

The Sociological Imagination of

S.E.K. Mqhayi

Towards an African Sociology

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

What areas of social life do our existing social theories allow us to understand, and what areas of society leave us baffled, unsettled and unable to respond? This paper will argue that we are in need of new interpretive tools to allow us to understand the areas of our social world that have previously been excluded from academic view by our colonial and apartheid history, and even by progressive liberal and Marxist responses to apartheid. By first surveying the intellectual history of sociology's emergence as a discipline and its formations in South Africa, I will argue that we are unable to effectively think about large areas of the African cultural and social world within our society.

In search of alternatives this paper will explore the work of the prolific early 20th c. intellectual, S.E.K. Mqhayi. Mqhayi was a product of the complex social hybridity of his time, but oriented this hybridity towards amaXhosa and African people. By looking at his various mediums of writing I will argue that Mqhayi offers powerful insight into the complexities of the changing social world of his time and that his methodologies—so different from those of academic sociology—give us powerful insights into an African tradition which can revitalise contemporary social inquiry.

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Introduction

The social world grows increasingly complex in South Africa, or perhaps to say it better; it has always been intensely complex, but our awareness of the complexities grows. As the layers of social separation ingrained into South African society slowly erode we come to realise that there are whole worlds which we have previously been unaware of, or have been happy to relegate to the bin of ‘not my problem’.

The sociologist in South Africa sees a radically different society than what was visible 20 years ago. This is due less to newly created problems (though these too proliferate) and more to the fact that our eyes are slowly opening to what has, until now, remained invisible to the frame of sociological questioning, at least in the academy. We remain confused and silent when initiates die or are maimed during circumcision ceremonies, knowing neither how to respect the social importance of the traditions nor how to advocate for meaningful social change. What do we think when our president proclaims his party will rule until Jesus returns, or marries six wives? How do we understand the mindset of those who bare their buttocks – protesting against a lack of services, or those who throw poo at the clean city spaces? Maybe we snigger dismissively at the proliferation of fliers promising to bring back a dead loved one or increase the size of someone’s manhood. But when, in a high profile political court case, it is claimed that striking miners are being guided by *inyanga* and using *muti* to protect themselves from police bullets, it is evident that so-called ‘traditions’ are deeply embroiled in the complexities of our social, political and judicial life. These sites are shocking disruptions of our existing interpretive framework, but they point to something less scandalous and more profound: most South Africans live in a complex, rich, and meaningful social worlds which our intellectual traditions give us no access to.

This paper will argue that sociological theory is profoundly unable to understand broad swathes of South African life, let alone provide insight or wisdom. This is because we have inherited a narrow focus tailored to the social questions either of another place, or trained to equip the ruling elites with the

tools of social control. It is clear that we must develop a sociology that will help us make sense of this 'new' world in a way that is meaningful and relevant for people.

In search of such an 'African Sociology', this paper will turn to one historic figure who sought out just the kinds of social insights we are missing: This paper will seek to explore the sociological imagination of S.E.K. Mqhayi, arguably the most prolific literary figure of the late 19th and early 20th Century in the black world in South Africa.

Outline

This paper proceeds in three conjoining parts. The first chapter lays out a detailed history of the intellectual traditions and methodological trends that have defined sociology, as well as tracing our own unique South African sociological tradition. This chapter aims to demonstrate some of the disciplinary trends which actively *disable* us from thinking about the unique social formations that are emerging in South Africa today. In response to these absences, the chapter concludes by considering the need for an 'African' sociology and where we might turn in order to pursue alternatives to develop such a sociology.

The second chapter highlights S.E.K. Mqhayi as one thinker who provides an alternative intellectual approach to the social world. This chapter highlights that Mqhayi offers us a pivot point between Western and South African knowledge systems because he himself is a profoundly hybrid character, drawing his intellectual influence from both of these worlds. However, this hybridity is markedly different from many other African intellectuals. By contrasting Mqhayi's approach with that of the famous Tiyo Soga, this chapter highlights that Mqhayi does not aim to transform the Western system from within, as many other leading intellectuals do. Instead, Mqhayi orients his contribution towards his fellow Africans. In doing so he transforms Western intellectual tools into new hybrid forms. He melds together Western and African intellectual methodologies in order to understand the complex social change which surrounds him and shares these social insights with other amaXhosa and Africans in a

range of mediums. In doing so, he becomes a renowned public intellectual who inspires African people countrywide.

In the third chapter, I argue that Mqhayi is so influential in his time because his work allows Africans caught up in disconcerting social change to make sense of the changing world and still maintain a sense of identity. In doing so he engages in what C. Wright Mills has famously called the “sociological imagination”. Mqhayi does this by weaving together an analysis of macro change at the historic level with micro change at the personal level. This chapter follows a close analysis of Mqhayi’s methodologies, seeking to understand the various tools he employs in his sociological imagination. It engages in an in-depth analysis of his use of history and biography and also highlights the sociological importance of neglected mediums such as *izibongo* (praise poems) and novels. These various mediums serve as sources of sociological insight and theory within the African intellectual traditions in South Africa. A close study of Mqhayi thus opens up access to already existing African intellectual traditions which have been neglected as well as highlights a range of alternate methodologies which are marginalized in the Western sociological tradition. I argue, therefore, that Mqhayi should be looked upon as a founding father, forming and transforming modes of response to social change in an African intellectual tradition. His work, as well as the work of many other African thinkers, offers us an alternate intellectual history, with a plethora of insights and theories that have yet to be uncovered.

Methodological Caution: on Language and Context

Mqhayi wrote all of his important work in isiXhosa. This in itself was a bold and unconventional move which shall be discussed later. It does, however, create problems for the analysis of such texts, especially when the methodology this paper employs is a close textual analysis of his writings. As an English speaker, I must primarily point out that I thus engage with Mqhayi’s work through the lens of his translators. The collection of Mqhayi’s writings which provide the primary source of his work has been

carefully and meticulously translated by Jeff Opland and four co-translators with the express purpose of making Mqhayi available to a larger audience. They help to minimize the interpretive distance from the original work by furnishing the text with a number of notes which highlight context and important translating choices. This enables the English reader to gain a greater understanding the implicit meanings in the text.

Furthermore, as an interpreter of a 19th c. Xhosa writer, I am distanced not only by language, but also by the foreign context—both historic and cultural. I have aimed to mitigate misunderstandings in a number of ways, drawing on my undergraduate and graduate training in literature which has given me an apprenticeship in negotiating textual interpretation. I have aimed to cross-reference sections of Mqhayi with other similar sections to establish trends in his work rather than relying on individual passages alone. I have engaged in a wide range of secondary readings which elucidate the both the historic and cultural context. Finally, I have been able to check my interpretations with my supervisor, Prof. Xolela Mangcu, a first language Xhosa speaker, as well as an expert on thinkers of this time period. Such a project, which extends beyond my own historic and cultural context, always holds interpretive risks, and while I have aimed to mitigate such risk, they are not completely effaced. However, the risk seems both necessary, and worth the reward: African thinkers have been largely neglected in South African social theory, and are desperately in need of unearthing. I hope that future interest in these thinkers will spur on other academics to provide whatever interpretive lenses I may lack.

Chapter 1: Whose Sociology?

Introduction

Before turning to S.E.K Mqhayi as a possible source for an African sociology, we must consider the existing trends in social thought and the genealogies which instantiate these dominant focal points, ideas and methodologies. What do we focus our social investigations on today? Why do we have this focus? Does the tool kit of ideas we have allow us to understand our current social moment? We can only consider what Mqhayi might have to offer to South African sociology if we are cognizant of what is missing in the current toolkit for social thought.

To operate within the discipline of sociology offers both a substantive and a methodological focusing of thought. The discipline gains its coherence from a history of ideas that offer a set of boundaries to narrow what questions can be asked and how one ought to approach answering them. As we seek to understand and act in our own society, we must negotiate this tradition and discover how this discipline helps us to understand our own social context.

The classic texts of social theory are classics for a reason. Sociologists have often turned to the work of a set of 19th and 20th century social thinkers for inspiration and guidance in interpreting the social world. This mark of enduring genius is astounding. What power these thinkers have that they continue to ignite fresh and creative reflection on the world today! This paper by no means aims to detract from the achievements or continued importance of such inspirational thinkers. However, if we are to pursue an African sociology, the usefulness of the tradition of social theory must be contextualized. What we must always be aware of is that the history of thought we inherit has the potential to highlight some aspects of the social world as valid objects of study and at the same time must naturally neglect other areas. This chapter will seek to investigate some of the dominant trends in social theory to understand the

boundaries of sociology in South Africa today. I hope to look at some of the factors that have made certain areas the common focus in South African sociology and argue that there are vital areas of society which we are today at risk of neglecting.

The Historical Shaping of Sociology

The Divergence of Sociology and History

When we look back to the founding fathers of sociology we remember men who sought to understand and interpret society in the midst of the massive upheaval in the social order of their time. They sought to understand and explain new social formations that developed due to a change in the economic, social and political order, a change that we today call the rise of modernity in Europe. Durkheim explain change as a movement from 'mechanical solidarity' to 'organic solidarity', Weber saw a move from 'substantive rationality' to 'instrumental rationality', Marx explained it as the movement from feudalism to capitalism, Tönnies saw a change from 'gemeinschaft' to 'gesellschaft' and various other theorists offered their own definitions of social change (c.f. Inglis and Thorpe, Ch1, p.p. 13-37). Those we remember as the founding fathers all sought to develop theoretical tools to understand the change in their own time.

These early sociological thinkers all shared a 'historical sensibility': they were deeply aware of social change and they developed new categories and tools to explain the new social formations that they perceived. They saw the sociologist's role as understanding the structure and development of society which were understood as different from previous historical epochs (Burke 1992, p.2). However, they employed a historical methodology to different extents. Karl Marx, under the influence of both Hegel and the German historicists, was fully committed to a historical method in his work, expressed in his historic materialism. Durkheim was exemplary of the opposite trend. Following Auguste Comte and

drawing on the ideals of 'science' and 'rationality', Durkheim was committed to the scientific method as the most important methodological tools for social research. Weber attempted to carve out a middle ground between these alternate impulses. He aimed to define a distinct methodology that offers a relation between the externalizing, scientific impulse of positivism and the internalizing, 'spiritual' impulse of idealism. Stuart Hughes argues that "Weber's goal was to establish a 'middle' level of empirically derived conceptualisation: he was trying to introduce conceptual rigor into a tradition where either intuition or a naive concern for the 'facts' had hitherto ruled unchallenged." (1974, p.p.302-303)

What we see therefore is that the founding sociologists clearly had a historic sensibility, even if they did not all draw on a historic methodology. While the positivists represent the beginning of a break with a historic methodology, the generation after Durkheim and Weber (who died in 1917 and 1920 respectively) moved further away from the historic method and away from even a sensitivity to social change.

Peter Burke (1992, p.11-14) provides a number of reasons for this divergence of history and sociology.

Primarily, Burke follows how changing methodologies led to a divergence in the social sciences.

Economists were turning to statistical data of the past (rather than the narrative focus on politics, individuals and chronology used by historians) or neglected the past altogether and moved towards 'pure' economic theory based on mathematical models. Psychologists "abandoned the library for the laboratory" (Burke 1992, p.12) as they turned to focus on new experimental methods that could not be applied to the past. Social Anthropologist moved away from accounts written by travellers, missionaries and historians and began to prioritize fieldwork as the standard of research.

Following this same trend, sociologists also developed new methodologies that led away from historical research. The University of Chicago—the first sociology department in the United States—turned to focus on contemporary society, specifically their own city, using anthropological methods of observation

to study “its slums, ghettos, immigrants, gangs, hobos and so on” (ibid). Others pioneered the questionnaire along with selective interviewing as an approach to understand the social world and from these beginnings Burke notes that “[s]urvey research became the backbone of American sociology” (ibid).

There are many factors that aided this methodological divergence. I will focus on those that pertain to sociology and history. Firstly, the “centre of gravity” (Burke 1992, p.13) of sociology shifted from Europe to America. Alvin Gouldner (to whom I shall return) argues that, despite its origins in Europe, sociology first successfully achieved institutionalisation in America and in the Soviet Union (1971, p.20). Burke notes that in America, and specifically in Chicago, the past was far less visible than in Western Europe, and therefore appeared “largely irrelevant to an understanding of how people came to do what they did” (Hawthorn [1976] in Burke 1992, p.13)¹. Secondly, the increased professionalization of the different social science disciplines created unique and separate associations and journals (Burke 1992, p.13). Each discipline sought to carve out and defend its own academic space and disciplinary independence was necessary to form new disciplinary identities (ibid). This resulted in a separation and specialisation within disciplines, and practitioners naturally came to be exposed to a narrower scope of interests. Thirdly, increased methodological rigour also contributed to an inability of disciplines to cross-pollinate. Alongside the increased adoption of survey research in sociology, historians were moving towards a more ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ approach using documentary research which resulted in a narrowing scope of what could be studied (Burke 1992, p.p.6-7). Thus, not only did sociology move away from history, but what was acceptable as ‘scientific’ history became more distant from sociological questions. Finally, the rise of functionalism offered a whole new basis for considering the fundamental mechanism of society. Previously social institutions were considered using a historical idiom, applying terms such as

¹ For early discussions of the historic memory in America see De Tocqueville (1945, [1840]) and Van Wyck Brooks (1993, [1918])

“diffusion’, ‘imitation’ or ‘evolution’” (Burke 1992, p.13). However, developments in physics and biology inspired the new idiomatic possibility of thinking about society and institutions in terms of “the contribution of each element to the maintenance of the whole structure.” (ibid) This idiom facilitated the rise of functionalism which sought to understand the relation of different social elements to each other in a “system of equilibrium” (ibid). This approach clearly focuses on the complex interrelationships in the present rather than the effects of the past.

Ultimately these resulted in sociology shifting away from both a historical methodology and even the historical sensibility that makes possible understandings of social change over time. Instead the intellectual focus was dominated by what Norbert Elias called “the retreat of sociology into the present” (in Burke 1992, p.12). This focus on the present has aided in shaping and directing the kinds of questions that are ‘valid’ for sociological research.

Sociology and Social Control

A second area which has shaped the discipline is the way sociological knowledge has been used.

According to Zygmunt Bauman “[t]he shape of a human science depends ... on the type of functional demand it meets” (1969, p.7). What functional demand has sociology met historically and how has this shaped its focus? Bauman takes up the analysis of the role of the intellectual in the rise of modernity in his work *In Interpreters and Legislators* (1987). He argues that intellectual knowledge production was instrumental in creating the state as a site of centralised power in the 18th Century. In the feudal system decentralization had been the primary mode of governance. Centralization and increasing control by a central state body was achieved through implementing state-wide policies developed by intellectuals of the time and implemented by ruling monarchs. This relationship created an elitism that excluded the ‘unenlightened masses’ from governance of their own lives. The language of ‘Passion’ and ‘Reason’ was used to allow a few ‘rational’ elites to dictate best practice to the ‘passionate’ masses who had to be

controlled to facilitate the creation of an orderly and stable society. This relation between intellectuals and rulers is underlined in the appearance of 'enlightened despotism', where Enlightenment thinkers were welcomed into the courts by some monarchs of the time in order to help reform policy to build stronger nation states. Here we see the first stages of a union between intellectuals and the state in the aim of achieving social control.

From its earliest instantiation, sociology has always shared in this trend of social control. The earliest form of sociology, named 'ideology' by the French thinkers who created it, was intended to extend science to the social world for the purpose of social control:

Like physics or chemistry, ideology was to be an instrument of mastery over its objects. ... Society and its members were perceived by the ideologists as, first and foremost, an object for purposeful action; as material which ought to be studied like any other material one wishes to employ in constructing desirable designs. ... The project of ideology was a manifesto proclaiming more than anything else that the function of administering a civilised, orderly and happy society belongs naturally to scientifically trained professionals. (Bauman 1987, p.p.101-3)

Auguste Comte followed directly from this line of ideologists and 30 years after the creation of ideology, he renamed this new science 'sociology' (Bauman 1987, p.104). What we see here is that the positivistic trend in sociology emerges out of the Enlightenment belief that the greatest intellectuals can use a science of society to understand the first principles of human nature and thus can give to the controlling elite the 'right pattern' for society.

As mentioned above, sociology was instantiated in Western Europe, but was first institutionalised in the United States and the USSR. While the elites in these two countries had different visions for the ideal society, they both adapted sociology with the aim of progressing towards these social ideals (Gouldner 1971, p.20-21). Thus, one brand of sociology—the Marxist variety—arose in coalition with the rise of the Soviet Union, the other kind—'Academic sociology'—flourished in a union with the American State. While Marxist sociology was carried by a group of "unattached intelligentsia, by political groups and

parties oriented to lower strata groups” and sought out social revolution that displaced ‘bourgeois’ social organization, Academic sociology was developed by academics “oriented towards the established middle class, and who sought pragmatically to *reform rather than systematically to rebel against the status quo*” (Gouldner 1971, p.20) [My emphasis]. This focus on reform highlights that the knowledge produced by Academic sociologists follows the same motives (if not the method) of the positivist ideologists/sociologists, seeking mastery over the social world for the implementation of ‘better’ systems. Gouldner notes that “[t]he tremendous growth of Sociology in the United States is one manifestation of the continuing efforts of American culture to explore, to cope with and to control its changing environment.” (1971, p.22) The intellectuals do the exploring and learning and the state does the coping and controlling. Thus, Gouldner argues that his era is the era of sociology “largely because it is the era of the Welfare State” (1971, p.23)

Bauman, in his essay “Modern Times, Modern Marxism” (1969), argues that the kinds of questions asked have a profound influences on the kinds of methods pursued and the kinds of answers produced. Bauman believes that when the social sciences are used to try to control society the questions that are focused on and the methods used can trend towards a dangerous implementation of the social sciences. His analysis is insightful, and thus I quote at length:

In terms of institutional societal integration our epoch is one of large-scale organisations. The main problem these organisations deal with is the manageability of their units, e.g., the human beings who perform the roles ascribed to them due to their positions in the organisational structure. The main instrumental values these organisations cherish are the set of manageable stimuli assuring the highest probability of achieving the expected response. ... [A]ny large-scale organisation is interested solely in those factors which are at the same time manageable ... and evoke more or less uniform, repetitive and therefore predictable response. ... This interest, which is structurally and functionally determined, shapes in its turn the peculiarly organisational image of the human world. The interest and significance of human beings consist in their interest and significance for managerial purposes. ... Managerial thinking is technical thinking. The kind of human science managers stimulate intellectually and sponsor financially is technical science. (pp. 3-4)

Sociology that seeks to meet these “managerial” needs is one that orients itself to the interests of the elites. In this situation, sociologists produce solutions that allow governing/managing elites to maintain control over the functioning of their specific managerial unit. It is clear that this kind of sociology is interested in social stability and seeks to maximize social control. In this formulation, social change is either something that is ignored, or is something that is actively resisted because it introduces unknown and uncontrollable elements into a ‘closed system’.

As the focus of sociology shifted from Europe to the emerging states of America and the USSR, so sociology shifted from its focus away from newly emerging forms of social organisation (focused on by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, etc.) and took up a much greater “managerial” focus because of sociology’s close involvement with the state. This trend away from sociology as a response to social change and towards an emphasis on social stability arguably finds its peak in the figure of Talcott Parsons who dominated American sociology from the post-World War II period, until the 1970’s. Methodologically, Parsons was one of the most high profile advocates of a functionalist approach, which, as argued above, turns away from history in its understanding of society. I will now briefly consider Parsons’ work as indicative of a sociology that not only abandons a historical methodology but has lost its historical sensibility and therefore ignores social change.

Talcott Parsons and Managerial Questions

Bauman explicitly names Parsons as one who is using ‘global theory’ to solve “managerial-type problems” (1969, p.p.9-10) and Parsons is accused by ‘critical’ sociologists of fulfilling a managerial role in his development of a social structure which emphasises and seeks to maintain an orderly and stable society.

C. Wright Mills summarises sections of Parsons’ *The Social System* (somewhat disparagingly), and in doing so, usefully highlights key evidence of Parsons’ managerial thinking:

[I]n other words: When people share the same values, they tend to behave in accordance with the way they expect one another to behave. Moreover, they often treat such conformity as a very good thing – even when it seems to go against their immediate interests. ... [T]hese shared values ... become part of the personality itself. As such, they bind a society together, for what is socially expected becomes individually needed. (1959, p.39)

Shortly after this, in summarizing the whole book he notes Parsons' conception of the 'social equilibrium' created by shared values:

There are two major ways by which social equilibrium is maintained, and by which – should either or both fail – disequilibrium results. The first is 'socialization', all the ways by which a newborn individual is made into a social person. ... [T]he second is 'social control', by which I mean ways of keeping people in line and by which they keep themselves in line. By 'line' of course, I refer to whatever action is typically expected and approved in the social system. ... *The first problem of maintaining social equilibrium is to make people want to do what is required and expected of them. That failing, the second problem is to adopt other means to keep them in line.* (p.p. 40-1) [My emphasis]

In these two brief summaries, we can see clearly that Parsons' concern lies in the management and maintenance of stable social order. These are questions relevant to managerial control and not ones that arise in the lived experience of individuals' lives. The final highlighted portion of the quote shows clearly that, for Parsons, social equilibrium is something which ought to be maintained. This maintenance ensures that people act in an expected way, in conformity with a predictable system². This emphasis on conformity and expectation are the very elements that Bauman highlights as the chief concern of managerial thinking.

For Mills, this account of society is problematic because it neglects a consideration of power. Mills shows that Parsons' account of a 'value hierarchy' naturalises the social norms which are often enforced by institutional domination. Parsons' account of a self-stabilizing system does not allow for social resistance and change either: "the idea of conflict cannot effectively be formulated. Structural antagonism, large-scale revolts, revolution – they cannot be imagined." (1959, p.52). Thus, Parsons'

² For a critique of this conformity see Gouldner's "Metaphysical Pathos and the Theory of Bureaucracy" (1955) as well as Mills' critique of Parsons in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959, Ch 3)

account, which validates social conformity—either by means of self-sanctioning ideology or by means of stabilizing social structures which enforce order, is ignorant of the way it sanctions the maintenance of the power of the ruling class. Mills notes that “[a]mong the means of power that now prevail is the power to manage and manipulate the consent of men.” (p.50) It would seem that Parsons conception of social equilibrium is a theory that validates just such power to control people’s wants and needs.

Conclusion

What is clear is that there are multiple trends in sociological theory. While there has always been a trend in the scientific study of society towards social control, those we see as founding the discipline (Marx, Weber, Durkheim and their generation) had a definite historical sensibility which sought to understand the social change of their time. However, for both methodological reasons as well as particular managerial application by both the state and other large organisation, there has been a move away from such analysis of social change and of history. This trend, exemplified in the work of Parsons, is important in the South African context. Parsons is a fundamental figure in the founding of South African sociology, and managerial sociology has been in league with the state for much of South Africa’s sociological history. Let us now move to consider sociology’s history in South Africa.

An Intellectual History of South African Sociology

South African sociology has its own unique history which shapes our intellectual focus today. In order to understand our own disciplinary norms we must ask: What factors have shaped the kinds of sociology practiced in South Africa and how has this trajectory shaped the kinds of questions we ask, and the methods we use to find the answers? To answer these questions I will now turn to a history of South African sociology.

Sociology from the 1920's-1960's

Sociological courses first appeared in South Africa in the early 1900s. Groenewald (1984) notes that in 1919 the Association for the Advancement of Science passed a resolution “calling for the systematic ethnographic, philological, anthropological and sociological study of the indigenous people of South Africa” with the purpose “both to advance science and to assist those concerned with the administration of the indigenous inhabitants” (summarised by Jubber 1983, p.51). This focus meant that early sociology courses were often taught in connection with non-sociology departments, most often with anthropology (ibid). The first Professor of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town was the famous Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown who was appointed in 1921. Jubber notes that because he had near total control over the department and was educated in and helped to formulate the dominant functionalist tradition “it could be argued that the early 'context' of social anthropology was an amalgam of South African, English and European influences” directed by “a scholar whose thought was shaped by the conservative forces of his time” (p.52). These courses were first instantiated in order to gain knowledge to deal with the supposed ‘native problem’. Here begins a trend where sociological tools are employed to allow administrators deal with ‘managerial’ problems and we can see that from its beginnings sociology was bound up in the need for knowledge acquisition to solve governance challenges.

However, the social inquiry that was to give birth to sociology in its own right was not this anthropological trend, but instead questions that emerged from social work. In the 1920s and 30s university courses and research in the area of social work grew in response to a growing social intervention instituted by the government (Webster 2004, p.28). This social policy work emerged as the government sought to intervene in issues such as the “‘poor white problem’, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and mounting rates of social pathologies” (Jubber 1983, p.52). This welfare focus is mirrored in the creation of the government department for Social Welfare in 1936. Sociology existed to

serve this welfare need and social work drew on sociological tools and empirical social research methods in order to create and justify social policies.

This linkage between government and social work is well illustrated in Hendrik Verwoerd – the Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 until his assassination in 1966 and known as the “architect of apartheid” (e.g. Coombes 2003, p.22). Before his political career he was appointed as the first professor of sociology in South Africa at Stellenbosch University’s department of Sociology and Social work (Jubber 1983, p.52). His work focused on the ‘poor white problem’ during the economic struggles of the great depression. Jubber argues that Verwoerd won much political impetus from his work in this sphere, as the majority of the poor whites at this time were Afrikaners, and Jubber sees this work as part of a bigger move to “weld all Afrikaners into a potent political force in order to seize power in the name of the Afrikaner volk” (1983, p.52). His social work won him favour with poor Afrikaners and his sociological and psychological training offered him political credibility because it added “an element of scientific respectability and validity to his proposed solutions to the race problem” (ibid). In another paper (2007), Jubber argues that sociological theorizing played a large part in the justification of the government’s creation of apartheid policies, influenced specifically by sociologists like Geoffrey Cronje, who was closely associated, both intellectually and personally, with Verwoerd and other apartheid politicians (p.528-531). In Verwoerd we can see a profound expression of how a ‘managerial’ sociological framework was put to work to allow a conservative approach to society. Indeed Jubber notes that “[t]he Apartheid era that commenced in 1948 drew many social scientists at the Afrikaner universities and in state research bodies into conducting research intended to promote the implementation of Apartheid policies” (2007, p.531). Here we see sociology providing the knowledge for social control and government deploying this knowledge for conservative ends to maintain social stability.

Sociology continued in this mode of “policy sociology” (Webster 2004, p.28) until the 1950’s when it began to increasingly form an identity of its own right. Webster notes that Parsons’ theoretical work was vital in this break away from social work, and it was the increased theoretical sophistication offered by the incorporation of Parsonian structural functionalism that gave sociology a unique autonomy (ibid). One of the most influential figures of this era was S.P. Cilliers who played a vital role in ushering in this theoretical paradigm after studying under Parsons at Harvard (Jubber 2007). Groenewald argues that the publication of *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*—co-authored by Cilliers and Dian Joubert, and drawing on Parsons’ Action Theory as an interpretive framework—was widely influential in the Afrikaans-medium universities and a corner stone of what might be a ‘Stellenbosch school’ of sociology in South Africa (2013, p.91). Under this new paradigm, sociology’s focus broadened to include questions of “social stratification, class difference, intergroup relations, family life, social change, ethnic relations, urbanisation and rural-urban migration” with the last two of these being the most dominant (Jubber 2007, p.531). These areas are all indicative of a combination of South African problems with a Parsonian approach. Groenewald notes that in Parson’s theory “the social system of a small group such as a family faces exactly the same logical exigencies as that of a community, an organisation or a full-scale society: they all have to overcome constant threats to their continued equilibrium and existence.” (2013, p.92) Through Parsons, this school focused on the creation of social equilibrium³. What this new theoretical lens did allow for was the justification of sociology departments separate from social work, and independent departments of sociology began to form. By the 60’s all sociology departments had split with social work, for the first time offering sociology a sphere of its own (Webster 2004).

³ The Parsonian emphasis on ‘Values’ later offered sociologists like Joubert a site for critique against apartheid. Groenewald highlights how Dian Joubert’s emphasis on values led him to a “measured indignation” against the state and social critique of apartheid (Groenewald 2013, p.93). Groenewald, however, notes that this normative intervention came from a partial break with “the Parsonian emphasis on stability and order and the role of values in it” (ibid).

This history fits significantly into the model of managerial sociology discussed above. Sociological tools are used to control and shape society, specifically by a state trying to institute a welfare system. When a more theoretical framework is included in this sociology it is the conservative framework of Parsons, well suited to a political system that is trying to create and maintain social control and stability while trying to promote the dominance of a specific set of social values. Indeed, Jubber argues that sociology departments, once separated from social work, “were valuable aids to the state and industry. They provided a steady stream of useful graduates and information while propagating the conservative ideology that is functionalism” (1983, p.53). Here Parson’s system suits the needs of the apartheid architects trying to create a stable social order, and conveniently excluded the self-critical questions about power and social domination.

Parsons was not the only theoretical influence in South African sociology. Seekings (2009) notes that between 1949 and the early 1970’s there was a Weberian framework of analysis at work in the intellectual engagements of some scholars. Much of this approach entered South African scholarship through the ‘caste-class’ school of thought pioneered in America by W. Lloyd Warner (e.g. Warner 1936, see Seekings 2009 for more). This approach considered social stratification not only through economic terms of class as Marxism does, but also incorporated notions of social honour or prestige and argued that ‘race’ in South Africa served to divide people into social ‘castes’. While there was mobility of social status within a ‘caste’ group (i.e. while each caste comprises different economic and status classes) racial distinctions functioned as a definitive break between the castes, where people could not traverse either upward or downward in social mobility. Seekings argues that this approach, and the Weberian framework in general, offers useful tools in South Africa today. Separate from its theoretical value or usefulness, however, we can understand this Weberian camp politically: as developed by white liberals (opposed to the functionalism of the conservatives) seeking social reformation (rather than the revolution of the later Marxists). This research suggests that racial castes provided untraversable

barriers to an individual's rise or fall—a profoundly anti-liberal situation—and focuses on the African middle class (prevented from rising by both law and social stigma), the class that “provided the natural allies for liberal or social democratic white opponents of apartheid, whose opposition to racial discrimination stopped short of a commitment to socialism or communism” (Seekings 2009, p.871).

1970's – 1990's

While there is a stream of Weberian scholarship, Webster (2004) notes that in the two dominant sociological associations, the 'Afrikaner Sociology' of the whites only South African Sociological Association (SASA) and the 'oppositional sociology'⁴ of the non-racial Southern African Sociological Association (ASSA) both held primarily to a structural functionalist approach.

However, by the 70's a new mode of sociology was emerging. Webster argues that a new generation of sociologists in South Africa, influenced by the rise of the New Left in America, were able to challenge the dominance of the structural functionalist approach (2004, p.30). Webster names this a 'critical' sociology (ibid). Jubber, more explicitly and in more detail, considers this a rise of a Marxist approach:

Though some were slow to recognize it, it is now widely accepted that by the late 1970s Marxism had made great headway into the teaching and research programmes of some departments at the white English-medium universities. Something analogous to a Kuhnian "scientific revolution" had taken place. This revolution forced many members of these departments to read Marxist literature for the first time and to offer courses informed by Marxism. By the early 1980s a significant proportion of staff members could be classified as "Marxist" or something closely approximating this. (Jubber 1983, p.54)

Marxism grew rapidly in the historically white universities (HWUs) and Hendricks argues that sociology was an intellectual leader “at the forefront of a materialist broadside which challenged the intellectual hegemony of the liberal school in South Africa in the late 1960's and early 1970's and its connections with the rising anti-apartheid movement were often very intimate.” (2006, p.86) This shift was due to

⁴ Webster draws these terms from Crothers (1998)

political as much as intellectual influences. Intellectually, Jubber argues that the broad adoption of Marxist approaches in England had a great impact on the intellectual trends of English speaking universities in South Africa (1983, p58). According to Seekings, the demise of Weberian analysis and the rise of Marxism was political as much as intellectual: the growth of independent trade unions, as well as intellectuals linked to the exiled Communist Party helped promote Marxism. Meanwhile “a genuine liberal political opposition remained very weak.” (Seekings 2009, p.880) Furthermore, the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement created a challenge for leftist whites. Originally, English speaking South African intellectuals were able to retreat to the political ideology of liberalism to find a shared political site to resist the increasing marginalisation of the ‘English’ identity under apartheid (Jubber 1983, p.61). In this milieu, white students took up American counter culture, emboldened by the global student revolts of the 60’s and 70’s. However, while white students drew on anti-establishment rhetoric, black students were facing the daily oppression of the apartheid state. Jubber says that black students “came to realize then that sympathetic whites were, in the main, only capable of conducting the struggle in words and as a hobby.” (ibid) Out of this realisation emerged the Black Consciousness Movement, which sought political autonomy for blacks, aiming to regain a sense of pride and self-worth which had been undermined by a century of oppression. The growth of Black Consciousness and the establishment of the South African Students’ Organisation in 1969 thus left white ‘leftist’ students in “political limbo” (ibid). Both liberal and radical students and intellectuals were now marginalised both from conservative white politics as well as radical black politics. In this context Marxism offered a non-racial explanation of oppression and therefore offered white leftists a way to narrate their own part in resisting apartheid oppression while simultaneously downplaying their potential complicity in the system of racial privilege. It must be noted that while academics at the historically white universities (HWU) were given a large degree of academic freedom, which allowed the rise of Marxism in opposition to the apartheid state, the situation at the historically black universities (HBU) was much more repressive. ‘Afrikaner’ sociology

was maintained at these universities through strict recruitment policies (Webster 2004, p.29, Jubber 1983, p.28). Balintulo argued that “[t]he recruitment of academic staff into these instruments of apartheid is carefully designed to burden the black students, especially in the humanities and social sciences, with the most reactionary products of the established Afrikaans medium universities” (in Jubber 1983, p53). An example of this repression is the case of Prof. Herbert Vilakazi—the first Professor of Sociology at the University of Transkei—who in the early 1980’s taught Marxist classes which attracted huge numbers of students, even from disciplines beyond the social sciences and the humanities (Webster 2004, p.29). The popularity of these classes drew the attention of the homeland government and he and Ms Thalele-Rivkin (a fellow Marxist sociologist) were fired (Jubber 1983, p.59). Subsequently the teaching of Marxism was publically condemned and banned, and academics teaching it at HBU’s were deported (ibid, Webster 2004, p.30).

While Marxism was repressed at HBUs, it nevertheless offered a shared utopian political project which facilitated the uniting of university academics and students at HWUs with social movements resisting apartheid. Thus Webster categorizes the period from the 1980’s until the end of apartheid as an era of public sociology, with university sociologists working closely with social movements (2004, p.30).

Webster argues that this mixing produced a “flowering of original sociology” (ibid) and Hendricks argues that “[t]here was a vibrance and relevance which animated the discipline and excited its students frequently into direct action against the apartheid regime” (2006, p.86)

Sitas argues that more was at work in this period than simply an imported academic Marxism. For him

[w]hat started from the early 1970s onwards through marginal and harassed groupings of left intellectuals, white and black, was a social discourse which had a normative and political foundation; it was such a formation that provided the culture levers to prize open departments and disciplinary fields of inquiry. And such a formation contained different narratives of emancipation and was animated by egalitarian norms. (1997, p.13)

What was important about this period was that a host of mostly oral debates were going on in great depth both inside and outside the university,

[i]n short, the formation linked as it was to a sense [of] emancipation was marked by a cross-disciplinary ethos where history, sociology, philosophy, politics and so on, interacted through various versions of historical materialism and critical social science to find answers to pressing problems. (Sitas 1997, p.14)

Sociology was influenced by this “hybrid formation” (Sitas 1997, p.16), and the numerous debates led to a number of sociologists publishing works that engaged with a “social science of liberation” (ibid). While Sitas argues that the broader hybrid discussions influenced these works, the publications he cites primarily relate to Marxist interpretations of capitalism, political economy, labour, exploitation, etc., in South Africa. Sitas’ work, however, does remind us that local intellectuals were not simply influenced by a canon defined in the dominant academic centres of the West, but that there was a deeply debated local “intellectual formation” which influenced local thinkers (1997). The relative influence of ‘Euromerican’⁵ ideas to local ideas on sociology needs further analysis. For the purpose of this project, however, these thinkers were in local dialogue with each other in a series of ‘intellectual formations’ defined by the political struggle of the time. What were still neglected, however, were historical African voices drawing on knowledge systems alternate to dominant Western discourses. While these discussions may have been had by many different South Africans, white and black, the source of the utopian ideals were still broadly leftist, defined by ideas generated in leftist struggles through European history.⁶

⁵ I use the word ‘Euromerican’ here and elsewhere to broadly signify theoretical ideas developed in Europe and America, which arise in their own particular material and ideological contexts and which continue to shape imaginative possibilities today.

⁶ Mangcu outlines the emergence of what he calls a “Black Consciousness sociology” in a paper originally presented at Cornell University in 1993. However these BCM traditions developed separately from South African Academic sociology, and were never included in the canon.

1990's to the Present

Those who praise the public engagement of the 70's and 80's mourn a decline in sociology since the fall of apartheid. In 1997, Sitas insightfully investigated "the waning of sociology in South African". He first highlighted what others came to see as a trend. Webster, in 2004, sees an "erosion of a critical and public sociology" in favour of a return to a policy sociology which serves government and business. Hendricks (2006) argues that post-apartheid sociology is in "intellectual decline" and that "there has been a massive exodus of sociologists from academic departments into state departments or into lucrative consultancies providing social recipes to the government and big business" (2006, p.86). While all three scholars see the departure of intellectual talent from the university to positions of power and wealth in government or big business, Sitas (1997) notes a number of other factors. Firstly, the collapse of the Soviet Union puts leftist, and especially Marxists, in a difficult ideological position. As Sitas says "the collapse of a left hegemony internationally has shattered the confidence of what used to constitute an 'intellectual formation'" (p.16). Furthermore, where social questions used to emerge from a broader social dialogue among activists and social movements, now dominant questions emerge instead through wealthy policy structures—which highlights managerial questions for governing/administrating—or through international academic collaboration programmes "where questions are defined elsewhere" (p.17). Added to all of this, the professionalization of the different branches of the social sciences has led to an inability to fruitfully overlap, and has led to narrowing of disciplinary questions and literature (much as Burke analysed in the specialisation of the social sciences in Europe and America, as discussed above). These factors all lead to a privileging of the lucrative policy sociology—which seeks 'objective' answers devoid of normative 'ideology'—and a professional sociology which legitimates such sociology by ensuring the discipline looks scientific and thus offering authority and pedigree to the findings of policy sociology. Clearly even democratic South Africa has not been beyond the reach of 'managerial' sociology.

What is Missing

What is the purpose of recalling this history of sociology? This genealogy of thought reminds us that dominant ideas are always related to the ideas that come before them. Whether it is in conformity with previous ideas, an adaption of them, or a rebellion against them, ideas are socially shared throughout history in relation to each other. Finding ourselves, as we do, in a rich history of sociological thought, we are necessarily affected by the ideas that came before us. As argued above, sociology (formed, as it is, by a history of thought) offers a substantive and methodological focusing of ideas about society. This ultimately makes some questions available as legitimate sources of inquiry and leaves other questions out. What we must ask ourselves in the sociological discipline in South Africa is: what are we unable to conceive of or approach in understanding our society today? In what follows, I will consider how the intellectual history of sociology in South Africa *disables* us from thinking about our social experience today.

Three challenges emerge in our sociological history: an emphasis on top down managerial sociology in close association with the state, the loss of not only a historic methodology but of even a conception of historic social change, and a dependence on Euromerican theories to make sense of our own social world.

The combination of these factors has led to a number of problems with our social science. The vision for society has always been generated from the top down, taking its image from Euromerican conceptions of the ideal society, even during Marxist resistance to apartheid. While this top down control might always be considered problematic, it is especially so in South Africa. This is because the 'top' has been historically far removed from the materially experienced problems as well as the knowledge system of the 'bottom'. Without serious intervention, the social world we aim to create will be significantly removed from the knowledge system and needs of the people who it is forced onto.

Secondly, the lack of a historical sensibility and awareness of social change has led us to only draw on Euroamerican theory as the explanation of the emergence of new social forms in South Africa. This is not to undermine the concepts contained in past sociological traditions. Weber, Parsons, Marx, etc., all offer important insights that can be useful in understanding aspects of our society. However, these theories shed light only on those areas of South African life which look approximately like the rise of modernity in Europe. Thus Marxism might allow us to understand social factors of growth in mining or industry, and Weber might elucidate the increasing bureaucratization of the state, etc. However, these theories leave the complex nuances created by South Africa's own unique history un/under-explored. While there are local thinkers who respond to local problems, a lack of focus on our own social history leads us to continually abandon our locally developed traditions and adopt the latest, most fashionable Euroamerican thinker's theory (c.f. Sitas 1997). To simply follow in the trends of global intellectual culture leaves us always out of touch with the specificity of our own world. As Ari Sitas insightfully says: "What seems to be happening is an intellectual version of the third world's relationship to the IMF or the World Bank; we are borrowing cultural capital from the most inappropriate sources to service appropriate needs. ... We are beginning to become mediocre imitators." (1997, p.17)

In Search of an 'African' Sociology

It is clear that there has been near continuous social upheaval in South Africa for the past 200 years. This social history has produced its own contingent appearances, its own unique formations and a society that needs to be understood on its own terms. The inattention to history has led to calls for an African sociology. Ari Sitas argued for a necessary renewal in sociology, seeing the need for, among other things, "a negotiation that does not demean our past, that recognises our achievements and limitations but also, a negotiation that problematises the canon. We must abandon the ease through which our past counts as a manifestation or extension of "sociology" as constructed in the metropolis." (1997, p.p.17-

18). Fred Hendricks followed this with a renewed problematisation of the stagnation of sociology, arguing that the lack of an African sociology was part of the problem: "It seems obvious that African sociologists need to use the continent as a source of theory and not only for data collection to prove or disprove inappropriate models and hypotheses derived from the West" (2006, p.95). Ken Jubber sees the challenge this implies for understanding our own context: "African and South African sociologists ... have tended to rely too heavily on borrowed sources and curricula at the expense of developing indigenous and locally relevant sociology" (2006, p.322). Sitas has deepened his critique of the challenge of an African sociology in two pieces (2006, 2014). The most recent, *Rethinking Africa's sociological project* (2014), highlights the same inability to engage in thought beyond a Euromerican dominance: "No matter what kind of endogenous scholarship was generated in the country, it was always surpassed by exogenous encounters from the 'elsewheres' where an imputed real scholarship thrived." (2014, p.4). What Sitas highlights is that, while it was always working outside the institution and separate from the canon of "imputed real scholarship", there has been a rich tradition of African scholarship on the social world. Thus, the challenge is that we have not been cognisant of intellectuals in Africa who have aimed to develop Africa centred theories that aim to understand the particular realities of our own world and have instead turned Euromerican particularities into universals for our sociological imagination.

Seeking new Questions as well as new Answers

The fact that many African intellectuals have been responding to the particularities of South African society means that these thinkers may offer a theoretical window into areas of society that we have hitherto ignored or even been unable to *conceive of* as areas of social investigation. These thinkers respond to questions that have been vital for the actual lived experience of people through the social chaos of colonialism and apartheid. Importantly, they also extend beyond questions of control and management which have dominated professional South African sociology. We can therefore engage

these thinkers outside of sociology in search of new methodological and substantive approaches to conceiving of ourselves and our society.

Chapter 2: Mqhayi—The Intellectual In-Between

Introduction

To begin a response to some of the challenges I have highlighted in the first chapter, this chapter will focus on the work of S.E.K Mqhayi and explore the alternatives he offers. There are a number of reasons for this choice. Firstly, Mqhayi's work is deeply engaged in the social questions that emerge from the change stirred up in the process of colonialism. However, his skill in the area of literature has confined the study of his work to primarily literary aspects and he has not been seriously considered as a social thinker. He was also positioned at a critical time for the development of South African modernity, and socially located in an ideal space to examine this change. His hybrid position between the Xhosa and colonial world, and his commitment to fighting for Xhosa identity, make him a fascinating case. I will argue that Mqhayi is particularly important because he continues the intellectual tradition of Xhosa intellectuals who sought to understand the world before him. He both revisits this tradition and reworks it through his own lens. He therefore offers a powerful source of an alternate African engagement with the social world. Finally, and most practically, a number of his works (many of them previously very rare and therefore unanalysed) have recently been collected and translated by Jeff Opland. This collection and translation make a significant body of his theoretical work available to English speakers for the first time. For these reasons he is a rich source of theoretical and methodological alternatives.

Introducing S.E.K. Mqhayi

Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi was arguably the most prolific African intellectual of the early 20th century. His oeuvre included *izibongo* (poetry), both performed and written, novels (he wrote the first

novel in isiXhosa), histories, biographies, and newspaper journalism. He also wrote the bulk of the national anthem. A.C Jordan says “[h]is contribution to Southern Bantu Literature is easily the largest and most valuable that has hitherto been made by any single writer.” (1973, p.105). In his time he was given the honorary title of *Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele* ‘the poet of the whole nation’, which testifies to his renown which spanned far beyond the amaXhosa people. He has been called Africa’s Shakespeare and Africa’s poet laureate by esteemed figures such as former ANC president Alfred Xuma (Mqhayi 2009, p.2) and Afrikaans poet Antjie Krog (in Neethling & Mpolweni 2006, p.131). Nelson Mandela gives testament to Mqhayi’s influence and force of character in the following recollection:

In my final year at Healdtown, an event occurred that for me was like a comet streaking across the night sky. Toward the end of the year, we were informed that the great Xhosa poet, Krune Mqhayi, was going to visit the school. Mqhayi was actually an *imbongi*, a praise singer, a kind of oral historian who marks contemporary events and history with poetry that is of special meaning to his people. The day of his visit was declared a holiday by the school authorities. On the appointed morning, the entire school, including staff members both black and white, gathered in the dining hall which was where we held school assemblies. There was a stage at one end of the hall and from it a door led to Dr Wellington’s house. The door itself was nothing special, but we thought of it as Dr Wellington’s door, for no one ever walked through it except Dr Wellington himself.

Suddenly, the door opened and out walked not Dr. Wellington (the principal), but a black man dressed in a leopard-skin kaross and matching hat, who was carrying a spear in either hand. Dr Wellington followed a moment later, but the sight of a black man in tribal dress coming through that door, was electrifying. It is hard to explain the impact it had on us. It seemed to turn the universe upside down. ... Mqhayi then began to recite his well-known poem in which he apportioned the stars in the heavens to the various nations of the world. I had never before heard it. Roving the stage and gesturing with his assegai towards the sky, he said to the people of Europe – the French, the Germans, the English – ‘I give you the Milky Way, the largest constellation, for you are a strange people, full of greed and envy, who quarrel over plenty’. He allocated certain stars to the Asian nations, and to North and South America. He then discussed Africa and separated the continent into different nations, giving specific constellations to different tribes. He had been dancing about the stage, waving his spear, modulating his voice, and now, suddenly, he became still, and lowered his voice. ‘Now, come you, O House of Xhosa’, he said, and slowly began to lower himself so that he was on one knee. ‘I give unto you the most important and transcendent star, the Morning Star, for you are a proud and powerful people. It is the star for counting the years – the years of manhood.’ When he spoke this last word, he

dropped his head to his chest. We rose to our feet, clapping and cheering. I did not want to stop applauding. I felt such intense pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa; I felt like one of the chosen people. (1994:47–49)

Mandela's recollection hints at some of the vast complexities of identity, history and colonization that Mqhayi's work deals with, and it demonstrates the impact Mqhayi had on his audience when performing his *izibongo* (praise poems). While his work has been taken up and appreciated by those in literary fields, Neethling & Mpolweni argue that he should be seen in a greater context, "as a forerunner to democracy, a visionary who had ideals for his country that only came to fruition 50 years after his death" (ibid). Peter Midgely sees him as a "versatile creative force who dedicated his talents to improving the circumstances of black people in South Africa" (2010, p.231).

What will be seen through the course of my analysis is that Mqhayi can be seen broadly as an intellectual who used a number of mediums to engage in a broad range of intellectual activities including teaching, social critique, historic and cultural conscientization, and philosophical reinterpretation of a world grown extremely complex—ontologically, epistemologically and morally—through the historical chaos caused by plurality of social forces at work during the colonial period.

Genealogy, early life and cultural pluralism

Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi was born on the 1st of December, 1875, in the Tyhume valley, in the now Eastern Cape, in the village Gqumahashe (close to Alice). Mqhayi was born to a world in profound flux, where the nature of power, knowledge and culture—the fabric of the social world—was being redefined by the intersection of 'traditional' Xhosa life and colonial influence—carried in part by the 'civilising' work undertaken by missionaries in the area (c.f. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991 and 1997). Mqhayi's own autobiography sets out the complex intermingling of Xhosa culture with missionary influence in his own family (1976, p.p.5-11). He traces his history back six generations to his great great great grandfather, Zima, a son of a Thembu chief and the man after whom the amaZima clan is named. He follows the

exploits of his predecessors and the rise to prominence of his great grandfather, Mqhayi, who became a councillor to Ngqika, the paramount chief of the Rharhabe branch of the amaXhosa. Mqhayi and Ngqika became “as close and inseparable as a mouthpiece to a trumpet, as a rope to a milkpail” (Mqhayi 2009, p.3), Mqhayi (the great grandfather) was thus clearly a member of the Xhosa elite. His son, Krune (S.E.K. Mqhayi’s grandfather), begins the complex history of the intermingling of Xhosa and Christian culture in Mqhayi’s genealogy. In his youth, Krune was granted the high honour of being the attendant of Kona, the son of Maqoma, at his initiation ceremony (Maqoma was the firstborn son of Ngqika, and regent after Ngqika’s death until the rightful heir Sandile came of age⁷). Thus, he too was clearly respected among the amaXhosa elite. Later on in life Krune converted to Christianity, among the first of the amaXhosa to do so. This conversion highlights the social schism in the Xhosa community. On the one hand, conversion came with social exclusion: Krune’s wife left him and he had to bear the social stigma, along with fellow converts, of abandoning their Chiefs (Mqhayi 1976, p.10). On the other hand it came with new social authority: Krune became a leading member of Rev Elijah Makiwane’s congregation (Mqhayi 2009, p.3), and his conversion bore significant fruit for Krune’s only son, Ziwani (Mqhayi’s father). Ziwani grew up in the midst of Christian ministers and “gave himself to education, and embraced the Word in his youth” (Mqhayi 1976, p.10). This resulted in Ziwani becoming “a leading man in his church, famous for his counsel, his preaching, and his singing.” (ibid)

This abridged genealogy of Mqhayi is important because it offers a glimpse into the new complex social configurations at work in the Xhosa community. In two generations social status has, for some, moved from recognition by an association with leading chiefs (as in the case of Mqhayi Snr and the younger Krune) to service and leadership in church and one’s education credentials (older Krune and Ziwani). This change is the empirical signal, the tip of the iceberg, for what must have been a massive

⁷ See Mqhayi’s piece *U-Maqoma* (2009, p.p. 122-143)

experiential upheaval in the structure and knowledge of everyday life as people navigated the moral and ontological divide between 'British' and 'Xhosa' worldviews.

Mqhayi is born into a world profoundly shaped by these plural influences. His strongly Christian parents saw his birth as an answer to their petition to God for a son (after 4 daughters) and named him Samuel. Mqhayi notes that Samuel, from the Hebrew for 'God has heard', could have been replaced with a Xhosa name such as Sicelo (petition) or Mcelwa (one petitioned for), but Xhosa names were associated with heathenism and his father, being a "child of the ministers" and "the best educated man in that area" (Mqhayi 1976, p.p.11-12), was expected to set a 'good' example. In some ways, then, the denigration of Xhosa culture perpetrated by the missionaries is built into Mqhayi's very name.

From the age of 7 Mqhayi began attending a local school in the Tyhume valley. From early on he showed his intellectual talent and excelled in school. In hindsight we can see that colonial education offers both positives and negatives. The up side for an 'educated native' is a distinct gain in social status among whites and fellow Africans who are educated or believe that European ways are superior to their own. This status offered the educated a (small) 'piece of the pie' in the new structures of power as colonialism spread its dominance. However, the education agenda of both missionaries and governors made the potential downsides significant. For the missionaries, education served as a way to equip people with a whole new view of the world in line with their Christian conception of the world. With great irony, Etherington points out that the settler and the mining magnate "merely wanted the Africans' land and labour. Missionaries wanted their souls." (in Comaroff & Comarhoff 1997, p.6) Education served as the means to gain influence over the 'soul', the lifeworld, of the native. The governmental purposes are illustrated well in the Indian context by T.B. Macaulay in what has become known as the 'Macaulay minute':

[I]t is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. (Macaulay 1835)

Here education takes up the purpose of putting British values into the body of the 'savage' native, thereby creating a class of native individuals who will function as the necessary intercessors and enablers of British imperial rule. The educated native who enters into the 'Western' worldview of the person who educates them thus serve as either a servant of the colonial administrative system or as a Christian convert who might bring other heathens to the 'light' of the incoming worldview. Without intervention, we could imagine that Mqhayi's genius could have been moulded to just such a role—repeating a British Christian worldview, and aiding the process of cultural imperialism. However, to the good fortune of posterity, this was not to be the case. After 3 years of education in the Tyhume valley, and not yet 10 year old, Mqhayi moved with his father (his mother having died when he was 2 years old) to Centane to stay with his uncle Nzanzana (the headsman of the area) during the witgatboom famine of 1885 (Mqhayi 1976, p.18, 2009, p.4).

The move took Mqhayi further away from colonial influence. Mqhayi's recollection highlights both the 'metropolitan' stereotypes, and the fact that even before the move, the young Mqhayi had 'patriotic' tendencies:

The people about us had the idea that it was a country infested with disease, famine and poverty, and that war still raged in that country. When people asked me why I looked forward to going to a country like Gcalekaland, I would answer, 'I go to the people of my race.' And again when they asked me what I was going to do as the country was always engaged in war, I would answer, 'I shall fight.' (1976, p.18)

Mqhayi recounts that the 6 years he spent in Centane were fundamentally formative to the rest of his life: "In those six years I learned much respecting Xhosa life, including the refinements of Xhosa language. ... If I had not been at Kentani [sic] for those six years, it seems to me as if I would not have

been any help to my nation ... it was the means of getting an insight into the national life of my people.”
(1976, p.p.19-20)

While he acknowledges that he learned so much in Centane, while he was there he yearned to further his education. In the interim his father had moved back to Grahamstown. A short while after his uncle died, Mqhayi's sister arrived, sent by his father, to bring him to Lovedale to continue his education. Mqhayi, who was 15 at this stage, was overjoyed. Lovedale was no rural school, it was “arguably the pre-eminent centre of missionary education on the African subcontinent” (Attwell 2005, p.27). The significant divide between these two ‘worlds’ is so palpable that the journey is embodied in Mqhayi's clothing: “I was made to put on my first trousers and jacket. Hitherto my only clothing had been a calico shirt or a sheep skin kaross.” (1976, p.22) As we shall see, this kind of pluralism—negotiating between the ‘British’ and ‘Xhosa’ world—defined much of Mqhayi's life. A powerful example is Mqhayi's circumcision and acceptance of the gospel. In the beginning of 1894, when he was 18, Mqhayi decided to enter circumcision school with his age-mates:

I knew how hateful the circumcision school was to the ministers, but I had determined to be expelled [from Lovedale] rather than not become ‘a man’. In my own mind I felt that I was going to be a worker for my own people in my own country, a worker for the Gospel, for social service, in politics, and in educational matters; and it was clear to me that I could not accomplish my work if I did not become a man as they did. (p.24)

At this stage, Mqhayi fully expected to be excluded from being allowed to return to Lovedale, such was the disdain with which Christians looked on such ‘heathen’ customs. However, he was eventually pardoned with a strong rebuke. This same pluralism drove Mqhayi's act of accepting the gospel. While he says he had already believed and prayed regularly, he didn't let anyone know and did not enter church fellowship:

I knew that if I did so, I should be cut off for going to the circumcision school, and on this my mind was set. So I hardened myself and did not give anybody the slightest notion that I was already a convert to the ‘Word’. (ibid)

However, one he had been circumcised, he “perceived that there was no obstacle to my accepting the ‘Word’” (ibid) and converted at the next revival meeting in the village. In these two cases we see a remarkable pluralism that purposefully escapes the strictures of the conservatives among both the traditionalist Xhosa and the Christian educators. Mqhayi wilfully deceives both groups, risking rejection by both, so that he may bridge the divide, becoming both a ‘real’ Xhosa man and a Christian, something that both sides would reject if they knew his true plans⁸. It is even more extraordinary that he was able to engage in such a self-assertive and self-conscious act of will at such a young age. Where most young men or women follow unconsciously in the pattern of ‘the good life’ given to them by those they look up to, Mqhayi was already self-reflexively skirting the boundaries of what was acceptable or even thinkable. It is this remarkable confidence and self-reflexivity combined with his intellectual ability and his strong convictions (witness his constant use of “on this my mind was set”), which made him a pivotal figure in the emergence of an African pride and consciousness during the course of his life.

As a sociologist, I have allowed a lengthy discussion of Mqhayi’s social context in order to position him in his social world. This is important because he navigates through the binary opposition defined by both the traditionalists and the Christians in a remarkable feat of pluralism that creates new possibilities for social existence in his context. It is Mqhayi’s capacity for self-reflexivity that enables him to chart a path towards cultural syncretism—but always from the standpoint of the Xhosa, and with the Xhosa as his audience. In this he offers a kind of ‘conservative rebellion’—which both honours the existing traditions (both Xhosa and Christian) while exploding them out of their moulds into new possibilities. This is indicative of Mqhayi’s work and one of the features that makes him so important. He expressly honours the ‘old’ allowing tradition to shape the present, but always recreates that tradition to meet the present in new and creative ways. I shall return to the sociological implications of Mqhayi’s orientation to the Xhosa people.

⁸ More so from the Christians, for many Christians were forbidden from the custom.

Mqhayi vs Soga – modernity on whose terms?

*Hail, Great Britain –
You come with a bottle in the one hand and a Bible in the other;
You come with a preacher assisted by a soldier;
You come with gunpowder and bullets;
You come with cannons and guns-which-bend-like-knees.
Please forgive me o God, but whom should we obey?
(Mqhayi, 1943)*

This fairly detailed biography of Mqhayi's early life serves to highlight something important about the 'worldview' that he gives us access to. In the search for new identity, those of us in the post-colony often look back in search of some romanticized pre-colonial past to form a counter-identity to the impositions of an imperial history. Edward Said calls this 'nativism'—"to fight against the distortions inflicted on your identity in this way is to return to a pre-imperial period to locate a 'pure' native culture" (1994, p.332). Fanon insightfully denounced this 'nativism' :

It is not enough to try and get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallised and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light. ([1963] 2001, p.p. 182-3)

Mqhayi's pluralism shows that he offers no such 'pure' return to an unaffected past. Instead Mqhayi is an ingenious intellectual who creatively negotiates his present by weaving together both Western and Xhosa influences. This being said, Mqhayi does engage in markedly different ways to other African thinkers, both those who precede him and who are his contemporaries.

One way to draw out what is so different about Mqhayi is to contrast him to other intellectual giants of his time. Perhaps the most renowned Xhosa thinker among Mqhayi's predecessors is Tiyo Soga, whose approach valuably contrasts with Mqhayi.

Soga's Modernity

Tiyo Soga was also a man struggling with the complex hybridity of the colonial encounter. He was born to a prominent Xhosa leader (Jotello known as 'Old Soga'), who was a councillor to chief Ngqika (just like Mqhayi's great grandfather). In his youth, Soga was taken under the patronage of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary Reverend William Chalmers, who believed in his abilities and sponsored his education, first to Lovedale, and later to secondary and tertiary education in Scotland first at Glasgow Free Church Seminary and later at Glasgow University Hall. By the time he returned in 1857, Soga was "[t]he first ordained African priest, and married to a white woman to boot ... and became the most prominent African of his time" (Ndletyana 2008, p.22). Ndletyana recounts the immense racial struggles that Soga had to deal with, both in Scotland and in his missionary work in South Africa, and the immense character of the man who endured these stereotypes, and came to be a powerful critic of racism and a defender of African people. "In many ways", says Ndletyana, "Soga was the first nationalist-intellectual and a progenitor of black consciousness" (2008, p.28)⁹.

Soga, however, takes up an alternate approach in his resistance when compared to Mqhayi. In many ways Mqhayi and Soga are very similar. They are both profoundly *hybrid* subjects, acting between two worldviews and for the betterment of their own people. The critical difference between them is the 'orientation' of this hybridity.

Soga is a prime example of an African intellectual who has embraced the worldview of 'The West'. In the now classic text *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger and Luckman consider cases in which an individual can have a "near total transformation" in their "subjective reality" (1967, p.176). They call this process 'alternation', something which is played out especially clearly in religious conversion (p.177), and their description is incredibly pertinent for Soga. They highlight how a profound 're-socialisation' is

⁹ Ndletyana here echo's the earlier work of Soga's biographer Donovan Williams, who saw that Soga was "the father of black consciousness" (1983, p.5).

partially enabled when an individual enters into and becomes dependent on the 'plausibility structure' of mentor figures: "This plausibility structure will be mediated to the individual by means of significant others, with whom he must establish strong affective identification. ... These significant others are the guides into the new reality." (ibid). For this to be possible it also requires a separation from the old community and worldview: "The plausibility structures must become the individual's world, displacing all other worlds, especially the world the individual 'inhabited' before his alternation. This requires segregation of the individual from the 'inhabitants' of other worlds, especially his 'cohabitants' in the world he has left behind[,] ... bodily if possible, mentally if not." (1967, p.178)

Soga's close affiliation with his patron family, and his two extended stays in Scotland, where he undertook his education surrounded by peers who shared a similar Western-Christian-Enlightenment worldview, offer the ideal conditions for a near total alternation in his conception of the world. This makes his racial experience all the more painful, and the racism he sees around him all the more despicable. Fanon has eloquently described a similar situation when he analyses how an educated person from Antilles comes to realise they are 'black' (with all the disdainful stereotypes this entails) when they go to Paris for further education¹⁰. Soga's method of response is what is vital to this comparison with Mqhayi: Soga works to turn the moral system of the West against the racism he sees Scotland and especially in the South African mission and colonial engagement. David Attwell (2005) follows how Soga turns the Enlightenment values of the West against the hypocrisy of the racist missionaries and European colonists. Attwell sees this as utilising the enlightenment project as a source of emancipation in "the service of all humanity" which he calls "the transculturation of enlightenment" (2005, p.33): "Soga embraced the civilizing mission but sought to establish a new point of departure within it, one that placed an African Consciousness and identity within the larger framework of modern history" (2005, p.p.47-8). Soga's response is similar to the response of a number of African intellectuals

¹⁰ see *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008), Ch 6, esp. p.p. 148-55

of the time: here we see a highly intelligent person first enter into a new worldview and then use that worldview to critically attack the racist abuses of fellow-men who hold that view. Thus, Soga's work is *oriented towards* the European colonist or missionary and *utilises* the foreign worldview to try and win gains for his 'own' people. Attwell gives a powerful empirical example of this as he looks at Soga's rebuttal to an article titled the 'Doom of the Kaffir races' written by John Chalmers, the son of the man who had sponsored Soga's education—someone who must have been like a brother to Soga. In this 'restrained' (Attwell 2005, p.38) response, Soga utilises all the tools of the Western-Christian worldview at his disposal. He "gains a foot hold in the discourse by appealing to an Englishman's sense of 'fair play'" (ibid), he uses the pseudonym 'Defensor', from *defensor fide*—defender of the faith (p.40) to bolster his image as pursuing a righteous cause, and his argument turns the biblical 'curse of Ham' on its head, using it to argue that God had given both a special uniqueness to the African people, and that "Africa was of God given to the race of Ham." (Soga, in Attwell 2005, p.39) On this basis Soga uses "the curse of Ham to claim access to God's grace and to envision the full participation of Africans in human progress" (Attwell 2005, p.40).

Soga thus directs his liberatory political thought to European thinkers and others who had accepted a 'Western' worldview. He speaks in the colonists language and uses the colonists logic and ideals. He is very much a hybrid subject, but one who orients his intellectual activity *towards* Europe. This is not to undermine his work *for* African people. However, this work still aims to 'uplift' or 'civilise' them in the mould of European values: translating English text into Xhosa, recording history, writing hymns, contributing to the newspaper (Ndletyana 2008, p.p.27-29). In Ndletyana's estimation, Soga extolled British culture because of the benefits it afforded and sought to reproduce such cultural 'enlightenment' in South Africa, but also did not wholly reject African cultural influence (2008, p.29)¹¹. In this Soga

¹¹ This defense of African culture will be further considered in the section on Mqhayi's use of history (Chapter 3)

represents many African thinkers who fight for Africa's inclusion into the project of modernity, but frame this fight on moral and epistemological grounds based in European thought.¹²

Mqhayi's Modernity

Mqhayi offers a powerful alternative to Soga's engagement. Where Soga takes up a Western worldview and challenges it (in order to enhance it), Mqhayi thoroughly situates himself in Xhosa identity, history and intellectual traditions. From this base he challenges, modifies and reworks these traditions. However, he has chosen the existing tradition of the Xhosa worldview as his point of departure. A second fundamental difference is the audience Mqhayi addresses. He writes all of his works in isiXhosa (even though his written correspondence with the Lovedale editor shows that he is just as fluent and eloquent in writing in English). He also mostly publically performs his *izibongo* in isiXhosa, extending his reach to amaXhosa who have not been to missionary schools. The primary audience of Mqhayi's work are African people generally and Xhosa people specifically. This changes the tools he uses for his intellectual engagement. Where Soga draws on the ethical tradition of Enlightenment equality in his theological debates with fellow missionaries and colonial people in general, Mqhayi draws on oral histories, traditions, metaphors and the common-sense knowledge of the amaXhosa in order to understand the changing world. Into these old traditions Mqhayi weaves new Western forms along with the old forms: experimenting with novels and rhyming poetry in addition to the traditional *izibongo* form; publishing much of his work in newspapers as well as performing and speaking publically. He also weaves together the incoming Western cultural ideas with the pre-existing Xhosa ones, including Western conceptions such as Humanity and Justice. What is important is that he does this work *for* Xhosa people, in their language, in their own idiom. His work reforms the Xhosa worldview, but does so

¹² For example, this is the frame of the early founders of the ANC. Jack Simons notes that the SANNC/ ANC constitution adopted in 1919 "did no more than advocate by just means for the removal of the 'Colour Bar' in political, education, and industrial fields and for equitable representation of Natives in Parliament". Here the struggle is for the inclusion of 'civilised men' into the existing racial hierarchy: "not then, however, and not for many years to come, did it claim universal suffrage and majority rule" (Simons & Simons 1983, p.387).

for the sake of continuing the worldview (as opposed to the worldview conversion sought by the missionaries and governors).

Mqhayi—like Soga, and so many other educated Africans in their time—stands between two worlds.

Mqhayi's work is vitally important not because it offers a 'pure' Xhosa worldview, but because it shows how an intellectual in the midst of crisis can be both committed to the framework of an African knowledge system, while at the same time reworking and renewing the content of that system to make sense of the changing social world.

Conclusion

This consideration of Mqhayi's approach to modernity highlights why he is useful today, in a post-apartheid space, as we seek to open up new questions and new theoretical tools to understand the particularities and complexities of our own society. Mqhayi and many others have developed tools to understand social change as it has been experienced by a majority of South Africans—not from the teleological assumptions of colonial Christianity, or Enlightenment liberalism, or even Marxism; but instead from the existential crises that arise in the clash of worldviews and ways of life that arises out of the colonial encounter. Mqhayi pays attention to the changes in the social world that colonial academics were uninterested in. This disinterest has persisted because those who held power in knowledge producing institutions have broadly been separated from the actual social experience of the majority of South Africans. The era of enforced separation is now over and Mqhayi, and many others like him, offer the intellectual traditions and theoretical tools to broach that historic life experience and understand how that social history shapes thought, action, and social formations and forces today.

Chapter 3: Mqhayi and the Sociological Imagination

Introduction

In what sense is Mqhayi's work sociological? And in what ways can he help us shape a sociology for today? His method is clearly different from the dominant norms of sociological research: he conducted no surveys, ran no regressions, delved into no data sets. His work looks very different from the contemporary data driven research of a professional sociologist. What I will argue is that while his methodology is different, his approach is the same as that which lies at the core of the sociological endeavour. This means that Mqhayi offers us alternate sources of sociological insight than the ones which sociologists have traditionally drawn on. I will thus focus on Mqhayi's methodology of social questioning and exploration. In doing so I will demonstrate how these very different techniques might give us access to the intellectual traditions and theoretical frameworks developed by Africans to understand their own social experiences and make sense of the changing social world. Out of those traditions might emerge not only new substantive theories but different methodologies.

The Sociological Imagination

The rigorous nature of the sociological discipline, its myopic focus on method and its academic nuance, can lead sociologists away from one of the core motives of sociology—what C.Wright Mills called 'the sociological imagination'. I have shown in Chapter 1 that there is a trend in sociology towards the acquisition and implementation of 'managerial' social knowledge for the purpose of social control. However, this managerial impulse is not the only impulse in sociology. Michael Burawoy argues that a moral desire for 'justice' or 'a better world' is a key passion that draws many people to sociology. There is an "original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment,

political freedom or simply a better world, that drew so many of us to sociology". However, this desire is displaced as it "is channeled into the pursuit of academic credentials." (2005, p.5) Nonetheless, Burawoy argues that this desire for positive change—created out of a moral frustration with the way things are—lives on in the heart of sociology: "despite the normalizing pressures of careers, the originating moral impetus is rarely vanquished, the sociological spirit cannot be extinguished so easily." (ibid)

C. Wright Mills captures this "sociological spirit" in his own work. In the tumultuous social and political upheaval of the mid 1900's in America, Mills saw the sociological impulse as that which responds not to the elites' need for control, but to the individual crisis of a changing society:

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in feeling this they are often quite correct[.] ... Seldom aware of the intricate connexion between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connexion means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and the world. (1959, p.9-10)

Mills saw his society in the midst of confusing and alienating social change. It is into this very real experiential crisis that he sees the sociologist intervening in order to help his/her society:

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality ... [that] may be called the sociological imagination. (1959, p.11)

Thus, we may group modes of sociology into two type: those that develop understanding of human society in order to allow elites to more effectively understand and control the social world, and those that seek to respond to the disconcerting experience of social change felt by numerous individuals, aiming to help people "achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be

happening within themselves” (ibid)¹³. The first group deals with human beings as problems in need of social management, the second responds to the individual and social crises felt by humans and aims to “adjust society to individual needs, not the reverse” (Bauman 1969, p.6).

Mqhayi’s Engagement with the Social World

This framing aims to highlight that, while Mqhayi may belong to a very different tradition to the one handed down to us through academic sociology, his aims are very much in line with the second of these two sociological modes. Mqhayi would perhaps embody C. Wright Mills’ call for the sociological imagination far more than many revered sociologists in the Western tradition.

Through his use of biography and history Mqhayi is able to address the crisis of the rapidly changing social world brought about by colonialism. Mills poignantly addresses a sentiment that could be just as well addressed to those experiencing colonial upheaval in South Africa:

The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. (1959, p11)

Thus Mills and Mqhayi, though vastly separated in context, live in a shared milieu of social upheaval and confusion. Mills sees the sociological imagination as a way to respond to this crisis:

[The sociological imagination] is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two. ... That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society. (p.14)

Mqhayi’s work is oriented towards this experiential social crisis among the amaXhosa and other African people. In a world fraught with the chaotic ambiguities of a newly appearing social world, Mqhayi draws

¹³ This is obviously a theoretical binary opposition and different sociologies would fall between these two poles

on the tools of biography and history in order develop a clearer picture of what is happening both at a broad historic level as well as at a close and personal experiential level. He is able to narrate history and biography in a way which allows the world to 'make sense' — he deploys the 'sociological imagination' and in doing so he functions both as an interpreter of what is happening and a guide as to how to respond. His work is all the more powerful because he is able to maintain coherence within the 'Xhosa worldview'—reinterpreting it and using its metaphors and 'common sense' knowledge to interpret the new world. By drawing on concepts that already exist as 'given' or 'taken for granted' in the Xhosa knowledge system he is able to make the new world intelligible by people who inhabit the 'old world'. It is this ability to explain the new as a continuation of an older tradition that makes Mqhayi's work so powerful and explains why he has been so revered as a public figure in his own time and why his work is still drawn on today.

We can thus see that while Mqhayi's methodology may at first seem foreign to the contemporary sociologist, he is profoundly engaged in one of the core modes of sociological inquiry. In what follows I will demonstrate how his biographical and historic work is always moving back and forth between the nuance of the individual's choices and actions and the broader historical and social forces at play within the larger society. Mqhayi's work demonstrates Mills' claim: "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both." (1959, p.9).

Thus, I will engage in a close analysis of Mqhayi's use of history and biography (although we will see that they are intertwined). I will aim to draw out broad trends in his work and demonstrate evidence of these trends with a close textual analysis of specific examples which will serve to highlight more general patterns.

History

One substantial area that Mqhayi devoted himself to was investigating history and educating people about their past. He weaved this history into his *izibongo* (praise poems) and also published histories of individuals and events in leading African newspapers. Mqhayi clearly saw this work as part of his greater project of defending the value and worldview of Xhosa and African culture. Specifically, he was opposed to the missionary education that taught African children only the great exploits of England and at the same time denigrated African traditions. Mqhayi writes a newspaper piece addressing this specific topic:

These educated people set up none but cowards for emulation, because their fathers did not narrate any history to them, and in those training schools and colleges they are taught a sequence of history, but in fact their education has entirely duped them, because in all our training schools the history of only one nation is studied, the English; they are the only people with intelligence, prudence, knowledge, they alone have national heroes, they have never been defeated by any other nation on earth; they claim as theirs even those things that clearly did not originated with them, and in this way they indoctrinate nations who do not appreciate that their awe of the English is exaggerated, that their respect for them is excessive. This is why a fool runs wild when he discovers them to be empty vessels, recalling all the years he honoured them where no honour was due. (Mqhayi 2009, p.28)

Clearly for Mqhayi history was an issue of 'national' pride as well as right thinking about the nature of the world. He goes on to show the cultural implications of this history and the impact on African's identity:

The person has been taught that his chiefs are sly and he believes it; he has been taught that the great men of his nation steal, that they are thieves, cowards, liars; and he believes it. He does not realize that in so doing they are misleading him into abandoning his fathers and his chiefs. (ibid)

Mqhayi here makes clear the links between historic education, personal identity and cultural pride: This kind of faulty education undermines personal pride in the social group who would be considered to be one's own. This schism in identity causes missionary educated amaXhosa to potentially seek to abandon their locating identity as 'umXhosa' with the concomitant social worldview and historic pride. Franz

Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008) has demonstrated how such denigration of identity causes a host of personal and psychological crises in other colonial contexts. Mqhayi thus responds to this assault of African identity by producing histories of important African leaders and events. From these brief extracts we can understand that Mqhayi's historical work is not patterned after the disconnected intellectual pursuit of a European academic historian, but instead fits into his larger project of a sort of 'national' conscientization of the amaXhosa and other peoples. Mqhayi is not alone in this history writing process, nor is he alone in aiming to utilise it to build 'national pride' amongst the amaXhosa. History telling had been a feature of the Xhosa oral tradition for generations past, often held and publically recounted in the form of *izibongo* (see Jordan 1973, p.59-60). Tiyo Soga, one of the first Xhosa people to record written Xhosa history, calls for a continuation of this practice in 1864, long before Mqhayi was even born. In an article for the inaugural edition of the newly formed Xhosa newspaper *Indaba* he says: "I envision in this newspaper a beautiful vessel for preserving the stories, fables, legends, customs, anecdotes and history of the tribes. ... All is well known today. Our veterans of the Xhosa and Embo people must disgorge all they know. Everything must be imparted to the nation as a whole. Fables must be retold; what was history or legend should be recounted." Soga goes on, calling for all manner of historic events to be recorded. He closes the section: "let us resurrect our ancestral fore-bears who bequeathed to us a rich heritage. All anecdotes connected with the life of the nation should be brought to this big corn-pit our national newspaper *Indaba* (The News)." (Soga, [1862] 1983, p.152-3) Joe Davis sees that "Soga acts as a cultural and historical mediator who 'stewards' Xhosa customs and traditions in a way that would preserve the dignity of the unique Xhosa heritage among a people whose very identity was being challenged and reshaped by its encounter with the unrelenting force of European civilisation." (2013) Here we see the later Tiyo Soga who, having been chastened by racism, is now prefiguring the cultural nationalism taken up by Mqhayi.

The importance of history for people like Soga is thus notably different from simply recounting oral tradition. The identity of the Xhosa people as a nation is now being challenged and undermined, and Soga sees a written recollection of history as a way to push back against this loss by preserving traditions. This identity loss and need for preservation is even greater in Mqhayi's time, when greater 'cultural erosion' has taken place. Mqhayi is thus clearly responding to the growing lack of 'self-knowledge' among the amaXhosa educated by the missionaries. Mqhayi follows Soga and other intellectuals by turning to history to develop this self-knowledge. His histories aim to develop a sense of pride and act as a psychological shield against the dehumanisation of colonialism. This also requires turning to colonial accounts and correcting stereotypes found in those histories. In what follows I will demonstrate this trend in by engaging in a close textual analysis of a specific case which exemplifies Mqhayi's methodology.

The Battle of Amalinde (1818)¹⁴

The Battle of Amalinde took place outside what is now know as Debe in 1818. Mqhayi recounts this battle in a number of different contexts, both in *izibongo* and a number of different prosaic histories. Mqhayi's account of this event functions on a number of levels. It ascends to the heights of an epic narrative, detailing the final battle at the end of a personal interplay between different political leaders of the time. His account also serves to correct negative and false attributions of the battles cause. Furthermore it serves as a lesson in political and social realities which Mqhayi wants to make clear to his readers and listeners. I will look at three ways in which Mqhayi uses history, using this event as an

¹⁴ I draw this example from a number of Mqhayi texts written in different contexts and different times which are reproduced in Mqhayi (2009). In this piece I will reference them by the item number that Opland ascribes to them in Mqhayi (2009) as well as by their page number. I will here reference the dates and newspapers of the relevant items: Item 9 (1912) "Ngqika" in *Imvo*. Item 12 (1917) "Maqoma" in *Ityala Lama-Wele* (3rd Ed). Item 27 (1928) "Ngqika" in *Umteteli*. Item 30 (1928) "The origin of the Ndlambe" in *Umteteli*. Item 32 (1928) "The Battle of Amalinde: white provocation (1818-19)" in *Umteteli*. Item 45 (1932) "Hail, Lwaganda!" in *Umteteli*. See notes in Mqhayi 2009 for more detailed references.

example. First, how Mqhayi corrects false history, second, how he teaches social and political lessons, and third, how he uses history to make sense of the present.

(i) 'Thuthula's war' – correcting history

At Mqhayi's time there was evidently a conception that the source of this war was a dispute between two leading chiefs, Ngqika (the paramount chief of the Rharhabe) and Ndlambe (Ngqika's uncle, and the regent of the Rharhabe while Ngqika was young). There is a long and complex history between Ngqika and Ndlambe which Mqhayi recounts in a number of pieces (see especially Mqhayi 2009, item 27 and item 30). At one stage Ngqika took one of Ndlambe's wives—Thuthula—for his own. The resulting tension had all the makings of a political drama to rival the battle of Troy, including the purported outstanding beauty of Thuthula and the added complication that the Xhosa people viewed Ngqika's relationship with Thuthula as incest—she was the wife of Ngqika's uncle. Popular but mistaken opinion at Mqhayi's time (which appears to continue to today) was that the battle of Amalinde arose because of this conflict. As Jeff Peires argues “The rivalry between Ngqika and Ndlambe ... is boiled down exclusively to the abduction of Thuthula, and deeper issues are forgotten” (Peires 1981 in Mqhayi 2009, p.21). The reduction of this battle to a personal conflict between two chiefs over a sexual relationship does two things. Firstly it negatively portrays chiefs as petty selfish leaders and irrational ‘sexually crazed’ beings (a stereotype that would have fit perfectly with the European conceptions of Africans). Secondly, it covers up the larger political reality of the time. Mqhayi is intent to counter this misrepresentation and show the deeper political significance: that this battle was more about colonial intent to gain power in Xhosa territory than any interpersonal conflict between chiefs.

In a number of pieces Mqhayi counters the incorrect popular assumption:

It is a serious mistake for historians to call the Battle of Amalinde Thuthula's War. The Thuthula affair took place earlier, it was resolved internally by the Ngqika, who passed sentence after

discovering the person who went to Alexandria for Thuthula. Mquye was found guilty and Ntlebi exonerated, because he was the senior royal councilor, and Thuthula was sent home before anyone came to blows. *The relationship between Ngqika and Ndlambe could not affect the affairs of state.* (Mqhayi 2009, Item 32, p.310) [my emphasis].

Mqhayi here is at pains to point out the ‘civility’ of Xhosa politics. The ‘Thuthula affair’ was dealt with by proper legal process and duly resolved. Mqhayi here counters the idea that Xhosa politics was fuelled by the despotic whims of individual chiefs. Instead the ‘affairs of state’ are determined by much more complex political interactions.¹⁵

Instead, Mqhayi details Ngqika’s rise to military superiority over the other Rharhabe polities, and even over the Gcaleka—the paramount house of all the amaXhosa. This military supremacy itself was not problematic because it did not give Ngqika political authority:

By this stage the reader has already heard that Ngqika was a warlike ruler. He defeated the Gcaleka, he defeated the Ndlambe, and now it seemed no nation could withstand him in battle. Nevertheless, no one was much impressed because it was recognized that he was not the paramount, and so he posed no threat. The reader must understand that Xhosa kingship passes down in a direct line, and minor princes assume their appropriate rank—no one usurps another’s rightful place. For this reason, no one was much impressed with Ngqika’s prowess in battle. (Mqhayi 2009, item 32, p.310)

The real challenge arose because of the political relationship between Ngqika and the colonial government. The colonial government either mistook Ngqika as the paramount leader of all the amaXhosa, or else saw him as an ally who could take dominion over the Xhosa. They thus sought to build a strong political relationship with Ngqika. This situation came to a head when the governor, Lord Charles Somerset, called together all of the Xhosa chiefs to discuss Xhosa-British borders as well as regulations which would be shared by both the British and the Xhosa. In this meeting he spoke and negotiated only with Ngqika and excluded the other chiefs. He concluded the meeting by esteeming Ngqika as the paramount among the other chiefs, publicly declared British support for Ngqika and

¹⁵ This same idea is conveyed in item 27 (pg. 268), item 30 (p.304) and item 45 (p.424).

showered Ngqika with lavish gifts. Mqhayi recounts his words: “I recognize you alone as paramount chief of the Xhosa here, and I intend to consult you only. Therefore look to my interests and I will look to yours.” (2009, p.314) This show of power, likely intended to both gain Ngqika’s alliance and intimidate the other chiefs into following Ngqika (and thus simplifying political interaction with the Xhosa to interactions with one favourable chief), instead led to political strife. Mqhayi says that “after that meeting all the chiefs, with the Gcaleka [the true paramount house] in support, resolved that this young man [Ngqika] must be punished, he was assuming airs, and he had sold the nation to the white man.” (ibid)

Thus, the battle of Amalinde gathered together warriors from all the Xhosa polities aligned against Ngqika in order to teach him his place and prevent the Xhosa nation being ‘sold to the white man’: “The principle reason for this Battle of Amalinde was to disempower Ngqika, and it was not over Thuthula, as most people believe” (Mqhayi 2009, item 27, p.268). After his forces were defeated in this great battle, Ngqika then turned to Lord Charles Somerset for support (which I will discuss later). It is clear that Mqhayi’s nuanced dealings with the political complexities sheds a totally different light on this historic battle: it was an internal response to attempt to limit the complex political expansion of the colonial government rather than some lovers spat between leaders.

(ii) History as a tool for social and political knowledge

In recounting the story in this way, Mqhayi helps the reader understand something of the nature of social and political change in his own day. There are a number of points worth raising. Firstly, in this history, Mqhayi esteems both Ndlambe as well as Ngqika (in different rights) as noble leaders. Ngqika is shown to be hot headed, but Mqhayi claims that he did not lust for power, and that he never claimed to be the paramount over either the Gcaleka or a number of other ‘smaller nations’ (Mqhayi 2009, p.314). In his broader dealing with both Ngqika and Ndlambe, Mqhayi is able to skilfully represent these leaders

as three dimensional characters, weaving in both praise and criticism to produce a well-rounded image of them (such praise and criticism is a hallmark technique of praise poetry). This historical representation is clearly aimed against colonial histories that defame Xhosa leaders. In this sense Mqhayi restores a sense of positive identity in any Xhosa reader, who would feel proud to associate with these great leaders of the past.

Secondly, this history offers insight into the unfolding social process of colonialism and its social and political implications for the Xhosa people. The influence of advancing colonists upsets the 'correct' running of Xhosa political affairs. In this there is a lesson for his contemporaries: the 'Whites' are not to be trusted or depended upon politically. This point is re-enforced when Mqhayi details Ngqika's response to the battle. Upon being defeated, Ngqika turns to Somerset for help. British troops arrive but all the warriors except for the Ndlambe have dispersed and the British defeat these remaining warriors. As 'payment' for this assistance "the white man excised a large section of land for himself as a reward, and established Ngqakayi, claiming it was for Ngqika's protection." (Mqhayi 2009, item 12, p.124) This ceded territory was all the land between the Fish and the Keiskamma rivers. The experiential power of this blow is well captured by Mostert: "[Ngqika] recognized with considerable shock the price that he had to pay for his collaboration with the British. ... Ngqika's shock was greater for the fact that his own Great Place, his beloved Tyumie valley in which he had spent practically all his life, was included in the extensive expropriation of territory that he considered to be his own domain." (Mostert in Opland's footnote, Mqhayi 2009, p.548). Even Ngqika is thus seen to come to understand that the whites are treacherous and greedy because of this encounter:

[Ngqika] did indeed receive help but the victims received nothing, hence he began to refer to the whites with this poem:

They're Nonibe's coarse things,
Who halter a pregnant cow:
'Let it give birth so we can drink the first milk.'

The turncoats,
Who wheel and stab their own people,
With eyes like forest berries! (Mqhayi 2009, item 27, p.270)

This metaphor—whites as those who “halter a pregnant cow”—is an image that is repeated in a number of contexts to express the greed and immorality of ‘white’ politics. For Mqhayi to push such a point is a shocking claim in his time. Today we are aware of the political conniving that accompanied colonialism, but at Mqhayi’s time, other black intellectuals would likely have felt significant admiration for white people who had been their benefactors, mentors, bosses or teachers.¹⁶ This is just one specific example amongst a multitude of lessons that Mqhayi draws from historic reflection. In this example we can see Mqhayi belongs to an intellectual tradition arguing for the same ideal of political self-determination that we see in future intellectuals such as Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe¹⁷. Mqhayi offers numerous other lessons in his histories, both explicitly and implicitly. In this sense, his histories function as empirical evidence to back up his social commentary, criticism and theorizing. Mqhayi’s sociological imagination is thus demonstrated here, as he uses both broad historic events and their personal impact on individuals to develop a way to make sense of his own time.

(iii) History for developing a greater field of meaning

This sociological imagination can be clearly seen in a third aspect of Mqhayi’s use of history: the way he uses his histories to situate the contemporary individual in a greater field of meaning and identity that is

¹⁶ An example of this shock is recounted by Mandela when he saw Mqhayi perform live. Mandela recalls Mqhayi’s oration and his response. The quote begins with Mqhayi’s words: “[W]hat I am talking to you about is the brutal clash between what is indigenous and good, and what is foreign and bad. We cannot allow these foreigners who do not care for our culture to take over our nation. I predict that, one day, the forces of African society will achieve a momentous victory over the interloper. For too long we have succumbed to the false gods of the white man. But we shall emerge and cast off these foreign notions.’ I could hardly believe my ears. His boldness in speaking of such delicate matters in the presence of Dr Wellington and all the other whites seemed utterly astonishing to us. Yet at the same time it aroused and motivated us, and began to alter my perception of men like Dr Wellington, whom I had automatically considered my benefactor.” (Mandela 1994, p.48-49)

¹⁷ This intellectual heritage is also very evident to some of these people. Sobukwe, for example, speaks very highly of Mqhayi (see 1949, p.3)

anchored by the events of the past. In the history of the Battle of Amalinde, for example, Mqhayi ties the heroes who fell in battle to people and clans that his contemporaries would know: “In the Battle of Amalinde, many of Ngqika’s councilors died, foremost among them Jotelo, the father of Soga, of the Jwarha; Nteyi, father of Tyala, of the Dala; Ntlukwana, father of Neku, of the Cirha; and Qukwana, father of Nxokwana, of the Ntakwenda” (Mqhayi 2009, item 45, p.424). By linking fallen heroes to their modern day descendants who are well known intellectuals and leaders, as well as linking them to their clans (thus allowing individuals to imagine themselves with pride in the position of their forefathers), Mqhayi makes the distant history much more experientially accessible, and allows the individual to have a new lens for understanding themselves and their peers. Mqhayi is also able to translate from the world of the ancestors to the world of his day. For example, Mqhayi says “Among the dead was Jotelo, the father of Soga, of the Jwarha clan; to this day his descendants remain vigorous in fighting the nations battles!” (2009, item 32, p.320). Here Mqhayi translates the warrior identity from more than 100 years prior into contemporary terms by implying that the kinds of warriors the amaXhosa need today are intellectuals who can fight for the Xhosa nations (Mqhayi would be referring to the sons and daughters of Tiyo Soga, son of Jotelo. Many of these people were intellectual leaders of the time.) It is exactly this kind of epistemic translation that makes Mqhayi’s work so vital: he is able to interpret the present not only in the metaphors and typifications of the Western knowledge system, but instead is able to revitalize the meanings and metaphors of the Xhosa knowledge system, both renewing them with contemporary significance while at the same time maintaining the implicit structure of connotation and inference that allows them to make sense within the Xhosa worldview and knowledge system. This one example (which is far more evident in his body of *izibongo*) gives us a window into the vital work that Mqhayi and others like him do in traditional knowledge systems—they are able to both maintain the implicit value and meaning structure of a knowledge system while at the same time revitalizing that system in a way that makes it a meaningful tool for understanding the present. It is precisely these links

that are lost when we neglect African knowledge systems, and Mqhayi's example can inspire us to the necessary work of both continuity and revision, as well as provide some of the metaphoric tools that we need to continue this work.

Conclusion

Mqhayi, like the founding sociologists, has a profound historic sensibility and his awareness of social change leads to his sociological intervention. Methodologically, however, Mqhayi diverges from the Academic sociological tradition: it is clear that Mqhayi draws heavily on a historic methodology to generate his social insights. History thus offers both the data for his analysis as well as a specific set of stories which offer a way of anchoring identity in the rapidly changing world. For Mqhayi, history is a vital methodological tool to develop new social understandings which nevertheless remain coherent as part of an intellectual and cultural tradition. Mqhayi thus sets about correcting misassumptions, offering 'bigger picture' insights into unfolding social processes, and allowing the individual to place themselves within a greater field of meaning using a 'Xhosa' or African worldview. All of this can be understood as part of a broader project of sociological imagination where Mqhayi uses history—both prideful recollections and disastrous lessons—in order to make sense of the world of the individual umXhosa and how they fit into the bigger historical picture of social change.

Biography

A second mode that Mqhayi uses in his social engagement is biography. Mqhayi narrates history and deals with ideological concepts and the lessons he wants to convey often by anchoring them to the story of an individual's life. We can broadly divide this biographical technique into two categories: historical biography and contemporary biography.

Historic biography

Mqhayi's histories cover a range of events. However, what makes his historic method interesting is that these events are primarily narrated through the lives of important political figures in Xhosa history—most often leading chiefs. For example, the account of the Battle of Amalinde that I have just dealt with is found in one article specifically focused on the event, and in four articles focusing on chiefs.

Thus, the insight that Mqhayi uses history as a tool for social intervention and critique can be taken one step further: Mqhayi uses the biographic narratives of the lives of leading chiefs as part of the way to achieve his social and critical goals. Sometimes this narrative history is more general, and the social lessons and critiques are more implicit. Examples of this mode are his longer histories of people like Ngqika (Mqhayi 2009, Item 9, item 27, item 45), Rharhabe (item 28), Maqoma (item 12), Langalibalele (item 31) and many others. These biographies are full of the kinds of important social interventions discussed in the previous section. However, there are biographical histories that draw even more explicit social lessons. For example, in his piece “Rev Tiyo Soga, Shaka and Mlanjeni” (item 23), Mqhayi groups these three men together to draw explicit lessons for the ‘young men’ of his own generations. For example,

Mlanjeni's youth was not despised by nations and chiefs, because he stood firm on what he said, he was courageous, he was strong. You, young man of the nation, do not look down on yourself, transmit what has been given to you to the people you have been sent to, you will not be despised. (Mqhayi 2009, p.230)

It is clear that Mqhayi intends historic figures to serve directly as role models and guides to younger generations. In this same mode Mqhayi draws even more extensive lessons from the life of both Shaka and Tiyo Soga and holds them up as role models of social action for the next generation. Mqhayi applies this same mode to other historic figures, for example his history of Dingiswayo (item 25) is exemplary in this respect. He opens this piece making his intentions explicit: “Perhaps young men will have some

lessons to learn after we have told them the vicissitudes of this prince of the Mthethwa” (2009, p.246).

In this biography he includes a number of sections to explicitly draw lessons for how young people should conduct themselves in his day from the praiseworthy actions of Dingiswayo.

The use of historic biography in these two examples serves a dual purpose in response to the rapid social upheaval and concomitant social crisis among the amaXhosa. This mode of biography both instills knowledge and pride in African history and also is able to use that history to offer concrete advice for the changing world, linking positive ethical action of the past to a conception of the ‘good life’ and admirable moral practice in Mqhayi’s own day. What is interesting to note is how these historic lessons are drawn not just from Xhosa men and women but from African leaders more broadly. In this Mqhayi moves past Xhosa cultural nationalism towards a pan-African cultural nationalism; instilling pride, identity and morality in people as more than just amaXhosa—but as Africans.

Narrative effects of biographic history

It is also important to understand the effect of the medium that Mqhayi has chosen. The biographic method of historic recollection is a narrative device. Its use helps extend the lessons learned through Mqhayi’s histories due to what I will call the *narrative effects* of biography. By building histories around the narratives of people’s lives Mqhayi is able to achieve a greater focus on questions of personal and social identity than other historic modes might offer. This method of history is effective for a number of literary reasons: Firstly, the natural inclination of a reader is to develop strong sympathies and associations with a protagonist. Thus, the very act of narrating the histories of a chief as the key protagonist builds the individual’s appreciation and positive notions of that chief. By using this historic method Mqhayi is able to counter the negative conceptions of African chiefs and leaders that have been perpetrated by missionary education (as Mqhayi discusses in his article on History, quoted above (Mqhayi 2009, p.28-31)). This affirmation is created in a second way; in these histories, the leading

figure functions as a role model in a way that their successes and failures give Mqhayi the tools to teach specific lessons (as seen in item 23: “Rev Tiyo Soga, Shaka and Mlanjeni”). The failures of the protagonist are transformed into lessons and thus the historic figure serves as a mentor even in his/her failures. Mqhayi’s work on Ngqika offers a good example: Mqhayi highlights flaws such as Ngqika’s quick temper and lack of long term thinking (c.f. Mqhayi 2009, item 27). These negative characteristics results in him almost killing his uncle Ndlambe (Mqhayi 2009, p.266) and later being stopped just before killing his paramount chief; Hintsa (ibid). Mqhayi thus steers clear of hagiography in his biographic histories. However, despite these characteristics, Ngqika is shown to be repentant and grateful for the wise advice of his councillors who prevent his hot-tempered actions. Ultimately Ngqika is held up as a national hero despite these and other negative events. The biographic association with leaders as protagonist leaves the reader with sympathy even for a leader’s shortcomings, rather than reviling leaders for their failures.

This effect of ‘narrative association’ is also important in its potential role of shaping individual and shared identity. By the close association that inevitably happens between protagonist and reader/listener, the audience experientially places itself in the experiences of the subject of the biography. One effect of this close association is that it allows the audience to interpret the experiences of their own life through the metaphor of the protagonist’s experiences. Drawing on the example of the Battle of Amalinde, we could imagine the formation: ‘Like Jotelo, I too am a warrior fighting the battles of my nation’. Regarding individual identity, this process allows the individual to conceive of themselves and their world using tools from a ‘Xhosa’ identity. When these metaphors are shared broadly they create the basis for a shared social identity. What Mqhayi’s biographies offer is a filling out of the idea of what it means to be umXhosa or an African in South Africa. When these individual identifications are shared widely enough, they offer a source of unity or shared identity. The shared identity takes substance from a shared history and a shared set of metaphors and interpretations. One clear example of this today is the prideful association Zulu nationalists have with Shaka Zulu. The shared identification

with Shaka is the basis for a shared Zulu identity. Attention to these narrative effects highlight the identity work that Mqhayi's histories offer for those who read them. They allow the individual a set of identity markers to understand themselves pridefully as an umXhosa and an African. This individual identity is then shared and associated with all other amaXhosa and Africans, thus developing pride in a shared identity based on a shared set of cultural and historic practices.

Contemporary Biography

A second distinct style of biography that Mqhayi engages in is biography of contemporary individuals. This mode is stylistically different from his historic biographies and often takes the form of obituaries for great men and women who have passed away. Of the 37 articles that Opland collects of Mqhayi's newspaper journalism concerning contemporary individuals, 28 of them are obituaries to celebrate important public figures who have recently passed away (Mqhayi 2009).

Mqhayi's key concern in this contemporary biography is twofold: firstly he aims to praise the positive characteristics and choices of his subject, and secondly he aims to praise the contribution that these great men and women made for the lives of Xhosa or African people. In doing so, he is able to hold up the achievement of African men and women and encourage others to follow in their footsteps. Mqhayi uses his well respected position as an *imbongi* (praise poet) to proclaim the positive characteristics of the subjects of his biography. His obituaries usually take the form of both a prose recollection of the subject's life as well as an *isibongo* to celebrate their life and achievements.

Mqhayi clearly links the efforts of contemporary individuals to the complex unfolding social change that besets the African 'nations' of Southern Africa during colonialism. For example, Mqhayi opens the obituary of the leader and politician J.T. Jabavu as follows:

Anyone trying to construct the life history of the deceased would have to include the ups and downs and the many difficult patches – yes, one would be struggling to construct the history of

the progress of the entire country of the Xhosa. It would be good to do that when the time is right because many affairs of our nation were hung on this fellow who had just died – and so his story needs to be constructed and constructed thoroughly. (Mqhayi 2009, p.154).

What is made clear here is that Mqhayi's focus on contemporary biography (much like his historic biography) brings together the individual and their social and historic moment. Each individual thus offers a window into the changing social life of African people. Mqhayi's contemporary biographies thus offer him tools to consider 'the good life' and offer positive examples of how leading men and women respond to the political, social and cultural context of their time. For example, Mqhayi offers both personal praise as well as social critique in the obituary of William Congreve Mvalo:

Educated people are not normally concerned with the conduct of Xhosa affairs, especially when they hold good jobs in service of whites. We Ndlambe thank God that this student of ours did not forget the role of chief's councillor exercised by his ancestors, but maintained close contact with his chiefs – he and Chief N.C. Umhalla were very close. (Mqhayi 2009, p.466)

Mqhayi similarly praises the achievements of leading politicians, poets, and social activists.

This obituary form connects issues of memory and meaning in a powerful way: Mqhayi's recollections of these prominent African men and women serves to both celebrate and remember their lives, but also serves a similar social teaching function that runs through the rest of his work. As Mqhayi mourns the loss of these individuals his praise of their achievements also exhorts others to follow in their footsteps. The lives of these heroes implicitly offer a normative framework for how other individuals can and should respond to their world—the lives of those who have passed away thus give meaning to the lives of those still here. By holding up certain people and certain deeds as worthy of praise and memory, Mqhayi offers a set of ideals and values for a world in the midst of social upheaval and flux. In this respect, he functions as a public intellectual, helping to form and inform community of shared values.

Capturing the ironies and ambiguities of colonial 'progress'

Mqhayi's obituaries can also be filled with complex irony, which carry the experiential complexity of the changing social world during colonialism. A good example is the obituary of the missionary Rev J.M Auld (Mqhayi 2009, item 49). Mqhayi says the following of this minister:

The fellow was unruly, true to his heritage as a Scotsman, as a Scot in Skirts, and he met his match in the Ngqika, true to their own heritage. The result was constant strife and conflict in which they laid into each other with sticks and sjamboks, locked in that kind of head-to-head struggle. The son of the Scots, the brave man, would say just one thing: 'How can you speak like this to your minister! You deserve to be thrashed!!!' On uttering the last word he brought a sjambok down on the man's body. The fellow hated sin and those who committed it, and entertained no traffic with 'obstinate' people. Because of this he was not respected among the Ngqika; of customs, traditions, religion, marriage, cattle, charms, circumcision and such like, he used to say: 'I will fight these things until the day I die!' (Mqhayi 2009, p.440-2)

What is clear here is the disjuncture between ideological systems. This minister is shown to reject not just certain customs but all important social institutions of the amaXhosa in the area: "customs, traditions, religion, marriage, cattle, charms, circumcision and such like" (ibid). Mqhayi links this difference, and the ministers "unruly" engagement with it, not to concepts of right/wrong, or truth/falsehood, but to different cultural traditions—different heritages—which both the Scots and the Ngqika have.

Here Mqhayi offers a social critique of the disdain and violent repression of amaXhosa customs by arguing that the Scottish have their own customs (and are therefore equal to the Ngqika) and that these customs produce the kind of negative characteristics seen in J.M. Auld. However, in spite of this critique, the lines of inclusion/exclusion are not clear cut. For example, Mqhayi recounts a "major conflict" that happened in 1888/9 between these two groups "which allowed the Wesleyans to establish themselves in Centane. They took control of Sizi, Cebe and Kantolo in Nyuthura, and paved the way for other denominations; but through this the Word entered the Ngqika; education flourished, and churches and schools increased in number." (2009, p.442) Here the missionaries win a conflict and take territory—a loss for the Ngqika if they are considered separate from the 'Scots'. But with this defeat and loss comes

education and churches, the institutions that allowed amaXhosa people increasing entrance into the new institutional power systems being set up by colonialism. For Mqhayi, the growth of churches and schools is a deeply positive thing. Herein lies the ambiguity of colonial progress: both loss and gain characterise the lives of the people involved in the colonial encounter. This ambiguity is reflected in Mqhayi's *isibongo* for J.M. Auld. The nuance of the poem deserve it to be quoted in full:

Awu!!!
We sit silent, Ngqika people,
tribes of Rharhabe,
tribes of Tetha, Mbombo and Mbede;
we sit silent –
a man has gone, a Ngqika's gone,
God's home called and he responded;
he left Luqongo for Ngcabanga;
at Ngcabanga his heart was in Luqongo
Mercy, tribes of Phalo!
He's still with us today
fighting sin, and filth, and evil:
Phalo's people never die.
Mercy, daughters of Rharhabe's home!
Why are you silent?
Where have you seen such a thing among us?
Aren't you supposed to be speaking well,
creating gateways of song
about the Scottish son of Auld,
who enlightened the benighted Ngqika,
who crossed Qhora and Qwaninga into Gcalekaland
and returned through Manyube and Qolorha
Mercy, men, I'm not crying –
I'm not a person to cry at the moment,
I'm happy I closed my father's eyes;
I'm happy I buried my father;
I'm happy I sat in wait for my father
That is it!!! (Mqhayi 2009, p.442-4)

In this poem, Auld is considered to be one with the Ngqika people, "a man has gone, a Ngqika's gone," however, the Ngqika people sit in silence and do not mourn his passing. This inclusion is extended to

ironically undermine Auld's belief system: "He's still with us today/fighting sin, and filth, and evil:/Phalo's people never die." Here Mqhayi refers to the notion that the ancestors continue to dwell among people, one of the 'heathen' beliefs that Auld would have wanted to destroy. Because Auld is given to be a Ngqika in this poem, he is assumed to continue his work as an ancestor. This metaphysical belief also has very practical consequences: the legacy that Auld began will continue, his death does not stop the viewing of Xhosa custom as "sin, and filth, and evil". Thus the irony extends both ways: his (Christian) belief is undermined by his inclusion as an ancestor, at the same time his continued influence in the area (whether through metaphysical spirit, or materialist legacy) will continue to assault the very idea of ancestors as well as other Xhosa customs. Thus, Mqhayi sarcastically exhorts the amaNgqika to celebrate the man who "who enlightened the benighted Ngqika". Ultimately, in the conclusion to the poem, Mqhayi too remains silent, joining the Ngqika and refusing to mourn.

This poetry allows us access to the complex identity experience of colonialism in ways that plain prose never could. The complexities and ambiguities affect the amaXhosa and white people alike: Auld's identity is also wrapped up in the Ngqika people, and when he retires from ministry Mqhayi says he still yearned to be with his Ngqika people: "he left Luqongo for Ngcabanga/at Ngcabanga his heart was in Luqongo". Ultimately the Ngqika are profoundly affected by Auld and he is profoundly affected by them. Thus, Auld is remembered as both Ngqika and Scot, both a father and unmourned. Mqhayi is arguing that cultures affect and mutually undermine each other, Auld's by the Ngqika, and the Ngqika's by the Scots. But he is also making a distinction between culture and identity. Auld has taken up a Ngqika identity but not all of their culture. What is mourned is his identity, but not his culture.

The example of Auld demonstrates a trend that is present in other works of Mqhayi. He uses irony and sarcasm as well as other literary devices to get at experiential social phenomena which are harder to access in prose. This allows Mqhayi to speak to the social realities of people beyond simple scientific

description and access the emotive ambiguities that people are experiencing in the midst of social change.

This negative characterisation of a missionary can be contrasted with Mqhayi's obituary of William Thomson Brownlee (item 52). The piece is titled "Hail, Busobengwe". This use of 'hail' followed by a person's praise name Mqhayi uses elsewhere only for important chiefs, such as Ngqika and others. W.T. Brownlee (Busobengwe), is seen to be of major help to the Xhosa nation. Mqhayi primarily praises him because of his excellent knowledge and wisdom in Xhosa custom: "Ultimately he became chief magistrate in Mthatha, following other white Xhosa like the sons of Stanford (Ndabeni) and Gwadiso. All of these fellows were fluent in Xhosa and proud of it; they were students of Xhosa custom and tradition and were popular magistrates among us because they understood their work well." (Mqhayi 2009, p.456). Busobengwe is considered to be a 'white Xhosa' and later Mqhayi says "His wife was also a Xhosa, just like him." (ibid). His Xhosa name inscribes this complex plural identity: "The Xhosa name means Face of a Leopard, Freckleface." (Opland's notes, in Mqhayi 2009, p.585). This name is both a privileged praise name and references the leopard, whose skin was worn as a sign of a chief, but also always alludes to his difference: he has a white freckled face. Thus, in this obituary, Mqhayi considers a person he sees to be a 'White' as worthy of respect: one who has taken up and has a deep value for Xhosa culture—just the opposite of J.M. Auld. This contrast allows us to see how Mqhayi offers a critical valuation of the social world and of individuals. He is deeply committed to the preservation of Xhosa culture and he helps others understand the larger socio-cultural currents at work as well as individuals who take up alternate sides of the complex battle at play in the setting of colonial cultural plurality.

Conclusion

In his intimate biographies, Mqhayi is able to reach far beyond the individual alone. By employing a methodological focus on individuals, Mqhayi is able to analyse both the historic processes which impact

their lives, as well as highlight how they impact and shape this emergent social order¹⁸. Biography offers Mqhayi case studies for insightful analysis of broader social trends while also providing him a vehicle for his social intervention. His intellectual endeavour is not as disaffected as many academics in the Western tradition. Biography offers him the place to entwine his social knowledge with its implications for everyday life; praising what is honourable, critiquing negative social trends, and capturing and cathartically expressing the emotional crisis felt by many in his time. Here is the sociological imagination at work: Mqhayi is able to use this methodological medium to both access sociological insight and present it to Xhosa and African men and women, helping them understand their changing social world.

Novels and *Izibongo*

I have paid close attention to Mqhayi's histories and biographies because they present the greatest resemblance to contemporary sociological sources, and thus offer the most recognisable data in my argument for Mqhayi as a sociologist. However, anyone wanting to mine the depths of Mqhayi's sociological thought would also need to pay attention to the development of his thought in both his *izibongo* and his novels. While space limits my discussion of these two elements I will briefly discuss their importance here.

Izibongo

A C Jordan excellently elucidates the importance of *izibongo* as a sociological tool:

It must be repeated that the African traditional praise poem is not, as most white people think, just a song of praise in which the bard showers flattering epithets on his chief. The "praises of the chiefs" deal primarily with the happenings in and around the tribe during the reign of a given chief, praising what is worthy and decrying what is unworthy, and even forecasting what is going to happen: rivalries for the chieftainship and conflicts with neighbouring tribes; military and political triumphs and reverses, etc. Thus the African bard is a chronicler as well as being a poet. The chief is only the centre of the praise-poem because he is they symbol of the tribe as a

¹⁸ In the parlance of social theory, Mqhayi is able to analyse both 'structure' and 'agency'.

whole. This period being that of 'treatises', annexations, and 'resettlements', we are able to see, through the eyes of the African bard, that encroachment of the white man on the land of the Africans, the breaking of alliances between one tribe and another, boundary disputes, the undermining of the power of the chief by missionary and magistrate, the relations between non-Christian and Christian, etc. (Jordan 1973, p.59-60)

It is clear from the above quote that anyone who wants to seriously engage with the African intellectual traditions in South Africa must pay attention to the *izibongo* form in their analysis. This is especially true in Mqhayi's case, because he is esteemed as perhaps the greatest figure in Xhosa literary history (c.f. Opland in Mqhayi 2009, p.27; Pieres 1979, p.165 and many others). Because of this esteem, his poetic work has been give substantial attention in literary circles. However Jordan's quote makes it clear that these 'poetic' works can be considered as far more than just poetry in the Western sense (i.e. as 'art for art's sake'). These *izibongo* offer sites to understand social and political traditions and theoretical developments. Just as important is the fact that that the poetic form relies heavily not only on the denotative meaning of a word, but also the connotative meaning. This connotative connection does its work by drawing on 'common sense' connections between ideas that we are often not even explicitly aware of. This means that poetry both relies on a broader social worldview to make sense and do its work, and it also reiterates that worldview. This reiteration often connects already existing meanings with new meanings, and in doing so renewing ideas of the worldview by investing it with new metaphors and new connections in new contexts. For example, in Auld's *isibongo*, quoted above, Mqhayi utilises the idea of the ancestors. Without knowledge of the worldview, one cannot make sense of this passage. However, Mqhayi captures this already existing idea to highlight the sociological idea that the dead have an influence over the living, even for the new white men who do not believe in the ancestors. Mqhayi recalls the idea of the ancestors, but also renews it with subtle new meanings and connections, showing that those who have passed on can have both positive and negative influences on the continued shape of Xhosa culture.

We see Mqhayi delving into the existing Xhosa worldview and utilizing it to make new connections. This means two things: it makes a strong understanding of the implicit worldview necessary for successful interpretation¹⁹, but it also means that it is an ideal site to track how concepts in the common worldview are reinterpreted and transformed. The poet thus both captures and creates the transformation in ideas which occurs as worldviews clash and are transformed in the emerging society being formed in South Africa. This attention to the relation between ideas expressed in poetry and their relation to changing worldview structures suggests that the *izibongo* form, which has been broadly neglected by sociology, might offer incredible insights into the emergence of new social and political conceptions in South Africa. It certainly is a site that deserves further sociological analysis.

Novels

Mqhayi's novels are just as important as his poetry in his oeuvre. He arguably wrote the first ever novel in isiXhosa (Opland 2007), and his novel *ITyala lamaWele* (1983) is still considered one of the most important classics in isiXhosa literature. Mqhayi's novels demonstrate his complex intellectual hybridity: the novel form is clearly of European origin, but Mqhayi both adopts it and at the same time distorts its form to make it unique. A vitally important, but fairly simple distortion is his insistence on writing in isiXhosa. As mentioned earlier, this means that his audience is not a colonial or Western audience, but instead the Xhosa people. Mqhayi distorts the novel form in other ways. His narrative form deviates from the classic linear form that defines the Western novel. In *ITyala lamaWele*, for example, the story of the court case between the two twins does not end with a clear conclusion which wraps up the question of justice and defines a winner and a loser. Instead the twins return home and they are reconciled by the king's judgment and in fact reverse the judgement of the king (see Lalu 2009, p.p. 161-169 for more). The ending is much more complex and does not bring closure. Furthermore, Mqhayi

¹⁹ I lack such an in-depth knowledge of the 19th Century worldview—one of the reasons I have not spent significant time interpreting *izibongo* but instead leave it to more skilled academics.

includes in this novel historic narratives, such as a chapter on the life of Maqoma, a corrective account of the death of Hintsisa and the dismissal of the governor D'Urban. In addition to this he moves between prose and *izibongo*, welding these styles together. This novel clearly adopts the novel form while adjusting it to both Xhosa narrative traditions and to Mqhayi's own political and social goals of instilling cultural pride in the amaXhosa. This is clearly a hybrid work that breaks new ground for African fiction and Jordan says "to be fully appreciated, *ITyala lamaWele*, though partly fact and partly fiction, partly verse and partly prose, must be viewed as a whole." (1973, p.109). Another example of his melding of literature and social commentary is his utopian novel *UDon Jadu* (1929). In this novel the influential leader Don Jadu sets up an ideal state for the amaXhosa which prospers as a self-governing nation in good relations with its neighbours. The novel outlines an ideal state filled with Mqhayi's utopian vision and hope (in much the same spirit as Thomas Moore's original *Utopia*(1961) and Soga's plans to create a new nation of free people in the Eastern Cape(Davis 2012). This ideal vision presents a fascinating vision of modernity and hybridity where Christian and traditional Xhosa rituals are blended together and where there is restorative justice and broad social equality (See Jordan 1973, p.p. 109-11 for a more detailed synopsis). Clearly a close analysis of this work would yield a fascinating insight into Mqhayi's political and social ideals and their place in the intellectual history of South African responses to the modernising world.

Conclusion

What is clear is that, while the novel and poetic forms are not generally considered as viable sites for sociological analysis in contemporary sociology, much of Mqhayi's theoretical insights, intellectual contributions and proposed solutions are held in these forms. If we are to consider Mqhayi's theoretical contributions to particular ideas we cannot ignore these mediums. Furthermore, it suggests that if we are to reconstruct an intellectual tradition of African intellectuals we cannot ignore the more 'artistic'

forms of engagement in our intellectual histories. It is clear that both the poetic and the novel form are vital mediums through which social and political ideas are conveyed in these traditions. An African sociology must delve into these mediums to discover the theoretical possibilities they offer. For now, this cursory engagement is all that space permits and this work will be left to future projects or future intellectuals.

Methodological Alternatives and the Sociological Imagination

In Mqhayi's work, the opposite poles of broad impersonal history and myopic individual biography are brought into a synthesis which enriches both. Mqhayi's histories highlight both the massive societal trends while also narrating the victories and defeats, joys and despair, of the individuals who are caught up in them. His biographies show us men and women who are at times brave, at times weak, at times persistent, at times foolhardy. These individuals, however, are shown to be profoundly people of their time, and Mqhayi raises the biographic up to the level of the historic and shows how each is shaped by, but also shapes, their own period. By uniting biography and history, Mqhayi deploys the sociological imagination to help his fellow men and women make sense of their world, so thrown into flux. His works, thus, are not simply analysis but also seek to help his people understand "the kinds of men they are becoming and ... the kinds of history-making in which they might take part." (Mills 1959, p.9-10) His analysis is turned into applicable wisdom and insight aimed at helping Africans navigate the new social world without losing their sense of identity as Africans.

I argue that Mqhayi should be looked upon as one of the founding fathers of an African sociological tradition. He captures the essence of already existing traditions in writing, while transforming it to meet new social needs and realities. Mqhayi is both profoundly modern—a graduate of Lovedale—while at the same time powerfully traditional—never abandoning already existing methods of African social thought.

His dynamic traditionalism marks him as an important thinker in the transformed appearance of the African intellectual, and offers us inspiration for our own necessary hybridity today.

Mqhayi thus shows us that a host of methodologies and mediums—which are not a part of the Academic sociological tradition—are vital for coming to terms with the already existing social theory crafted by African thinkers to make sense of our society. By understanding Mqhayi's methodology, and the insight he gives to how he and other African intellectuals have practiced their sociological pursuits, Mqhayi opens up access to existing African intellectual traditions which have been neglected and also highlights a range of alternate methodologies which are marginalized in the Western sociological tradition. This offers us a host of previously unexplored tools to understand our world today in a new light. As we begin to face social challenges which have never existed in the Western tradition, these thinkers may provide a wealth of insights to help us understand our challenges today, allowing us to respond with wisdom developed over the last 200 years.

Conclusion

How do we make sense of this crazy world, and how can we help the people who live in it? This simple motive has driven social thinkers worldwide to search for a meaningful understanding of their world, not for themselves alone, but for their communities and societies. With this same motive, we must seek to develop a sociology which is relevant to our own society, which gives us wisdom to respond to our own challenges, which gives us hope for a better future and an idea of how to get there.

I have shown how South African sociology has fallen short of this goal for a number of historic, political and disciplinary reasons. While our inheritance gives us deep and important insight into some areas of society, in many areas we remain blind—unable to even see the problems that face many people, let alone respond to them. We must search on.

In this search, I have turned to S.E.K. Mqhayi, and shown his immense effort to make sense of the changing social world for his people. Mqhayi opens our eyes to the fact that there are a number of African intellectuals whose profound insights have never been pursued. This gives us hope to face new challenges in South Africa, and offers the promise of new questions, and new solutions, yet to be discovered. Broadly, we see the vital possibilities offered by African intellectuals to develop a sociology which draws on our own history and experiences to develop knowledge and theories relevant to our own world.

Mqhayi also offers us alternatives to the ‘managerial’ sociology of control what has had such a profound influence on South African sociology. Primarily, we have seen sociologists worldwide work in league with the dominant powers of the day—a trend running from the dawn of the Enlightenment right up until the present. Mqhayi did not have the luxury of producing knowledge for people who had the power to shape the social world to their own ideas. Instead, his sociology is directed to everyday people trying to

face the complex world. His sociology is one that embraces not only social facts, but sees that those facts are important insofar as they shape the lived lives of people. This sociology is bound up in all the messy human realities of identity, emotion, existential confusion and so on, which positivist 'value free' science has aimed to avoid.

This paper has thus sought to highlight what is lacking and where we might turn for new answers. By considering how Mqhayi's methodology is notably different from the dominant methodologies of Academic sociology we can gain a clearer image of how we might gain access to an African sociological tradition. African intellectuals have both drawn on a different intellectual tradition, and have also had a different functional aim than 'managerial' sociology. Furthermore, Mqhayi's methodological fusion and hybridity confounds the Western binary division between 'Tradition' and 'Modernity'. His work is both insightful and accessible because he melds together the supposedly 'traditional' and 'modern' into something new which nonetheless remains meaningful within the worldview. The tradition/modernity binary has long been used to exclude the non-Western from appearing worthy of our attention. Mqhayi shows us that if we are to meet the real lived problems of our people, we will need to develop our own hybridity: drawing on the best of the Western sociological tradition while also delving deeply into our own local histories, worldviews, and imaginative possibilities. We are in need of both insightful analysis that can explain our own world as well as the poetic/prophetic imagination that denounces social failings and inspires dreams of wholesomeness. Both analysis and imagination must draw on our own history, tradition and metaphor if it is to resonate with our people. Mqhayi's example call us to leverage our own hybridity, drawing tools, methods and insights of both 'African' and 'Western' knowledge systems. This hybridity, while always a difficult negotiation, has the potential to powerfully broaden our own sociological imagination.

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