Poet of the nation'). Mona (2015, 80) analyses and interprets the historic encounter between Mqhayi and Mandela when the latter was a student at Healdtown in 1938. Mandela had first-hand experience of Mqhayi's poetry when he sang the praises of Chief Makinana, ending with *iminyaka yobudoda: iminyaka yobudo-da* ('years of manhood'), an experience that he reflects on in his book *Long walk to freedom* (Mandela 1995, 47; 2001, 39–40). Mqhayi made a profound impact on the young Mandela and imbued him with the spirit of Africanism. Mandela's account of this 1938 encounter with Mqhayi at Healdtown, in the presence of Dr Arthur Wellington, the school principal, supports this argument.

*Ngelo xesha ndaziva ndinelunda ngendlela engumangaliso, ndingazingci njengokuba ngumAfrika, kodwa ngenxa yokuba ndingumXhosa; ndaziva ngathi ndingomnye wabantu abanyuliweyo. Ndavuseleleka kodwa ndabethwa intloko yahiliteka yiloo nto yayisenziwa nguMqhayi ngaloo mini. Wayesuke wawuthi tya umxholo wakhe awuthandayo wobuzwe ngokubanzi nomanyano lwama-Afrika, waya kojongene ngaphuzulu nesakhe isizwana ejolise kwisizwe samaXhosa awayengomnye waso... Ndandiqala ukubona ukuba ama-Afrika anento eninzi afanayo ngayo, kodwa nanku lo Mqhayi wodumo ebonga amaXhosa ngaphezulu kwento yonke; ndabona ukuba umAfrika angakwazi ukuyimela inyaniso... Ngenye indlela le nto yokuguquka kukaMqhayi kwindlela abeqhele ukuzimisa ngayo imbono zakhe, yaba sisipili seyam ingqondo kuba ndandisithi ndiphambili ndibe ndisemva phakathi kokuzingca ngobuXhosa endibubo nemvakalelo yokwalamana namanye amaAfrika. (emphasis added, Mandela 2001)*

*'I felt such intense pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa; I felt like one of the chosen people. I was galvanized, but also confused by Mqhayi's performance. He*

had moved from a more nationalistic, all-encompassing theme of African unity to a more parochial one addressed to the Xhosa people, of whom he was one. As my time at Healdtown was coming to an end, I had many new and sometimes conflicting ideas floating in my head. I was beginning to see that Africans of all tribes had much in common, yet here was the great Mqhayi praising the Xhosa above all; I saw that an African might stand his ground ... In a sense, Mqhayi's shift in focus was a mirror of my own mind because I went back and forth between pride in myself as a Xhosa and feeling of kinship with other Africans. But as I left Healdtown at the end of the year, *I saw myself as a Xhosa first and an African second.*' (Mandela 1995, 49–50, emphasis added)

Mandela again reflected on this encounter in a television interview conducted by his daughter, which was screened on SABC television immediately after his passing in December 2013 (see Nelson Mandela Foundation).

Mqhayi's eloquence and prolificness was acknowledged by the young Robert Sobukwe in his October 1949 address on behalf of the graduating class at Fort Hare College: 'To the completers among whom I number myself, my exaltation is: REMEMBER AFRICA! ... This is a difficult period to analyse. It is a confused period. Such as only Mqhayi, or Bereng or Dickens could describe' (Karis and Carter 1973, 3). James Calata, in his endeavours to revive the African National Congress (ANC), in his presidential address as leader of Cape African Congress (July 4, 1938), quoted Mqhayi: 'I say let us not get despondent and think that we have lost all. Our poet, Mr Mqhayi, has told us that the handle that turns the wheels on the universe is in the hand of God and a new world is about to be begotten' (ibid, 138).

The argument I advance is that Mqhayi's oral poem was transformed through writing into a fixed written text which, in turn, contributed towards the creation of political oratory by some of the leaders of the South African liberation struggle, such as Robert Sobukwe and James Calata. As Saunders (1970, 21) intimates, 'oratory is an art particularly connected with politics'.

## JOLOBE, J.J.R.: DIFFUSION OF AFRICANISM THROUGH THE WRITTEN TEXT

A significant contribution by James Jolobe in the ideological discourse of the late 40s is his three poems which were not included in his anthology, but were published in *Umteteleli* and *Umthunywa* newspapers in 1952. The poems are *Osemboniselweni*, *Abakhululi belizwe* and *Imbumba yolutsha*. Opland and Mtuze (1994, 115–117) republished the poems in *Izwi-laBantu*. My submission is that Jolobe's ideologically laden written texts gave birth to oral texts which continued to diffuse ideology, in this instance, Africanism.

### *Abakhululi Besizwe*

*Ndalama umfo ezolile*

*Ondele kumwonyo wekamva,*

*Ethe cwaka ethungw'umlomo,  
Izandla zibotshwe ngobhedu,  
Imbonakal'isoyikeka  
Ziimpawu zokutshutshiseka,  
Uvuyo luvangwe nosizi,  
Uxolo luxutywe nentlungu,  
Idin' elithozamileyo*

*Ukuvul' amaty' entliziyi,  
Ukuhluphez' otyhafileyi.  
Ndabon' ethunzini ngasemva  
Kumi impulsuwa yenzwana  
Incuma ingenamaxhala,  
Inyembezi sezisuliwe,  
Umlomo ukhululekile,  
Eqhawulwe namakhmandela  
Ijonge kumxokelelwano  
Ubomvu ligazi lotyabuko.  
Yathi ngelizwi lenzukiso,  
"Intyatyambo yenkululeko  
Inkcenkceshelwe ngomgudu  
Negazi nokubandezelwa  
Kwabanjengawe gorhandini!"*

**'The ones who will set the nation free**

I saw a quiet gentleman  
Looking into the deep future,  
Being quiet, his mouth closed,  
Hands tied with gold  
He had a fearful outlook  
Signs of oppression,  
Happiness mixed with sorrow  
Peace mixed with pain  
A sacrifice that is yielding  
  
To open the rocks of the heart  
To encourage the one who has lost hope  
I saw in the dark background  
A healthy young man standing  
Smiling without any fear  
Tears wiped away  
The mouth granted freedom  
The shackles broken



Looking at the chain  
 Which was red with the blood from the scourging  
 He said with a voice of exaltation,  
 “The flower of freedom  
 Has been watered by the efforts  
 Struggles and the blood and the suffering of  
 persons such as you courageous one!”

Jolobe sees in members of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), which was founded in 1943, the ‘ones who will bring about the freedom of the nation’. Jolobe has a vision of a man in chains, the signs or effects of oppression showing on his face and body, peaceful despite enduring pain, dejected, grief-stricken, having made the sacrifice on behalf of his people. In the background Jolobe sees a handsome young man, good looking, smiling, fearless and articulate. The young man looks at the old man in chains red with the blood oozing from his chafed skin, abraded by the chain which has caused lacerations. The young one acknowledges the role of the previous generation in the struggle, and utters the words that ‘the flower of freedom is being watered by the blood of courageous persons like yourself’. It is interesting to note the influence these short poems by Jolobe had on subsequent generations of South African activists who were involved in the struggle for liberation. The red chain symbol or motif used by Jolobe would later be used by Miriam Makeba, one of the greatest artists who sacrificed their lives for the struggle, in a song she composed and sang: *Ndinomqokoz’ obomvu, ndawuphiwa ngubawo* (‘I have this red chain which I inherited from my father’) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmlDdacs2uQ>). Makeba’s red chain symbolises oppression by the apartheid ideologues. I argue that Jolobe’s red chain motif, which is in a fixed text, re-emerges in an oral form in the indigenous song of Makeba. Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu, the young Umkhonto weSizwe member of the ANC freedom fighters, who was executed by the apartheid regime, before going to the gallows in 1979 said: ‘Tell my people that I love them and that they must continue the fight. My blood will nourish the tree that will bear the fruits of freedom, Aluta continua!’ Again Jolobe’s ‘flower of freedom ... watered by ... the blood and suffering’ re-emerges in Mahlangu’s political oratory. This recurring element or theme demonstrates the interface between the written text and the political oratory of the generation that succeeded Jolobe’s.

It is against this background that Jolobe’s poem is interpreted as a contribution to the Africanist discourse of the late 40s, which followed the establishment of ANCYL. The argument submitted is that Jolobe’s fixed texts contributed to developing the oratory skills of the next generation. Jolobe’s motif of a freedom that is watered with the blood of martyrs re-emerged in the oratory, the art of speech and persuasion, of political activists of the next generation. The poems also demonstrate how Jolobe’s fixed poetry text gave birth to oral forms that accelerated the Africanist discourse.

*Ndeva izwi lisithi,  
 “Mlindi, kuxaliphi na  
 Ebusuku?” Wakhwaza,  
 “Isifingo sidlule  
 Ngums’ obomvu. Ukuza  
 Kwemini sekumbovu.  
 Umyalel’ uyenziwa.  
 Ungekho kuyalindwa.  
 Iyathamb’ iAfrika.  
 Ithemba lengomso  
 Luqeqesho. Kuyasa.”*

‘I heard a voice saying,  
 “Night Vigil what is the time  
 Of the night?” He called loudly,  
 “The rolling up of the night has passed  
 It is the dawn of the day  
 The coming of the day is nearing.  
 The message is being crafted.  
 If there is no message people wait.  
 Africa is getting transformed  
 The hope of tomorrow/the future  
 Is education/training. The day is coming.”’

In the poem, Jolobe reflects the hope that was brought about by the rise of the ANCYL and its programme of action during the period 1943–1949 (Karis and Carter 1973, 98–107). He has this vision, where he hears someone asking ‘what time of the night it is’. The answer to the night vigil? is that ‘the dawn of the day is nearing and the light of the day will come soon’.

The night is obviously the segregationist regime of the time, and the day envisages the dawn of Africans’ freedom from oppression. An important statement, *Iyathamb’ iAfrika* (Africa is getting transformed) reflects the hope for freedom of South Africans, which was brought about by the independence of other African states from colonial rule. People’s hopes were raised by the announcements that Ghana would obtain freedom from colonial rule. This indeed happened on March 6, 1957, making Ghana the first South Sahara country to attain self-rule. But Jolobe warns that education and/or training is critical in preparing for the anticipated freedom.

Goodwin (1982, x), in his introduction to his work on African poets, notes that ‘the notion of the poet as a visionary, diviner, oracle, prophet, and social conscience has come to seem much more immediate’. He quotes Wole Soyinka’s statement at a Dar es Salaam conference of 1971: ‘The writer is the visionary of his people, he recognizes past and present not for the purpose of enshrinement, but for the logical creative glimpse and statement of the ideal future. He anticipates and he warns’ (ibid).

Unfortunately Jolobe, the visionary poet who died in 1976, did not witness his prediction of the 1943 ANCYL which, in 1994, played a significant role in bringing democracy to South Africa, under the guidance of two prominent members of the league, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela.

### *Imbumba Yolutsha* – The Youth League

An overt contribution by Jolobe, in the ideological discourse of the late 40s, is his poem *Imbumba Yolutsha* ('The Youth League'), which is not included in his published anthologies. Sirayi (1985, 190–195), succinctly argues that this poem exhibits Jolobe's politico-philosophical thought. Mdaka (1992, 171) also makes reference to the poem to argue that some African writers have defended 'violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order.'

#### ***Imbumba Yolutsha***

*Umlisela weAfrika*

*Umthinjana wesizwe*

*Ulibo olumkhitha*

*Abantwana bothuthu*

*Balibanga ngezenzo*

*Ilizwe lokuzalwa.*

*Ookhala beli duli*

*Amadela-konwaba*

*Afikelwe ngumbono*

*Wenkululeko yomntu*

*Kanye ngexesha lethu*

*Akhokelwa sithatha*

*Igqange lenkwenkwezi*

*Ingeyontshotsholoji*

*Yona ikhanya' icime.*

*Okwalanywe lulutsha*

*Akasayi kucima*

*Ngumlilo ethanjeni*

*Ophemba intliziyo*

*Ivuthe ngeAfrika*

*Kulindelwe izenzo*

*Kubathandi besizwe*

*Huntshu! Mafa-nankosi!*

*Huntshu! Mbumba yolutsha!*

'Male youth of Africa  
 Female youth of the nation  
 Vibrant generation  
 Indigenous children  
 Claim through their actions  
 The land of their birth  
 Vanguard of the organization  
 Who sacrificed pleasure  
 Have been struck by a vision  
 of the freedom of mankind  
 Precisely in our lifetime  
  
 They are led by a light  
 A brilliant star  
 But not the shooting star  
 Which brightens and darkens instantly  
  
 The observation of the youth  
 Will not fade away  
 It is like fire on the bone  
 Which kindles the heart  
 To let it burn about Africa.  
  
 What is expected is actions  
 From the lovers of the nation  
 On to victory! Your last line of defense  
 On to victory! Youth league!'

The significance of this poem is its explicit demonstration of Jolobe's support for the Africanist ideology, which gave impetus in the early 40s to the founding of ANCYL.

At the 1943 Annual Conference of the ANC, the then president, Dr Xuma, in his presidential address, included a call to youth and women which resulted in the adoption of a resolution to establish the Youth League and the Women's League. In 1944, the Youth League was formally established, with Anton Lembede elected as first president. A manifesto and constitution were endorsed, which were followed in 1948 by the 'Basic Policy' document (Karis and Carter 1973, 102–107).

Jolobe's poem in many respects resembles the 'Policy of the Congress Youth League' which is contained in an article by Lembede, submitted to *Inkundla yaBantu* in May 1946 (ibid, 317). The first principle of that policy is that 'Africa is a blackman's country, and Africans are the natives of Africa'. Jolobe's two opening lines identify his objects of praise as *umlisela weAfrika* ('Male youth of Africa') and *umthinjana weSizwe* ('female youth of the nation'). The policy elaborates

that Africans have inhabited Africa, their motherland, since time immemorial and that Africa belongs to them. Jolobe's objects of praise are *abantwana bothuthu*' (indigenous children) who, with their actions, lay claim to the land of their birth (motherland, in terms of the policy). Jolobe states that the young people who are the vanguard of the organisation (*ookhala beliduli*) envisioned the freedom of the African people (*Afikelwe ngumbono wenkululeko yomntu wase-Afrika*). The policy of the Youth League stated that 'the divine destiny of the African people is national freedom'. It argued that as a result of educational and industrial colour bars, young African men and women were converted into juvenile delinquents, and proposed that national freedom is the 'panacea' for all ills. Jolobe notes that the youth's vision is for freedom 'exactly in our time' (*kanye ngexesha lethu*). This closing line of the second stanza is the closing line of the policy document, which was presented as the motto of the Congress Youth League (CYC), i.e. the phrase 'Freedom in our lifetime' (ibid, 102–117).

Jolobe's poem, which was not published in the anthology aimed at school learners and students, exposes how censorship has deprived South Africa of a rich cultural heritage. The poem was not published probably because the organic intellectuals of the segregationist regime censored the poems or the entire text.

### Jolobe's influence on younger revolutionary orators

Sobukwe, the first president of the Pan African Congress (PAC) and one of the great orators and advocates of Africanism, delivered an address at the Basutoland Congress Party in Lesotho in 1957 in which he quoted a few verses from one of Jolobe's poems, saying that they 'sum up most handsomely the spirit that urges us on':

*Apho igazi lenu lithe lathontsela khona,  
Komila intyatyambo evumba limnandi,  
Eliya kuthwalwa ngamaphiko empepho,  
Zithi zonk'izizwe zilirogole.*

'Wherever your blood has dropped,  
Will blossom a flower of exceeding sweetness,  
Whose scent will be carried on by the wings of the air  
And all the nations will inhale it.'

I argue that Sobukwe's distinctive and recurring motif of blood which waters the seed that produces the plant from which a flower of exceeding sweetness blossoms, demonstrates the interface between Jolobe's written poetry and Sobukwe's political oratory.

## CONCLUSION

The article has highlighted the significance of an interdisciplinary approach in the study of African oral literature. Contrary to Havelock's (1986, 35) view, it finds the meeting of oral and written cultures not to be an instance of 'cross-cultural collision'. Rather, it demonstrates the mutual relationship between the oral and the written, and how these complement and supplement each other. The political music and oratory of Makeba, Calata, Sobukwe and Mahlangu is evidence of this observation. In his preface to *The interface between the written and the oral*, Goody (1987, ix) asserts that '[t]here is the interface of written and oral traditions in societies that employ writing to varying degrees in various contexts'. IsiXhosa speakers are an example of the abovementioned societies.

The article has furthermore exposed that the written can be an inspiration for the production of other oral forms. Collaborations with ethnomusicologists and students of oratory, the art of public speaking or 'the power to speak well' (Saunders 1970, 8) can develop the point further. The article has also demonstrated that oral literature is also not immune from ideology, as it has been used as a medium for diffusing the Africanist ideology. Mqhayi and Jolobe therefore served as organic intellectuals who spread the ANC's ideology of Africanism. It is hoped that the aural evidence submitted here will assist in our understanding of such oral discourse.

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- Mandela's encounter with Mqhayi is narrated by Mandela during the ten-day special broadcast after the death of Mandela. The SABC, on Thursday December 4, 2014, handed over the archive material to the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF). See <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>