

**THE FORMS, FUNCTIONS AND TECHNIQUES OF XHOSA HUMOUR**

by

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### ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the way in which Xhosa speakers create humour, what forms (eg. satire, irony, punning, parody) they favour in both oral and textual literature, and the genres in which these forms are delivered and executed.

The functions of Xhosa humour, both during and after apartheid, are examined, as is its role in challenging, contesting and reaffirming traditional notions of society and culture. The particular techniques Xhosa comedians and comic writers use in order to elicit humour are explored with specific reference to the way in which the phonological complexity of this language is exploited for humorous effect.

Oral literature sources include collections of praise poems, folktales and proverbs, while anecdotal humour is drawn from recent interviews conducted with domestic workers. My analysis of humour in literary texts initially focuses on the classic works of G.B. Sinxo and S.M. Burns-Ncamashe, and then goes on to refer to contemporary works such as those of P.T. Mtuze.

The study on the techniques of Xhosa humour uses as its theoretical base Walter Nash's *The language of humour* (1985), while that on the functions of Xhosa humour owes much to the work of sociologists such as Michael Mulkay and Chris Powell and George E.C. Paton.

The study reveals the fact that Xhosa oral humour is personal and playful — at times obscene — but can also be critical. In texts it explores the comedy of characters as well as the irony of socio-political realities.

In both oral and textual discourses the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of Xhosa are exploited to create a humour which is richly patterned and finely crafted.

In South Africa humour often served to liberate people from the oppressive atmosphere of apartheid. At the same time humour has always had a stabilizing role in Xhosa cultural life, providing a means of controlling deviants and misfits.

## SUMMARY

The thesis is divided into four chapters.

*Chapter One* deals with the way in which humour is manifested in oral discourse. The humour of oral literature is examined with reference to praise poetry, riddles, folktales, songs and idiomatic expressions. Critical, sarcastic and sometimes obscene humour is evident in praise poetry and songs, while riddles play with the semantics of the language and folktales rely on dramatic performance for their comedy. Although jokes do occur in conversational discourse, Xhosa speakers also create humour from an elaborate system of word-play, including homophonic translations, nicknames and tongue-twisters.

Extracts of anecdotal humour (its particular genius being very similar to that of the traditional storyteller) are included in this chapter. These anecdotes, related by domestic workers aged from 50 to 60, reveal a subversive humour that challenged racism and exploitation.

In *Chapter Two* the specific nature of Xhosa textual humour is explored and analysed, with particular reference to the works of G.B. Sinxo and S.M. Burns-Ncamashe. The chapter examines how these two authors, while employing the various categories of humour (eg. irony, parody, incongruity, satire, word-play) in their creative works tend to concentrate on comic characterization. Other writers such as P.T. Mtuze and L.K. Siwisa have generally followed this focus on developing characters who will be remembered for their laughable utterances and habits.

*Chapter Three* examines the functions of Xhosa humour. Under the heading "To act as a defence against risk and danger" I make reference to the way in which humour gave people licence to comment on the limitations of westernism and the

injustices of apartheid. Contemporary writers and comedians have continued to use humour as a means of subverting the social order by caricaturing officials and authorities.

Humour was also used to cope with despair and failure. Evidence of this function can be seen in the way in which writers encouraged people to view the vicissitudes of life in perspective and to be on the lookout for humour in the most depressing of situations. The absurd pass laws, for example, led to the creation of a number of jokes.

Humour enables Xhosa speakers to communicate on taboo topics such as sex, death and disease. It also serves to increase the morale of the in-group and introduce or foster a hostile disposition towards the out-group. The establishment of separate homelands created divisions amongst the Black majority, diminishing the threat which a unified front would have posed to the White minority government. Hence much of "formalized" Xhosa humour concentrates on criticizing the stupidity (and other perceived weaknesses) of the Zulus, the Mpondos, the Shangaans and the Coloureds. This historically inward-centred humour has in recent years changed to include the foibles and limitations of Whites.

Finally, it is argued that one of the main functions of Xhosa humour is to make social interaction easier and more enjoyable.

*Chapter Four* discusses the techniques of Xhosa humour. Writers exploit the phonology, syntax and semantics of the Xhosa language in order to create both expansive and contractive humour. Names, insults, idiomatic expressions and ideophones compress humour, while authors achieve generic expansion by referring to cultural and traditional practices.

Writers such as Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe create comic discourse by interacting with their readers, alluding to personal idiosyncrasies and then expanding on such allusions by employing recognizably funny syntactic structures, thus engaging in interactional expansion.

Linguistic expansion is attained through exploitation of the alliterative possibilities of concords and reduplicated noun stems, such repetition being extended in synonyms, hyponyms and antonyms.

The thesis concludes with the following observations:

- \* Xhosa oral humour is personal and playful — but also critical — and, at times, obscene.
- \* Xhosa humour in texts explores the comedy of characters as well as the irony of socio-political realities.
- \* Xhosa humour functions on many levels, some more serious than others. It has always had a stabilizing role in Xhosa cultural life, exhibiting a tendency to control deviants and misfits. Changing political and social realities, however, indicate that not only the nature of Xhosa humour, but also its significance and function, will change.
- \* Xhosa humour, while manifesting many of the techniques of English humour, exploits its own phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, creating a humour which, although apparently artlessly playful, is in fact richly patterned and finely studied.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ukutya kuyaphumelelisa ukuba mnandi kwakunongwa ngozityuwa kwanezinye izinto zokwenza kunandipheke. Ubomi bomntu emhlabeni ngebukrakra ukuba bezingekho izinto ezihlekisayo ezibunongayo ukubenza mnandana. (J.J.R. Jolobe 1970:42),

(When food is prepared with salts and seasoned with spices and herbs it is more delicious. Life on earth would be bitter if there were nothing to make one laugh, to give it spice and make it a little more pleasant.)

The academic study of humour is becoming increasingly important to psychologists, sociologists, linguists, anthropologists and folklorists (see A.C. Zijderveld 1983). To understand the humour of an individual or group is to understand the way that person or group perceives reality, what they hold important, what they think about themselves and others:

Humour is of interest, not only in its own right, but also because its study helps us better to understand our serious social world. (M. Mulkay 1988:1)

When studying the humour of a particular culture it is important to remember that

humor is by and large culture based and ... can be a major conceptual and methodological tool for gaining insights into cultural systems. (M.L. Apte 1985:16)

The humour of Xhosa speakers, a major cultural group in South Africa, has not yet been methodically collected, explained or analysed. In fact, historical and more recent references to the humour of South African Blacks have been, for the most part, uninformed and patronizing. This could be attributable to the fact that since

South Africans lived lives of forced separation for so long, whole areas of possible shared experience, such as humour, have remained inaccessible to the majority of people. As Nash (1988:9) notes,

we share our humour with those who have shared our history  
and who understand our way of interpreting experience.

White and Black South Africans shared neither the same experiences nor history, but the situation has now changed, and there is an unmistakable and growing desire for mutual understanding. I hope in this thesis to provide a hermeneutics of humour that will in some way contribute to the study and analysis of the South African “experience” in general, and also to generate an appreciation of the specific creativity and wit which characterize this aspect of the Black South African experience.

In order to do justice to this involved subject I refer extensively to many academic works dealing specifically with the topic of humour. These works have been important in focusing the study, giving it a theoretical base and providing a perspective from which the ways in which Xhosa humour differs from and resembles humour in other societies can be discerned. I have also borne in mind that any study of humour benefits from a multi-disciplinary approach (see Davies 1984).

In Chapter One, I analyse the extent to which traditionally accepted forms of humour, such as puns, satire, irony and parody, are found in Xhosa. I also discuss the way in which specific genres of Xhosa oral literature lend themselves to expressing types of humour. For example, I show that the praise poem is a suitable vehicle for satire and sarcasm, and in some cases even for obscene humour. I

demonstrate the way in which riddles, proverbs and word-play in Xhosa amply exploit linguistic techniques of humour, while the folktale relies heavily on the performance element of comedy. This chapter also includes examples of humour in conversation being rendered more effective through the adoption of a casual, code-switching register, in which the Xhosa speaker artfully employs the syntax and phonology of English as well as Xhosa.

Chapter Two deals with humour in literary texts. This chapter initially concentrates on the works of G.B. Sinxo and S.M. Burns-Ncamashe, two writers who have provided us with some of the most endearing and enduring comic characters as well as some of the most detailed descriptions of humorous events. The extent to which these writers use parody, irony, word-play and other forms of humour is discussed and exemplified, and subsequently analysed in relation to other works of comic fiction.

Chapter Three is concerned with the functions of Xhosa humour, and thus makes particular reference to the works of sociologists and psychologists. Although it is impossible to place the functions of Xhosa humour in absolutely distinct categories, I use such headings as “To communicate on taboo topics”; “To subvert the social order” and “To cope with defeat and failure” for the purpose of coherent analysis.

Chapter Four deals with the techniques of Xhosa humour, referring extensively to Walter Nash’s seminal study *The Language of Humour* (1985). Here I examine how the principles elucidated by Nash are uniquely manifested in the language and linguistic conventions of Xhosa. I give many examples and detailed analyses of specific texts.

The conclusion sums up the findings of the thesis and makes certain projections and recommendations as to future scholarship in this field.

Finally, it should be noted that while all passages in Xhosa are accompanied by English translations, these do not always convey the true wit of the original. The particular genius of Xhosa humour can only be fully appreciated with a proper knowledge of Xhosa culture and language. It is nevertheless my hope that the translations will allow even those without such knowledge to enjoy, to some extent, the idiosyncratic comicality of the quotations.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FORMS OF HUMOUR IN ORAL LITERATURE AND CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

An “act” of humour, according to W. Nash (1985:9-10), will always have:

A “genus”, or derivation, in culture, institutions, attitudes, beliefs, typical practices, characteristic artefacts, etc ...;

A characteristic design, presentation, or verbal packaging, by virtue of which the humorous intention is indicated and recognized;

A locus in language, some word or phrase that is indispensable to the joke; the point at which humour is held and discharged ...

I will consider all three of these principal references in relation to humour in Xhosa, but in Chapters One and Two the primary focus will be on the “design, presentation, or verbal packaging”, i.e. the forms, in which it occurs.

In order for humour to “happen” various strategies are employed which, whether or not consciously recognized by the reader or audience (or even by the author), usually follow some convention of humorous discourse. Puns, parody, satire, irony, and jokes are just a few of the many ways in which an author or comedian can create comic situations. However, as languages differ radically, so does the way in which they are employed for humorous effect. For example, D. Chiaro

(1992:122) notes that word-play, and particularly punning, is a form of humour that is extensively used in Britain. She nevertheless observes:

It would indeed appear that all natural languages contain ambiguities which can be deliberately exploited to create verbal duplicity ...

Since punning and other forms of humour such as the understatement have been identified as being extensively used in Britain (see Nash 1985), the question now to be asked is: "What are the most pervasive forms of humour in Xhosa?" In order to provide an adequate answer to this question, examples from some of the most comic verbal utterances (Chapter One) and written texts (Chapter Two) in Xhosa will be presented and analysed and a final thesis offered as to the kind of humorous devices most favoured by the authors and performers of comic discourse.

The distinction between the forms of humour in oral and textual discourse is made because

textual humour expands through elaborative networks rarely, if ever, found in oral humour. (Nash 1985:20)

Unlike in texts, where humour can be recognized through the existence of certain forms and conventions, humour in non-written discourse is both less and more elaborate. Nash (1985:20) observes that with textual humour

what begins as a game, on the bounce of a lucky notion or the teasing flight of a word, ends as an art, with diverse elements wrought together in a scrupulous design.

He does, however, add:

There is of course the limitation of all texts, that the design is made once and for all, without possibility of an adaptive



improvisation, for the distant anonymous respondent who must interpret complex signals made via the restrictive conventions of print. (Nash 1985:20-21)

It can thus be argued that humour occurring in oral contexts is less restrictive, with endless possibilities for adaptive improvisation and the benefit of a non-anonymous audience. Oral humour is therefore more playful, more interactive. W. Fry's comments (in M. Mulkey 1988:47) in the following passage would seem to have specific reference to oral humour:

First, humor is play. Cues are given that this, which is about to unfold, is not real. There is a "play frame" ... created around the episode. The frame can be indicated by a voice quality, a body movement or posture, a lifted eyebrow — any of the various things people do to indicate fantasy to one another ... Usually these frames are established at the beginning of the humorous episode. A wink, a smile, a gurgle in the voice will set the stage ...

Although Fry's observations are pertinent to this discussion, it will nevertheless be argued that humour in some forms of Xhosa oral discourse "plays" both with fantastic *and* real situations depending on the particular context and audience involved.

As I have argued, humour in oral discourse occurs in a less structured way, with forms being manipulated according to highly individualistic contexts. It is for this reason that I group examples of oral humour in two discrete categories — humour in oral literature and humour in conversational discourse.

## 1.1 HUMOUR IN ORAL LITERATURE

Praise poetry, riddles, iintsomi (folktales), songs and even proverbs all contain and exploit humorous forms. Each one of these sub-genres will be examined separately in order to highlight the particular strategies they employ in order to produce humour.

### 1.1.1 Praise Poetry (*izibongo*) and praise poets (*iimbongi*)

Everyone in traditional Xhosa society has his/her own personal praises (*izibongo*) as well as the praises of the clan (*iziduko*). W. Kuse (1973:46) observes that

the crucial difference between *iziduko* and *simple izibongo* is that *iziduko* are inherited while *izibongo* are earned by the hero to whom they apply.

However, as A.T. Wainwright (1979:49) points out,

it is difficult to draw a decisive and definitive line between clan and personal praises because personal *izibongo*, which can be recited for as long as a few minutes (generally being of longer duration than clan praises) very often also have elements of clan *izibongo* in them.

Although the praises of the clan are not usually considered humorous, they can contain amusing elements, such as in *Dlomo, Madiba, vela bembhentsele!* (Dlomo, Madiba, come while they are exposing their bare bottoms!) and *Gaba, Thithiba, Ndoko, Nozinga, Mnto'mlambo into ephuma emanzini igcakamele ilanga*

*inesirhama emnqundu!* (Gaba, Thithiba, Ndoko, Nozingo, Mnto'mlambo, something that comes out of the water and lies in the sun with an unwiped bottom!) In Kuse's (1973) collection of iziduko there are the praise names *uBhodlinyama* (Belcher of beef) (p.11), *uMab'iinkomo zabantu athi zezakhe* (Stealer of other people's cattle and then claim ownership) (p.12), *uVela-zimbentsele azisambentsheli zoyik'abeLungu* (Appearer and they expose their loins to him; they expose themselves to him no longer, they fear White men) (p.13) and *uNdlebe ntle zombini de kuthi le yasekunene* (He with both ears beautiful especially the one on the right) (p.18). These names wittily characterize and, with their economy of expression, manage to pack humorous observations into a single phrase — an example of what Nash (1985:13) would term the “contractive” energy of humour.

Humour in praise poetry may be derived from the teasing often implicit in praise names:

These “praises” are often given to a child when young as a form of teasing, or perhaps when mildly chastising him for reproachable behaviour. (N.S. Turner 1990:58)

Mulkay (1988:78) maintains that teasing is linked to mild criticism:

It appears that not only is teasing a form of amusing play, but is regularly used as a way of formulating reproof, scepticism, correction ...

Amongst Zulu and Xhosa speakers teasing is not an arbitrary pastime, but is integrated into the very fabric of praising, thus giving it an almost poetic character. Turner (1990:58) discusses how these playful and teasing “praise” names may originate:

*Izibongo* which contain critical/comic lines may even originate from a person's childhood days, when he may have been known by such *isithopho* or nicknames as "the one with bandy legs" or "the one with flapping ears."

Even animals can be given nicknames (*izikhahlelo* — Xhosa for the Zulu *izithopho*), and J. Opland (1983:26) notes that A.C. Jordan uses this custom for humorous effect in his *Wrath of the Ancestors*. He quotes the following passage:

You might have said that Mphuthumi's horse, Goloza, (the Lingerer), was actually conscious of the admiring eyes which followed his cavortings. He even had a trick of affecting lameness, the rogue, and it was such a convincing performance that more than once his rider had been held up by the police for riding a lame horse. Mphuthumi derived so much satisfaction from thus making fun of the police that he had named the horse "Destroyer of the Peace." He would tell the tale of this clever trick when he sang his praise-song.

Perhaps it is because the teasing element in praise names is personal, and requires a certain degree of familiarity between the person bestowing the praises and the person being praised, that praise poetry performed by recognized praise poets is less likely to be humorous than the praise poetry of ordinary people. Therefore, although E. Gunner (1979:239) observes that the chief impression of praise poetry is "one of robust realism, an uncompromising, shrewd and even harsh appraisal of appearance, personality and action", a distinction should be made when discussing humour in praise poetry between the praises of royalty and the praises of ordinary people. Turner (1990:54) notes that

the ordinary man's praises are but an extension of his "being". They record him "warts and all" and do not aspire to the level of the elevated eulogies that befit the person of rank, importance or royalty.

Although the official praise poet has the licence to use ribald language which may amuse the audience (see Opland 1983:66) it should be acknowledged that

amusement is not the primary focus of his poetry. In this regard Opland (1983:263-264) notes the difference between Wainwright's mine poets and the rural iimbongi:

Wainwright observes that the mine poet serves to relieve social pressures by amusing or entertaining his audiences, with poetry often far more boldly obscene than seems to be customary in rural areas (pp. 138-63); obscenity is found in rural poetry, as we have seen (for sexual explicitness in Zulu poetry see Gunner 1979), and the iimbongi does on occasion amuse his audiences, but entertainment is not as marked a feature of his role in the rural areas as on the mines ...

An example of a poem on a royal subject which *does* employ ribald language is the portrait of Mtshiki, son of Hintsá:

Yimbhadlul' ukukhuph' umoya,  
Intw' eyathi yakumitha zaphel' iimpundu,  
Yathi yakuzala zand' ukuvela.  
Irhasowa,  
Ugxel' egxumeka,  
Ungqengqa ngezibond' inge ngumf' omhle. (in Opland 1990:244)

(He is a fart who expels wind,  
One whose bum puckered as his guts ballooned,  
Then filled once again as the air erupted.  
A dandy,  
A transient with wanderlust,  
Lounger on struts like a man of great beauty.) (translation in Opland 1990)

Kuse (1973:111) argues that because criticism is an integral part of the praises of the royalty, the wit of the poet is often put to the test:

The bard's license to criticize permitted adequate room for making witty and indirect references to the bad habits of kings.

He quotes from the opening paragraphs of both Silimela's and Ngangelizwe's praises as they appear in *Zemk' iinkomo Magwalandini*:

UMbambo zemka zabuyelela;  
ngaphantsi kwelitye kuyoyikeka,  
kuba zilaph' iinzwana namadikazi

(Ribs-go-back-and-forth;  
[What goes on] beneath the rock is horrible,  
for the handsome and [their] concubines are there)  
(Silimela's praises)

NguMahob' azizantanta ngenxa yokhozi.  
MaRudulu! lozililela neliswel' amaphiko.

(He is Pigeons-are-ruffled-because-of-the-eagle  
Rudulus! he will weep,  
even the wingless one.  
(Ngangelizwe's praises)  
(quoted with translation in Kuse 1973:111)

In analysing the first line of Silimela's praises (*UMbambo zemka zabuyelela*) Kuse (1973:112) comments:

The naming component of the eulogie is a witty and indirect reference to a king's reputation as a sexual athlete. The metaphorical reference to "heaving ribs" and the suggestion of panting create an image of sexual intercourse.

Kuse (1973:112) goes on to show how the metaphor also refers to the undisciplined behaviour manifested by some Xhosa monarchs after their authority had been usurped by the magistrates.

*The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1985:867-868) defines a satire as

a poem, or in modern use sometimes a prose composition, in which prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule.

The vices and follies that are satirized in the ribald humour of ordinary people are often of a sexual or scatological nature, and in oral poetry sex and humour often go together. R. Finnegan (1970:225) comments that

many of the poems are noted for their vitality and humour, in particular their treatment of sex.

The following poem, collected during my research in June 1994, uses the image of the dog to describe the promiscuous goings-on of Toki, a young Hlubi man, and exemplifies that type of praise poem which includes both criticism and direct sexual references:

*UToki*

Bhotani mzi waseMahlubini!  
 Bhotani mzi wakwaBhungane!  
 Iyanibulisa inkulu into kaTyelembizeni.  
 Namhlanje ifikile imini ekade ixelwa;  
 Amas' abekw' elangeni —  
 Umphokoq' unexhala.

Namhlanje sidibene ngenja  
 yalapha ekhaya.  
 Ayimithisi, hayi suka!  
 Kwinyang' ephelileyo — angenil'  
 amaNtshilibe ezis' isisu  
 senja yawo emithiswe yile yethu.  
 Kwiveki ephelileyo ibingamaBamba nawo ikwaseso.  
 Namhlanje yenze eyokugqibela  
 imithis' eMaHlubini.

Hayi, suka, Toki!  
 Hayi, suka, voetsek, man!  
 Uyinj' enjani l' ingevayo?  
 Ncincilili!!

(Greetings Hlubi household!  
 Greetings Bhungane household!  
 Tyelembizeni's heir greets you.  
 Today the day that we have been waiting for has come;  
 The secret is out —  
 Those who have sins are worried.

Today we are meeting about a dog here in our home.  
 The way it impregnates!  
 Last month the Ntshilibe people came bringing their own bitch  
 who had been impregnated by our dog.  
 Last week it was the Bamba with theirs.  
 Today the worst has been done, he has impregnated someone  
 from the Hlubi clan.

No, get out, Toki!  
 No, get out, voetsek<sup>1</sup>, man!  
 What kind of a dog are you who doesn't listen?  
 I disappear!!)

The humour of this poem begins with the two connected sayings *Amasi abekwe langeni* (literal: The sour milk has been put in the sun; figurative: The secret is out) and *Umphokoq' unexhala* (literal: The stiff porridge is worried; figurative: People with sins are worried)<sup>2</sup>, both of which anticipate some comic revelation. The listener's expectation is satisfied with *ayimithisi* (how it impregnates) in line 8, gains momentum with the list of clans whose daughters have fallen victim to this "dog" and finally explodes with *Hayi, suka, voetsek man!* (No, voetsek [be off with you], man!)

Faeces and defecation also feature in the poetry of ordinary people. In the following extract from a poem (also collected during June 1994) criticizing disunity in rural areas, the explicit scatological references provoke both humour and disgust:

Hoyi-na! Hoyi-na!  
 Ndibhekisa kuni midak' emnyama  
 komsintsil' ehashi  
 Ngakumbi nina abatshitshiliza  
 ngempund' emathafeni  
 Bakronokrono yimbola okwempundu zorhudayo.

(Hoyi!  
 I am referring to you, you dark ones  
 like a horse's anus  
 Especially you who wipe your bottoms in the veld  
 Who are dirty from ochre smeared like a bottom with runny  
 faeces.)

- 
1. *Voetsek* is an Afrikaans word meaning "go away", normally addressed to dogs.
  2. The saying *Amasi abekwe langeni - umphokoq' unexhala* derives from the practice of putting out in the sun milk which is to be used for pouring over porridge.



Similar obscenities can be found in some of the praises collected by Wainwright on the mines. He quotes from a poem critical of a lazy headman (*induna*):

Wena 'wagcakamela ilanga,  
Unesirama! (Wainwright 1978:34)

(You who sit enjoying the sunshine  
Your anus has the remains of excreta.) (translation in  
Wainwright 1978:14)

In a later work Wainwright (1979:152-153) makes the following observation:

Praises in which reference is made to the passing of stool are not uncommon among the Xhosa. Chiefs can be praised as men who cause their enemies to defecate in fright. An *imbongi*, reciting over the public address system at the Independence Stadium in Umtata on the occasion of Transkei's independence, before an audience including State Presidents and other dignitaries, said that the Whites when they fought the Xhosa "farted at one another" in confusion.

Wainwright (1978:27) describes the "entertainment" functions of the *imbongi* on the mines as follows:

He maintains the spirit of his listeners, entertaining and encouraging them and, through his representation of their problems and attitudes, combined with his bawdy humour, possibly performs a cathartic function, relieving the tensions of the listeners.

In his later study Wainwright (1979:138) again refers to the humour of the miners' praise poetry:

Certainly throughout the praises of Xhosa miners, recited in an all-male context, there is constant use of bawdy allusions, imagery and lewd innuendo; invariably with humorous effect on the listeners. The audience laughs at language which in most other circumstances would be considered outrageous.

The praises of the Xhosa miners often make reference to penis size, and according to Wainwright the humour is increased by exaggerated gestures. The imbongi would obviously be gesturing in the following proclamation:

Ingangoba ingaka!  
(It is as big as it is!) (Wainwright 1979:140)

Two further examples from Wainwright's collection serve to illustrate the bawdy (often sexist) nature of this poetry:

NdinguLux waseBizana  
Hlafuna mthondo, uyancamuza!  
'Vumba lenyo liyavakala!  
Ungamlahla na umfazi ngokuthi uyasuza?

(I am Lux from Bizana.  
Chew, penis, you are tasting something pleasant!  
The smell of vagina is perceptible!  
Can you reject a woman for just passing wind?)

NdinguSende Leke-leke! Pita-pita Zibhokweni.  
Siyafuna siyaphica umntwana  
Simshiy' ezinzeni kunina.  
Dem koDem! 'Mzimb' okhal' imali.

(I am the suspended testicle, arriving at Zibhokweni!  
We are hunting, we are searching for the "child"  
Whom we left in its mother's pubic hair.  
Damn son of Damn! Body jingling with money (in the  
pockets). (both extracts and translations from Wainwright  
1979:142-143)

Apart from noting that much of the humour of mineworkers' praises relies on sexual and scatological details, Wainwright (1979:116-122) also refers to word-play and punning. It is difficult to find sufficient evidence to support his argument that these forms of humour are deliberately employed by the poets. He cites, for example, the clan praises of Hlangulela Duduma. I have not translated this extract as it merely consists of a list of names:

Hlangulela! NdiliGagasi! NdiliNyisa!  
 UMfunda! uDzeba! uTsophi! uMgwiji!  
 UMadwalaza kwesika Foto! USidoyi. (Wainwright 1979:118)

These names, he claims, could just be clan names, or they could be puns, since each of these names has a meaning. To support his thesis he argues that:

The *imbongi's* name, Hlangulela, could be interpreted as the applied form of the verb *Hlangula* which Kropf cites as meaning "to relieve one of a debt" or alternatively "to extract, draw out ... rescue, save, deliver from an enemy, to draw out from danger." (1979:118)

J. Sherzer's view (1978:341) that punning is not a word with two meanings but "a projection of the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic" implies that there needs to be a context for a pun to work. This analysis would seem to contest Wainwright's claim that punning exists in simple, unelaborated praise names. I would argue that, although unintentional puns do occur, punning is usually a *deliberate* process, and that it would consist not in the mere listing of names which have possible literal meanings, but rather in the use of such names in a context in which such meanings are employed to humorous effect. For example, if someone's name is "Sandy" we are not punning by merely *saying* this name. However, if we say "John wants to go to the beach and get Sandy" we *are* punning because the literal meaning of the name is being exploited to create ambiguity. In the clan praise *Mfene, Jambase, Lisa, Hlangedanda eliweni* there is some humour, because the name *Mfene* is similar to the word for a baboon in Xhosa (*imfene*), and the phrase *hlangedanda eliweni* (going down the cliff on buttocks) humorously expands on this sense of the name. In this context punning *has* taken place.

Subtle, sarcastic humour can also be found in Xhosa praise poetry and, as Kuse observes, the poetry often serves as a kind of character sketch. The connection

between satire and caricature is expounded by A. Zijderveld (1983:19), and relates to the critical and, as previously mentioned, satirical function of the praise poetry of Xhosa royalty:

Caricature is a form of humour which comes close to satire. It is an over-accentuation of certain physiognomic and bodily features of "important individuals", usually with the intent to expose some allegedly hidden moral or immoral qualities and character traits. It has a distinctly critical function, and its focus is mainly on people in power, whom the caricaturist often tears from the pedestal they have been put on by others and by themselves.

Although Kuse notes that the praises of Ndlambe, Hintsisa and Sarili are on the whole aimed at portraying these men in a favourable manner, he observes that these praises do not exclude critical commentary. To illustrate his point he quotes a certain eulogium in the praises of Sarili, a chief who "regarded himself as accountable for the actions of minor chiefs under his jurisdiction":

*UNgxowa inemilenze*  
 Sack with leg-like pockets  
*yokufak' amadun' akowabo,*  
 For snuggling in the princes of his home,  
*ooPhatho nooSandile.*  
 the Phathos and the Sandiles.  
 (extracts and translations in Kuse 1973:104)

It is more often this kind of sarcastic and ironic humour that is found in poetry about royals than the ribald language explored in depth by Wainwright.

Examples of humorous praises that do not have any obscene references can be found in the praise poetry of S.M. Burns-Ncamashe. In his introduction to *Izibongo zakwaSesile* H.W. Pahl (Burns-Ncamashe 1978:n.p.) writes:

Akusoze kungahlekwa apho kukho khona lo mfo kaNcamashe,  
 kuhlekwe zitsho zibe buhlungu iintumbu. Ukuba ufuna

ukuzisindisa ezo ntumbu zakho uzilondoloze, mcwezele! Apho kuhlekwa khona, kuyintswahla, kusisiqhazolo sentsini, qiniseka kukho uNcamashe! Nalapha ke kwizibongo zakhe, nakwezinye iimbalo zakhe, obu burharha bakhe busiyolisa kangaka busoloko busithi qhaphu gqi phutshu buxelisa umsila wembulu: akakwazi ukubufihla, buyasuka buzimpompozele.

(There will always be laughter where this chap Ncamashe is — wherever he is people laugh until their sides ache. If you want to save your intestines, stay away from him! Wherever you hear noisy gales of laughter you can be sure Ncamashe is there! Even in these poems of his, and in his other writings, this jocularly of his, which so entertains us, will just erupt and wonderously appear like the tail of the dwarf: he cannot hide it, it just pops out.)

By way of illustration Pahl then goes on to quote from Burns-Ncamashe's praises of Jeff Opland:

Apho awa khon' amazwi emilomo yeembongi,  
 Ze yen' awahlanganis' ewaqokelela, awabuth' ewatha  
 Kwigogog' elithethayo xa limfikilwayo,  
 Limfikilwa kwiqhosha lenkonkx'  
 esisikhwenene  
 Esith' uthetha sibe sichola-chola kuw' emlonyeni,  
 Wothuke le nkonkxa seyikucengcelezel' amazw' akho,  
 Id' izenze wena nokuthint' isikhohlela esi;  
 Mna fuda ndiba isikhwenene yintaka-ntaka,  
 Kant' amagcis' abeLungu asenza nangegogogo,  
 Uve sisombela, uve nabantu bexokozela.  
 Ngumfuyi waloo magogogo umfo uOpland. (Burns-Ncamashe  
 1978:40-41)

(When the words come out of the poet's mouth,  
 He collects them and puts them through the mouth of a box  
 that will talk when pressed,  
 When the button of this parrot-like tin is pressed  
 As you speak it will pick up what comes from the mouth,  
 You will get a fright when you hear this box repeat what you  
 were saying,  
 Even pretending it is you when you cough;  
 I used to think a parrot was a real bird,  
 Now I realize the wise White people can make it from a tin,  
 You hear it singing and you hear it chatting.  
 He is the breeder of those tins, this chap Opland.)

Umunc' iminwe uthi lixhwele lixhway' itasi yamayeza,  
 Izilawu neziphephetho, iimpendulo noomayisake,  
 Kanti hayi ligutyen' elineminxeba yonqakulo

Ikhongozel' ilizwi lomntu nentetho yakhe. (Burns-Ncamashe 1978:41)

(You would think it was a witchdoctor with all the herbs in a bag,  
With remedies for everything,  
But no it is a box with wires to catch everything,  
It collects the speech of people)

Ngamabandl' awambath' iingub'ezinoboya.  
Hayi ngeentakumba iingubo zeembongi, zizwe!  
Yiyo loo nt' ungafik' ookhekhe bezibhija-bhija!  
Zibaphethel' imbengwan' iintakumba zabo! (Burns-Ncamashe 1978:41)

(They are groups that wear woollen blankets,  
But nations you must be careful of the fleas in the blankets of  
praise poets!  
This is why you find them wriggling  
Because the fleas are constantly biting them!)

Apart from choosing appropriately comic vocabulary, Burns-Ncamashe also adopts a particularly ironic tone. For example, in the first extract he plays the part of a simple rural fellow who is amazed at the technology of the Whites. The irony implicit in his stereotypical representation would not have been lost on his audience, who would have been only too aware of a certain prevailing perception of Blacks as harmless “sambo-like” characters.

The fact that he refers to the tape recorder as *igogogo* increases the humour of the poem since this word usually refers to a paraffin tin — thus highly technological equipment is being compared to a very mundane item.

The image of praise singers with fleas in their blankets is also funny since it reduces the somewhat lofty status of these performers by hinting at a very prosaic reason for their movements.

There are other instances of Burns-Ncamashe's gently ironic wit in this collection, as for example when he uses worn-out shoes as a metaphor for Opland's hard work and many travels:

Phumani, bantu, niye kubenzi bezihlangu,  
 Nimkhethel' ezingenayo umfo kaOplandi,  
 Yena mnt' uvuthulukelwe ziimbadada  
 Kukuhi' enyuka phakathi kosapho lukaPhalo,  
 Yena mnt' utyabuk' iinyawo zaza zacandeka,  
 Kukucand' ilizwe lakwaXhosa nezibhaxa zalo,  
 Yena mnt' utshelwe ziinyawo zemoto,  
 Eqabel' iingqolo ephala esithubeni,  
 Ezingelana namadod' akwaziy' ukuthetha,  
 Eland' umkhondo wabaf' abakwaziy' ukuthutha;  
 Abathutha nenkomo le bangathi babong' ithole lomntu,  
 Bamthuk' umfo wasemzini ange uzalelwe kubo,  
 Amakhwenkw' asekhay' azithuko zinobusi,  
 Kant' ayakwazi nokuzigalel' inyongo zikrakre;  
 Akhe atsho ngesaqhwithi samazwi, luqhum' uthuli,  
 Bazothuk' abantu sebesuk' amadlu nendulumbane,  
 Sebehlokohleka, sebesukuzeka, bechukumiseka.  
 Mzi kaXhosa, mfunelen' izihlang' umabhijela,  
 Ubhijel' ilizwe engqawa-ngqawa ngeembongi,  
 Kalok' uneentlang' ezisezinyaweni zombini ... (Burns-  
 Ncamashe 1978:40)

(People, go to the shoe maker  
 And pick a pair that will fit Mr Opland,  
 Because his shoes are finished —  
 He has been going up and down Phalo's generation,  
 His feet are cracked and bruised  
 From roaming the country and its boundaries  
 His car tyres are finished,  
 Climbing the mountains going everywhere  
 Looking for men who can speak,  
 Looking for men who know how to praise,  
 Who even praise an ox as if it were a person,  
 Who swear at a foreigner as if born with him,  
 Boys whose swearing has honey,  
 But they can even add gall and become bitter;  
 People will get shocked when they listen,  
 Finding themselves excited and jumping and being moved,  
 Xhosa nation please get the roamer some shoes,  
 So he can roam the country asking about praise singers,  
 He has incisions in both feet ...)

Hyperbole, here used in the exaggerated descriptions of Opland's possessions (the worn-out shoes and tyres), is a device that is often used for comic effect,

particularly in praise poetry, which lends itself to excessive and extravagant descriptions.

In his praises of Rhodes University itself, Burns-Ncamashe includes some witty (and obviously critical) references to the difference in style between the conduct of White and Black women at ceremonies:

Baphela n' abafazi kulo mzi wasemLungwini  
 Le nto singabeva beyiyizelela phezulu,  
 Beventshuza, bevotshoza, berhuq' iityali namabhayi?  
 Akusekho zintombi na aph' emaNgesini  
 Le nto singaziboni zigquba zigqakadula,  
 Zibhenq' amatshotyazana, ziphum' into ngomlomo?  
 Asiyoyesizwe sazo na le yunivesithi  
 Le nto ziman' ukumaya-mayaza  
 Ngathi zoyik' amadodan' eza kuzimfikila?  
 Zingakikizeli nje? Zingatshongoli nje?  
 Zingatshayeleli nje zinani n' ezi ntombi zasemaNgesini?  
 Zisuke zangathi ngabafazi bebhaqwe bethakath' emini!  
 Phof' umhla lo wona ngowukugcoba nokugcadiya,  
 Eneneni ngowokudloba nokudlwayiza,  
 Asinguwo owokwany' imitya nokuzinyathela:  
 Asinguwo owokudodobala nokufobala!  
 Mihlotshazana yamahotyazan' akoNibe!  
 Ndithi vukani nihlokome, lusapho lwasemaNgesini!  
 Hoyini luhle lwasemLungwini!  
 Mathol' eenkuz' ezimhlophe zonke zakwaNtsasana!  
 Sithetha ngamanzi, ngawo la ke nikuwo!  
 Amas' abekw' elangeni, ngokwesiXhosa!  
 Waselen' amanz' angeva mbalela yalanga,  
 Kule yunivesithi kaSesile kaRhodes,  
 Inyath' engenampondo edle ngamandla. (Burns-Ncamashe  
 1978:8)

(Are there no women in this White vicinity  
 That we cannot hear them ululating,  
 Shaking, dancing, dragging their shawls and blankets?  
 Are there no girls here amongst the English  
 For we cannot see them jumping with excitement,  
 Raising dust, leaping high, wagging their tails and singing?  
 Is this not their nation's university?  
 Why are they shy as if catching sight of young men about to  
 pinch them?  
 Why can't they ululate and *tshongola*?)

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3. Burns-Ncamashe occasionally "creates" words which are difficult to translate. *Tshongola* could roughly be translated as "falsomely celebrate".



Why don't they rejoice, these English girls?  
 They are like witches that are caught during the day!  
 But that day is one for rejoicing,  
 It is a day to jump right up and to be frisky  
 It is not a day to put your finger in your mouth and tramp on  
 yourself,  
 It is not a day to sit about heavily hunched up!  
 You little white pigeons from Nibe!  
 I say wake up and resound, English family!  
 Take note, English Flower!  
 All the white calves of Ntsasana!  
 We are talking about water,  
 This is the water that you are in,  
 Secrets will be revealed the Xhosa way.  
 Drink the waters that do not know drought,  
 In this university of Cecil Rhodes,  
 The hornless buffalo known for its strength.)

While it would appear that Burns-Ncamashe is openly criticizing the reticence of White women, it is a very mild reproach full of incongruous and therefore humorous suggestions. The poet is possibly referring to their lack of outward enthusiasm and excitement, and his pointing out of this could be seen as an implicit criticism of their behaviour.

In conclusion it can be argued that since criticism is an integral part of praise poetry, satirical humour (which often accompanies criticism) is an important component of this genre. In addition the exaggeration conventionally used when positively praising some person for certain outstanding attributes also often results in witty hyperbole. I have also shown that bawdy humour is found in praises, particularly in those of ordinary people.

### 1.1.2 Riddles

The riddle in itself can be considered a humorous form although, as Chiaro (1992:68) reminds us,

it is worth remembering that the riddle did not start out as a comic form at all, but rather as a word game in the literal sense of the term.

D.F. Gowlett (1975:136) notes that in most societies in Africa riddles are “propounded only at night, and essentially by children”. This fact would tend to suggest that riddling would be considered an *entertaining*, and therefore *amusing*, pastime. S.C. Satyo observes:

Amaqhina enziwa ngabantwana kanti nabantu abadala, besenzela ukuzonwabisa. (Satyo et al. 1992:39)

(Riddles are performed by children and adults to entertain themselves.)

Although it is the scatological references in riddles that provoke the most laughter, their general wit and creativity (whether crude or not) often prompt a smile. A selection of riddles from R.M. Sobukwe (1971:117-150) reveals both the ingenuity and funniness of this type of word-play:

Ndinanto yam; imdaka; inokufa, kodwa izityebi ziyayigcina ziyilondoloze; amahlwempu wona, ayayilahla. — Ngumkhunyu — izityebi ziyawugcina emalaphini: amahlwempu awulahla ezindleleni. (No.33, p.121)

(I have a thing of mine; it is dirty; it carries disease, but the rich keep it and preserve it; the poor throw it away. — It is nasal mucus — the rich preserve it in cloths; the poor throw it away on the roads.)

Nda...nda...ndaphuma! Buya! — Ngumkhunyu. (No.35, p.121)

(Ou...ou...out I come! Go back! — It is nasal mucus.)

Ndinaxhegwazana lam; alinamazinyo kodwa linqumla “itshu” (incuba lebhulu) ngeentsini. — Ziimpundu. (No.49, p.122)

(I have an old woman of mine; she has no teeth but she cuts “Boer<sup>4</sup> tobacco” with her gums. — It is the buttocks. )

Ndinamntu wam osuka akhamluke xa abona ukutya angenakuya kukho. — Ngumthondo. (No.93, p.126)

(I have a person of mine who stretches himself when he sees food that he cannot get at. — It is the penis.)

Ndinamabhaku am; mabini; alinde inyamakazi emngxunyeni. Ngephanyazo taa inyamakazi igquma, asale amabhaku emi bhuxe! — Ngumsuzo. (No.99, p.126)

(I have bulldogs of mine; there are two of them; they are lying in wait for the animal, at the mouth of its den. Suddenly, out jumps the animal roaring, and the bulldogs are left standing, unmoving! — It is a fart.)

Ilitye lilala njani emanzini? — Lilala manzi. (No.382, p.150)

(How does a stone lie in water? — It lies wet [there is a pun here on *amanzi*, which may mean “water” or “wet”]). (translations in Sobukwe)

Fry (1963:13) comments on the “play” aspect of riddling, and argues that

riddles are, in one sense, early experiences of formalization of intellectual behaviour. The riddle may be considered to be a parent to the anecdotal joke. Also the riddle is quite obviously a *playing together* in the sense that a contest is joined wherein the child hopes to confound the wits of others.

It is important to note that Xhosa riddles, and indeed riddles in other African languages, cannot be said to be mere translations of European riddles. It has been argued that Xhosa riddles are in fact similar in content and style to those found in other related African languages. In this regard Gowlett (1975:137) notes:

In some instances Common Bantu riddles were recorded at an early date from people who had had no contact with Whites,

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4. The *Chambers Dictionary* describes a Boer as “a S. African of Dutch descent, esp. one engaged in farming.” To some Afrikaners the term expresses ethnic pride. Outside the Afrikaner community, however, it normally has the derogatory connotation of a racist White bully.

and thus seem unlikely to have been acquired from recent European settlers.

### 1.1.3 Folktales (iintsomi)

Just as Wainwright observes that much of the laughter elicited by a Xhosa oral poet is due to his or her *actions and gestures*, H. Scheub (1975:7), in describing a performer of iintsomi, notes that she

often drops to her hands and knees to give character and vividness to one of her creations. Her techniques are broad, her style approaching *hilarious slapstick*, and her *ntsomi* productions vibrate with ideophones dramatically produced. Her creative method is characterized by apparently unrestrained action, as episodes and details erupt with staccato rapidity from a deep and bellowing voice. Character development, an essential element of her art, is achieved through frenzied (but always controlled) action and constant use of mime. Narration is uninterrupted, gestures are bold, and the world that she creates in her *ntsomi* images is stormed by *a humour that is direct and bombastic*. [my emphasis]

I have emphasized those references to comedy and humour indicated by Scheub since I believe they are fundamental to an appreciation of the art of Xhosa storytelling. It is clear from Scheub's allusions to "slapstick style", and "direct" and "bombastic" humour, that performance is an essential part of comic storytelling. While much of the humour relies on exaggeration, Scheub's comment that the youthful storyteller is apt to concentrate on overemphasis and exaggeration in order to elicit laughter from her audience suggests that the experienced storyteller elicits laughter from more subtle humorous inventions. At the same time H. Bergson's (1911) comment that comedy relies on "artificial exaggeration" has relevance for the comedienne-storyteller. Entertainers are aware that they are required to create a separate reality, or non-reality, in order to amuse their

audience. Without exaggeration the storyteller's world would seem prosaic and commonplace.

Exaggeration must nevertheless be accompanied by demonstrations of acting ability, such as described by Scheub (1975:73), who admiringly records the accomplishment of a particularly gifted storyteller:

Mrs Sidima scoops up food with her hands, chews it with *hilarious exaggeration*, she climbs the massive tree, and her body reflects the magical change when human becomes beast. [my emphasis]

The storyteller must therefore be both comedian and actor, and be able to gauge how to temper exaggeration with realism:

Characters seem large and bold in the core-images, but these caricatures are often toned down in performance, the parody giving way to realism. Characterization is achieved primarily through gesture, vocal dramatics, and body movement; the verbal narrative only sketches in the characters as it concentrates on their actions. This is not to suggest that the characters are flat, for the performer herself gives them form, flesh, and credibility. (Scheub 1975:54)

The connection between acting ability and good storytelling is mentioned by Jordan (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*:45), who, when describing an excellent storyteller, notes:

Umfo lo ube elichule ke lokubalisa, kuba yonke into ayibalisayo uyayilinganisa, niyibone ngamehlo, niyive ngeendlebe.

(This chap was an expert storyteller, because everything he told he would act out, you would see it and you could hear it.)

Another important factor in the creation of humour in folktales is the interactive nature of storytelling. Scheub (1975:20) observes that the storyteller will tend to

overemphasize and to repeat those aspects of her narrative that almost certainly *guarantee a response from the audience* — hence, the gruffness, the exaggeration, the emphasis on ideophone, the use of humorous cliché. [my emphasis]

The performer thus manipulates the audience by engaging it in the comic proceedings — the more exaggeration used, the more the audience laughs. The more the audience laughs, the less inhibited the performance and the greater the demonstrations of wit and burlesque.

Certain linguistic aspects of Xhosa are also exploited for comic effect. While ideophones in written literature are used as descriptive devices, in oral literature the real potential of such graphic linguistic inventions is exploited. Scheub (1975:62) notes the following colourful ideophones, which, when uttered, act as lively and expressive sound effects:

Thus, a mouse moves — *ceti ceti ceti ceti*. A Zim<sup>5</sup> knocks on a log *nkqo nkqo*. A Zim chews a child — *qwam kwam*. Dogs tear a Zim to bits — *nuntsu nuntsu nuntsu!* A tree becomes pliant — *vevetye vevetye*; it leans — *vebele*; it falls — *hle hle hle hle hle hle*.

In conclusion it can be argued that entertainment is the primary focus of storytelling. True, a series of events is narrated, and a moral unfolds, but there is the added ingredient of *amusement*, without which the storyteller would lose her audience. I. Okpewho (1992:221), whose work on African oral literature covers many cultures of the continent, recognizes entertainment as being essential for all storytellers:

But perhaps the most pervasive interest of all is that of entertainment: there is hardly any storyteller who does not

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5. *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa* (1989:661) defines *izim* as an “ogre of cannibalistic tendencies figuring in Xhosa folktales”.

welcome an audience's acknowledgement of his or her skill as a performer, however tamely this is expressed. The various incidences of *Laughter* in the performance by Simayi and Okoojii (whose tales belong in different categories) show how seriously these artists take their role as entertainers.

Scheub (1975:168) echoes the view that the performing storyteller

seeks to externalize the core-image, to evoke it, to give it a pleasing form.

Z.S. Zotwana (Satyo et al. 1992:14) likens the storyteller to a stage actor:

Umbalisi wentsomi sele kutshiwo ukuba angafaniswa nomdlali weqonga. Ngoko ke eyona njongo yakhe kukwenza abaphulaphuli bakhe bahlale benomdla kwibali lakhe ...

(It can be argued that a storyteller is like an actor. Therefore her main aim is to ensure that her audience is completely absorbed by her story ...)

Entertainment cuts across the various categories of oral narrative, although Finnegan (1970:350) observes that humour is particularly exploitable in animal stories:

One of the obvious points in these stories is just the sheer entertainment afforded by the description of the amusing antics of various animals, and they are often told to audiences of children. The fact that most of the animals portrayed are well known to the audience — their appearance, their behaviour, their calls, so often amusingly imitated by the narrator — adds definite wit and significance that is lost when rendered for readers unfamiliar with this background.

She argues, however, that while these stories can be appreciated

on a straightforward and humorous level ... on another level, what is often involved in the animal stories is a comment, even a satire, on human society and behaviour. (1970:351)

In order to illustrate both the satirical and humorous aspects of Xhosa iintsomi, one oral narrative selected from Scheub's collection<sup>6</sup> and two narrated by Xhosa-speaking informants will be presented and briefly analysed.

*Story A:*

In the tale "Furujani and Demazana do battle" there is ample opportunity for both the storyteller and the audience to act, sing and laugh. The story starts with Furujani and Demazana finding some meat in a rock. Demazana stays with the meat while Furujani goes on to their uncle's place. Then a Zim arrives and sings:

(sings in a low gruff voice)  
litye litye likaNtunjambini  
vuleka ndingene ...

wathi uDemazan' suka akunguye ubhuti we ... lahamb' iZim'  
laya kwa many' amaZim' ... lathi madoda ningathi ni na xa  
ufumana inyama — inyamazan'... athi amaZim' tshisa izembe  
libe bomvu ulifake liya kuphuma ngezantsi walitshisa iZim'  
laliginya eli zembe labomvu ... lithe "sakuba lifika elityeni  
lath"

(sings) litye litye likaNtunjambini  
vuleka ndingene ...

lavuleka ilitye ... langena iZim' langqal' enyameni ladla ...  
lithe "sakuba lisitya wabon' uDemazana okokuba iyaphela  
inyama ... wabiza inkuku ... wathi nkuku ungathi ni na xa  
ndikuthuma ... yathi inkuk' ndiza kuthi kukurukuru ...  
wontyi yath' iwontyi ndiza kuthi nre bhokhwe me ... donki  
mmm — yakhal' idonk' wath' uDemazana hobe ungathi ni xa  
ndikuthuma k' lath' ihobe ndiza kuhamba ndiza kufika ndithi

(sings) andisohobe lokubethwa kantintikintiki

"sohobe lokubethwa kantikintikintiki  
ndifun' uFurujani kantikintikintiki

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6. Scheub's transcription is so faithful to the spoken word as to be difficult to follow on the printed page. I have taken the liberty of adding words in brackets to make the meaning clearer for the reader.



umntwawab' udliwe kantikintikintiki  
 liZim' o lidala kantikintikintiki  
 lamxutha-xutha kantikintikintiki ..."  
 (Scheub 1975:216-221)

(rock! rock-of-two-holes!  
 open! that I may enter!

Demazana said, "Get out, you! You aren't my brother!" The Zim journeyed, it went to some other Zims. It said, "Men, what would you do if you found an animal?" The Zims said, "Heat up an axe until it's red hot! Then swallow it, it'll come out below!" The Zim heated the axe, it swallowed this red-hot axe. Then, when it came to the rock, it said,

rock! rock-of-two-holes!  
 open! that I may enter!

The rock opened. The Zim went in, it slashed into the meat, and ate. As it was eating, Demazana saw that the meat was almost finished, and she called a fowl.

She said, "Fowl! What'll you say if I send you [to my brother]?"

The fowl said, "I'll say, 'Kukurukuruku!'"  
 "Pig?"

The pig said, "I'll say, 'Nre!'"  
 "Goat?"

"Meeee!"

"Donkey?"

The donkey bawled.

Demazana said, "Dove! What'll you say if I send you?"

The dove said, "I'll travel and say,

"I'm not a dove to be beaten, *kantikintikintiki!*  
 Not a dove to be beaten, *kantikintikintiki!*  
 I seek Furujaani, *kantikintikintiki!*  
 His sister is being eaten, *kantikintikintiki!*  
 By an old Zim, *kantikintikintiki!*  
 It dismembered, dismembered her, *kantikintikintiki!*"  
 (translation in Scheub)

After dodging some men who try to throw stones at it, the dove finally gets to Furujaani's uncle's place. Some men at a beer party here also try to beat the dove, who dodges them, singing a song. Furujaani then exclaims:

"We ngumntawethu lo!" Walilahl' intusi phants' wasuka wathatha i ... wathatha igongqo leparafin' igaloni ... wathatha umlil' wazenza is..wathi sebupuru sebupuru ke makhahla teng!

wahamba waya kufika le ... kwelaa litye wafika wagalela iparafini phezu kwelitye ... lavutha iinwele zeZim ...

Lathi iZim' "Demazana Demazana yinto ni na l' e mane ukuthi zzzzzz", wath' uDemazana "Hayi tatamkhulu lizulu liyezisa."

... Lathi ... ladl' iZim' ladl' iZim' ... zasuka kanti njengoko esithi lizulu liyezisa kutsha iinwele zeZim'... zasuka kanti njengoko esithi lizulu liyezisa kutsha iinwele zeZim'... sokufikelanga sesikhumbeni seenwele zeZim'... lithe apho lisuka khona laphind' eli Zim' "Demazana Demazana yinto ni na l' eman' ukuthi zzzzzz" lath' ... wath' uDemazana "Hayi bo tatamkhulu (shouts) yidla inyama ley' lizulu liyezisa."

... Lithe apho lisuka khon' iZim' leva sokusitsha isikhumba sentloko ... lagijima laphum'endlini laya kuzifaka emgxojeni labhek' indutsu phezulu ... latshona ngentloko ...

Basukile abantwana bahamba baya kutheza abangamantombazan' ...

Wasuk' omnye wabo wath' "Thixo nantsi iinyosi zisisakanq' [zisisangqa] ... zinentsi aph' zithi khiq'" wadla wakhwaz' a banye badl' abantwana baza kudla iinyosi aph' endutsweni yeZim' ... abaz' uba zi ... yindutsu yeZim' [babengazi ukuba yindutsu yeZim] nokuba nants' iinyawo zibheke phezulu ... badla badla basukile omnye umntwana warwaya ... satshonela isandla [omnye umntwana wakrwela saza isandla satshona saqina] ... sabambelela wabathe [wabangathi] uyasidonsa esi sandla sabambelela isandl' kwacaca okokuba asiphumi isandla endutsweni yeZim'... bancama bathe basesikhela apho ... kuthe kaso kuya sokuthethwa sokusikhelwa esi sandla salo mntana kule ntunja yeZimu ... kwathiwa [basisika apho...kuthi xa kuthethwa ngokusikwa kwesi sandla ngabantu kuthiwe] kulapho kwakufele khona iZim' ... yabe iyaphela ke apho intsomi. (Scheub 1975:216-221)

("Hey, that's my sister!" He left the milk on the ground. Then he took a pail of paraffin, a gallon of it. He also took some fire. He said, "I am brave! I am brave! Look at what I'm doing!" Then he travelled and came to arrive far away at that rock. He arrived and poured paraffin on top of the rock. The Zim blazed, the hair of the Zim was on fire!

The Zim said, "Demazana! Demazana, what's that always going 'ZZZZZZZZ'?"

Demazana said, "No, Grandfather, it's just the clouds gathering."

The Zim ate, the Zim ate. Its hair went on burning, but she had said that the sky was just clouding up. The hair of the Zim was burning, and now it got near to the skin of the Zim's head!

The Zim got up! It said again, "Demazana! Demazana! What's that always going, 'ZZZZZZZZ'?"

Demazana said, "No, man! Grandfather, eat that meat! The sky is clouding up."

The Zim got up, it felt the skin of its head already burning! It ran, it went out of the house and threw itself into a marsh. Its buttocks stuck into the air, its head disappeared!

It happened that some children were journeying, they had gone to gather some firewood.

One of them said, "God! Here's a beehive! There's a lot of honey here!" The bees had produced a lot of honey. She ate it, and called the others. The children ate, they came and ate the honey here in the buttocks of the Zim. They did not know that it was the buttocks of the Zim, and that there are its feet, sticking up in the air! They ate and ate. Then one of the children scraped, and her hand disappeared! It stuck tight, she tugged this hand, but her hand stuck tight! It was clear that her hand would not come out of the Zim's buttocks! They despaired, they cut it off there!

Now, when people talk about the cutting off of this hand in this hole of the Zim, it is said that it is here where the Zim died.

The *ntsomi* ends there.) (translation in Scheub)

### Story B:

Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi.

Udyakalashe omaqhinga wabhaqwa ngumfama esiba esitiyeni sakhe. Wambamba ke wambophelela lo mzuzu asaya kuthatha imvubu yokumohlwaya. Wayebotshelwe emthini, intloko ijonge ezantsi ejinga. Kusenjalo wabona imfene isiza ngakuye, kwangoko wayeka ukulila wacula wathi:

"Ndijinga kamnandi!

Ujingi wabantwana bakudala

Ndijinga kamnandi!"

Imfene yacela ukuba nayo ikhe iphiwe ithuba ijinge kuloo jingi wabantwana bakudala.

“Khulula mna ke ukuba nawe uyafuna ukujinga.” Watsho uDyaki.

Yamkhulula imfene waza wabophelela yona. Wayityhala kanye, yeva ukuba akukho nto imnandi kuloo jingi yacela ukuba ikhululwe yanele. Wabaleka eyishiya apho akubona umfama esiza. Yabethwa kakhulu imfene ngenxa yobudenge bayo.

Phela phela ngantsomi. (traditional story related by an informant, Mr S. Mntubu)

(A wily jackal was caught stealing by a farmer in his garden. The farmer caught him, tied him up immediately and then went to get his sjambok [whip] to punish him. He was tied to a tree, his head dangling down. He was hanging like this when the baboon came upon him. He immediately stopped crying and started to sing:

“I am dangling nicely!

The swing of children of long ago

I am dangling nicely!”

The baboon asked to be given a chance to swing on the swing of children of long ago.

“Free me so that you can also swing”, said the jackal.

The baboon freed him and the jackal tied him up. He pushed him once, and he felt that there was nothing pleasant about swinging in this way, and asked to be freed since he had had enough. The jackal ran away leaving him there to be seen by the farmer when he came. The baboon was beaten a lot because of his stupidity. So ends the story.)

### *Story C:*

Kwahlala kwahlala kwangantsomi.

Indoda ethile yayilisela kakhulu, kodwa ikwahamba neCawe. Yayisoloko inenyama emzini wayo, ihlala yodwa ilisoka. Yade yathatha umfazi, kodwa ayawuyeka umkhuba wokutya imfuyo yabanye. Yayiphuma ngokomntu oyakuzingela ibuye sele isiza nenyama. Ngenye imini wabuza umfazi ukuba kutheni le nto

isoloko isiza nazo sele zihlinziwe izilwanyana ezo izibambayo. Yathi yona ngumyalelo wegqirha layo lowo.

Yaqhubeka le nto lityebile isela nomfazi walo. Bafumana umntwana owayethandwa kakhulu nguyise. Naye lamfundisa ubusela lamyala ukuba angaze ayithethe loo nto woze amle ingca emqolo. Lafa isela lamshiya nonina unyana walo.

Ngenye imini wathi kanti ube igusha yexhwele elikhulu lalapho, yakhala kuye apha esiswini. Akazange afune kuyixela imfihlelo yakhe, wakhala unina esithi mayithethe kuba uza kuncedwa lelo xhwele. Wathetha umfana wamila ingca emqolo ngenxa yobusela. Phela phela ngantsomi. (traditional story related by an informant, Mr S. Mntubu)

(There once was a certain man who was a big thief but still went to church. He always had meat in his house because he lived alone, being a bachelor. He got married but did not stop stealing and eating the meat of other people's stock. He used to go out as if to hunt and would return with the meat. His wife asked him how it happened that he always came back with meat from animals that had already been skinned. He told her that he did this on the instructions of the witchdoctor.

So this carried on and the thief and his wife became fat. They had a child who was much loved by its father. The father taught this child while it was still young to become a thief as well and not to talk about it to anyone. The thief died and left the child with its mother.

One day he stole the sheep of a big herbalist of the district but developed a very sore stomach. He did not want to reveal his secret. His mother urged him to tell the herbalist so that he could be cured. Grass grew on his back because of his deception. So ends the story.)

Story A amuses not only because of the scatological detail at the end, but also through the ability of the storyteller to change her voice for each character. The humour is effectively paced, starting with the sounds made by the animals and continuing with the Zim's hair being set alight and finally reaching a climax with the children eating out of the Zim's buttocks.

The most humorous aspect of Story B is the stupidity of the baboon in being duped by the jackal. The storyteller is satirizing foolishness as well as the desire for

mindless pleasures. In Story C cunning and thievery are eventually found out and the protagonist is punished for his deeds.

In Story B we laugh with the deceptive jackal at the baboon, who is really the innocent victim, while in Story C, our laughter is at the deceiver who has finally been hoist with his own petard!

In conclusion, apart from the performance aspect, it would appear that the humour of folktales derives from a number of factors:

- \* The inversion of the conventional associations of weakness with defeat and strength with victory. Inversion is a form of humour which allows for an absurd twisting of the truth resulting in surprise and laughter. Very often in Xhosa folktales it is the wily hare or wise tortoise who outwits the larger, stronger animals. In Story B above, the fact that the baboon is a larger animal than the jackal and resembles a human being renders his stupidity all the more laughable.
- \* Anthropomorphism. This a common device of humour and can be seen in cartoons and pageants. Certain human characteristics are associated with certain animals, e.g. the jackal is wily, the baboon is generally represented as being stupid, and the tortoise is wise and patient. The audience are aware of these characteristics and are therefore pre-programmed to find the actions of the “stupid” characters funny.
- \* The repetition of words, songs and actions. This repetition leads up to an expected climax which is often comic.

- \* The performance of strange, sometimes crazy, acts, such as the eating of honey from buttocks, and all the other tricks and deceptions that the characters of the animal tales perpetrate on each other.
- \* The economical (few elaborate subordinate clauses), and yet richly descriptive, language<sup>7</sup> of Xhosa iintsomi.

#### 1.1.4 Songs

Apart from being used extensively in folktales, songs also reflect the mundane, as well as the not so mundane, aspects of Xhosa life. F.J. Dyubhele (1994:148) argues that a song may often

reflect the nation's cultural life, and, as a cultural art, it asserts and confirms the nation's values.

Dyubhele argues that Xhosa folksongs also comment on political affairs, and he includes a song which satirizes the one-time leader of Ciskei, a homeland state created by the then South African government. Dyubhele observes that the song emerged after Lennox Sebe's government, which was an arch-enemy of the African National Congress, had been overthrown by the military. The song is one of jubilation and relief and contains not a little humour:

Iwil' inyheke kaSebe  
yhem!  
Iwil' inyheke kaSebe

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7. This aspect will be elaborated on in Chapter Four.

yhem!  
 Izocholwa ngubani?  
 Izocholwa ngubani?  
 Whoza whoza ntando yesizwe  
 Yhem! (Dyubhele 1994:146-147)

(Sebe's big lip has fallen  
 Hurrah!  
 Sebe's big lip has fallen  
 Hurrah!  
 Who will pick it up?  
 Who will pick it up?  
 Come, come will of the people  
 Hurrah!) (translation in Dyubhele)

Work-songs may also be highly critical and satirical. D.N. Jafta (1978:51) notes that in the following song the workers are getting rid of their frustration with the White supervisor:

Leader: Siphukuphuku  
 Chorus: Somlungwana  
 Leader: Umahlal' edakiwe  
 Chorus: Somlungwana  
 Leader: Asenjiwa-njalo  
 Chorus: Somlungwana

(Leader: Fool  
 Chorus: Of a little white man  
 Leader: One who is ever drunk  
 Chorus: Of a little white man  
 Leader: We are not treated like that  
 Chorus: Of a little white man.) (translation in Jafta)

Satirical humour in songs is, however, not always prompted by bitterness and dissatisfaction, as is evident in *iintlombe*. Jafta (1978:28) observes:

The social *intlombe* is a song and dance for mature men and women who come together for amusement.

The following song (provided by an informant, Mrs A.N. Tsuluka) wryly comments on the foolishness of a man who has not responded to a lover's overtures:



Yho-ho! Iintanga zam zendile!  
*Verdom! Dammit!*  
 Kudala ndinombelela.

(Wow! All my age-mates are married!  
 Damn! Dammit!  
 I have been singing for you for a long time.)

### 1.1.5 Proverbs and sayings

A proverb may be defined as a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm. The “terseness” implies a certain economy in the choice of words and a sharpness of focus, while the “charm” conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression. (Opland 1992:226)

Although there is undoubtedly a difference between proverbs (*amaqhalo*) and sayings (*izaci*), an aspect that is very adequately dealt with by Satyo in *Sasinoncwadi kwatanci* (1992:107-117), this does not detract from the fact that both proverbs and sayings can be humorous and greatly enhance both written and oral literature in Xhosa.

Finnegan (1970:395) singles out, as an example of a humorous proverb, the Xhosa saying: “He devoured the Kaffir-beer and it devoured him.” She also notes the witty Zulu proverb on impossibility: “A goat may beget an ox and a white man sew on a (native) head ring.” (1970:398)

Some proverbs and sayings explore the symbolic significances of words, and in so doing greatly enhance spoken and written communication. Okpewho (1992:231) notes that

proverbs used in conversation mainly serve to spice up talk.

In the course of my research I asked informants to give examples of proverbs and sayings which they were familiar with and would use in conversation, and which they considered amusing. The following is a selection of their responses:

*Iqaqa aliziva kunuka*

(literal: A polecat does not smell itself; figurative: You never recognize your own faults)

*Unokala uthombile amasele ayangqungqa*

(literal: A crab sits in the dark, frogs celebrate outside; figurative: When the cat's away the mice will play)

*Zingasuzela zityebile*

(literal: When they (the bees) sting they are rich; figurative: A person will react violently when something is mentioned that pricks the conscience)

*Umdla-nkulu wafa yindlala*

(literal: A big eater died of hunger; figurative: People should grab the opportunities that come to them and not wait around for something better to crop up)

*Ubuso bendoda ziinkomo*

(literal: The beauty of a man is in his cows; figurative: A person's wealth is far more important than looks — particularly with regard to marriage)

*Igugu lingaba likhulu umbombo uyaqhosha*

(literal: Pride may become big if the arched nose is ill at ease; figurative: Pride comes before a fall)

*Umntu okhe wanya imfene*

(literal: A person who has just suckled like a baboon; figurative: Used to indicate the saliva that dribbles from a person's mouth when sleeping)

*Ukubuya noboya bentenetya*

(literal: To return with the hairs of a rabbit; figurative: To fail in an undertaking)

*Ooxam bayaphaxulana*

(literal: The iguanas are hitting each other in a clumsy manner; figurative: There is no difference between them — the one is as useless as the other)

*Into esuzelwe liqaqa*

(literal: Something that has been farted at by the polecat; figurative: Any thing or person that is repulsive, repugnant, despised, regarded as unworthy of notice)

*Ukusenga kwezimithiyo*

(literal: To milk from those that are in calf; figurative: To tell lies)

Proverbs and sayings can be exploited for humorous effect in all forms of oral discourse because they are able to signal a certain non-serious attitude towards a character or event as well as allowing the audience to interact in the discourse, since shared knowledge (in the form of generally understood expressions) is being offered.

## 1.2 HUMOUR IN CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

Much of Xhosa humour is revealed during ordinary everyday conversation, particularly when people are taking a break or relaxing after a long day's work. Often, as the conversation develops, a humorous mode develops as people start to mimic, play with words and crack jokes. Chiaro (1992:100) notes that this process is a natural development:

Jokes, quips and asides do not normally occur in isolation, but as an integrated part of spoken discourse. Consequently, if someone decides to be verbally witty, it is reasonable to suppose that something within the context in which the conversation is taking place has triggered off this desire.

It is not only formulaic jokes that are funny, however, but also the way in which the conversation is conducted:

It is also worth bearing in mind that humorous discourse does not only occur in joke form, nor as punning or quipping. The narration of amusing events and comic anecdotes is also part of the comic mode. (Chiaro 1992:117)

Humour in conversational discourse will therefore be analysed under the following headings: jokes, word-play and anecdotes.

### 1.2.1 Jokes

Jokes in Xhosa, like jokes in all other languages, must have a punch line:

The punch is the point at which the recipient either hears or sees something which is in some way incongruous with the linguistic or semantic environment in which it occurs but which at first sight had not been apparent. (Chiaro 1992:48)

My research suggests that Xhosa jokes (in the strictest sense of the word “joke”) tend to be derivative — that is, it would appear that they are historically “new” in Xhosa discourse and are often translations of English jokes, or follow a characteristically western structure. There are no Xhosa joke books, although a slim volume of jokes in English has been compiled by V.T. Mongoato. A large proportion of the jokes and riddles in this book have no reference to Xhosa culture or idiom, but there are a few with an obviously local flavour. An example is joke no. 346:

When September got his first old age pension he bought shoes for the first time in his life. When his son went to the mines he stole them. Old September got so fed up that he nearly lost his senses. The priest who had been trying to convert him to Christianity got a chance of convincing him that the only place where he could get peace was at the church. Poor September had no alternative but to take the advice. As he joined Christianity he sacrificed other things but he kept on drinking liquor privately. One morning he helped himself with a few tots before going to church. Most of the time the poor old man was fast asleep in the church. Deep in his sleep, he heard the priest preaching, “Up he went, up he went, the Son of Man, up he went”. Meaning when Jesus went up during ascension. The old man shouted with anger, “Up he went, up he went with my shoes that devil.” (Mongoato n.d.:37)

As with African Americans there is a tendency amongst Black South Africans to place many of their comic anecdotes or jokes in a religious context. J. Boskin (1986:204-205) notes the connection between humour and faith, and quotes Reinhold Niebuhr's aphoristic observation: "Humor is concerned with the immediate incongruities of life and faith the ultimate ones."

In the course of my research, people were asked to produce any specifically "Xhosa" jokes they knew. Although people would frequently give renditions of jokes easily recognizable as coming from a standard English joke book, there were some that were original and particular to the South African situation, and some that even characterized the Xhosa context. I would argue, however, that the functions of many jokes<sup>8</sup> (to relieve anxiety, to attack authority, to mention taboo subjects) were (and still are) fulfilled by various different discourses in Xhosa which may not be as easily recognizable as vehicles for humour as are jokes.

In addition, while the "fool" is a common character of jokes throughout the world, it has been noted by Davies (in C. Powell and G.E.C. Paton 1988:1) that it is people in western societies who are the most obsessed with jokes about "stupid" ethnic minorities. These jokes *do* exist in Xhosa with regard to Afrikaners in particular, but also to other Black ethnic groups (such as the Zulu, the Shangaan and the Mpondo) but it would seem that they are not as prolific as their western counterparts.

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8. To be discussed in Chapter Three.

My study of Xhosa jokes has also revealed a dearth of political jokes, particularly ones dealing with the South African apartheid regime. Having read L.W. Levine's<sup>9</sup> work on the humour of African Americans, I was eager to draw parallels with the humour of oppressed Blacks in South Africa. As far as jokes were concerned, I met with a virtual vacuum. There are few jokes circulating about Whites in general, let alone about D.F. Malan, H.F. Verwoerd, P.W. Botha and the evils of apartheid. The insensitivity of Whites during the apartheid regime was not a common theme of Xhosa jokes, nor is the cruelty of policemen and other authorities prevalent in joke form. Occasionally the more bizarre aspects of petty apartheid are burlesqued (a Black man wearing a completely white outfit sits down on a park bench marked "Whites Only") as is the law that required Blacks to carry passes. These jokes are neither very cruel nor very incisive.

I would argue that the reason for this apparent lack of "critical" jokes in Xhosa shows the extent to which apartheid succeeded in its aims. In the first place, fear of imprisonment made people extremely wary of any kind of criticism of the government (or of Whites). This is the reason given by a number of older people who were interviewed on this subject. G. Benton (1988:36-37) refers to the relationship between undemocratic states and the dearth of jokes:

No states specifically outlaw political jokes. After all, to do so would make them look even more ridiculous. But states can and do use other laws — laws against economic sabotage, undermining national morale, and so on — to silence joke-tellers.

In the second place, people were so successfully separated that the linguistic and literary forms available to the culture of the one were not internalized by the

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9. See L.W. Levine's Chapter Five "Black Laughter" (1977, pp.298-366).

culture of the other. Only recently have Whites become aware of the existence of praise poets, and very few understand their function and role in society. In the same way most Blacks in South Africa were so separated from the cultural world of Whites that the opportunities for assimilating their forms of humour were infrequent and isolated. In America, at least the English language was a common link between Whites and Blacks, while in South Africa, nothing was shared — neither land, resources, nor language. Without the sharing of language, there could be no sharing of humour. Nash (1985:9) observes that

we share our humour with those who have shared our history  
and who understand our way of interpreting experience.

As Blacks have gained more access to the language and culture of their one time oppressors the joke form has ceased to be exclusively White, and has taken on a new, more totally South African, character. The examples cited below are indicative of this change:

*Joke A:*

Kwakukho intlanganiso ye-ANC eyayibanjelwe kwiphandle elincinci laseCiskei. Kwa oko kuvakele isithonga esikhulu sokududuma ngathi yimipu. Ngengomso iPAC kwavakala ukuba ithi ibiyiyo leyo ibihlasela.

(There was a meeting of the ANC held in a small village of the Ciskei. Suddenly there was a huge clap of thunder that sounded like guns. The following day the PAC claimed responsibility for it.)

For this joke to be understood, some knowledge of recent South African political history is required. The PAC (Pan Africanist Congress), a far-left political organization, would regularly claim responsibility for armed attacks after the event. In some quarters the PAC was regarded as an insignificant and ill-

disciplined group eager to lay claim to acts they were incapable of perpetrating in order to enhance their image as a powerful force.

*Joke B:*

Indoda elondoloza imali nenkcukacha zobom babantu yabuza komnye umfama osele eqinile ogama lingu-Eugene Terre'Blanche kutheni ukuze alandule xa ebebuzwa ukuba wakha wafumana ingozi na kanti apha phakathi kwesisicelo uchaza ukuba wakha wasesibhedlela izihlandlo ezithathu ngengozi yokwenzakala. Ngenye imini wawiswa lihashi, ngenye imini wahlatywa yinkunzi yenkomo, okokugqibela watyiwa yinyoka. Indoda eyayingumthengisi-mpahla yayisithi makaphendule ngo-ewe, wala ngenkani esithi yayingezo ngozi ezo zinto ezazisenzeka ngabom. Watsho Eugene "Kangangokuba ndisaza kuziphindezela."

(A life insurance agent asked a certain middle-aged farmer known as Mr Eugene Terre'Blanche why he had answered "no" when asked whether he had had any accidents, yet further on in the application he indicated he had been in hospital three times for injuries. Once a horse had thrown him, once he had been gored by a bull and finally he had been bitten by a snake. When the salesman suggested he should answer "yes", he stoutly refused. "Those weren't accidents," Eugene explained. "They did it on purpose and I still have to avenge myself.")

Mr Eugene Terre'Blanche is a figure of fun (and some fear) to most observers of South African politics. His bombastic and unashamedly racist comments and unlikely statements about the "Boer" military potential are often ridiculed and satirized. Mr Terre'Blanche was indeed thrown by his horse during a parade, and would seem to be somewhat accident-prone — hence the humour of his very in-character paranoid retort that these things were somehow visited upon him on purpose.

*Joke C:*

Kuthiwa uThixo wabiza indoda yomLungu, eyeNdiya neyomntu oNtsundu ukuba beze nezicelo zabo. Waqala kweyomLungu wabuza:  
"Ufuna ntoni apha ebomini?"



“Ndicela umhlaba namandla okulawula abantu.”  
 Yaphendula.  
 “Kulungile, ungahamba.”  
 Kwangena eyeNdiya, yathi yona, “Ndifuna imali eninzi  
 ndibe ngusomashishini.”  
 “Wena ndoda?” Wabuza uThixo kweNtsundu.  
 “Hayi Nkosi, ndikhaphe nje la madoda.”

(God asked a White, an Indian and a Black what they wanted in life. He started with the White.

“What would you like here in life?”

“I would like land and power to rule people.” He replied.

“Good, you can go.”

The Indian entered, and he said, “I would like a lot of money and to become a businessman.”

“And you, man?” God asked the Black man.

“No, my Lord, I have just accompanied these men.”)

This joke adheres to the classic three-part structure which often features three different nationalities. The audience knows that when the teller of the joke gets to the third person the punch line can be expected and that it is this last person who will be ridiculed. As with some Jewish jokes, this joke seems to be self-deprecating. However, Zijderveld warns:

Self-deprecating jokes should not be interpreted too hastily as expressions of self-hatred. They may, on the contrary, signal a strong sense of group identity, for the laughter they elicit is not a laughter with whites at the expense of blacks, but rather an in-group laughter which strands proof of ethnic pride and self-consciousness. (1983:51)

In this joke it would seem that the oppression of Blacks in South Africa is being recognized and contrasted with the arrogance of other more avaricious groups. At the same time the joke criticizes the passivity and servility of those who do not dare challenge the presumed supremacy of Whites and Indians in the economy.

*Joke D:*

Kwakukho umcimbi emaMpondweni, abantu belele ndlwininye, abafazi namadoda. Ngengomso kwathiwa umfo othile uzume uMaDlamini. Wabizelwa amapolisa waya kuvela

enkundleni kamantyi. Xa selekuxoxwa kwacaca ukuba le ndoda ibilele phakathi kwabafazi, kodwa lo kuthiwa imzumile ebengekho ecaleni kwayo. “Mantyi, ndifuna ukukubonisa ukuba andinako ukuzuma uMaDlamini elele ngaphaya koNosonti.” Yatsho ithoba iziphu yebhulukhwe yayo iveza ubudoda bayo. “Uyayibona ke ukuba ingakanani Mantyi?”

(There was this matter amongst the Mpondo, people were sleeping in one house, men and women. The next day it was reported that a certain man had raped MaDlamini. He was called by the police and appeared in the Magistrate’s court. It was clear that this man had been sleeping amongst the women, but the one he was alleged to have raped was not [lying] next to him. “Magistrate, I want to show you that I couldn’t have raped MaDlamini lying over there near Nosonti.” As he said so, he undid his zip and showed his manhood. “Can you see how big it is, magistrate?”)

The humour in this joke is contained in the punch line which is quite unexpected and humorously shocking. Explicit reference to sexual organs is normally avoided amongst the Xhosa, and even in this joke the word *ubudoda* is used for penis, instead of the more anatomical term *umthondo*. The humour also relies on the audience’s knowledge of the Mpondo as being outspoken and forthright.

*Joke E:*

Makwetu: Complaints! Sithi nyak’omtsha!  
Mandela: Yintoni kaloku ngoku wafaka oocomplaints?  
Makwetu: Awundiva na ukuba ndibulisa ngesibuliso sonyaka omtsha?  
Mandela: Oo, ngelakho shame ubuzama ukuthi compliments.

(Makwetu: Complaints! Happy new year!  
Mandela: Why do you say “complaints”?  
Makwetu: Don’t you understand me when I give new year’s greetings?  
Mandela: Well it is you who is being pathetic by trying to say “compliments”.)

Translational malapropisms<sup>10</sup> are often used in Xhosa written and oral humour as in this instance, with aspersions being cast on the intellectual capabilities of a

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10. “Translational malapropism” is a term I have coined in order to explain the kind of humour that results when Xhosa speakers use inappropriate and often pompous English expressions and words or when speakers of languages other than Xhosa try to speak in Xhosa, with comic results. While I realize that this is an extension of the semantic field of the term, it nevertheless does fulfil the basic function of a malapropism, which is to be humorous via inappropriateness.

political leader who is unable to distinguish between “complaints” and “compliments”.

*Joke G:*

“Ngubani umntu wokuqala ukutya i-Chappies?” Wabuza utitshalakazi. “NguYesu. Wayephathelwe intlak’ emhlophe zizazi zaseMpumalanga.”

(“Who was the first person to eat Chappies?”<sup>11</sup> asked the teacher. “It was Jesus. He was given gum by the Wise Men from the East.”)

This joke relies upon the ambiguity of the word *intlaka*, which can refer to either myrrh or ordinary chewing gum, the situation obviously having been contrived by the joker since the question is not one likely to be asked by a teacher.

*Joke H:*

Ngenye imini inkwenkwana eyayiye evenkileni noyise ngapha phesheya kweNciba yabona ubuchopho obuthengiswayo etafileni. Obunye ibobeNgesi, obunye bobefrentshi, obunye ibobeBhulu. Inkwenkwana iphawule ukuba obu buchopho beBhulu budulu kunobu bezindidi zimbini. Ibuze kuyise isizathu oyiselele ngolu hlobo “Mfo wam, kungokuba ubuchopho beBhulu zange khe busetyenziswe ngaphambili.”

(A little boy went into a trading store in the Transkei with his father. He saw three brains on sale on the table. One was the brain of an English person, another of a French person, and the other of an Afrikaner. The little boy noticed that the Afrikaner’s brain was more expensive than the others. When he asked his father the reason he was told “My boy, that is because the Afrikaner’s brain has never been used before.”)

This joke occurs in many forms, depending on the ethnic group under attack — thus the same joke is told by Afrikaners with the characters merely reversed. In the above form, however, it is clear that the joke allows Black South Africans a sense of superiority over a group that constantly asserted the inferiority of “non-Whites”.

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11. “Chappies” is a well-known make of bubble gum.

*Joke I:*

Umakhulu nomzukulwana wakhe baphuma evenkileni apho uMakhulu ethenge khona umnqwazi omtsha. Xa bephumela phandle bafumana ukuba imvula iyana. Umakhulu athabathe ilokhwe, le kanye ayinxibileyo, ayithi wambu phezu komnqwazi. Kuba ke ebengombathanga nto ngaphantsi kwelokhwe, kucace into; yokuba iimpundu ziyavela.

“Makhulu, Makhulu!”, kukhwaza umzukulwana exhalabile, “Iimpundu zivelile!”

Aphendule umakhulu ngokungakhathali: “Sukukhathazeka sana lwam, iimpundu zindala, ke wona umnqwazi mtsha!”

(Once an old lady went into a shop with her grandchild and bought a beautiful new hat. On coming out of the shop they discovered that it was raining, so the old lady pulled up the dress that she was wearing and covered the hat on her head. The grandchild, on seeing that her granny’s buttocks were showing (since she had nothing else under the dress) worriedly called out to her: “Granny, Granny, your buttocks are showing!” The grandmother, with no sign of consternation, replied “Don’t worry, my darling, the buttocks are old but the hat is new!”)

This joke works on several levels. On one level it is gently mocking the habits of traditional Xhosa women, who often use their dresses as screens when they squat to urinate. The juxtaposition of the old buttocks with the new hat is also amusing, since clothes are usually referred to as being old or new, not body parts.

## 1.2.2 Word-play

### 1.2.2.1 Homophonic translations

While apartheid caused cultural and linguistic isolation between Whites and Blacks, Blacks in South Africa nevertheless had to learn the languages of their oppressors in order to survive economically. Therefore while an identification with English

humour as such might have eluded Xhosa speakers, the possibilities of *creating* humour out of bilingualism were seized upon. Xhosa speakers often amuse one another with apparent “translations” of English into Xhosa — actually playing on words in both languages which sound similar but are unrelated in meaning — thereby producing a kind of bilingual pun. Although these “translations” may have been inspired by genuine mistakes, the instances quoted are examples of deliberate manipulation. Chiaro’s observation on “intentional slips” has relevance for Xhosa homophonic translational phrases. She notes that

what the joker does is to manipulate the language in such a way that it almost appears to be a slip. (1992:25)

The following phrases are examples of the witty way in which homophones are used (or misused!) for the “language transference game”<sup>12</sup>:

long, long ago  
(*walongalanga wagoba*: he/she looked over, bent down)

sit on the form  
(*sithi isifombo*: the hunchback says)

where are the dull boys?  
(*aphi amakhwenkw’ amadala?*: where are the older boys?)

they are in the desert  
(*basemadizeni*: they are between the maize stalks)

come to me  
(*umkam’ umithi*: my wife is pregnant)

perpendicular  
(*ndiphephe ndidutyulwa*: I pulled away as I was being shot at)

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12. Some of my informants remember this word-game first happening in the form of gramophone records in the mid-1930s. Others remember a book called the *Bhidance Book*, which contained these phrases. It is likely that the name is derived from *ukubhida*, which means “to confuse”. For example, the phrase *ubhida umkhondo* means that someone deliberately chooses a separate route to go on after indicating that an agreed upon route will be followed. The connection could be that the so-called “translations” are actually quite misleading!

it's impossible  
(*iphosa imbila*: it is missing the rock-rabbit)

when I was in the equator  
(*xa ndandingumkhwetha*: when I was an initiand)

ladies and gentlemen  
(*amaledi aqaba ijem emilenzeni*: the ladies are rubbing jam on the legs)

masculine in gender  
(*amasi atyiwe yilaa nj'ende*: sour milk is eaten by that long dog)

the department of public education  
(*ndiphethe neportmente yokuphatha imidyuba yasekhitshini*: I've got the bag to take the scraps from the kitchen)

the peninsula is a piece of land almost surrounded by water  
(*bapenapena bethsula-thsula bembathisene ngebhayi likaWalter*: they wriggled and farted covered by Walter's blankets)

very well  
(*avela amawele*: there come the twins)

very good  
(*avela egudile*: coming smooth)

very much  
(*avela ngoMatshi*: they are coming in March)

oh, I see  
(*o, ulwandle*: oh, the sea)

this last example is not a homophonic translation but, rather plays on the ambiguity of the English word "see", which has its own homophones — the unintended meaning is translated here.

An example of this kind of word-play with Afrikaans as the target language was related to me in joke form:

Kwacelwa indoda ethile ukuba itolikele abantu into eyayithethwa ngumLungu. Waqhuba ke wathi: "*Daar is vier manne.*" "*Kukho amadoda omlilo.*" "*Hulle loop.*" "*Ayaloba.*" "*Hoekom?*" "*Inkomo.*"

(A certain man was asked to interpret for people what was being said by a White person. He proceeded: "*Daar is vier*

*manne* [There are four men].” “There are men of fire.”  
 “*Hulle loop* [They walk].” “They fish.” “*Hoekom*  
 [Why]?” “Cow.”)

An English translation cannot bring out the humour of the joke, which plays on near homophones in Afrikaans and Xhosa. *Vier* (four) is misunderstood as *vuur* (fire), and the Xhosa verb *loba* (fish), because of its similarity in sound, is used to translate *loop* (walk). *Hoekom* (why) is deemed sufficiently close in sound to *inkomo* (cow).

#### 1.2.2.2 Nicknames (*iziteketiso*)

Neethling (1994:89) notes the following with regard to Xhosa nicknames:

Not much research has been done on nicknames in the context of African languages in Southern Africa. Zulu is closely related to Xhosa, belonging to the same language family i.e. the Nguni, and there are many similarities on the linguistic level. This applies to the lexicon as well and often statements regarding the one language would also apply to the other. Koopman (1987:154)<sup>13</sup> provides three Zulu terms, apparently synonyms, used in Zulu for these derivations. Although the first two, i.e. *izidlaliso dlalisa* “amuse, play with” and *izifekethiso fekethisa* “play with, cause to sport, amuse, make a joke, say in fun” also appear in Xhosa, they are not used within the context of onomastics. The third one, *izifenga fenga* “talk in sport, say in fun, make derisive remarks, use nicknames”, is unknown in Xhosa.

People may be assigned humorous nicknames in Xhosa, these names being used both as a sign of affection and as an indication of contempt. A small person might be called *Nomadzedze* (tiny flea) and a large, imposing man *Mqosho* (a big thick thing). A jealous woman could be referred to as *Nomona* (jealousy), a skinny

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13. Here reference is made to the article “Zulu names and other modes of address” in *Nomina Africana*, Vol.1, No.1: 136-164.

person as *Nonkwetshelele* (flat bottom), and a freckled girl as *Nongqoqwana* (little dot).

During the apartheid era, giving nicknames to one's employers was one way of letting off steam, particularly since the majority of Whites would not understand their literal meanings.

### 1.2.2.3 *Tongue-twisters*

Because of the clicks, Xhosa tongue-twisters are often exploited to great comic effect. Xhosa speakers are greatly amused at learners of the language even attempting these sound combinations. The most famous of these tongue-twisters is S.E.K. Mqhayi's *Iqaqa Liqhawuk' Uqhoqhoqho* (The polecat split its windpipe) of which the first stanza is quoted below:

Iqaqa liqikaqikek' eqaqaqeni,  
 Laqothek' umnqonqo liqhawuk' uqhoqhoqho;  
 Wee qhaphu noQaqa eqhiwule umqoqwa,  
 Eqoq' ezo ngqaqa zeNqonqo neNquqhu,  
 Enqand' elo qaqa lingaqikaqikeki,  
 Liqothaqotheke liqhawuk' uqhoqhoqho. (in Satyo, *Amazinga Eembongi*, 1983:2)

(A polecat rolling itself on the lawn,  
 Broke its marrow and split its windpipe;  
 At that moment Qaqa came up holding his carved stick,  
 Carving those rocky hills of Nqonqo and Nquqhu,  
 Making sure that the polecat did not roll,  
 And wriggle and split its windpipe.)

Under 1.2.3 I quote a domestic worker's account of an occasion on which she confused a policeman with a string of clicks. This is an example of how Black people in South Africa could use tongue-twisters in order to subvert the control of



the linguistically challenged White authorities, who could be momentarily silenced by such shows of phonetic virtuosity.

### 1.2.3 Anecdotes

This is a form of humour which is very prevalent in Xhosa society, and is far more widespread and popular than the more self-conscious forms of humour such as jokes and puns. In this discussion I will include extracts from conversations with domestic workers which, while appearing light-hearted on the surface, in fact deal with the more serious aspects of employment under apartheid.<sup>14</sup>

The women interviewed were pointed out by people in the community (Guguletu in the Cape) as good raconteurs, and their anecdotes were prompted by an informal interview. Respondents were asked questions on their experiences as domestic workers, coping strategies and issues such as friendship and gossiping.

Like the traditional storyteller, the authors of these anecdotes embellished their accounts with facial expressions and bodily gestures. As they related their stories, they seemed to be enjoying not only their reminiscences but also the effect they were having on the listeners.

The extracts I have selected are typical, and manifest recurring themes relating to racism. The isolation in which many women had to bear the insults of their

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14. The plight of domestic workers continues. A fairly recent report in *The Argus* (8 October 1994) quotes the general secretary of the Domestic Workers Union as saying, "Employers treat their workers like animals."

employers, the language barrier, and the physical setting apart of utensils and rooms for their use, were sometimes only relieved by communal laughter. Boskin's observation on African American humour has relevance to this discussion:

Humour was used as an antidote to the omnipresent tension that accompanied nonviolent demonstrations and to tweak and undermine whites and their racist institutions. (1986:208)

The following are the reminiscences of Saddy Marhubelela, a woman who worked as a domestic worker in the 1960s:

Kaloku kusemaBhulwini babecalula. Isitya esicrackileyo wawutyiselwa kuso utye pha phandle noba umoya unje [pointing outside as it was a very windy day] wawuma pha phandle, utye, kuba kaloku uhluphekile ulambile *and* uyaphangela ngolo hlobo.

(You see amongst the Boers there was apartheid. You would be given a cracked plate to eat out of, outside in the wind. So you would sit outside and eat because you were poor and hungry and that was the way we worked.)

Ikomityi engenamphambo yayikomityi yam. *Iplate enecrack yayiyiplate* yam. Icephe elithe [showing the funny shape of the spoon by twisting her mouth towards her ear], yayilicphe lam elo.

(The cup without a handle would be my cup. The plate with the crack would be my plate. The twisted spoon would be mine.)

Uthi wawuyibuza kuye uba ‘‘Kutheni na *madam* le nto ukuba noba kukho umoya soloko usibeka phandle?’’ athi ‘‘Awuzazi. *Jy's mos 'n bobbejaan man, jy kan mos nie hier kom eet binnekant in die kombuis nie, jy moet daar buitekant staan en eet, maak klaar, maak klaar, maak klaar.*’’ Yenza yenza yenza ugqibe. Ubone ukuba ngezinye imini utshintshe ugesig lo, apha eb'sweni akamandanga. Kuthi ngenxa 'ba uhluphekile, unyamezele usebenze.

(If you asked her, ‘‘Madam, why do I have to sit outside even when it is so windy?’’, she would reply, ‘‘You don't know. You are just a monkey, man, you can't sit inside the kitchen here, you must go and stand outside and eat, and hurry up and finish.’’ Just do, do, do and finish. On other days you would see from the expression on her face that her mood had

changed for the worse and she was not nice. But because you were poor you just had to bite on the bullet and carry on working.)

Omnye nomnye kusasa uba sidibene siyenze into yoncokola sihleka ezi zinto zaba beLungu. Kuba kaloku sakubheka phi? Siyaphangela siwufumene lo msebenzi ngolu hlobo siwufumene ngalo, silambile, abantwana balambile ekhaya.

(When we met in the morning we would chat and laugh about the habits of Whites. Because where else could we go? We had this work because we were hungry and our children were hungry at home.)

Xa sisezilok'shini [laughing] xa sisezilok'shini ngoba kaloku pha asifuman' *chance* omnye ukweliya *huis* nomnye ukweliya. Ngelinye ixesha sibuye ke ngoku sihlale sincokole ezo zinto zethu, "He wethu usile umLungu namhlanje akandigezela, wandigezela ndingena emnyango — esibuza ukuba kutheni na ndingena emnyango — esibuza ukuba kutheni na into ethile nethile ingenziwanga?" Ndithi, "Tyhini! akalibali ixesha le *slave* lagqitha nje — basasenza iidonkey nangoku, uya kuncama ke lo mLungu, into kunayo ndiza kumvimba lo [gestures that her lips are sealed] sisebenze." Usuthi wawufika ekhaya s'kuhlale, "Tata, mama kunje-kunje-kunje-kunje ..." "Hayi mntan'am, bakungaba sathiwani sesilapho."

(When we were in the location [we would gossip] because when you were there [in the suburbs] you wouldn't get a chance because one was over at one house and another was somewhere else. Sometimes we would get back and sit and chat about things, "My dear that White person is really stupid, today she really made me mad, because when I came in the doorway she asked me why I was coming in the door, and why this and this and that?" I say, "Grief! She doesn't realize that the days of slavery are over — they are still making us donkeys even now, she is going to have to give it up because I won't answer her at all<sup>15</sup> [gestures that her lips are sealed] and will just work. As soon as you get home and sit down it is "Mum, dad, it is like this and this and this ..." <sup>16</sup> "No, my child, it is no use, we are already in this position.")

[talking about gossiping] Ewe siyayenza nje. Ewe siyayenza nje [laughing] siyayenza ezo izinto, akeva *mos*, kanti ke omnye akuve athi kuwe, "Kutheni le nto undihlebayo,

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15. There is a Xhosa expression *ndiza kumvimba lo ugqiba umbona* (literal: I am going to be stingy to the one who finishes up the maize - i.e. the mouth; figurative: I am going to keep quiet.)

16. She is referring to the politicized youth, who would question their parents' perceived passivity.

kutheni le nto uthetha ngam?" Sothuke ngoku sirhwaqele, sesiyithethile mos laa nto besifuna ukuyithetha [laughing] singayihoyi futhi singabi namsebenzi na loo nto.

(Yes we do that. Yes we do that [laughing], we do those things, but she doesn't understand. But sometimes there is someone who understands you and says to you, "Why are you gossiping about me, why are you talking about me?" Now we get a shock and draw back, but anyway we have said what we wanted to say and we just pay no attention and do not let it worry us.)

Linda Lujabe, who worked at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town as a chambermaid during the 1980s, relates the following reaction to an unpopular manageress:

Wayethi uba uthe gqi uMrs Thomas bajijitheke besithi, "Usile lo atsho ngothanda ukuthwala i-wig, asoze uzibone iinwele zakhe zinqabe oku kwe-China elinekiss-madolo." Wade wahamba uMrs Thomas engazange wayiqonda le ndlela yokuhletywa kwakhe.

(If Mrs Thomas suddenly appeared they would look at her sideways and say "What a fool she is, liking to wear a wig, you will never see her hair which is so sparse like a knock-kneed Chinese person." Mrs Thomas would go without having had any idea of what people had been talking about.)

Alice Ngxola refers to her employer's stinginess and the common practice of assigning broken utensils to domestic workers:

... lo mfazi lo womLungu isonka esi esifresh, akanakho ukukunika wena. Kufuneka wena udle esi sidala. U'ba bebhakile like ngoMvulo njengoba namhlanje inguLwesine, esiya sonka sangenantsika mos uyaqonda 'ba ngoku sidala ngoku, uza kusinika, wena ke eso and soze uyibone ibhotolo. Uyeva ke?! Uya kunika eso sonka sinjalo nalo ti emnyama. Bengaba beLungukazi abanesitya sokuba esi isitya akunakho ukudlela kuso. Uyeva ke?! Kanti esi sitya kuthwa unakho ukudlela kuso nje sesenja. Uyadla njeinja nantsi ikujongile. Uyeva ke?! Kanti ikujongile nje le nja ikujongele ukuba uya kude ugqibe nini na izothi idle esityeni sayo. Athi umntu ukuze ayiqonde le nto ukuba kanti sesenja athi lo mLum'kazi, "Khawulezisa le nja ifuna ukudla — sisitya sayo eso". Uyeva ke?!

(... that White woman would never give you fresh bread. You had to eat the stale bread. Like on Monday she would have baked bread and then on Thursday when you would know that it was stale, she would give it to you, and that was it, without butter. Do you understand?! She would give you that bread with black tea. And you would not be able to eat out of one of her plates. Do you understand?! The plate you could eat out of was the dog's. You would be eating and there would be the dog looking at you to see when you were going to finish and when he was going to eat out of his plate. And the White woman, knowing whose plate you were using, would say, "Hurry up, the dog wants to eat, that is his plate." Do you understand?!)

As recently as 1993 Manala Butshingi experienced similar racism:

Ikomityi yam yayihlala kunye nezinto zokucoca indlu nokuhlamba iimpahla izinto ezinjenge-*Omo* ne*Handy Andy*. Ngamanye amaxesha ikomityi yam ichithelwe yi-*Omo*. Xa endenzela ikofu ngamanye amaxesha agalele amanzi abilileyo ekomityini enesepha engakhange ayirinse ikomityi — linyuke ke igwebu le-*Omo* ekofini andinike injalo. Ndisuke ndimlandele ndiyichithe esinkini.

(My cup used to be kept together with the cleaning things and the washing powder like *Omo* and *Handy Andy*. Some times *Omo* was poured into my cup. When she made me coffee she sometimes poured boiling water into the cup which still had the remnants of soap powder in it because she hadn't rinsed the cup — and the *Omo* foam would rise to the top and she would give it to me just like that. I just followed her and and chucked it in the sink.)

The situation of the dog and the plate occurs again in Nomalizo Siyo's narrative:

Ukungena kwam epolitikini mtan'am, kungencinezelo yabeLungu. Ndibe nale ngqondo yokuba lo mntana kanene ndamkhulisa ngoku une-*18 years* xa ndimjongayo "funeka ndimbonge ndithi "*master*". Ndaqonda ukuba hey, linzima ixesha ndimkhulisile lo mntana kufana ingathi ngumtana wam, "funeka ngoku abe yinkosi kum. Ndikhonze umntanam' ngoku ngoba ndimkhulisile *from 4 months to 19 years* — *master-master-master*. Ngelinye ixesha andikhabe apha ezimpundu — "*No, master.*" Uyayibona into enjalo? Ngomntana obebelekwa ndim! Ndayijonga le nto ukuba, hey, ibuhlungu ingcinezelo yamaBhulu, ibuhlungu ingcinezelo yamaBhulu. Ndangena ke kakhulu kwipolitiki ngolo hlobo,

ndamzonda umLungu. UmLungu, *what made me* ndimzonde, uyakwazi ukuthatha isitya sepapa se*Oats* kusasa atyiseinja yakhe wena ungenakho ukutya kweso sitya. Athathe isitya bekutyela injayakhe kusasa ipapa ayinike injaixhapha phakodwa wena unesitya sakho mntanam. Akunakho ukutya kula *plate* yala mlum'kazi. Kodwainjayakhe iyatya, injayakhe iyalalalebhedini.

(I got involved with politics, my child, because of the oppression of the Whites. For instance I realized that I now had to praise the child who I had brought up until he was 18 years old, calling him "master". I realized that, hey, it was a difficult time I had had, bringing this child up as my own, and now he had to be my master. I brought him up from 4 months to 19 years — master, master, master. Once he kicked me here on the buttocks — "No, master." Can you understand such a thing? By a child who was carried on the back by me! I saw that, "Hey, the oppression of the Boers is painful, it is painful." That is why I became involved with politics, I hated White people. What made me hate White people was that they could take a plate of oats in the morning and feed the dog from the same plate when you were not allowed to eat out of the very same plate. She would take the plate and let the dog lick out of it but you would have your own plate, my child. You cannot eat from that plate of the White woman. But her dog eats, it sleeps in her bed.)

Alice Ngxola talks about the kind of humorous gossiping that would go on:

Uyabona ke amaxesha besifumana *ichance* yokuhlekisa ngazonke ezaa nto — lixesha leti *tea time*, sihleli sonke apha etafileni [at the hospital]. Omnye ngenye imini ubalisa into yokuba, *umatron* zibani bani uthe *like* u'ba indim ndisebenza neboy, uyeva ke?! Athi kum mhlawumbi, "Uze uxelele ubani lo ukuba aze". Wathi, "Uxelele ubani ashayinise ikamere yam le yona, namhlanje ndithi ndifika ibe ishayina ndizibone apha eflorini." Uyeva ke?! Ewe, uthi makuxelelwe *iboy*. Mna ke ndiqonde ukuba andizukuyixelela le *boy* ngoba yena *why* engayixeleli? Uyeva ke?! Apho ndifika khona ngoku ndibalisela abanye ndithi, "He bethu na, uthe *umatron* zibani bani mandixelele unantsika ..." — futhi yayinguDula lo nantsika ndiyamkhumbula — "Uthe mandixelele uDula ukuba aze ashayinise inantsika yakhe." Bathi Engamxeleli nje ufanele kuba mhla wayethi kuDula makashayinise, wathi uDula "Yithi kuye makashayinise le yakhe [pointing at the anus] azibone kuyo." Uyeva ke?!

(You see the times we got to laugh were during tea, all sitting around the table [at the hospital]. One day someone would tell a story, like maybe matron whoever, like maybe I was

working with this boy. Do you understand?! And maybe she would say to me, “Go and tell whoever that he must come,” she would say, “Tell what’s-his-name that he must shine my room, today I want to be able to see myself in the floor.” Do you understand?! So she said the boy had to be told. I knew that I wouldn’t tell the boy, because why couldn’t she tell him herself? When I told the others “Hey, you lot, matron so-and-so told me to tell what’s-his-name ...” — oh yes it was Dula, I remember now, “She said I must tell Dula that he must come and shine her what’s-its-name.” They said The reason why she doesn’t tell him herself is because once when she told him, Dula told her to shine her own thing [pointing at the anus] and then she could see herself in it. Do you understand?!

UDula lawo ke wayesisislamsi. Ewe, leyo matron ke ingeyebala. Ewe kwathi na ufanele ukuba makangatsho wathi mhla wayethe kuDula makashayine ikamere wathi uDula, “Shayinisa apho kuwe uzibone apho kuwe!” Uyeva ke?!

(That Dula was a Moslem. And the matron was Coloured. So when she told Dula to shine her room Dula said, “Shine there yourself and see yourself in it!” Do you understand?!)

Sihlekiswa kwa ngabaphathi bethu ngoba kaloku basithatha njengezinto ezingenangqondo. Uyabona? Kodwa kuthi awunamandla akwenza nto kubo, us’ke uyithathe le nto izithi noba ibikukhathazile us’kuthi wawufika kwabanye ngoku uthi usakuyincokola is’ke ibe yintlekisa kangangokuba kuthi nokuthi gqi lowo kuthiwe, “Nanku umhlobo wakho”. Uyeva ke? Athi mhlawumbi ebesayibambile umbone ngelinye ixesha eya eswabuluka, ngoba uyayibona ukuba le nto mos wena wayikhupha engqondweni awuyihoyanga konke, uyigcinile ukuba wayethe, uyigcinele into yokuba nawe ngenye imini useza kum’phinda ngayo ayiphelanga, into ekunayo ke se iyinto nje endihlekisa ngayo ngelo xesha.

(We also laughed at our employers although they took us to be really stupid. Do you see? But because you have no power to do anything to them, you just take what they do, even if it bothers you, and once you get together with the others and you chat about it, it just becomes a joke, like when she arrives unexpectedly someone says “There’s your friend.” Do you understand?! Perhaps the employer still harbours a grudge but when she sees you are not angry any more and have not been hurt by what she said, then her face changes back to normal. But you do harbour something, you keep it with you and one day you will get revenge because it did not go away, and so that understanding makes me laugh about it at that time.)

Nomalizo Siyo had other, more scatological, anecdotes to relate concerning her employer's complete lack of sensitivity. Her pride in her own boldness was evident in the following saga:

Ndiya pha *etoilet* awukho ngelinye ixesha kuba *itoilet* isezantsi *from the 6th floor* kufuneka ndiye erumini yam ndiyokukaka erumini yam. Andinakho ukukaka kule *toilet* yakho kodwa ihlanjwa ndim *everyday*. Andinakunya kule *toilet* yakho, “funeka ndiyonya ezantsi noba sendiphethwe ngumrhudo. Ndakubuya awuzazi ezi zandla noba bendikhe ndazihlamba na. Nantsi *i-mincemeat*, xa uyenza *you must handle i-mincemeat* ngantoni, ngedlanza, zakho xa uxuba *i-mincemeat* ufaka nantoni — nesonka. Ubuye uvela emsebenzini ngesuppertime. “*Oh Grace, what a lovely mincemeat*”. Kwahlekwa ebhasini. Ndathi wayetsho njalo umadam wam, “*Oh Grace, what a lovely mincemeat.*” Kanti ngeza zandla zimdaka, njengoba endinyanya nje.

(When I needed to go to the toilet I had to go and shit in my room. I am not able to shit in your room but it is washed by me every day. I cannot shit in this toilet of yours, I must go and shit downstairs even if I have a runny tummy. When I get back you don't know whether or not I have washed my hands. Here is the mincemeat, when you make it you have to handle it with what, with your hands, when you mix the mincemeat you must put some bread in it. When you come back from work at suppertime you say, “*Oh Grace, what a lovely mincemeat*”. We used to laugh about it on the bus. I said that is what she would say, my madam, “*Oh Grace, what a lovely mincemeat.*” But it was made with dirty hands which had just wiped the bum.)

Nomalizo's account became even more lively as she recounted the incident of her arrest. A policeman, on detaining her asks:

“*What is your English name?*” Ndathi, “*Uxolo mntanam, I'd like to know from you have you got a Xhosa name, by the name of emxaxo baxabeni ngomxhaxha ingxoxo yaxoxwa ngamaxoxo?*” Wathi, “*No!*” Ndathi kunjalo na kum. Wathi, “*Mama, please tell me the truth.*” Ndathi, “*I've got no slavery name, andinalo igama lobukhoboka.*” Ndim lo utshoyo kuye. Wathi, “*What standard have you passed?*” Ndathi, “*I'm a cultured woman. I've never been to school.*”

(“*What is your English name?*” I said, “*Sorry, my child, I'd like to know from you have you got a Xhosa name, by the*



name of *emxaxo baxabeni ngomxhaxha ingxoxo yaxoxwa ngamaxoxo?*” He said, “No!” I said it is the same with me. He said, “Mama, please tell me the truth.” I said, “I’ve got no slavery name.” That is what I said to him. He said, “What standard have you passed?” I said, “I’m a cultured woman. I’ve never been to school.)

The humour in the above exchange derives largely from the inversion of roles. The policeman is meant to be interrogating the woman, but she challenges his authority by intimidating him with her feisty retorts. The inversion continues with her final statement, which subverts the assumption that culture and education are synonymous.

S. Holdaway, who has done an analysis of one type of occupational humour, observes:

Humour and narrative expose the underlying reality of the occupational culture which, as we have noted, differs sharply from the public image of police work. Narrative expresses the adaptations by the rank-and-file to formal and potentially constraining structures. (1988:109)

I would argue that in the stories related by domestic workers we have the same exposition of the “underlying reality”, which does indeed differ from the (generally uninformed) “public image” of domestic workers as being non-aggressive, compliant and apolitical. What Holdaway notes about themes of narrative is also applicable, particularly if one realizes that in the narratives of domestic workers there are recurring themes (such as the dog-plate theme, the insensitive employer theme, the outspoken employee theme). Holdaway argues that:

To an “outsider” who is not familiar with the nuances of meaning which pervade police action, many of the humorous narratives and jokes re-told in this chapter will not seem

funny. Once a researcher, however, has cracked the veneer of the occupational culture and is able to place them within their social context they will be appreciated and open to analysis. As the various themes of narrative and of the jokes to be discussed are clarified, it should be noted that exaggeration, dramatic inflection, a lack of factual accuracy and very probably untruth enters into them. (1988:109-110)

Certainly the anecdotes related by the domestic workers I spoke to were full of exaggeration and dramatic inflection, and even the factual accuracy of some was doubtful. This is because the women were involved in storytelling, recounting incidents that had now become part of a repertoire of stories about work. The reward for "biting on the bullet" and suffering countless humiliations was the laughter and sense of solidarity that could be generated by wit and performance. Holdaway quotes U. Hannertz, who points out that

definitions and evaluations of self, others and the external world are developed, maintained and displayed with greater intensity than in other interactions ... An individual's vision of reality is often a precarious thing: we can find comfort in the knowledge that it is shared by others, thus acquiring social anchoring in an objective truth. (in Powell & Paton 1988:110)

## **SUMMARY**

The dynamic nature of Xhosa humour in oral discourse is evident in both traditional literature and everyday discourse. Although the humour reflects the preoccupations of the time, it is often extremely playful and inventive, with established concepts and preconceptions being turned upside down, allowing a healthy cynicism and iconoclasm to develop. It is in this topsy-turvy world that the greatest truths are often uttered and the sorest wounds healed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### XHOSA TEXTUAL HUMOUR

As was observed in Chapter One,

textual humour expands through elaborative networks rarely, if ever, found in oral humour. (Nash 1988:20)

In this chapter the specific nature of Xhosa textual humour will be explored and analysed, and an attempt made to highlight those forms which authors have found most successful. The pioneers of humorous writing in Xhosa are G.B. Sinxo and S.M. Burns-Ncamashe, both of whom are also acknowledged as the creators of some of the finest literature that exists in Xhosa. Their humour is, moreover, firmly rooted in the “culture, institutions, attitudes, beliefs, typical practices [and] characteristic artefacts” which Nash (1985:9) mentions in the first of his principal references.

The humour of these two novelists will be examined separately, and the forms they employ highlighted and thereafter related to the comic devices used generally in humorous fiction in Xhosa. It is hoped thereby to avoid imposing a Eurocentric paradigm on Xhosa humour which could lead to faulty and imprecise conclusions.

## 2.1 HUMOUR IN THE WORKS OF G.B. SINXO

In his doctoral thesis entitled “Satire and humour in G.B. Sinxo’s works — a critical perspective”, B. Mkonto (1988:1) concedes that

I find it entirely impossible to discuss his books without reference to the satire/and or humoristic component in them.

Mkonto rightly observes that Sinxo’s satire is influenced by the times in which he lived<sup>1</sup>. Sinxo’s works, he argues (1988:46-47), satirize the “violation of social norms” that occurred during a time of social and political change which “shook the pillars of Xhosa culture and tradition”.

Evidence of this fundamental change in societal norms can be found in Sinxo’s satiric *UNojayiti wam*, first published in 1961. Although the context is domestic, the *effect* of political and social change is evident in the frequent references to Christianity and western dress and habits, all of which seem incongruous in the context of a rural African setting. One senses that these domestic scenes are subservient to a larger political reality to which the actors of Sinxo’s world are denied access, and in this way Sinxo’s book reflects the larger irony of the South African situation. As a colonized writer he writes about a colonized people without referring to the colonizers (there are no significant White characters in his novels) and in so doing exposes the deeper irony. As L. Hutcheon (1994:92) argues,

we all belong to many overlapping (and sometimes even conflicting) communities or collectives. This overlapping is the condition that makes irony possible, even though the sharing will inevitably always be partial, incomplete, fragmentary; nevertheless, something does manage to get shared — enough, that is, to make irony happen.

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1. Sinxo was born in 1902 and died in 1962, his writing career spanning his entire adult life.

White and Black communities in South Africa overlapped in an unequal way — Whites in South Africa distanced themselves from Black culture and assumed allegiance to and acceptance of western traditions. The resultant situation in which Blacks struggled to interpret this foreign culture, while at the same time remaining wary of its many pitfalls, cried out to be parodied. Thus while a superficial reading of *UNojayiti wam* would suggest that only Black characters are mocked, a closer understanding of historical context and ideology suggests a more complex satire.

In addition, the fact that overt political satire would have been risky under the colonial regime implies that authors were constrained to satirize westernization indirectly by ridiculing those people who were most impressed by its trappings and most likely to “violate social norms”. One of these violations was the diminishing authority of the husband, and it is this aspect that is most skilfully satirized in *UNojayiti wam*.

In order to maintain harmonious social relationships, there exists in traditional Xhosa society a code of respect known as *hlonipha*, whereby both men and women respect their in-laws and in so doing show deference to the ancestors. Once a woman marries and moves into her new household she is expected to respect her husband’s relatives and ancestors not only by appropriate behaviour, but also by avoiding the syllables in their names. To some extent, this requirement enforces the conventional view that women have less authority in the home than men do. In *UNojayiti wam*, Sinxo (1986a:6) inverts the roles of the submissive woman and the authoritarian husband, and has the wife, Nojayiti, produce some extremely venomous invective with regard to the laziness and “cruelty” of her spouse:

Le nto yetywakutywaku levila! Lo mngqikangqikana uhleli apha unghambiyo namanye amadoda! Yini le, ucinga ukuba uza kugeza ngomntwana wam! Ithi into mhlana yanemali ifombe abantwana! Khona ndoda enjani le yasoloko igolozelene nomfazi?"

(This brute of an idle man! This sloth who sits here and does nothing, doesn't even roam about with other men! What, you think you are going to play the fool with my child? Imagine this brute! When it has got some money it bullies children! What kind of a man is this that is always attached to the apron strings of his wife?) (translation in Mkonto, 1988:104)

The names that Nojayiti chooses to call Koranti, her husband, lend much to the humour of the passage. He is *le nto yetywakutywaku levila* (this brute of an idle man) as well as *lo mngqikangqikana* (this sloth) — the reduplication of the stem of both nouns lending to the intensity of the insult, as well as increasing the humour.

Nojayiti uses biting sarcasm to belittle her husband and to reduce his masculine status: he does not even go about with other men, and he even plays the fool with her child. Once again it is important to see Koranti's diminished status in the context of a South Africa in which men became "boys" when employed by Whites and were often treated as children. Sinxo's depiction of the browbeaten Koranti and the vicious Nojayiti can thus be viewed as symbolic of the emasculation of Blacks by Whites. Mkonto (1988:114) notes that Sinxo uses the subservience of Nojayiti's husband, who willingly becomes a domestic worker, to "symbolize the loss by men not only of their authority but also of their economic role". He quotes, by way of illustration, the passage in which Koranti describes his domestic duties, noting that "the climax of his new role" is the fetching and smearing of cowdung. This, he claims, is

risible especially when one considers that these are, according to Xhosa culture, major women's duties and, needless to say, beneath a man's status. (Mkonto 1988:115)

When Nojayiti thinks her husband has taken another wife, Sinxo satirizes the unsubstantiated anger of the woman with humorous exaggeration:

Nanko uNojayiti eligeza eli ngumsindo, ephethe elingasakhuliyo izembe, efutha, ethetha, “Ndodandini, iswele kunene ukuthembeka, uphi lo mfazi? Uphi lo mfazi umzekileyo?” Ndafana ndasidenge, ndikhohlwe nokuphendula. Engalindanga nampendulo, wabhabha ukuya entangeni, walubetha kwakanye ngezembe ucango, lwapoqa phaya.” (Sinxo 1986a:16)

(There goes Nojayiti wild with rage, clutching an axe, puffing and talking, “You untrustworthy wretch, where is this woman? Where is this woman whom you have married?” I just felt like a fool, unable to answer. She didn’t even wait for an answer, but flew off to the bedroom, and chopped the door with the axe, and it came off its hinges.)

The comedy in the above scene is enhanced by the author’s use of the demonstrative copulative construction *Nanko*<sup>2</sup>, which encourages the reader to imagine he or she is actually witnessing the spectacle. The verbs used to describe Nojayiti’s actions are also highly charged: she puffs (*efutha*), flies (*wabhabha*) and hits (*walubetha*), causing the door to come off its hinges (*lwapoqa*). The author is thus able to create a comic scene by using expressive and vividly descriptive language in his development of characters and events.

Although much of the humour in this novel emerges in the colourful dialogue, Sinxo’s commentary on the foibles of his characters (through the eyes of Koranti) is often satirical. In the following passage Nojayiti’s dress-sense is derided:

Yayiyilokhwe apha ebumxingwa boyikekayo, awayesuka oyinxibileyo abeluthiniko lwento ebopheke yakohlwa nakukuhamba. (Sinxo 1986a:17)

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2. See Chapter Four for elaboration on this stylistic device.

(It was a frighteningly tight dress, the person who was wearing it was like a bandaged stick, unable to walk.)

Nojayiti's attempt to justify her choice of dress on economical grounds is a good example of the kind of illogicality that baffles precisely because it is not entirely without logic:

Wandixelela umfazi ukuba umangalisiwe ndim kukuthi ndakuncedwa yifeshini ndimana ndikhwina, endibonisa ukuba ezi iilokhwe zibangela ukuba libe lincinci kakhulu ilaphu elithengwayo, into ke leyo eyayiza kusindisa into eninzi yemali yam, itsho ndibe sesingawothiyo umlilo isityebi ngexeshana ilifutshane. (Sinxo 1986a:18)

(The woman told me that she was suprised by me because although I was being helped by the fashion, I continued to complain. She showed me that one only needed to buy a very little material for these dresses, a factor that would save me money — in fact I would be a very wealthy man in a short while.)

Koranti complains that his own choice of clothes is predicated by Nojayiti:

Akazange andinike nelincinane ithuba lokuzithethelela kule nto, wema ngelizwi elinye lokuba akanakube aze into yentsini yena ahambe nentsoyi ebhakuphela ibrukhwe esitratweni. (Sinxo 1986a:18)

(She never gave me a chance to reply for myself, insisting that she was not going to make herself a laughing stock by walking with an idiot in flapping trousers in the street.)

He exclaims that he is driven to give in to his wife:

Uthi ndathini ke, Lawondini! Ngubani ofuna ukuba yintsoyi? Ngubani ofuna ukuphoswa yinyhweba yokungcamba nomfazi wakhe? (Sinxo 1986a:18-19)

(What was I to do, my friend? Who wants to be an idiot? Who wants to lose a chance of taking a nice walk with his wife?)



The use of the vocative *Lawondini* (as if directly addressing the reader as his intimate friend) renders Koranti's rhetorical question chummy and comic. At the same time Koranti reveals himself as so susceptible to the charms of his wife that he is unable to assert his individuality. It could be argued that Nojayiti represents westernization, which, although abhorrent to many, succeeds because of its promise of pleasurable reward. On the other hand, Koranti, who is depicted as being conservative and yet easily swayed, is symbolic of the destructibility of tradition.

The author's disapproval of slavish devotion to fashion is revealed in a farcical scene in which Koranti is unable to run in his Oxford bags and high-heeled shoes:

Loo mabhakubhaku andithuthumbisa imihla ngemihla ngokumana endibhijela xa ndihambayo, into eyenziwa mandundu yinto yokuba ngelo xesha kanye ifeshini yayisifake entolongweni yokunxiba izihlangu ezinezithende ezide. Le nto ngathi incinci nje yakha yaphantsa yandibulalisa. Sasihamba nomhlobo wam ebusuku, ongalandeliyo yena, sivela kwenye ilali ecaweni. Sahlaselwa ligquba lamakhwenkwe, sacela kooxhongo. Ndaba ngathini mna ndilinga ukubaleka, suke ezi ngxowa zindibophe, izithende zenze into yazo ukubhetyeka — bhukulu — ndiyokuwa, ngalo lonke elo xesha induku yenkwenkwe itsho eboyeni. Ndahamba ndibhukuleka njalo, de kwavela awesethu isixeko amakhwenkwe, ajika asaba lawo asemzini, nanko yena umhlobo wam onganxibanga ziOxford bags sesiya kungena ekhaya. (Sinxo 1986a:19)

(Those big baggy trousers tortured me every day by always wrapping around me as I walked. We once nearly landed up in jail for wearing high-heeled shoes. You might think this a small thing, but it nearly killed me. My friend and I were walking together at night, coming from church in another village — he didn't follow the fashion. We were attacked by a group of boys and immediately started to run. But when I tried to run, these bags just tied me, and the heels tripped me up — I fell down, and all the time these boys were beating me. I was rolling all over the place until the boys from our village arrived, and chased them away — my friend who had not been wearing Oxford Bags was safely in his home.)

The trousers are referred to as *loo mabhakubhaku* (those big baggy trousers), this reduplicated stem being followed by a further reduplication of the verbal stem in *andithuthumbisa* (wrapped around me), both words exaggerating, by way of their own morphemic embellishment, the length and activity of the trousers. The positioning of *entolongweni* (in jail) in the context of such trivia as clothing, gives a nice touch of comic incongruity, as does the phrase *yaphantsa yandibulalisa* (it nearly killed me)<sup>3</sup>. In addition, there is the use of words with similar initial syllables and the repetition of certain sounds, for example, *ukubhetyeka* — *bhukulu*, (to trip up) and *ndibhukuleka* (I was rolling). Such repetition encourages what Nash (1985:159) refers to as “rhythmic romping” and a “density of alliteration” which, he says, can be “downright comic” (Nash 1985:158).

Much of Sinxo’s humour is created through his particular selection of comic vocabulary. Chiaro (1992:119) comments that it is often the narrator’s choice of words that signals to the audience that the episode being related is expected to be taken as funny: “the choice of item changes the tone of the text and begins to render it lighter”.

In addition, it is Koranti’s self-deprecating attitude that increases the comic potential of the passage, his status being deliberately diminished by the author, who makes him the victim of an attack by mere *amakhwenkwe* (boys). Chiaro (1992:118) rightly observes that “we tend to laugh at people who make fools of

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3. Nash refers to this type of incongruity as “comic mis-collations” (1985:69), being the use of a totally inappropriate combination of words. For example in the phrase *Le nto ... yaphantsa yandibulalisa* (this thing [the trousers] nearly killed me), the seriousness of the verb is contradicted by the instrument of the “murder” i.e. - the trousers. Burns-Ncamashe describes a laugh as “refusing to come out” (*yala ukuza intsini*) which seems odd because one does not normally think of a laugh as something which can refuse.

themselves and lose face'', a ploy certainly used by Sinxo in his characterization of Koranti.

In *Isakhono somfazi*, by contrast, poor, unfashionable clothing is afforded humorous treatment. Sinxo (1932:151) describes how a farmer gives Jamangile, the hero of the story, some old clothes:

Ngele waye selehambela abantu ze ngoku ukuba iBulu elo lalingatange limnike impahla yonyana walo endala, ibulukwe yekaki endala eyayisuke ixomekeke kuye, iti imilenze yayo ijonge ngemva ngokungati uza kutsiba. Lamnika nehempe, nebatyi emfutshane ekwaxomekekile, lamgqibela ngomnqwazi owawushiywe sisicaka salo esasingumalusi wenciniba ... (orthography as in text)

(He would have been walking around naked if the farmer had not given him his son's old clothes — old khaki trousers that didn't fit him — if you looked at his legs from the back it seemed as if he were going to jump. He also gave him a shirt, and a short, ill-fitting jacket, and finally a hat which had been left behind by one of his servants who had been the ostrich-herder ...)

Here Sinxo is also indirectly satirizing the paternalism and insensitivity of the farmer, who obviously believes himself to be benevolent in parting with a few old rags. In this passage it is the elaborate descriptions of the history of the clothes that are humorous, particularly the reference to the hat having been owned not just by a herder, but by the *umalusi wenciniba* (ostrich-herder). Possibly it is the image of ostriches — strange-looking creatures with their extended necks and skinny legs — that invests the description with humour.

Apart from outward manifestations of character such as looks and clothes, the vices of gluttony and laziness are often the subjects of Sinxo's comic descriptions. For no discernible reason, Koranti's own child, Balafuthi, suddenly seems to undergo a

religious conversion. The author's description of his prophetic garb is most amusing:

Kwakusithi sivuka kusasa sive ngentswahla kankabi, ebetha intsimbi — amagogogo ke lawo — ebizela abantu abangekhoyo kuloo tyalike nayo ingekho. Kuthe kunjalo wamana ezenzela iingxowa, azinxibe zirhuqa zinde, azibhinqe ngentsontelo esingeni sakhe kuba esithi yena unguYohane, umBhabhatizi. (Sinxo 1986a:25)

(When we woke up in the morning we heard a commotion, the ringing of bells, calling people to a non-existent church. He was wearing long sacks, tied round at the waist because he said he was John the Baptist.)

Balafuthi's irrational eagerness to pray suggests a humorous outcome:

Kwakusithi sisalele, yena ekolo khuko lwakhe, simve ekhwaza, "Mama, Tata! Masithandaze!" Kwakuba nje sasivuka buphuthuphuthu senze umthandazo wakusasa. Kwale, lakusondela ilixa lesidlo sasemini asingenele kwakhona umf' omkhulu, "Mama, Tata, masibulele! (Sinxo 1986a:26)

(When we were still asleep, he would call out from his mat, "Mum, Dad! Let us pray!" So we would wake quickly and say the morning prayer. And again, when the time came for lunch, this lad would again say "Mum, Dad, let us say grace!")

The humour of the above description is enhanced by the author's description of the parents' obedience to their son in *sasivuka buphuthuphuthu* (we would wake quickly), the use of an adverb with a duplicated stem (*buphuthuphuthu*) intensifying the depiction and adding to its comic import.

The reason for Balafuthi's piety is revealed at the end of the story, when it becomes evident that his religious fervour has just been a ruse to get to the food more quickly. After gorging himself at a wedding, the young boy falls asleep under a bed. When he is finally found by his anxious parents, who ask him how it

is that he has gone to sleep without praying, his honest reply is humorous because of the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane (prayer and gluttony):

‘‘Besendityile, Mama’’, yaphendula yatsho into enkulu, isatyhale eso sisu sisengozini yokughekeka kukuhlutha. Yaqala yadandalaza inyaniso, kanti umntu lonke ixesha eli ebengananze mthandazo, kuloko ebejonge koko kutya akufumana kwakugqitywa ukuthandazwa. (Sinxo 1986a:27)

(‘‘I have already eaten, Mum,’’ this rascal replied, still pushing out his stomach, which was in danger of bursting. The truth dawned at last, which was that he had not been wanting to pray, but had been looking forward to the food which came after prayers.)

The same incongruous juxtaposition appears again when Nojayiti thanks the Lord that her nephew, Mbokreni (who has previously failed to impress her with his fine clothes and horses), has finally bought something useful — a pig:

Nazo, iintokazi zomthandazo zibeka, zihlala. Nanko uNojayiti eshiyeka emi yedwa etwabalula izandla, ekongathethekiyo umoya, ethetha, esithi: ‘‘Ewe, bafazi bokuthandaa, nibizwe ndim. Imithandazo yethu iyeviwa nguMdali. Ewe, siyabaphiwa ooSamweli nooDebhora. Nanku ngoku nale ntwana uMbokreni iyiyekile imfeketho — iyekile ukuthenga amahashe, izinto ezingatyiwayo, omalahlanofele. Namhlanje siyambonga uMdali, umfo wodade wethu uthenge inkabi yehagu, soze ke ngenye imini *sintsentsethe* isipeke sayo.’’ (Sinxo 1986a:30)

(There are all the prayer women, looking behind them and sitting down. There is Nojayiti standing alone with her hands outstretched, moved by the spirit, saying, ‘‘Yes, women of prayer, you were called by me. Our prayers are heard by the Creator. Yes, we are given Samuel and Deborah. And now here is this young man, Mbokreni, who has stopped playing around — he has stopped buying horses, things that cannot be eaten, useless things. Today we thank the Creator because the child of our sister has bought a pig and one day we will be relishing its bacon.’’)

When considering the juxtaposition of the sacred and profane in Xhosa writings, it should be remembered that religious converts were sometimes won over more by

material than metaphysical concerns, outwardly manifesting signs of conversion, but inwardly retaining traditional beliefs. Reflecting this duality<sup>4</sup>, Sinxo's characters often demonstrate a certain ambivalence towards Christianity, their need for practical comforts being couched in parodic and hyperbolic exhibitions of spirituality.

Further incongruities are established by using inappropriate religious analogies, as when, in *UNojayiti wam*, Koranti describes his sister-in-law's suitor:

Wayenesidima ngokwebhishophu isetroneni yayo. (Sinxo 1986a:93)

(He was as dignified as a bishop on his throne.)

This image is then contrasted with the description of the man's greed:

... kodwa ayikho into awayeyithanda njengenyama yehagu. Wayeyiva ngevumba iseziintsuku ezisishenxe ihagu eza kuxhelwa emzini, wayeliphupha nebala layo, nobuntanga bayo, nesipeke sayo, avuke alawule amathongo akhe ngayo. (Sinxo 1986a:93)

(... but there was nothing he liked as much as pork. Seven days before a pig was to be slaughtered in another house he could smell it. He used to dream about its colour and its age and its bacon, he would get up and relate his dreams about it.)

Once again, juxtaposing the holy and the base, Sinxo uses the inappropriate image of an angel's face to illustrate the joy this man exhibits when he hears a pig being slaughtered:

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4. The possibilities, comic and otherwise, of the personality with divided loyalties to both westernism and African tradition have been exploited by other African writers. E.D. Jones (1988:47) observes the following of Wole Soyinka's portrayal of Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel*:

He emerges as a comic character, but there is an underlying pathos arising from the recognition that he has a split personality, the two separate halves of which are clearly visible.

Ubuso bakhe obungxoliswe kunene babujika bufane nobengelosi akuva isikhalo sehagu exhelwayo ... (Sinxo 1986a:93)

(His very ugly face would change and become like that of an angel when he heard the cry of a pig being slaughtered ...)

Like incongruous imagery, unexpected or absurd logic is also used for comedy, as when Koranti observes that he actually likes being controlled by his wife:

Phofu ke mna andizange ndiyinanze nganto loo nto, kuba ndizazi kakade ndisiqihela apha esikhohlwe kunene kukwenza izinto, kwaye kungekho nto ndiyithanda njengokutsalwa ngempumlo, kuba kaloku loo nto isusa wonke umsebenzi kwinqenerha elindim, iwubeke bhuxe kumagxa omabini kaNojayiti ... (Sinxo 1986a:32)

(I really didn't take any notice of that, because I knew that I was incapable of doing things. There wasn't anything I liked as much as being pulled by the nose, because this took away all the responsibilities from my lazy self and placed them on the two shoulders of Nojayiti ...)

Blind devotion to all things western, and the resultant muddling of conventions, are satirized in a christening scene. In a brilliant comic build-up to the naming of their new child, Koranti declares that he trusts his wife's discretion in this matter, which renders her intention to call the child "Cannibal" all the more hilarious:

Abanye abazalwana yabakhathaza le nto yokufihlelwa kangaka nguNojayiti, kodwa mna mntu umthembe kangaka, andizange ndizidube nokuziduba oku, kuba ndisazi ukuba yonke le nto isezandleni zikaNojayiti nje iza kulunga. Yangena ke inkonzo yophehlelelo, yaphakama kakhulu, sonke sisemlindweni omkhulu, silindele elo xesha eyothi inzwana enkulu igalelwe amanzi, esithi umpriste, "Mthiyeni igama lo mntwana."

Wahamba ke wafika, nalo ilizwi likaNojayiti linkenteza livakala lodwa, lisithi, "Cannibal, Mfundisi!" (Sinxo 1986a:38-39)

(Some relatives were worried by Nojayiti's excessive secretiveness, but I really trusted her, I didn't worry at all, because I knew that everything in Nojayiti's hands would be

fine. The christening service started, there were a lot of people, all in great anticipation of the time when the baby would receive the water and the priest would command, "Name this child."

When the time arrived the voice of Nojayiti was heard tinkling out, saying, "Cannibal, Father!")

Most of Sinxo's other works, such as *Imbadu* (1960), *Umzali wolahleko* (1933), *Imfene kaDebeza* (1925), *Isitiya* (1964) and even his collection of poems *Thoba sikutyele* (1959) contain humorous passages or utterances similar in style to those quoted above. (Subsequent references to Sinxo's works cite date of edition used.) For example, in *Umzali wolahleko* Nojaji displays a similar lack of repose to that of Nojayiti in *UNojayiti wam*, while in the short play "Umprofeti owacima ilanga" in *Imfene kaDebeza* the mixing of the sacred with the profane is evident:

UMbhodamo: Kodwa noko kunjalo, wawungenakude usikelwe loo nto, Ndlebentlezombini. Yintlalo yendoda ukungenwa ngunyana xa ikhe yafumana. Mna ndagqobhoka ndinxilile, ndazibona sendiphakathi.

UMoshani: Maze uhlale ulumkile ke, mntakaMbhodamo, ungaze uthathe kakhulu hleze uzibone sewuphinde wangaphandle. (Sinxo 1991:36)

(Mbhodamo: Nevertheless, he would never have been excommunicated, Ndlebentlezombini. It is human nature to accept Jesus when you are drunk. As for me, I converted when I was drunk, and I found myself inside.

Moshani: But you had better watch out, Mbhodamo, you had better not take too much or you will find yourself outside again.)

The above exchange is funny not only because of the content but also because of the witty rejoinder by Moshani in picking up on the locative position *phakathi* (inside) in *sendiphakathi* and counterposing it with *phandle* (outside) in *wangaphandle*. Mbhodamo's attempt to comfort Moshani by saying that it is natural to accept Jesus when drunk is a wonderfully iconoclastic statement,



implying that accepting Jesus is just one of those irresponsible things one does “under the influence.”

In *Imbadu* the comparison between the evangelist’s whiskers and the horns of an ox is incongruous and therefore comic:

“‘Hayi, hayi,’ esabhonga njalo umfomkhulu, “andigqobhoki! Ndililiswa yinto inye, amabhovu alo mVangeli andikhumbuza iimpondo zenkabi yam eyafa ndiyithanda.” (Sinxo 1960:67)

(“No, no,” bellowed the man, “I am not converting. I am crying because the whiskers of the evangelist remind me of the horns of my beloved ox which died.”)

Once again, the very notion of conversion, considered an extremely serious matter by western missionaries, is rendered ridiculous when the witty and disrespectful utterances of the unconverted are considered.<sup>5</sup> Romantic love, notably the oversentimentalization of relationships between men and women, is also satirized. A woman’s hold over her husband (mirroring the relationship between Nojayiti and Koranti) is humorously dealt with in this description from the short story “Umfazi nomphokoko wedyasi” in *Isitiya*:

Wasuka wayogona ngokushushu uNomboniselo indoda yakhe engathethi, ephikele kuphela ukumana eyanga ngothandokazi olukhulu, emlonyeni, empumlweni, emehlweni, entloko nasezandleni. Yathi yakunxila lolu thando indoda yadanduluka isithi, “Yibize ngegama nje, Nto yam, into oyifunayo, iya kuba yeyakho, kude kuse kwisiqingatha sobukumkani bam.” (Sinxo 1964:29)

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5. One of the reasons why conversion was treated with disdain was that

religious conversion was invariably linked with cultural conversion. The adoption of a new way of life and new values resulted in the converts to Christianity becoming alienated from their pagan countrymen. This threatened to break down the basic structures of Xhosa society. (J. Hodgson 1980:2)

(Nomboniselo suddenly embraced him warmly without speaking, and kissed him lovingly on the mouth, on the nose, on the ears, and on the head and hands. When he was sated with this love, the man declared, “Ask me for whatever you desire, my love, and it will be yours, you have half of my kingdom.”)

This passage could also be parodying the kind of romantic passion favoured by certain western authors and scriptwriters, as well as satirizing the foolishness of those who are too easily flattered by the physical attentions of the opposite sex.

A comic character who has only a “cameo role” in *Umzali wolahleko*, and who does not have similar counterparts in Sinxo’s other novels, is Dr Zinobee Jomsini. In this character Sinxo successfully portrays a mix of pomposity and geniality, and his satire is gentle and affectionate, rather than coolly critical. Here we have the “doctor” describing his home life to Ndimeni in a mixture of Xhosa and English:

And moreover, ngoku ndikusa endlwini yam [now I am taking you to my house] And, my boy, that’s a little heaven because andeh andeh, because there’s mutual understanding, andeh, andeh, peace and concord between myself and my wife. (Sinxo 1986b:25)

Satyo (1978:183) observes:

In this character Sinxo demonstrates the technique of “contrast and fun”...

While the “doctor” does not misuse the grammar of the English language, his speech is full of translational malapropisms such as “mutual understanding” for “we get on” and “there’s ... peace and concord” for “we do not fight”.

Mkonto (1988:217) makes the following observation on the nature of Sinxo’s particular brand of humour:

In his attack on evil and foolish behaviour Sinxo always generates a laughter so gentle that the line between comedy and satire comes near to being erased. The comic spirit employed as a vehicle for his satire and the grotesque distortion embedded in it are the humorous traits that make his satiric works readable.

In sum, it is necessary to view Sinxo's works from the broader perspective of the historical realities of his time. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Sinxo avoids *overt* political comment. However, being a witness to profound changes to the social and political life of Black people in South Africa, his particular style of satire draws much from the political and social absurdities that resulted from western imperialism. A foreign, and often bewildering, culture and religion was imposed on Black people. In order to gain access to the positive aspects of this culture and religion, many of the weaker and less defensible attributes of western life also had to be adopted. Sinxo subtly criticizes the weaknesses of the new order by exposing the frailties of the people in relation to its obvious materialism and individualism. His characterization, however, is at times so specific as to allow the reader to ignore the larger irony.

## 2.2 HUMOUR IN THE WORKS OF S.M. BURNS-NCAMASHE

Just as Sinxo exposes the frailty of the human condition with great humorous effect, so does Burns-Ncamashe, whose characters are acutely and satirically observed.

In the story "USoSobose" in *Masibaliselane*, the farcical character of SoSobose is brilliantly and wittily drawn. SoSobose's wife is as hardworking as he is lazy.

Every morning, after having feigned illness to his wife, Sosobose leaps up and asks the village children to sing for him:

Kuyo yonke loo nto, kuya kwala xa umfazi asemasimini okanye ehlathini, kude nekhaya, avuke umntu omkhulu, aqale emvubeni phaya, atsho, atsho, atshaye. Tshitshilili eso sitya sicokiswe ngokungathi besikhothwa yinja, nanko ehlanganisa zonke iintwanazana zale mizana imelene nalo wakhe. Zakuba zifikile, uza kuthi mazombe, ayilileke ke, atyhabatyheke ke, asuke amadlu umthakathi. Awise, anyolule intamo, adlwayize, athini! Yotsho ingoma yabantwana eshushwana ikhatshwa zizandlana:

USoSobose uyafa!  
 USoSobose uyafa!  
 Udl' ixiki, ngelani?  
 Udl' ixiki, ngelenkomo!

Ubevakala umthakathi engqumshela impendulo:

Angifi, kuphela  
 Ngidl' ixiki  
 Ngidl' ixiki  
 Ngidl' ixiki  
 Lixiki lani?  
 Ngelenkomo!  
 Ngelenkomo!  
 Ngelenkomo!

IBhele lisitsho nje ke *lilithonti ukubila* oku. Lidabalele ke, lidela izandla eziqhwabayo, liphathe kumisa lingxolise ngasengomeni ukungevani kwayo. Ezi ntwanazana ke nazo sezithe nta imixhadana zikhwaza, ziqhwaba, engqisha umombelelwa, emisa namaxhaka kuluthuli. Uya kuthi ke akudinwa amise, ababulele abantwana ngamazwi amnandi. Bakuthi bakusithela aphindele elukhukweni uLanga, azithi luqe. Ngumfo obuthongo bukwalapha. Esithi qukulu nje selerhona, nokuba kusemini. Erhona nje lo mntu ulolu hlobo luhlafunayo lwakulala. Ekuhlafuneni apha kukwakho nokutswina kwamazinyo okutsho kugqibele ngendawo engathi iyaxukuxa eBheleni apha. Umfo lo nokubhuda ukuphiwe xa asebuthongweni. [my emphasis — for comparison with passage from Sinxo's *UNojayiti wam* quoted below] (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:56)

(Whenever his wife was in the fields or the forest, far from home, this old chap would wake up, start on the sour milk and eat it all up. He left his plate so clean you would swear it had been licked by a dog, and then he would get all the youth of his neighbourhood together. When they had all arrived, he

would ask them to sing, and he would walk around, swaying and stamping excitedly. He would stretch his neck and go wild. As the children's song warmed up they would start clapping their little hands, singing:

SoSobose is dying!  
 SoSobose is dying!  
 He drank the milk of what?  
 He drank the milk of a cow!

And his answer would be:

I am not dying at all  
 I drank the milk  
 I drank the milk  
 I drank the milk  
 The milk of what?  
 That of a cow!  
 That of a cow!  
 That of a cow!

Bhele would say this *sweating profusely*. He couldn't hear the hands clapping, and he would stop them and shout at them for lack of harmony. These youngsters would also stretch their necks, shouting, clapping, and the man they were singing for would be stamping, pulling up his shoulders and pushing his elbows out sideways in a cloud of dust while they shouted and clapped. As soon as he got tired he would stop them and thank them kindly. Once they had disappeared he would go to his mat and sleep. And even though it was daylight he would start to snore once asleep. He was the kind of snorer who would chew while asleep, and as he chewed there would be a grinding noise as if he were brushing his teeth. He would also talk in his sleep.)

Burns-Ncamashe's description is vivid and full of action and zany repetitive movement — the man moves about *engqisha, umombelelwa, emisa namaxhaka zikhwaza, ziqhwaba, engqisha umombelelwa, emisa namaxhaka kuluthuli* (stamping, pulling up his shoulders and pushing his elbows out sideways in a cloud of dust while they shouted and clapped). In addition the author draws a subtle, comic comparison between Sosobose and a dog. His plate is licked so clean *ngokungathi besikhothwa yinja* (you would swear it had been licked by a dog), and like a dog he makes noises while he sleeps: *ekuhlafuneni apha kukwakho nokutwina kwamazinyo* (as he chewed there would be a grinding noise).

When his wife catches him in the act he reacts wildly in a valiant attempt at pretending dire illness, and again the author uses the image of a dog to great comic effect:

Ithe xum kwangoko loo ngoma ishushu. ULanga usuke wanga yingqeqe le ibe amaqanda. Ufumene wayebeyebeza. Ubonakele phofu ukuba wothukile, laye limyile nokumya. Usuke waziphosa phantsi, jwenye, okwemazi yenja elambileyo. Ufune ukuphakama akwalunga; wanga angazigquma akwavuma. Ufune ukuhleka, yala ukuza intsini, yayeyamazinyo nje odwa. Usuke ngoku wenza isimanga esitsho nabantwana babaleka, kwasala abalapha bodwa. Uzimbolambole phantsi, ebhuda, eshwaqa izinto ezingadibeneyo. Esenza le nto nje amehlo la athe phundlu, umana ukuchopha alathe emnyango, alathe entungo, ajike azonwaye ngamandla nokuba kundawoni na, atsho ophe. (Burns-Ncamshe 1991:58)

(The wild song stopped abruptly. Langa became cold although it was the middle of the day. He became very shy. He was obviously startled and didn't know what to do. He flopped down on the ground like a hungry bitch. When he tried to get up he couldn't; when he tried to cover his head he was unable to. He wanted to laugh, but nothing would come out, and he just showed his teeth. When this happened the children ran off, and only the ones from that village remained. He rolled from side to side on the ground, talking nonsense, coming out with illogical utterances. His eyes seemed to be popping out, and he would constantly point at the door, and then at the ceiling, turning and scratching himself so hard all over his body that he bled.)

Like Sinxo, Burns-Ncamashe deliberately uses mis-collations to heighten the comic nature of his descriptions, for example there is the laugh which "refused" to come out *yala ukuza intsini*. Also, the fact that Sosobose is likened not just to a dog, but to a female dog *imazi yenja*, is comic. Songs are injected into a humorous narrative in order to act as a kind of refrain and, although not intrinsically funny, often highlight and foreground the main (comic) scene.

Compare the following passage from *UNojoyiti wam*, in which the author describes the strange disappearance of the greedy Ketile on his wedding day, with the above passages from Burns-Ncamashe:

Ziziyunguma, yimiyeyezelo, imini yomtshato ifikile, uyacula umntu, uyaqhwaba, uthi,

“Vela, langa!  
Kutshat’ uManqezula!”

Uphinda athi,

“Ndonga ziwelene,  
Ndonga ziwelene,  
NgamaJwarha namaVundle.”

Nantso imiqodi, kusingwa ecaweni, hayi namhlanje igqwesile intombi yamaJwarha ubuhle. Nantso inathuza ingena nabakhaphi bayo. Kwathi zole kulindelwe ukungena komyeni nempi yakhe, kwalindwa, kwalindwa, akakhe atsho ukuvela. Baqala abantu bathingaza, bakhamnqa, bamangaliseka. Waya umntu esiya kubuza, wafika nalapho abantu bematshamatshekile, akavakali ndawo umyeni. Angaba uphi bethu? Baqala ngoku abantu bathetha izinto ngezinto, abanye besithi weyele, kuba ukhe wabonwa esinga ngasemlanjeni, abanye bathi uphetshethiwe, baye abanye besithi uthathwe yibhaloni yamagqwirha, yayiloo matha injalo, awabikho umtshato ngenxa yoko kuphel’ emehlweni komyeni kungummangaliso.

Bathi bhazalala abantu, kubhuqwa kufunwa, elinye iqela lafathula laya kufika eSheshegu ngaloo njikalanga. Ekungeneni esixekweni batsalwa ngumsi omkhulu nomlilo oneembiza ezinkulu, kwaye kuthe thande abantu abaninzi kufuphi kuwo. Bathi besaya bothuswa kunene kukubona nanko uKetile engxathe ngaseziko, *elithontsi ukubila oku*, ubuso *buyinyhithilili kukubila namafutha*, *entsentsetha* ngokholoseko olukhulu *isipeke sehagu*. [my emphasis] (Sinxo 1986a:95)

(There were people in groups, ululating because the wedding day had arrived. There were people singing and clapping hands, saying:

“Come sunlight!  
Manqezula is getting married!”

And they would again sing:

“The walls have fallen on each other,

The walls have fallen on each other,  
They are the Jwarhas and the Vundles.”

Trails of people were going to the church, Jwarha's daughter winning over everybody because of her beauty. There she is, slowly going in with her bridesmaids. It was quiet, everybody was waiting for the bridegroom with his family. They waited and waited but all in vain. People started doubting, wondering what had gone wrong. They started asking each other, but no-one seemed to know the right answer. Where could he be? Everyone asked the same question but they all had different answers — some said he must have drowned because he had been seen going towards the river, some said he had been blown away by witches, in fact he could even be flying with them in their aircraft. That was the end of the wedding because the bridegroom never pitched up. It was a complete mystery. They left in all directions, searching everywhere — one group went as far as Sheshegu that afternoon. As they entered the village they were attracted by a big cloud of smoke and a big fire with huge cooking pots and a large group of people nearby. They got a fright because as they approached they saw Ketile sitting there, his face *dripping with sweat* and fat, sitting with his legs wide open next to those pots, *chewing large chunks of pork* with great determination.)

Like Burns-Ncamashe, Sinxo has a clapping mass of people surrounding his comic hero. In Burns-Ncamashe's case the hero is in the middle of the singing, instigating and encouraging it (behaviour which he should not be indulging in), while in Sinxo's case the hero is outside of the action (of which he should be an integral part). Both men are greedy — Sosobose has licked his plate clean, while Ketile is relishing his meat, completely forgetting his wedding. Both authors use the verb - *bila* (sweat) in their comic descriptions, particularly the phrase *elithontsi ukubila* (dripping with sweat). It is also interesting to note that in Chapter Seven of *UNojayiti wam*, Sinxo (1986a:30) has Nojayiti use the phrase *sintsentsethe isipeke sayo* (chewing the bacon) — exactly the same phraseology employed by Burns-Ncamashe in the above passage.



In addition, both authors create scenes of great energy and expectation which they then contrast with the lazy and greedy behaviour of their protagonists, thus successfully developing a comic anticlimax.

In Burns-Ncamashe's story, Sosobose's false flattery in trying to win over and deceive his wife is desperate and therefore amusing in its extensive use of hyperbole:

Zizikazi lam elihle, ndiyavuya wakundiqonda ukuba andizenzisi. Kukho oku kufa kukum apha. Kwaye uze utshetshe kwelo khemesi kuba ukufa kungxamele ukundenyuka ngoku. Futhi, ndiyaqonda ukuba zindiphethe ngomona ezinye iinkabi ngenxa yakho, umfazi wam omhle ebusweni, emhle nangokukhuthala oku. Intsimi yam iyachuma. Ndiyavuna kodwa ke ...” Uthe qukulu engagqibanga ukuthetha, kanye okomntu ongcungcuthekayo ziintlungu, wade anga uthiwe ngxale naliphika. Uzigqumile wajonga elongweni, encwina. Uthe xum kwesi sithuba umfazi ezixelela ukuba eli gidiva alinawo nowempumlo. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:58-59)

(My beautiful Zizikazi, I am glad that you understand that I am not doing this on purpose. There is this sickness in me and you must hurry to the chemist because it is rapidly getting worse and I can see that it is because of people who are jealous of my beautiful and active wife and because of my field which is so fertile. I am reaping but ...” He suddenly crumpled and lay down before he could finish what he was saying, like a person in terrible pain, pretending to have difficulty breathing. He covered himself with his blankets, looking at the wall, whining in pain. His wife stood still for a while knowing that this hulk of a man didn't even have a runny nose.)

In the story “Umfazi Okhonkothayo” in the same collection, Burns-Ncamashe satirizes the stupidity and bad temper of a woman. His humour relies much on character description, and there are similarities to the way in which Sinxo satirizes the harridans Nojayiti and Nojaji. Consider the following extract, in which the dogs of the neighbourhood join this shrew, who has just been described (1991:69)

as *umpompo ingavalwayo* (an open pump) *luphodla izabhongo zamazwi* (burping out condemnations):

Mhla abethiweyo ke umfazi ubetyibela ethuka, ashiye angazange asive. Ubesenza isithukuthezi sokukhonkotha phandle, enukuneza umyeni wakhe, ethatha ngathi akaphefumli ukukhawulezisa oku. Ebesithi akwenjenjalo zimqhule izinja zamaHleke, ziphume zonke ezasemaHobeni, kwaNomgwadla kude kuye naseMzintshane, zize kumncedisa, ibe nguloo hawuhawu umntu nezinja. Bezisithi zakutsho uve nophantsi kwehlathi kwaMpundu esithi, “Uyawakhonkotha umkaXhashiza.” (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:70)

(When she was beaten the woman would continue to swear and curse as if she hadn't felt a thing. She would bark outside by herself, rebuking her husband, talking so fast she could hardly breathe. It was said that the dogs of the Hleke got used to her and also those of the Hoba, from as far afield as Nomgwadla to Mzintshane, and that they would all come out and help her. It would be the “woof woof” of the dogs and a person. Even down in the Mpundu forest people used to hear her and say, “There goes Xhashiza's wife, barking again.)

Sinxo also uses words often associated with dogs to describe a furious woman, as in the following passage from *UNojayiti wam*, in which a woman foams at the mouth like a rabid dog:

Kuthe kusenjalo, gqi phandle, uZixinene egqotsa, umfazi elandelisa ngesikhuni, exhaphe amagwebu ethetha esithi, “Hamba! ...” (Sinxo 1986a:11)

(There Zixinene dashed out, fleeing with his wife in hot pursuit, foaming much saliva as her voice rang out, “Go! ...”)

In “Umfazi okhonkothayo” a woman finally goes to see the priest about her husband, whom she describes thus: *Sisikhohlakali. Sisigebenga esiya!* (He is a cruel man. He is an ogre!) (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:70). When the priest asks her why she thinks her husband beats her, she answers:

“Uyayazi inikisi le ityiwa ziinkuku? Nantso ke into endibethelwa yona. Inikisi yakwaNikisini umLungu

waseTshabho, ndifung' uMxumbu!' (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:71)

(“You know this nothing that is eaten by chickens? Well that is what I am beaten for. Nothing of Nothing, the White man of Tshabho, I swear by Mxumbu!’’)

The priest tells her he is going to give her some medicine to help solve the problem. He produces two balls and tells her to put the balls under her tongue whenever her husband starts arguing with her. The author notes that:

Baxabene amaxesha amaninzi emva koku abaxabani abakhulu, kodwa asuke uNosonti aqubule ingqakumba kaKhandilitye ayinkwamle athi cwaka. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:75)

(There were many times after that when arguments started, but Nosonti would just put the stones of Khandilitye under her tongue and there was silence.)

It seems that, to this particular priest, ensuring the wife's passive submission is a good enough solution to the problem of her husband's violent behaviour towards her!

In the story “USozizwe kwaRharhabe” the heavy drinking of chiefs is satirized. The context of the story is the visit of the King of Great Britain to South Africa in 1946. The magistrate, a Mr Van Heerden, warns the chiefs about alcohol and urges the councillors not to let them disgrace everyone on such an important occasion. But the author remarks:

Utsho koobani na bona, kanye loo maphakathi! Kaloku amaduna akomkhulu abe mnandi wona kwangezolo kutyiwa la manzi akuloVitoli afundwa kumaNgesi! (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:92)

(Whom was he referring to but precisely those councillors! Because, you see, those headmen also enjoyed partaking of the water of Victoria's place, which they had learnt from the English.)

The English are sarcastically acknowledged as having imported the drinking habit, while alcohol is referred to euphemistically as being Victoria's water — an appellation full of irony since that queen is generally viewed as having being the soul of conservative values. Eventually the councillors who have not been seduced by liquor have to go around picking up the chiefs from the local pubs and hotels:

Kufikwe kwesezantsi ihotele xa kanye ezintathu iinginyinkosi zithululelana emngxwini wesitawuthi zisithi noko zithobela amazwi kaMantyi ngokuthatha "ilight stuff" yabashumayeli ababubayo.

"Yinton', apha bafondini?" Ubuzile uDungu, umNywabe. "MntakaDungu, sewusivumela sifince nje lo mcetshana. Asinxilanga. Senza nje noko ukuba singafundekelwa bubukhulu bomhla lo". Kutsho enye inkosi iginya ngokukhawuleza. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:92-93)

(When they got to the hotel further down they found the three "swallowing-chiefs" downing a big bottle of stout, obeying the magistrate's words to take only the "light stuff" of preachers of old.

"What is going on here, chaps?" asked Dungu Nywabe. "Son of Dungu, please allow us to finish this up, we are not drunk — we are just doing this to avoid the noise of the big day," said one of the chiefs, swallowing hurriedly.)

In "AmaRharhabe agxwala emswaneni ngonina" the solemnity of the church service is contrasted with the description of the wild swingings of the incense-bearer:

Uqale ukuzitsala iingqondo xa ebeqhumisela umbingeleli. Uthe umNdungwane egqiba ukuqhumisa esibingelelweni phaya yaye le ntyewana seyimi kufuphi isamkela le nkonkxa yomsi. Inqwale ngaxanye nehlakani layo ngokukhawuleza, kwathi kusajongwe leyo kwabonwa ngayo seyimlingisa, imlingisa, imlingisa, umfundisi ngale nkonkxa, kuthi khaphu, kuthi khaphu, kuthi khaphu izixa zomsi wentsentse. Ixhala labantu kukuphuncuka kwale mbizana, kuba lo mntwana ibuya phambi kwempumlo emfundisini ukuyijiwula oku kwakhe. Phofu bathi bakumsa amehlo umbingeleli bafike emi bhuxe, eyekelele

umzimba negazi kanye njengongekho ngozini. Umi izandla zakhe zangene ngamanzi azo phambi kwencum apha. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:4)

(He concentrated the minds of the people as he swung the incense over the priest. As soon as Ndungwane finished swinging the incense, this cunning fellow was standing nearby to take the tin of smoke. He took this tin of smoke from the priest and nodded quickly to his partner. While the people were still looking at this he swung the incense three times in front of the priest and as he swung, the smoke billowed out. People worried that the pot of smoke would escape his hands because the child was in front of the priest swinging it wildly before his nose. But they noticed that the priest was still standing straight and relaxed as if there were nothing to worry about, with his hands together, the fingers kissing each other in front of his chest.)

Once again Burns-Ncamashe is able to depict a scene in which the action comes across vividly. The repetition of *imlingisa, imlingisa* (swinging it in front of him) and *kuthi khaphu, kuthi khaphu* (billowing out) not only burlesques, but also parodies, a religious event. The tension (both comic and other) of the episode is relieved by the unexpected display of calm by the priest.

As is evident, the forms of humour employed by Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe are very similar, even if, at times, their styles and techniques differ. It is therefore necessary to highlight and discuss the forms of humour employed by these two writers of Xhosa comic fiction.

### **2.3 FORMS OF HUMOUR EMPLOYED BY SINXO AND BURNS-NCAMASHE**

Language is culture-specific, so it is often difficult to find, in Xhosa, examples of the categories or forms of humour generally discussed within a Eurocentric

framework. It is, however, important not to assume that these forms do not exist, but rather to contest the rather narrow definitions conventionally attributed to them in English literature. Turner (1990:20) seems to be partially aware of this problem when she observes:

Unfortunately, in Zulu there seems to be no *direct equivalent* to some of the English terminology ... which deals specifically with certain aspects of satire, e.g. burlesque, parody, conceit.

However, embedded in the narrative, whether it be oral or written, there are specific forms, styles and techniques of humour that are employed with great efficacy. In our initial investigation of texts from two of the most successful comic writers we can claim that the following forms<sup>6</sup> of humour appear and may be considered characteristic of Xhosa comic textual discourse:

- \* satire
- \* word-play
- \* irony
- \* parody
- \* incongruity

*Satire and word-play* are widely utilized to characterize in Xhosa literature, while *irony* and *parody*, being more indirect forms of humour, are used to comment on social and political mores.<sup>7</sup> Satire in Xhosa literature might be more easily

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6. Obviously these forms are not exhaustive, and should be understood in conjunction with Chapter One, which deals with Xhosa oral humour.

7. Irony in Xhosa fiction is often ludic. Hutcheon notes that ludic irony is “the affectionate irony of benevolent teasing” (1994:49). However, she adds that even ludic irony can “still ‘leap upon’; it can still be tendentious, even aggressive” (1994:54).

identifiable than parody and irony because of the changing nature of political and social institutions. A reader who is unaware of historical events will miss any ironic or parodic content. However, within all these forms, *characters* are the primary conveyors of humour.

### 2.3.1 Satire

Mkonto (1988:5) quotes Cavanaugh on satire:

Satire is literature that ridicules human frailty. The ridicule may be kind or ruthless, but it usually has as its objective the improvement of man's character and institutions.

I would argue that Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe focus primarily on satirizing *character*, and that even when certain religious and political institutions come under attack, it is usually the people involved who are lampooned. Therefore satire in Xhosa literature normally takes the form of exaggerated character descriptions of people verging on the stereotypical. This is evident in the existence of characters who show tendencies to excessive behaviour, and who are generally satirized through

- \* *their movements*, eg. the dancing of Sosobose, the wild swingings of the altar-boy, the anger of Nojayiti which leads her to tear down a door;
- \* *their speech*, eg. the invective of (amongst others) Sinxo's Xantippes, Nojayiti and Nojaji, and Burns-Ncamashe's "barking woman", defective exchanges (see Nash 1985:117-122) which occur when two characters misunderstand each other as with Nojayiti and Koranti;

\* *their habits*, eg. pomposity, drunkenness, laziness, gluttony, vanity.

Ordinary people (as opposed to those in influential positions) are generally the objects of satire by Sinxo as well as by Burns-Ncamashe, although the latter manages to satirize chiefs in the story “USozizwe KwaRharhabe” in *Masibaliselane*.

Feminine “frailties”, which frequently feature in humour generally, are also extensively satirized by these two authors. Such humour might reveal feelings of repressed fear and anxiety<sup>8</sup> rather than superiority, and relies heavily on stereotypical and sexist representations. P.T. Mtuze (1990:93) notes:

It is obvious that Sinxo condemns Nojayiti’s behaviour which he regards as socially deviant. He is clearly satirizing people who disregard contemporary social values and gender divisions.

He adds, however, that underlying the satire there is an attempt by the author at coaxing

conservatives into temporarily suspending their inherent prejudices and biases and pay attention to the changing circumstances and roles in the marriage context. (Mtuze 1990:94)

Mtuze (1990:92) also notes that there is some ambiguity in the comic representation of women in Burns-Ncamashe’s stories in *Masibaliselane*, since even their “abusive” and “abrasive” language (such as that of the woman in

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8. See Freud’s *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (1960). An interesting analysis of Freud’s argument is that of K. Smythe (1991:19), who claims that Freud makes “woman the scapegoat for his own negative self-image.”



“Umfazi Okhonkothayo” (The Barking Woman), is a subtle attempt at showing “audacity and assertiveness”.

In their satires of lazy, greedy and bad-tempered people, both Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe use the symbols of the dog and pig. Mkonto (1990:19) has also observed this fact and comments that:

Sinxo takes pleasure in using the image of pork as a device to take someone down a peg or two. His choice of a pig was probably owing to the fact that the pig is the filthiest and fattest of the animals reared at home.

Mkonto then cites Sinxo’s short story “Wanyangwa yinyama” in *Imbadu* to exemplify this point. Makhwange, a “popular scholar”, becomes ill but suddenly recovers thanks to the promise of some pork:

Ndiphilile ngqe ngoku, ntanga. Laa hagu ubawo wayendithembise ukundixhelela yona ukuba ndiphumelele eli banga lesine ife ngequbuliso elikhulu, sintsentsetha yona ngoku. (quote in Mkonto 1990:19)

(I am well now, my fellow. That pig which my father had promised to slaughter for me if I should pass standard four died all of a sudden. We are now feasting on that fat part of its flesh.) (translation in Mkonto)

In a similar way the symbol of the dog is frequently used to draw humorous comparisons, as in Burns-Ncamashe’s “Umfazi Okhonkothayo”(1991:69-75), in which a woman’s angry outpourings are compared to the barking of dogs .

The preponderance of these animals as metaphors in humorous writing can, to some extent, be attributed to the fact that neither animal enjoys much respect in traditional Xhosa culture and life. They have no special ritual or spiritual significance, and are viewed as base creatures with filthy and despicable habits.

### 2.3.2 Word-play

While word-play is more easily identifiable in oral discourse<sup>9</sup>, because of the particular morphology and phonology of Xhosa, it is also frequently used in comic texts. Under this section, however, the discussion will be limited to word-play in the form of names, ideophones, repetition of sounds and translational malapropisms.

#### 2.3.2.1 *Word-play and naming*

In Xhosa there is often a deliberate play on words, particularly names. In Xhosa culture and literature, names often have a particular significance and it is this that is exploited by Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe.<sup>10</sup> In the story “USoSobose” the author tells us that nicknames are often said in secret in case people do not like them:

Thina, maXhosa, singabantu abathanda ukubizana ngezacana ezimnandana. Zikho phofu nezibiwayo ngenxa yokuba

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9. The fact that word-play is usually associated with conversational discourse is substantiated by D. Crystal’s entry on humour in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995:404-411), which concentrates on describing and analysing verbal word-play.

10. S.J. Neethling notes:

The impact of a literary work of art can therefore be increased by using proper names, by concentrating on the evocative and connotative levels. Naming has thus been described as the process by which words become names through associations, and knowing and using names involve a knowledge of the appropriate onomastic associations, the range of which may differ widely from name user to name user, depending on the scope of his individual name competence and onomastic idiolect. (1985:88)

ziphathelele kwizinto abengethandi zithethwe lowo zisingisele kuye. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:55)

(We Xhosa people like to give people nicknames. There are, however, those that are only used secretly because their owners wouldn't like them.)

In some of the stories it is the names themselves which are particularly funny, in others it is the context in which the name occurs that renders it comic. The following names are used with comic import in texts:

- \* *Ketile*, in *UNojayiti wam*. This is a name for a man whose main preoccupation is with food, "Kettle" being a name that locates him firmly in the kitchen.
- \* *Cannibal*, the name Nojayiti wants to call her child. The humour in Nojayiti's pronouncement is derived from the complete inappropriateness of the name for a person, and an innocent little baby at that.
- \* *Dr Zinobee Jomsini* (who likes to be known as *Dr Jameson*), in Sinxo's *Umzali wolahleko*. This name immediately amuses since it plays on the phonology of Xhosa in an attempt at anglicization:

Zinkobe, "boiled mealie-grains" who calls himself Dr Zinobee Jameson or Dr Jomsini, is treated in a light-hearted way by Sinxo ... In Xhosa the word *iinkobe* is often used metaphorically to refer to that which has not been done thoroughly. Perhaps this is a reflection of his poor knowledge of English although he pretends to be an expert on it. (Satyo 1978:61)

- \* *Koranti*, the main actor in *UNojayiti wam*. Mkonto (1988:166) notes that this name is

derived from the Afrikaans word *koerant*, which means newspaper. The significance of the name lies in the fact that

the narrator supplies all the necessary information pregnant with dramatic interest to elaborate and feature to his readers as a newspaper.

- \* *Maqebengwana* (little cakes or delicacies), in *UNojayiti wam*. He is spoilt by his mother and therefore, although clever, does not have the will to stay at school. The name is appropriate for a boy who has been over-indulged.
- \* *Notyantoni* (What will you eat). Burns-Ncamashe (in his eponymous story in *Masibaliselane*) gives an amusing account of the naming of this child. A mother is worried that her blind child will never be able to earn enough to get food, and the author tells us:

KumaXhosa kukholisile ukuthi kanti igama lomntwana sisikhumbuzo sesiganeko esithile. Kwaba njalo kanye kulo Nywabazana ...

Into yobumfama balo mntwana imkhathaze kunene unina. Ithe khona yakuqina, yakungazipheleli ngokwayo, waya edubeka ngakumbi nangakumbi. Kuthe kwakumana kuphikiswana ngeyona nto inokwenziwa ukuze ade abone lo mntwana mhlana, webetha isifuba ebhomboloza esithi:

“Azi uya kutya ntoni na umntwan’ am xa amkhulu! Kuba engaboni, yinto eya kuthi yakunikwa ukutya isoloko ikrokrela ukuthi yona incitshiwe. Nkosi! Azi wotya ntoni na?”

Kwaqalela loo mini ukumila kweli gama. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:45)

(Amongst the Xhosa a child’s name usually has a certain significance. This was exactly the case with Nywabazana ...

The child’s blindness really bothered its mother. As the child grew stronger and her blindness did not go away by itself, she became progressively more worried. They used to argue about this thing as to what could be done to make her see again one day, and she would beat her breast and cry loudly saying, “So what will my child eat when she is big! Because she does not see, when she is given food she will always suspect that she has been cheated of some. My God! What will she eat?”

And from that day onwards that name stuck with her.)

- \* *Siporho* (Ghost). In the story ‘‘Izimo Ezingangqinelaniyo’’ Burns-Ncamashe relates the story of a man with the nickname ‘‘Ghost’’, a name often given to cruel people because ghosts are considered frightening and heartless:

Lo Siporho ke ngumnini mzi lo. Kaloku izicaka naphi na zinegama lazo kulowo ziphantsi kwakhe. Limothusile elo gama umtshakazi kuba libi, laye lixela lukhulu ngalo mntu azinyulele yena. Wayeqala nokuliva kuba noNgova uphulukiwe ngenxa yokubona la mathambo. Lalingabile kumninilo nomkakhe kuba lalingathiwa pahaha. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:34)

(This Ghost was the owner of the household. You see, servants wherever they are have names for their bosses. This name frightened his wife because it was a bad name, and it said a lot about this person whom she had chosen for herself. She heard it for the first time because Ngova had made the mistake of mentioning it in front of her because of the shock of seeing those human bones. It was generally kept a secret from her husband and herself, not being used openly.)

- \* In Sinxo’s play ‘‘Lafa ilizwe ngedonki’’ in *Imfene kaDebeza* the names of most of the characters are indicative of their personalities. Amongst the most appropriate are *Zibuthe* (Mercury), who is eloquent, articulate and mercurial, and *Zilibele* (Forgets-himself), who speaks out of turn in front of his elders. The author plays on the sense of these names in the following exchange:

UZilibele: Hayi, mkhuluwa, akulungisi nawe ukuthi kwakuba ngathethwa ube sewulilisela ngobu bunkulu bakho.

UZibuthe: Ninani na, makwedini? *Nizilibele* kakade? Anazi ukuba nikhula phambi kwam izolo eli? Ngoku senifuna ukufundisa mna ukuthetha? (Sinxo 1991:20) [my emphasis]

(Zilibele: No, sir, you are not right always to cry about your own authority when a speech is under way.

Zibuthe: And who do you think you are, lad? *Have you forgotten yourself?* Don’t you know I have known you since you were little? Now you want to teach me how to speak?)

### 2.3.2.2 *Word-play and ideophones*<sup>11</sup>

In the wild swingings of the incense bearer in the story by Burns-Ncamashe cited above, the repetition of the ideophone, *kuthi khaphu* (graphically illustrating the gusts of smoke) emphasizes the recklessness of the action and increases the potency of the description. In the comic opening scenes of *UNojayiti wam* there are no fewer than six ideophones: *ndithi nqa* (I am astonished) (p.5), *lathi qatha* (it came to light) (p.7), *Wasithi tshitshilili* (sliding it) (p.10), *wee cakatha* (hopping like a bird) (p.11), *kwee qatha* (it came to light) (p.11) and *gqi phandle* (suddenly outside) (p.11). All these ideophones hasten the action of the narrative and charge it with comedy.

### 2.3.2.3 *Word-play and repetition*

An example of the repetition of sounds can be found in Burns-Ncamashe's story "USoSobose" when Nongangayedwa is chastized by her father for having wasted her youth:

Ulixekexwa elixikixeke laxubayela ... Thina ke nonyoko  
sixhamlekile sikuzala: sixhamlekile sikondla: sixhamlekile  
sikuqeqesha: sixhamlekile kukuxhalela ezingozini zobutsha:  
sixhamlekile sikuthombisa, sikulungiselela ubufazi obunendili.  
(Burns-Ncamashe 1991:63)

(You are an old, discarded thing — your mother and I have  
wasted our time bearing you, we wasted our time feeding you,  
we wasted our time worrying about you and the accidents of

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11. For a definition and analysis of ideophones, see Chapter Four.

youth, we wasted our time doing all those things for you,  
*intonjane*<sup>12</sup>, preparing you to be a respected woman.)

The repetition of the lateral click increases the impression of extreme anger and acts as a kind of comic relief for the otherwise tense situation<sup>13</sup>. Other examples of the dramatically effective repetition of sounds from *Masibaliselane* are *qhwethe-qhwethe isaqhwithana* (the low-creeping hurricane) (p.32), *egxwala nokugxwala* (crying out aloud) (p.33), *Kutyhalwa-tyhalwana* (pushing each other) (p.34), *namacutyana nemigutyana* (with little bits of tobacco and powders) (p.35), and the tongue-twisting *ubebezile, usebezile, uswiswizile, utyizisile* (mumbling, whispering, muttering) (p.39).

#### 2.3.2.4 *Word-play and translational malapropisms*

Translational malapropisms are particularly evident in the works of Sinxo. As has already been noted, the character of Zinobee Jomsini is the best exponent of this form of humour. Satyo (1978:183) notes that even Zinobee himself is amused by his role as “guru” to Ndimeni and

he feels that only a fool would reject advice which has been given in such “good” English.

Satyo (1978:184) adds:

What heightens the humour in this episode is that just before Jomsini gives Ndimeni this advice which he (Jomsini) himself

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12. *Intonjane* is the traditional transition rite during which a girl is initiated into womanhood.

13. X! is an interjection which is described as being “used to show disappointment, displeasure, impatience, contempt” in *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa* Vol.3, (1989:556).

feels is very good, he dashes into his room and takes a very big tot of brandy and when he comes out he hits his chest — indicating satisfaction and pride over what he has just done.

Sinxo also exploits the fact that when Whites speak Xhosa their pronunciation and tone are often incorrect. Mkonto quotes from the story ‘Mhla inxila lavuya’ in *Imbadu*, in which a white policeman says the following:

Jan! ... namhlanje *ziya sinda* ngenxa yokuyekwa ndim! Kodwa *mazingacingi* ukuba “*zakuze zisinde* emlilweni wesihogo xa *zingxila* kangaka! Baleka *usindo* ozayo, uyeke utywala! *Gugquka* kuselixesha! (quoted in Mkonto 1988:192)

(Jan! ... today you are saved because I let you go free! But do not think you will be saved from the fire of hell when you are so often drunk! Escape from the wrath that is coming, and give up liquor. Repent while there is still some time!)

Mkonto (1988:193) notes that he has emphasized all the misspelt words in the paragraph in order to illustrate Sinxo’s purpose:

What characterizes this spelling is the plural form of reference made to Mpondozephela and the Xhosa phonological approximation *-ngxila* for *-nxila* and *-gquka* for *-quka* (often drunk and repentance). Though true to life, this spelling evokes laughter in the reader and what is important is that the message is carried across unhindered by the incorrect language both to Mpondozephela, who responds by thanking the policeman, and to the reader.

### 2.3.3 Irony

According to Nash (1985:152), the ironist

insincerely states something he does not mean, but through the manner of his statement — whether through its formulation, or its delivery, or both — is able to encode a counter-proposition, his ‘real meaning’, which may be interpreted by the attentive listener or reader.



In the writings of both Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe there are various instances of these “encoded counter-propositions”. For example, in the story “Injongo Ngeenjongo” in *UNojayiti wam*, Maqebengwana, after having eventually passed Std 4, announces that he is not going to carry on with his studies because:

“Kaloku ngoku, tata, nam ndinokungena enkanti njengoko nawe ungena ngephepha lakho lebanga lesine.”

(“Because you see, dad, now I can go to the off-sales like you with your Std 4 certificate.”) (Sinxo 1986a:120)

The irony of the remark, even if not intended by the character, is certainly intended by the author, who is suggesting that entry into the off-sales is not the desired effect of education.

Another instance of irony in this collection is Nojayiti’s calling of a meeting to ask forgiveness from the people who have borrowed from her. When Koranti questions her logic she replies:

“Hayi, Tipha omhle, kulapho kanye uphosisa khona. Akaze azazi umntu womhlaba ukuba nguyey owonileyo, xa kunjalo ke imfihlelo enkulu yoxolo kukuba usuke wena uzohlwaye kuqala, uya kuqala ngoko ke unyana ka-Adam nentombi ka-Eva ukungakulibali umntu olungileyo nonengqondo wakuba wazile ukuba uyingcwele engazange yone yona.” (Sinxo 1986a:125)

(“No, my lovely Tipha, that is where you make your mistake. Nobody on earth likes to admit to doing wrong, so when it comes to the big secret of keeping the peace one must just punish oneself first. Adam’s son and Eve’s daughter will not forget the person who is good and reasonable, after perceiving that you are [in fact] holy and have never been wrong.”)

In the works of Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe the irony will often only be perceived if the reader has a proper understanding of the social and political context in which

the writers worked. Thus, for example, the satirization of Black characters who speak English, follow fashion and drink too much, can also be viewed as an ironic commentary on the nature of western civilization.

### 2.3.4 Parody

According to M.H. Abrams (1993:18) parody

imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre, and applies the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject.

Since Xhosa written literature was still in its nascence during the time that Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe were writing, these authors tend to parody the peculiarities of oral discourse. For example, in Sinxo's *Umfundisi waseMthuwasi* (1927) the praise poem genre is rendered humorous by the inclusion of inappropriate and egotistical eulogizing. Satyo (1978:47) notes that the character Bonani, on the occasion of his engagement

praises himself out of all proportion and goes to the extent of saying that even nature seems to honour this "great" day of his life. He elevates this matter so ridiculously that he starts singing praises about it:

Awu! Awu!  
Labonakala namhlanje nezul' eli  
Ukuba kugwadlw' indab' ent' enkulu!  
Indab' oxolo; indab' obulawu!

(Oh yes! Oh yes!  
Today even the sky shows  
that a great man's indaba  
is being discussed, a  
peaceful matter, a solemn affair.

It is moreover interesting to note that the pomposity, hypocrisy and sometimes sheer ineptness of people conducting and attending religious ceremonies is often caricatured. Lengthy, repetitive prayers of intercession are frequent in churches and religious ceremonies, and in Burns-Ncamashe's story "Izimo Ezingangqinelaniyo" (*Masibaliselane*) this type of self-indulgence is brilliantly parodied in the prayer of Nqu:

"NdinguNqu, Bawo. NdinguNqu, Thixo wam. NdinguNqu, Thixo wethu sonke apha, onceba ingasoze iphele. Ndingathetha na nam, nawe, Kumkani? Thamba lithambela namasikizi nenkohlakalo, liwuzeke kade nomsindo! Zive, singaboni nje, izikhalo zethu, siyakubongoza. Xola, Tshawe leZulu nomhlaba. Emhlabeni kuyoniwa, xola noko. Emhlabeni yinkohlakalo, xola noko. Emhlabeni zizibulali, xola noko. Umoni ngowakho, isikhohlakali sesakho, nesigebenga sesakho kude kube ngunaphakade. Ndisekeleze uSiporho xa nditshoyo, Bawo. Ewe, isono sakhe sokubulala uJulibhokhwe simfake esiseleni sosizi kukaloku nje. Thixo wamathintitha, nezicaka eziphethwe kakubi, yiva izikhungo zethu. Uyazi ukuba yinto yethu, zicaka zakho ezintliziyo zimnyama, ukuphathana kakubi. Ndithi mna, Bawo, mxolele uSiporho, angabulawa yena ukuze azuze ithuba lokubuyela kuwe, ashumayele ububi benkohlakalo ezicakeni zakho ngowakhe umlomo. Singabakho, Bawo wethu. Nosiqeshileyo ngowakho. Thina naye sizizicaka zakho ngokulinganayo. Ubungethandi na ke, Nkosi, Nkosi, ukuba aguquke enkohlakalweni yakhe umxolele, nathi njengawe simxolele? Amen." (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:38)

("I am Nqu, Father, I am Nqu, my Lord. I am Nqu, Lord of all here with endless faith. May I also speak to you, King? Kind one, even kind where there is awful cruelty and ever patient. Hear us, even though we are sinners, we beg you to listen to our cries. Pardon us Prince of Heaven and Earth. On earth there is sin, on earth there is cruelty, please pardon us. On earth there are murderers, please pardon us. The sinner is yours, the cruel one is yours, the murderer is yours, until the end of time. I mean Siporho when I say that, Lord. Yes, his sin of killing Julibokwe has now put him in the black pit of the unfaithful. Lord of stutterers and ill-treated servants, hear our prayers. You know it is common for us, your servants with black hearts, to ill-treat each other. I pray, Lord, that you forgive Siporho, let him not get the death sentence so that he has time to convert to you and preach the rewards of cruelty to

your servants with his own mouth. Lord, we are yours, even the employer is yours, him and us. We are all your servants, equally. Wouldn't you like it Lord, Lord, if he converted from his cruelty and you forgave him, and we too forgave him?''')

The very personal appeal made by Nqu, mentioning Siporho by name, as well as his self-deprecating references to servants and their behaviour, reduces the dignity of the invocation and increases its comedy.

### 2.3.5 Incongruity

Xhosa writers make extensive use of incongruity in order to create humour. Incongruous metaphors are frequently found in the works of Sinxo (for example comparing a greedy expression to the face of an angel), as are incongruous situations (Nojayiti's prayer of thanks for a pig).

As has been mentioned, incongruity resulting from the inversion of expected roles is also exploited by Xhosa humorists. Apte (1985:99) notes that the inversion of gender roles is common in the creation of humour and cites the following example:

In villages in North India, husbands are always stereotyped as dominant, while wives are perceived as submissive in husband-wife relations. Indian children seem to derive much amusement from reversing these and other social relationships: children's songs make fun of the traditional authority figures of husband, father, and mother-in-law. In their songs, husbands are portrayed as weak and cowardly or are beaten up by their wives.

Gender incongruity in the works of Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe is particularly evident in characters like Koranti (the "submissive" man) and "Umfazi

Okhonkothayo'' (The Barking Woman), although in both cases the writers poke fun not at the traditional roles, but at the flouting of such roles.

## **2.4 OTHER HUMOROUS WORKS OF FICTION AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY EMPLOY THE ABOVE FORMS**

Most authors of humorous texts since Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe have employed similar forms in which to convey their comic content. It would also appear that the short story (up until the works of Mtuze) has been the most favoured literary genre for humour. Humorous passages from collections of short stories, novels and plays will be analysed in order to assess the ways in which the abovementioned humorous forms are employed in Xhosa writing.

Because a large body of literature (including drama, short stories and novels) is being covered in this section, the treatment of the various forms (satire, irony, parody, etc.) will include reference to significant themes and preoccupations.

### **2.4.1 Satire**

Since satire is a crucial aspect of Xhosa humour, various satirical extracts will be analysed under topical sub-headings that refer to the foibles under attack.

#### 2.4.1.1 *Greed satirized*

As we have seen in the works of Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe, characters in Xhosa fiction are satirized for their greed. This vice is also exploited in other comic writing, such as “UMaphelo” in the collection of plays *Imidlalo yokulinganisa* by L.K. Siwisa (1963). Siwisa satirizes the greed of this eponymous character, who, having dropped in at a house in the hope of a free meal, offers the following pieces of inconsequential information in a transparent attempt to fill the time:

“Tyho kuthiwa nazo iinqwelo zamanzi, izitimela zamaJamani, Mfondini, echwebeni eMonti”. (Siwisa 1963:9)

(“Wow, my friend, it is said that there are German submarines off the coast at East London.”)

A page later he is still prevaricating, but getting closer to the true purpose of his visit:

“Inye kuphela into endikhathazayo kukunyuka oku kwamaxabiso ezinto. Ilofu yesonka iza kuba yisheleni enetiki. He, he, heee! Yindlala yodwa leyo.” (Siwisa 1963:10)

(“The one thing that bothers me is the way things are increasing in price. A loaf of bread is going to cost a shilling and a tickey<sup>14</sup>. Hey heyyyy!! That is famine tactics!”)

Maphelo’s ruse in all this is to procure a piece of bread he has spotted:

“Uyeva nje ukuba iqhekeza lesonka, elingangeliya livele phaya kulaa mfanta yekhabhati, liza kuba yitiki.” (Siwisa 1963:11)

(“You see that morsel of bread over there on that broken cupboard, that is going to cost a tickey.”)

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14. A tickey was a threepenny bit (later, 2½ cents).

His greed is equal only to his infamous stinginess when entertaining at his own home:

UNomvubo: Kuthiwa kaloku usuka athi phithi kwakungena umntu kutyiwa. Abethe ngenqina phantsi, akhohlele; athini! (Siwisa 1963:17)

(Nomvubo: It is said that he gets very agitated if someone comes in when he is eating. He hits his fists on the table and coughs and carries on!)

The same writer provides a very similar description of greed and miserliness in “Mthandi kaNqatha” (*Ndibuzen’ amathongo*). Solenkawu, just like Maphelo in the above extract, becomes extremely agitated at the thought of having to share meat:

Kanti ke enjalo nje ukurhala uSolenkawu, unjalo nokuvimba kowakhe umzi. Ukuba kuthe kwenzeka ukuba kuphakwe kukho omnye umntu kowakhe umzi, uya kumva ekhohlela kabini, kanti uxelela umfazi ukuba angayiphaki inyama. Ukuba kwenzekile angene umntu seyiphakwa inyama, uya kungqisha kabini phantsi ngequza lakhe, kanti ukhumbuza umfazi ukuba amnike nje amathambo odwa loo mntu ungenayo. (Siwisa n.d.:41)

(Solenkawu was as stingy as he was greedy. If it happened that there was someone else at his house when they were dishing out, you would hear him coughing twice, indicating to his wife that she shouldn’t dish out meat. If it happened that someone came in when the meat was already being dished out, he would stamp twice on the ground with his boot to indicate to his wife that she should just give bones to the person who had come in.)

The description of coughing and foot-stamping is an example of the satirical description of physical movements discussed in relation to the works of Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe.

In the following passage from L.S. Ngcangata's *Ingwe emabalabala*, material greed is satirized, with the author using incongruous and therefore comic metaphors to describe physical features:

Phofu walala ekhamisile, umlomo usengozini yokukrazuka, imilebe ingasahlangani, inwebekile ngenxa yoncumo lwemincili ngobo busuku, iingcinga zakhe zindanda kamyoli phezu kweentaba zinandiphiso njengoko wayezabele amakhulu asixhenxe eerandi kwimali yesikali. (Ngcangata 1982:55)

(He went to sleep with a wide open mouth, in danger of being torn, the lips not meeting, wide with a smile of excitement from that night, thinking his thoughts which floated nicely above the mountain, so happy because he had a share of the R700.)

#### 2.4.1.2 *The foibles of other ethnic groups/cultures satirized*

Jordan, in his essay "Isiko" in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*, pokes fun at both Whites and Blacks when he describes, and gently mocks, their greeting habits:

UmLungu xa athi: *how are you?* ungade ucinge ukuba uthinta nje isikhohlela, kuba nokuba akuphendulanga akabonakali kuyikhathalela loo nto. KwaNtu igama elithi *mpilo* lishwankathela izinto ezininzi. NgokwesiNtu le nto ingumntu yinyama nomphefumlo. Ukuze umntu abe uphilile ezi zinto maziphile zombini. Kunokwenzeka ukuba nangona inyama iphilileyo, umphefumlo wona udandathekile. Imbalela, imbambano ekhoyo phakathi kwamaNantsi namaThile, ukusweleka kweemali zokusa abantwana ezikolweni ngenxa yokungabikho kwemivuzo, ukutshutshiswa kwabantu eRhawutini ngamapasi, — zonke ezi zinto ziyawuxhela umphefumlo. (Jordan n.d.:109)

(When a White asks, "How are you?" you might think he was just clearing his throat, because even if you don't answer, they clearly do not mind. For Black people health combines a lot of things. To Blacks it is body and soul. If a person is to be well, both these things have to be well. It can happen that even if the body is well, the spirit might be depressed. Drought, a disagreement between so-and-so and what's-her-name, the lack of school fees because of unemployment, the



prosecution of people in Johannesburg because of passes — all these things serve to depress the spirit.)

In C.A.W. Sigila's *Ndalikhenketha elaseNtla* both the cruelty of White farmers and the forced subservience of Blacks in relation to them come under attack. The following extract nicely captures a predictable scenario:

Kuvakele kusiza izingqi ngenyoba eza ngasekunene, kwaza kwathi gqi kumnyango oza ekhitshini ujongene nalo ndikuwo ngaphandle, isixhathuva seBhulu, into entshebe ibomvu, ndakuthelekelela yile ntanga indodana — phakathi kwamashumi amathathu namane iminyaka ubudala. Ukuyithi mandla oku kwam wothuka umphefumlo wam, zatyhatyha izibilini yakundithi nzoo ngaloo mehlo antshatshawula, ebuthe nkwa ubuso, ingakhange iwamkele nombuliso wam, endathula umnqwazi ndagob' umnqonqo ndikhahlela, ndisithi "Molo nkosi!" (*Môre Baas*). Khwitshi, yabuyela apho ibivela ngakhona, ngaloo nyoba ibize ngayo, emva kokundibuza apho ndivela khona, nento endiyifunayo, ngobuso obubi nangelizwi eligadlelayo. Ekuyiphenduleni le mibuzo ndaqabuka mva ukuthi kanti ndigqobhe ndiphuma esiBhulwini nasesiNgesini ndingaziva. (Sigila 1953:8)

(Sounds were heard coming from a dark, narrow passage to the left. Finally the ugly Boer appeared at the kitchen door, opposite the door I was standing outside; he had a red beard, and I guessed he must have been about thirty-four years old. As I looked at him I became full of fear. My insides boiled when he stared at me with those glaring eyes, with the brows drawn down, not accepting my greetings. I took off my hat, bowed, and sat down with a thump on the floor, saying "Good morning, Sir!" After asking me with a stern expression and a deep voice where I came from and what I was looking for, he turned away and went back from where he had come, along the dark, narrow passage. I realized later that when answering his questions I had been unwittingly mixing Afrikaans and English.)

While the above extract certainly is an indictment of the humiliating social realities of the apartheid era, the author nevertheless manages to render a serious scene humorous by satirizing the idiosyncracies of the master-slave relationship. His description of the "Boer" makes use of many comic descriptive devices — he is referred to as *isixhathuva seBhulu* (an ugly Boer) whose eyes *antshatshawula*

(glared), whose brows *ebuthe nkwa ubuso* (were drawn down) and who speaks *nangelizwi eligadlelayo* (with a deep voice). The “dark, narrow passage” also acts as a backdrop against which the scene is played out, reflecting the bleak conservatism and Calvinism of the “Boers”. By contrast the protagonist portrays himself as a cowardly buffoon who notes that he is in such fear and trembling of this man that: *endathula umnqwazi ndagob’ umnqonqo ndikhahlela, ndisithi ‘Molo nkosi!’* (I took off my hat, bowed my head, and sat down with a thump on the floor, saying “Good morning, sir!”)

Mtuzé’s story “Umhla weKrisimesi kwaNkwancube” in his collection *Alitshoni Lingaphumi* offers a similar caustic look at the obsequiousness of certain Blacks. Mtuzé has one of his characters voice the following sentiment:

“Awethu amadoda kaloku akashwabanisi minqwazi xa athetha nomLungu ...” (Mtuzé 1986b:10)

(“Our husbands don’t take off their hats and twist them nervously when talking to a White person ...”)

#### 2.4.1.3 *Theft satirized*

In “UVelebhayi” (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*) Jordan gives a humorous description of the ingenuity of a hardened thief:

Kweli lasemaMpondomiseni uVelebhayi waba yinkunkqele yamasela akhona. Ihashe uthanda ukuliba liselincinane, khona ukuze athi ukuba akanandlela yokulityhutyhisa liye kufika eLusuthu, abenakho ukulijika zonke iimpawu zalo, kangangokuba ade abe nakho ukuphinda alithengise nakumninilo!” (Jordan n.d.:9)

(Amongst the Mpondomise, Velebhayi was the best thief there was. He liked to steal a horse while it was still young, so that

if he couldn't take it to Lesotho, he could change all its marks to such an extent that he could even sell it back to its owner!)

Similarly, Mtuze in "UShoti" (Shorty) in *Alitshoni lingaphumi* deals with a sheep that Phukaneka and Sabile set out to steal from a nearby farm. They dress the sheep as a human and give it the name *UShoti*, hoping thus to smuggle it off the farm. Pretending that Shorty is drunk, they say to it:

“Obu tywala nibuthanda kangaka buza kunenzakalisa nibuthanda kangangokuba nibeke nobomi benu esichegeni nje. Imela iyanazi.” (Mtuze 1986b:11)

(“This alcohol that you like so much is going to harm you because your great love of it will put your life in danger. The knife knows you.”)

Although one of the inhabitants on the farm becomes suspicious of this “Shorty” he is not able to follow its spoor, and so Phukaneka and Sabile are successful in their plan.

It would seem that while unprincipled thieving is criticized by these authors, there is an element of admiration in the authors' descriptions, as well as a certain respect for the cunning and resourcefulness of these particular transgressors of the law. In a sense the victims — those who are taken in by the criminals — are made to look silly and hence indirectly satirized.

#### 2.4.1.4 *The eccentric aged satirized*

The eccentricities of old age are satirized by Siwisa and Jordan. The following extracts from Siwisa's *Ndibuzen' amathongo* deal with the oddities of the author's grandfather:

Ziyahlekisa kodwa izinto zakhe utat'omkhulu. Izimbo zakhe zonke zezomntu osel'egugile, nangona yena engayifuni loo nto. (Siwisa n.d.:36)

(Grandfather's behaviour is really funny. All his habits are those of an old person, although he wouldn't want to admit it.)

Ungena endlwini ngenye imini, afike kubekwe ikhaphetshu phezu kweetapile. Ungxole akayeka, embombozela yedwa ngalo mhlola wokuyekwa kwekati ilale phezu kokutya ngale ndlela. Wayinokoza le nto ixesha elide sekubonakala phofu ukuba ubaleka le ndawo yokuba kuza kuthiwa akaboni. (Siwisa n.d.:36-37)

(When he went into the house one day he found that a cabbage had been put on top of the potatoes. He shouted and scolded, mumbling about this strange occurrence of a cat sleeping on top of food. He carried on like this for a long time and you could see that he was trying to get away from the fact that he couldn't see and had made a mistake.)

Wayikhalazela gqitha into yokuthi akukhwaza kuzo ngesiqhelo esithi, "Krismesi," ziphikele ukuthi "Sinento yonke!" ("Same to you!") Waliphawula nesiko elibi elifundwa ngabantwana ezidolophini, lokuthi "Dad!" emntwini omkhulu, angxole esithi, "Bathi dede kum, ndidede phi!" (Siwisa n.d.:38)

(He used to complain a lot when he said "Merry Christmas" to the people and they would answer "Same to you," which sounded to him like *Sinento yonke* ("We have everything"). He also found that there was a bad habit that the children had learnt from the town, and that was to say "Dad!" to an older man. He would complain and say "They say Dad to me, but where must I move aside to?")

The above description, while satirizing the stubbornness of old age, also makes use of word-play with the English phrase "Same to you" being confused with *Sinento yonke* (We have everything) and the word "Dad" with the Xhosa verb *deda*, which means "move aside". Ambiguity resulting from homophony is frequently used as a comic tool in Xhosa literature and oral discourse, and relies heavily on English and Afrikaans utterances being either misunderstood or wrongly translated.<sup>15</sup>

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15. See Chapter One.

Jordan's description of an old man tracking a stolen ram in the story "Uvelebhayi" (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*) is amusing because of the character's studied gestures and solemn air of intensity:

"Hee, niyabona ke!" Ume nje ngeenyawo, waguquka wasinga lee, wahamba ngomva, esenzela ukuba abe ngathi ngumntu oza kweli zibuko, kodwa ucacile umkhondo kuba izithende azifiki kakuhle phantsi xa umntu ahamba ngomva. "Nanzi iingqatha zenkab' egusha!" watsho ezalatha. (Jordan n.d.:8)

("Hey, do you see!" He just stood up and turned round, and looked far away. Then he walked backwards making as if he was coming to this shore, but if you examined his footprints you would see that his heels had not made much impression on the ground — as happens when a person is walking backwards. "Here are the droppings of the ram!" he said, pointing.)

Wathi efika ubawomkhulu waba selethumela uyise kaNtulo ukuba eze nengcaza yamasi. Akufika wemka nawo, ehamba ethetha yedwa. Alandela amanye amadoda mgama, bucala emkhondweni. Salandela nathi noNtulo, sibukele le nto. Ubawomkhulu wayephatha kugaqa, aphaathe kucambalala aphaathe kurhubuluza ngesisu. Nanko esihla, esiya kuwufaka emanzini eXhokonxa.

"Khawusondele nengcaza leyo, Ndungwana," watsho echophe elityeni. Waqwalasela umzuzu omde emasini, ebonga enqula, ethetha yedwa. (Jordan n.d.:7)

(When he arrived, grandfather had already sent Ntulo's father to fetch a can of sour milk. When it was brought, he left with it, talking to himself. The other men followed a little way behind, on the side of the trail. Ntulo and I also followed, observing this. Granddad was walking on his knees, then he lay prostrate and crawled on his stomach. He went down like this to the water of the Xhokonxa.

"Just bring me that can, Ndungwana," he said, perching on a rock. For a long while he looked straight into the sour milk, murmuring and muttering to himself.)

Both authors illustrate the eccentricities of old men by referring to their speech habits, Siwisa using the verb *ukumbombozela* (to mumble) and Jordan twice using

the phrase *ethetha yedwa* (speaking alone/to himself). Jordan subtly satirizes the superstitious beliefs of conservative old people in his story, with the grandfather peering into the sour milk for visions.

#### 2.4.1.5 *Uneducated people satirized*

In the following passage from H.N. Yako's *Umhlangengxaki*, the stupidity of the semi-educated is mocked:

Wathi kuba ugqwetha engaxhobanga, wangena phantsi kwetafile. Bathi abahlobo bakaSgomfolo, endaweni yokuba banqande, bazixakekisa ngokufuna iDictionary yesiNgesi befuna ukuqonda ukuba kuthiwani na xa umntu ofundileyo ebethwa liqaba. (Yako n.d.:13)

(Because he was unarmed he hid under the table. Sgomfolo's friends, instead of stopping them fighting, were busy looking for an English dictionary because they wanted to know what an educated person should do when being beaten up by an uneducated person.)

The story "Ukuza komLungu omkhulu" in Mtuze's collection *Alitshoni lingaphumi* satirizes the stupidity of holding Whites in awe:

UmLungu mdala, uyifaka intlanzi enkonkxeni ayivalele ungaze ulibone necala ayifake kulo. (Mtuze 1986b:23)

(A White person is wise because such a person can put a fish in a tin and close it there and you can't see in which side the fish was put.)

The author is trying to show how some Blacks allowed themselves to be unduly impressed by technology, the success of which they ascribed entirely to Whites. The broader political irony of this attitude should not be missed. Historically,

technological advances have often been implemented by Blacks — in factories, on the mines and on building sites — with Whites merely acting as supervisors.

In Jordan's story "Iindonga ziwelene" in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* an errant school teacher tries to hide his inefficiency and unpreparedness by using English with the pupils in front of the inspector who *wayefile yintsini* (died laughing) on hearing him issue the drill instructions:

*"One, two, three, four!" njalo-njalo ke. Lathi bakugqiba labakhuza kwangesiNgesi, lathi, "Odd numbers, one pace forward: even numbers, one pace backward, — March!"*

Yaqin' inqawa! Abantwana bayana ngamehlo! Lancuma kancinane "Irhamba lasezixhotyeni", lonwaya intloko, labajonga, lathethela phantsi ngokuzekelela ngesiXhosa, lathi, "Ndithi, abantwana abayiminqakathi mabathabathe inyathelo libe linye babheke phambili: abangeyiyo minqakathi bathabathe libe linye babhek' emva — Shukuma! Zonke!" (Jordan n.d.:6)

("One, two, three, four!" and so on. After that he called to them in English again and said "Odd numbers, one pace forward: even numbers, one pace backward — March!")

The children were dumbfounded. They stared dumbly at each other. The "rock puffadder" just smiled slightly, and scratched his head and looked at them. Then in a low voice he said, now in Xhosa, "I say odd numbers one pace forward and even numbers one pace backwards. Move! All of you!")

Amused and bewildered, the inspector asks:

*"Phofu ke isiNgesi esi ibe isesantoni? Ubungasuke uthethe isiXhosa nje kube kanye?"*

*"Kaloku bendisenzela wena, kuba bendithelekelela ukuba isiXhosa akukasazi, njengendoda efikayo apha."*

Akaba nakuzibamba ngoku umhloli. Wahleka waqikileka. Wakhupha isandla, wabulisa wahamba. (Jordan n.d.:6)

("But what was the English for? You could have just used Xhosa to begin with.")

“You see, I was doing it for you, because I surmised that you would not have learnt Xhosa yet, being new here.”

Now the inspector was caught out. He laughed until bent over double. He put out his hand, greeted, and went on his way.)

This story can be seen to be commenting ironically on a system of education which favoured White inspectors for racially segregated Black schools. While the teacher’s ruse might initially appear to have backfired, he ultimately beats the system by defying it, by treating it with disdain and by tricking the White authorities: *Akaba nakuzibamba ngoku umhloli* (Now the inspector was caught out). Like the wily jackal in folk tales, it is he who wins our respect, and not the inspector, who is duped because of his linguistic stupidity. Syntactically and linguistically the passage is also very effective, with the loud instructions of the teacher, repeated twice in English, being met with complete silence by the children — a scene nicely captured by the Xhosa expression *yaqin’ inqawa!* (literal: the pipe was blocked; figurative: they were dumbfounded).

Jordan also introduces an element of irony when he calls forgetful men *izilumko* (wise men) in “Imasi” (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* n.d.:88)

Obviously this treatment of satire in Xhosa literature is not exhaustive, and it is likely that in the near future new topics and types of people will become the targets of this literary art.

#### 2.4.2 Incongruity

In *Ndalikhenketha elaseNtla* Sigila gives a description of a heartfelt, but incongruous, prayer:



Ndajonga phezulu ndithe tu, kodwa ndithulula onzulu wona umthandazo ndisithi: Wanga uThixo angaba nenceba ngam, Enze ukuba obu butywala ndinyanzeleke ukuba ndibusele namhla, bungabi yimbangi yokuwa kwam ezandleni zakhe. Banga abungendinxilisi. Ndayithi hlasi ibhekile ndayisa emlonyeni. Ndawuvula banzi umqala ndabimbiliza ukuginya oku ndigalela nje emqaleni, ndinganiki thuba lakuphulaphulisa incasa yale nto. Kuthe xa ndiyithe gabhu phakathi ibhekile, xa kuvele inyanga ezantsi, ndanqumama ukuba khendiphefumle. Ndaqala ngoku ndanambitha. Yasuka le nto yemka nendlathi ezi ngobumuncu obandihlasimlisayo. Ndamangaliswa, ndafuna ukuba ngaba yintoni le ingaka kule nto ibangela ukuba abantu bathi phithi emva kwayo, imbi kangaka? (Sigila 1953:19)

(I looked up silently, inwardly pouring out an intense prayer, saying: May God have mercy on me, not allowing this beer that I have been forced to drink to cause me to fall from His hands, by making it not intoxicate me. I seized the tin to my mouth. I opened wide my throat and poured it down without taking time to taste it. Halfway down the tin, I decided to take a breather. I began to feel its effects — the sour taste making my whole body shiver. I was surprised, wondering what it was in this thing that made people go mad for it, since it was so bitter.)

The juxtaposition of the sacred with the profane (previously discussed under 2.1 above) is also found in G.I.M. Mzamane's book *Izinto zodidi*, in which a confused believer invokes the Lord:

Kwakuba kunje ke, waqonda mpela ukuba amathemba aphelile umfo, wadanduluka kakhulu ngelipholileyo ilizwi ekhwaza wathi: "Tarhu! Tarhu! Thixo Nkosi yiza ngokwakho, unyana lo wakho, ngumntwana!" (Mzamane n.d.:12)

(When he realized all his hopes had been dashed, he cried out aloud with a cool voice, "Have pity! Have mercy! Lord God, come yourself, as for your son — he is just a child!")

Another touching and yet funny prayer is that of Siwisa's *utat'omkhulu* (grandfather) in *Ndibuzen' amathongo*. Siwisa tells us: *Uncokola ngathi uyibambe ngomnwe iNkosi yakhe* (He chats as if he is holding his Lord's finger) and continues:

... atsho ngomde wona umthandazo, ehabiza ngamagama abantwana bakhe, khona ukuze iNkosi ingabalibali. Akhohlwe ngamanye amaxesha, umve selesithi. "Kanti nenantsi-kankosi endiyiphiwe nguNantsi-u-u-uNantsika-uSotasi, ekubeni ndimnantsele, inantsi-inantsi-impahla yakhe nayo ndiyayibulela." Uya kuva wena ngentsini yabantwana. (Siwisa n.d.:37)

(... and he would continue with his long prayer, calling the names of his children, so that the Lord should not forget them. Sometimes he would get lost and you would hear him say, "And also what's-its-name-of-Mr ... that I was given by what's-his-name-Sotasi, so that I-what-you-call-it, the what's-its-name -his things — I give thanks for them." You would hear the laughter of the children.)

Since sobriety and responsibility are the qualities expected of priests and teachers, Xhosa writers often depict (quite accurately!) the incongruity that arises when members of these professions display any fallibility. In the following extract from *Indlel'ecand'intlango* the frailty of certain ministers of religion is alluded to and burlesqued:

Kwalile xa iphakathi loo nkonzo izuke kunene kwavakala isithonga kanti kuwa umfundisi. Wathi tywa ecaleni kwesibingelelo. Agilana amagosa noBhishopu besiya kuhlangu olo sizana lwalutsho ngamehlo abomvu krwe sekwaphuke nezo ndondo. Bathe bakuthoba phezu kwakhe ukuba bamphakamise bazixela bona utywala ukuba bukho ngaphakathi. (Mtuzze 1981:14)

(Right in the middle of the service a huge crash was heard as the priest fell down unconscious right next to the altar. The deacons and the Bishop clustered around this poor creature with his red eyes and his already broken glasses. As they bent over to pick him up they were hit with the stench of beer.)

Another incongruous metaphor can be found in *Ntengu-Ntengu macetyana*, in which E.G.N. Mda likens a woman's rantings to the discourse of a praise poet:

Waliqonda uNanziwe ilizwi ukuba lelale ntokazi asebenza nayo, wavula. Walile nje ukuba avule lweza naye ucango waza kuthi bhaxa phantsi. Kowu! waphuma into ngomlomo esitsho

ezoyikekayo engaphefumli *ngathi uyabonga*. [my emphasis]  
(Mda 1971:23)

(Nanziwe recognized the voice of the young woman she worked with and opened the door. As soon as she opened the door, it fell off and came crashing down. Goodness! She didn't draw breath as terrible things came out of her mouth as if she were praising.)

This description is similar to the scene in Sinxo's *UNojayiti wam* (1986a:16) in which Nojayiti, in her anger, tears down a door with an axe. The caricaturing of the woman's speech — *waphuma into ngomlomo esitsho ezoyikekayo engaphefumli* (she didn't draw breath as terrible things came out of her mouth) — is equivalent to the description of the verbosity of the "barking woman" in Burns-Ncamashe's *Masibaliselane* (1991:70), who also talks so fast she does not stop to draw breath: *akaphefumli ukukhawuleza*.

In the following passage from Ngcangata's *Ingwe emabalabala* the actions of the protagonist are absurd and hence incongruous, the humour of the passage relying somewhat on its lavatorial reference:

Waliyeka xa eqonda ukuba selizakuzichamela. Labagxotha bobabini noThamsanqa lisithi mabaphume baphele emzini walo kunjalo nje bangaze bangene emasangweni omzi walo. Esakubuza uThamsanqa ukuba ugxothelewa ntoni na yena engaxabananga nalo nje lathi limgxothela ukunganqandi. (Ngcangata 1982:55)

(He stopped when he realized he was going to wet himself. He threw both Thamsanqa and the other one out, saying they should get out and never darken his doorstep again. When Thamsanqa asked why he had been thrown out, because he hadn't quarrelled with him, he replied that the reason was that he had not stopped the other one [from fighting]).

In Satyo's novel *Etshatile engatshatanga* a woman displays certain masculine characteristics, thereby challenging traditional notions of femininity. The humour of the situation is enhanced by the metaphor of the *indlovukazi* (female elephant):

“Tyhini!” Uxhume wakhuzo kuloo bhedi ebehleli kuyo.

Itshixize ibhedi yiloo ndlovukazi yayiphezu kwayo kwakho iingxolo ezininzi. Wathi ukuhlala oku ngoku wakhamisa ng’ a, wangxatha okwendoda. (Satyo 1990:24)

(“Goodness!” She jumped on to the bed she was sitting on.

The bed groaned and creaked under the weight of this elephantine woman. She sat with her legs splayed out like a man.)

### 2.4.3 Word-play and naming

As has been mentioned under 2.3.2.1 above (as well as under 1.2.2.2 in Chapter One), naming is extensively used as a comic device in Xhosa literature.

In “Intsimbi” (*Alitshoni lingaphumi*), Mtuze informs us that the workers called their employer *Maqhajana* (Little fearless person) and his wife *Nongqwaza* (The short-tempered one) (1986b:3). Both names could be used derogatorily and ironically, while also possessing a certain creativity and wit.

In Siwisa’s story “Izigigaba zikaNjengenja” (*Ndibuzen’ amathongo*), the main character is named *Njengenja* (Like-a-dog) because he is always surrounded by dogs. Referring to the same collection, Mtuze (1986a:75) notes that *Mlomana* (Small mouth) in “Lubisi namhlanje esikolweni”

has all the characteristics of a real mouth, e.g. he was good at talking himself out of trouble.

Mtuze also observes that the name is very appropriate for this character since he is very fond of food, and he quotes:

Sisonka namhlanje, lubisi ngomso, yinyama ngomsomny' esikolweni. (Mtuze 1986a:75)

(It is bread today, milk tomorrow, and meat on the day after tomorrow at school.) (translation in Mtuze)

Mtuze also recognizes the appropriateness of the name *Mbovane* (Ant) given to one of Siwisa's character's in the story "Umzingeli weembila ufel' eliweni". By way of illustration he produces the following extract:

... waza wafaka intloko yakhe phakathi kwaloo matye, wakroba kancinane. Wayikhupha intloko nengalo ukuphuma ... Waba ngabheka phambili, ebuya ngomva akwanceda nto. Waxinga umfo kwancameka. (Mtuze 1986a:76)

(... and he stuck his head between those stones and peeped in slightly. He later withdrew his head and arms in an attempt to get out ... he moved forward and backwards to no avail. He got stuck completely.) (translation in Mtuze)

A good example of word-play can be found in Satyo's *Etshatile engatshatanga* in a passage in which Yoliswa, who has just been jilted by her sugar-daddy, plays with the diminutive suffix *-ana* in Xhosa in order to effect great sarcasm:

Oo, bubonyana ngoku. Unyanisile. Ugoduka nini kunjalo nje uye ebomini, umke ebonyaneni. [my emphasis] (Satyo 1990:84)

(Oh, so now you call it a *little* life. That is true. So when are you going to live a big life, and leave the *little* life?)

The same novel contains a good example of creative exploitation of the compound noun system in Xhosa. Yoliswa's friend remarks:

Uthetha ukuba, Yoliswa, ungazithengisela loo mithombothi yasesiLungwini? Akuzi kuba likhoboka lalo *yihlomkhulu-sithandwa*. [my emphasis] (Satyo 1990:26)

(Do you mean to say, Yoliswa, you would sell yourself for those western cedar perfumes? You are not going to be a slave for your *big father-lover*?)

In ‘Mthandi kaNqatha’ (*Ndibuzen’ amathongo*), Siwisa describes a man who dresses so badly that the boys of the village call after him, ‘‘Wavel’ *umnga!*’’ (‘‘Here comes the thorn tree!’’/‘‘Here comes an ugly sight!’’). When the man manages to catch one of the boys and ask him why he is called *umnga*, the boy cleverly replies:

Hayi, tata, kaloku *umnga* ngumthi oqinileyo, nawe ke ngoko siyakuncoma kuba uqinile. (Siwisa n.d.:40)

(No, father, it is because the thorn tree is very strong, and we are praising you, because you are strong.)

Here there is a play on the semantic associations of *umnga* which is commonly used to describe an ugly sight, but can, as the boy quite rightly suggests, also refer to a thorn tree.

#### 2.4.4 Translational malapropisms

In the following passage from Mtuze’s *Umdlanga*, the inability of some Xhosa speakers to pronounce English names is ridiculed:

Langa: NguNtaba noRobert.  
 Fikele: NguRhobhane waphi lowo?  
 Langa: NguRobert, asingoRhobhane, tata.  
 Fikele: Phendula umbuzo, yeka ukucukula amadlala, titshal’omkhulu! Ndithi ngowaphi? (Mtuze 1976:5)

(Langa: They are Ntaba and Robert.  
 Fikele: Rhobhane from where?  
 Langa: He is Robert, not Rhobhane, father.  
 Fikele: Answer the question, don’t split hairs with me, senior teacher! I asked, where is he from?)

Siwisa's characters often display dedication to the English language, as in the case of a certain "gentleman" conducting a driving lesson in the story "Bonisani ... U-J.J. Jamangile!!" (*Ndibuzen' amathongo*):

"When you'm tshintshing de gear, you do so ... when you'm taking de U-turn, you do like dis ... and *tshitshiliza* to one side." (Siwisa n.d.:78)

#### 2.4.5 Defective exchanges

Defective exchanges can occur when an author indulges in word-play with the intent of creating humour out of the confusion of the characters (rather than simply out of ambiguous meanings). With reference to *Sinxo*, the comedy is created by the reader's awareness that the players are missing or misinterpreting each other's meanings, becoming progressively more confused.

In the following extract from *UNcumisa noNqabayakhe* by D.T. Mtywaku, defective exchange takes place between the two speakers as a result of the ambiguity of certain words such as *ubulawu*, which could mean "a marriage relationship" or "a sweet-smelling ointment". The double meaning of the phrase *anqwenela ukuyenza unina wawo* (they wish to make her their mother/they wish to take her as a bride) also creates confusion:

UNyathi: (Efuthekile yile mpoxo ezibambile) Hayi, Nzotho, amaJwarha asithume ukuba size kuwacelela ubulawu apha emaNgwevini.

UDambile: Utheth' enye ke ngoku. Niza kubenzani ubulawu Mtika? AmaJwarha aqale nini ukuba ziinkosi? Niyanyukela mpela Mtika. Nihlamba ngobulawu ngoku?

UNyathi: (Selezithe shwaca ezo ntshiyi) Hayi Nzotho, amaJwarha anentombi ayibonileyo apha emaNgwevini. Ke anqwenela ukuyenza unina wawo.

UDambile: Ninezimanga noko Mtika. Umntu yinto ekhe yanyiselelwe? AmaJwarha aqale nini ukuba ziihasi? (Mtywaku 1972:38)

(Nyathi: (Angry inside, but containing himself) No, Nzotho, the Jwarha sent us so that we could negotiate a relationship here amongst the Ngwevu.

Dambile: Now you mean something else. How are you going to make sweet-smelling ointment, Mtika? When did the Jwarha start to become chiefs? You are coming up in the world Mtika. So you wash with sweet-smelling ointment now?

Nyathi: (Frowning during all of this): No, Nzotho, the Jwarha have seen a girl here from the Ngwevu. They wish to take her as a bride.

Dambile: This is amazing, Mtika. Can you breast-feed a person? When did the Jwarha start to be orphans?)

In the following exchange from A.M. Mmango's *UDike noCikizwa*, the ambiguity of the verb *-phel-* (meaning both "finish" and "be overcome"), is exploited. Then, to create further comic confusion the author also then uses a near-synonym of *-phel-* with the transitive verb *-gqib-* (finish), here appearing in its passive form *-gqityw-*:

UNonjoli: Masithethe.

UMjongwa: Seziphelile.

UNonjoli: (ecaleni) Yiwa mthi wam! Zingaphela kukh' imvumelwano!(kuMjongwa) Ziphelile (encuma). Zigqitywe yintoni?

UMjongwa: (etsala inqawa) Ngabantu.

UNonjoli: (encuma) Ubuvumelani ukuba bazigqibe?

UMjongwa: (ekhupha inqawa emlonyeni) Tyhini, bendifun' imali.



UNonjoli: Kodwa uyayiqonda nje le nto ndithetha ngayo?

UMjongwa: (eqongqotha inqawa) Kanti uthetha ngantoni?

UNonjoli: Ndithetha ngeendaba.

UMJongwa: (efakela inqawa) Mna ke bendingathengisi iindaba bendithengisa iitapile. (Mmango 1963:25)

(Nonjoli: Let us talk.

Mjongwa: They are finished.

Nonjoli: (aside) Admit defeat. As soon as they are finished there is agreement. (to Mjongwa) They are finished (smiling). What were they finished by?

Mjongwa: (drawing on his pipe) By the people.

Nonjoki: (smiling) Why did you let them finish?

Mjongwa: (taking his pipe out of his mouth) Goodness, I needed the money.

Nonjoli: But do you realize what I am talking about?

Mjongwa: (knocking his pipe) So okay, what are you talking about?

Nonjoli: I am talking about the news.

Mjongwa: (putting down his pipe) I wasn't selling news, I was selling potatoes.)

In another extract from the same text there is further misunderstanding when the reluctant Mjongwa misinterprets a priest's utterances. When the priest, for the first time, says *ndiya kwenjenjalo* (I will do this), Mjongwa thinks he is responding to his request that he *tshatisa* (perform the marriage rites). The priest *is* actually performing those very rites by instructing Mjongwa to say the Xhosa version of the classic wedding formula "I do". Instead of echoing the priest, Mjongwa carries on talking about the fact that for a long time his parents have been hoping for him to get married. When the deacon prompts him by saying "*Yithi ndiya*

*kwenjenjalo kuphela*’ (‘Say only I do’), Mjongwa again misinterprets the injunction and repeats the word *kuphela* (only), as if totally unaware of the format of the marriage service:

UMjongwa: (ekhangeleka ebunakeka) Tshatisa. (ecaleni) Ndafa kukunqanqatheka; kwaye akukho nanto incumisayo apha, ndincume id’igqithe le nto yenziwayo.

Umfundisi: (ngeliphantsi) Ndiya kwenjenjalo.

UMjongwa: Ewe tshatisa, nabazali bethu kudala bavumelana ekubeni masitshatiswe.

IGosa: (lisebezela uMjongwa) Yithi ndiya kwenjenjalo kuphela.

UMjongwa: Ndiya kwenjenjalo kuphela. (Mmango 1963:51)

(Mjongwa: (looking puzzled) Marry us. (aside) I am dying for a smoke and there is nothing to smile about here, if there were I would smile so that this could be over.

Priest: (softly) I do.

Mjongwa: Yes, do marry us, our parents have wanted us to get married for a long time.

Deacon: (whispering to Mjongwa) Say only I do.

Mjongwa: Only I do.)

#### 2.4.6 Irony

As was observed regarding the stories of Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe, irony in Xhosa writing relating to the political and social situation in South Africa is detectable only if the reader has a thorough grasp of historical and contemporary developments in this country.

Separate development and influx control laws<sup>16</sup> led to the creation of a another level of apartheid — that separating rural and urban dwellers. Xhosa writers who have dealt with the clash of the two worlds (see for example Jordan's *Ingqumbo yeminyanya/Wrath of the Ancestors*) have been acutely aware of the ironic fact that the new, imported culture, with its so-called civilizing influence, appears barbaric and lacking in dignity when set against profoundly meaningful traditional customs and social structures. It is difficult to assess the irony within the discourse by extracting particular passages from these works since the authors often deal with the irony implicit in the political and social *status quo* by way of themes and plots. However, in a lucid and thought-provoking essay entitled "Impucuko neento zayo" Zotwana (1989:55) discusses, with a keen sense of irony, the advantages and disadvantages of "civilization". Contrasting historical and contemporary dressing styles he notes:

Kunamhla nje sibona iindlela ngeendlela zokunxiba. Zininzi kangangokuba kunzima nokusazi esona sisesabasetyhini nesisesamadoda. Yimpucuko ke leyo. (Zotwana 1989:55)

(Even today we see different dressing styles. There are so many that it is difficult to see which is the women's and which is the men's. This is civilization for you.)

He also notes (1989:57) the irony in the assumption that modern communications systems improve communication:

Kwakukade kuyinto eligugu "ukuwa ephepheni". Umntu xa esimka ekhaya enye yezinto ebezithethwa yile: "Uz' ubhale kaloku, uxe! ub'hambe njani na." Abaseleyo bebesakuhlala besemaxhaleni de kufike loo leta ichaza uhambo. Kube njani ke ukuba nzima kongakwaziyo noko kubhala. Ubeya kuhla enyuka efunana nonokumbhalela. Namhlanje sele iyinto nje

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16. These laws, particularly the infamous pass laws, prevented Black South Africans from moving about freely, with only certain areas demarcated for their habitation. The intention behind this was to control the access of Blacks to White areas.

yokonwaba ukubhala ileta uchaza uhambo. Naxa umntu ehamba umyalelo sel' usithi: "Uz' ufowune, kaloku, size kuva uhambe njani na." Abanye bayafowuna, abanye bayafona. Kulula ukuncokola nomntu ophesheya kolwandle uhleli endlwini. Sekwaba nzima nokuya kuncokola kwammelwane kuba abamelwane bancokolelana behleli ezindlwini kuphele iintsuku kungasabonana. Uthi yinto na kodwa le yale mpucuko iza kwenza ukuba kungahanjelwana, kuphela kuhleliwe kulo mnxeba!

(In the olden days the art of letter-writing was a valued occupation. To someone leaving home would come the injunction "You must remember to write and tell us how your journey went." Those left behind would be worried until that letter describing the journey arrived. Imagine how difficult it was if you didn't know how to write. A person would go up and down looking for someone to write for him. Today writing a letter describing the journey would be considered just a pleasurable diversion. Now when a person is leaving the injunction is "Remember to phone so we can hear how your journey went." Some people say telephone, some phone. It is easy to chat to someone overseas sitting in your home. Now it has become difficult to go physically and chat to the neighbours because neighbours chat to each other sitting in their houses without seeing each other for days on end. So what this civilization means is that people will stop visiting each other because they have the telephone.)

Sometimes irony in Xhosa writing includes a note of ethnic self-deprecation, as in the following extract from *Ukuqhawuka kwembeleko* by D.M. Jongilanga (1975:42):

Asazi ke ukuba umLungu wayezithabathaphi na ezi ndaba, phofu singaba sizibuzisa nje ngabom kuba sonke siyalazi ukukhawuleza kwalo ucingo lweendaba zabaNtsundu.

(It is not clear how the White got wind of this information, but it is also not necessary to ask since we all know how fast news travels in Black circles.)

Linda Hutcheon (1994:50) argues that this kind of self-deprecating irony (which she observes is used extensively by Canadians) can be used as way of signalling reluctant modesty, but may also be self-positioning. I would argue that the latter is its function here, and in most Xhosa texts where it occurs. In this instance, the

author presents the reader with the image of a gossiping Black community, but at the same time implies that there is something mysterious (to Whites) about the “grapevine” networking process in Black communities.

Another example of self-deprecating irony comes in the form of Zwelinzima’s letter to Thembeke in Jordan’s *Ingqumbo yeminyanya*. Zwelinzima is fully aware of the kind of pride he could be prey to because of his changed status and wryly writes:

“Kaloku ndinesithunzi ngoku; ndiyinkosi. Ndiyalingiswa lixhwele lam phambi kokuba ndibonane nabantu. Iintwanazana ezinga-ngani aba zisuka zingxamele ukujuba zife ndakuzijonga.” (1980:126)

(“Remember I have a presence now because I am a Chief. I am so well doctored by my medicine-man before I go out to meet people that young girls like you all but drop when I look at them.”) (translation in Jordan 1980:136)

Botha (1986:142) draws the following conclusions from this communication of Zwelinzima’s:

Hiervolgens blyk dit dat Zwelinzima steeds oor ’n fyn humorsin beskik en dat hy, ten spyte van al sy probleme, steeds kans sien om skertsend na sy posisie as kaptein te verwys.

(It is clear from this that Zwelinzima still has a fine sense of humour and that, in spite of his problems, he is still capable of referring jokingly to his position as chief.)

Irony is evident in the following passage from M. Yekela’s *Amaxesha empucuko*, in which the author sarcastically refers to drunkards as *amagorha* (brave people) when discussing the effects of heavy drinking:

Kwindawo enentselo kuye kubekho ukuthethela phezulu okukhulu okutsho athi nobezidlulela aqonde ukuba

umgangatho uxhomile ngaphakath' apha. Kuyakwala ngelingeni, xa i-alkhoholi ifikelele kwiqondo elithile apha emzimbeni, uve isiya idamba ngokudamba ingxolo ngokuya esiwa ngokuwa loo magorha exeshana kutsho kulandele obentlombe ubuthongo. (Yekela 1989:14)

(Where there is drinking, people always talk at the tops of their voices — even someone going past will realize that the atmosphere is charged inside. In the end, when the alcohol has reached a certain level in the body, the noise abates, and in a short while these brave people drop off to sleep.)

With heavy irony, Yoliswa, in Satyo's *Etshatile engatshatanga*, makes the following remark to her ex-lover:

Jonga wethu ukuba udiniwe ndim uncede ungene endleleni ujonge emzini wakho. Mhlawumbi uyaziqonda ngoku ukuba unomtshato weqhina elingcwele. (Satyo 1990:84)

(Look my dear, if you are tired of me, please just look at the way you view your own home. Maybe then you will discover that you have a holy marriage.)

In both of the last two extracts the irony lies in the difference between what is stated and the obviously intended meaning.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter I have shown that the two writers most often associated with Xhosa humorous writing, Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe, while employing the various categories of humour in their creative works, tend to concentrate on comic characterization. Other writers have tended to follow their focus on developing characters who will be remembered for their laughable utterances and habits. Therefore, while authors do use parody, irony, satire, incongruity and word-play

in their descriptions of events and situations, the comic character dominates in Xhosa humorous fiction.

It has also been demonstrated that much of the art of creating humour in Xhosa written texts can be related to oral discourse, while certain recurring themes and metaphors have their roots in oral literature. The issue of the link between oral and written literature will be dealt with more comprehensively in Chapter Four.

The preceding discussion has set out to provide a framework for the analysis of humorous texts in Xhosa. A great deal of work remains to be done in this field.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FUNCTIONS OF XHOSA HUMOUR

I have indicated in Chapters One and Two that Xhosa humour employs many diverse forms, from bawdy burlesque to incisive irony. I have shown that Xhosa humour cannot be viewed as a homogeneous whole; oral and written discourses adapt humour to their specific genres.

With regard to the functions of Xhosa humour it is also important to note that Xhosa society itself has been subjected to various historical forces that have had a fundamental effect on the type of humour employed and its purpose: the humour of a Xhosa community of the 1800s would have been very different from that of Xhosa speakers living in a modern, urban, heterogeneous society. Obviously humour had a function in pre-industrial and industrial times, during the wars with the colonizers, and possibly even during the great calamity following the prophecies of Nongqawuse. Xhosa humour functioned during the dark years of apartheid and it continues to operate now that a new order has been established in South Africa.

Unfortunately the majority of historical oral records still available provide little explicit material on Xhosa humour, and it is for that reason this chapter relies to a large extent on more contemporary data. The link that connects all these



“humours” — oral, textual, historical, contemporary, traditional, modern, — is the desire of the writer, oral artist, cartoonist or comedian *to make his/her audience laugh* or, at the very least, *to amuse*. Readers of humorous prose or audiences attending comic performances are also brought together by their *desire to laugh*, their *desire to be amused*.

If the instigation of laughter is the main purpose of humour, what remains is to discover *why people want to laugh*, and to ascertain the role played by culture, society and politics in influencing this need.

Much of the scholarship upon which I have drawn regarding the functions of humour refers more specifically to oral discourse, for example to what we think of as “jokes”. I nevertheless consider it appropriate also to analyse the functions of textual humour in the light of these studies because such humour in Xhosa frequently reflects the humour of oral discourse, with dialogue, anecdote and characterization closely resembling direct speech and live performance. This fact suggests that spoken and written humorous discourses are more mutually inclusive in Xhosa than in many other languages and that their combined treatment here is thus justified.

This discussion on the functions of Xhosa humour will therefore include references to the general functions of humour, and thereafter deal with the way in which Xhosa humour specifically performs these functions.

### 3.1 FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR

Theories on the functions of humour are influenced by the writer's particular discipline or academic preoccupation. The purpose of this study is not to repeat the copious and detailed work already done in any specific field, but rather to synthesize the primary findings of such work with an analysis of Xhosa humour ultimately in mind.

Powell and Paton (1988:229-230) observe that

humour is equally to be seen sociologically as constituting a form of tension management, social resistance and social control in human relationships.

It can perform these functions because it is a framework for non-real or "play" activity, an aside from normal discourse, a fact that allows messages and formulations to be "risked within its framework which would not otherwise be acceptable or possible" (Linstead, 1988:142). Mulkey (1988:91) also refers to this function of humour as a defence against risk and danger in claiming that

the humorous mode can provide a protective shield against some of the dangers lurking in the realm of serious discourse.

Winick (1976:125) observes that a joke can "provide a vehicle through which people can voice feelings for which there is no socially acceptable or easily accessible outlet" while Ullian (1976:129) contends that since subjects treated humorously or playfully are not held to be important or worthy of serious consideration the use of humour and play acts as a "defense against blame." This is why, Mulkey (1988:150) argues,

humour can allow the most unadulterated expression of sexist views because, when we speak humorously, we are not fully responsible for what we say.

In some cases the target of the joke is certain about the message, but the humorous form renders a serious confrontation inappropriate and futile. If the target should attempt such a confrontation, the joker could always reply that the remarks were only meant in jest.

As Walter Nash notes, we can be biased to expect certain types of humour to have discrete functions, for example we take punning for a

tawdry and facetious thing, one of the less profound forms of humour, but that is the prejudice of our time; a pun may be profoundly serious, or charged with pathos. (Nash 1985:137)

In a similar way a racist joke told by people about themselves will not have the same function as when told by outsiders.<sup>1</sup> Most writers on humour nevertheless agree on certain primary functions of humour which, while overlapping, will be summarized as the following:

- \* to act as a defence against risk and danger
- \* to communicate on taboo topics
- \* to increase the morale of the in-group and to introduce or foster a hostile disposition towards the out-group

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1. Martineau (1972:124), in *The Psychology of Humour* ed. J.H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee, provides an in-depth analysis of the social functions of humour and concludes that

humor assumes many forms and its social functions become complex under the influence of other social processes and existing social structures.

- \* to control behaviour
- \* to cope with despair, defeat and failure
- \* to subvert the social order
- \* to make social interaction easier and more enjoyable

These general functions will now be discussed with specific reference to Xhosa humour, using examples from both oral and written discourse. Many of these functions are related, for example Yali-Manisi's poem making critical reference to Matanzima is included under 3.2.1 (**To act as a defence against risk and danger**) because the poet's couching of criticism in humour protects him from recrimination. However, the same poem could be used to exemplify 3.2.2 (**To communicate on taboo topics**) since at the time it would have been considered more than presumptuous for a Black man to comment on the excretory habits of a White woman. Similarly its obvious subversive intent qualifies it for inclusion under 3.2.6 (**To subvert the social order**). The categories are nevertheless still valid and useful in providing a coherent structure for an analysis of functions.

## **3.2 GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF HUMOUR AS APPLIED TO XHOSA**

### **3.2.1 To act as a defence against risk and danger**

Viewing Xhosa society historically, it is clear that this particular function of humour would have been notably manifest during periods of intense conflict with

colonizers and other oppressive and militarily superior groups. Fortunately, certain forms of Xhosa discourse allow criticism against people and circumstances to be expressed without any blame being incurred. In a famous praise poem composed to honour the visit of the Prince of Wales to South Africa in 1925, Mqhayi successfully uses irony and inversion in order to criticize the hypocrisy of British imperialism:

Tarhu Bhilitan' eNkulu!  
 Bhilitan' eNkul' engatshonelwa langa;  
 Siya kumthini na lo mntwan' okumkani;  
 Siya kumthini na lo mntwan' omhlekezazi;  
 Khaniphendule nani zintaba zezwe lethu!  
 Nani milambo yakowethu khanithethe!  
 Maz' aselwandle khanimthule kambe, —  
 Mthuleni maz' aselwandle!  
 Sikhe simbone, simjonge, simlozele;  
 Ibilapha nenkwenkwez' enomsila;  
 Angaba yen' usekhondweni layo.  
 Ibize kwabakwaPhalo kaTshiwo;  
 Ibize kumaZulu kubeSuthu;  
 Ibize kumaSwazi kubaTshwana;  
 Ibilundwendwe losapho lukaNtu!  
 Kub' uYehov' uThix' uyalawula, —  
 Uyathetha ngendalo yakhe.  
 Uyawakhawulezis' amaxesh' akhe!

Tarhu Langaliyakhanya!  
 Uphuthum' inkwenkwezi yakowenu na?  
 Thina singumz' owab' iinkwenkwezi;  
 Nalo kamb' ikhwez' inkwenkwez' akowenu.  
 Sibambana ngesilimela thina, —  
 Yona nkwenkwezi yokubal' iminyaka, —  
 Iminyaka yobudoda, yobudoda!

Hay' kodw' iBhritan' eNkulu, —  
 Yeza nebhottle neBhayibhile;  
 Yeza nomfundis' exhag' ijoni;  
 Yeza nerhuluwa nesinandile;  
 Yeza nenkanunu nemfakadolo.  
 Tarhu bawo, sive yiphi na?  
 (in J.J.R. Jolobe 1974:72-73)

The following is a summarized translation of the above:

Ah, Britain! Great Britain!  
 Great Britain of the endless sunshine<sup>2</sup>!  
 She hath conquered the oceans and laid them low;  
 She hath drained the little rivers and lapped them dry;  
 She hath swept the little nations and wiped them away;  
 And now she is making for the open skies.

She sent us the preacher; she sent us the bottle,  
 She sent us the Bible, and barrels of brandy;  
 She sent us the breechloader, she sent us cannon;  
 O, Roaring Britain! Which must we embrace?  
 (Jordan 1973:27)

The irony is couched in the hyperbolic praises of the nation and country and in the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane: “preacher ... bottle/ ... bible ... barrels of brandy”. This kind of bathos succeeds in meting out strong criticism but avoids direct, and possibly harmful (to the poet), condemnation from the authorities. Opland (1983:8) notes that Deaken, a British journalist who accompanied the Prince in 1925, completely missed the irony in this poem and in his report simply depicted “the warm and harmonious welcome offered to the prince by his loyal black subjects”.

Wandile Kuse provides a further example of Mqhayi’s ability to criticize by means of satirical poetry, noting that the poem ‘Umkhosi WemiDaka’ was written

on the occasion of the recruitment of the ‘Black Brigade’, a black South African contingent in the First World War. If one has seen the film ‘Patton’, one can sympathize with Mqhayi’s sentiments in response, as it were, to Patton’s saying, “When your grandchildren expectantly ask you what you did in the great world war, you would not like to say you were shovelling shit in Louisiana.” (Kuse 1983:132)

Kuse quotes and translates the first paragraph of this poem, which he refers to as “bitterly satirical”:

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2. The phrase *engatshonelwa langa* is probably an allusion to the well-known boast of colonial times that “the sun never sets upon the British Empire”.

Awu ewe kambe siyabulela  
 Lakuth' ikokwethu lisicinge  
 Ngokuya kusebenz' emazibukweni  
 Ngexesha lalo lokuxakeka.

Be singobani na thina boomthina?  
 Ukuba singanced' ukumkani weBritani  
 Ingangalal' engatshonelwa langa  
 Int' elawul' umhlaba nolwandle!  
 Kungoku nesibhakabhak' isingxamele!

Niyeva ke, madodana, niphakamile.  
 Isizwe senu sisemqulwini wezizwe.  
 Ze niguye, ze niqambe;  
 Nenje nje, nenje nje! Nenje nje, nenje nje!  
 Nenje nje, nenje nje! Nenje nje, nenje njeya.

(We are indeed grateful and impressed  
 That his Britannic Majesty  
 Should think of asking us to come  
 And work as stevedores  
 At a time when he is under pressure.

Who were we?  
 To even think of lending a hand  
 To the king of Britain  
 On whose empire the sun never sets.  
 His dominions extend over land and sea  
 As things now stand  
 He is ready to colonize the heavens.

Listen now fellows! You have been honored!  
 Your people now belong to the Commonwealth of Nations.  
 You should celebrate and dance  
 And act like this and this and that!)  
 (Kuse 1983:133)

Another example of harsh criticism of Whites being softened by the praise poem format and the use of humour can be found in Yali-Manisi's poem on the occasion of Kaiser Matanzima's being awarded an honorary doctorate at Fort Hare. The relevant extract goes:

He's the one who wears clothes smeared with clay  
 When he goes to his home at Bumbana;  
 But when he returns from there  
 He'll be riding the clumsiest of nags,

the wagon of the white man.  
 Because of the whites!  
 Things who entered this country of Phalo,  
 The country of Phalo and Ndaba,  
 They place God ahead of them,  
 But they conceal cannon behind their backs.  
 I love a white woman,  
 But I can't sleep with a white woman,  
 For she's a thing of filth:  
 When she's high on a plateau she runs all the way down just to  
 sit in her house and shit!  
 (in Opland 1983:115)

It has been argued that the imbongi (Xhosa praise poet) has always been allowed to criticize and it is my contention that humour is often implicit in this criticism.

Opland (1983:268-269) remarks:

Evidence suggests that the imbongi has always enjoyed a degree of license to criticize with impunity; there is no record of action ever being taken against any imbongi by a chief, and Chief Mabandla ... asserted that he could not take action against an imbongi who criticized him. The imbongi must be free to express his views poetically before the people and before the chief in order to exercise his social function as critic.

Opland (1983:269) adds, however, that this right of the imbongi has changed as the status of the chief has changed:

When the individual chiefdoms form part of a wider polity, however, one that enacts legislation and authorizes officials to act in the interests of the state, when, as in Transkei, it becomes an offense to criticize a chief or to impugn the sovereignty of the state, then the imbongi speaks his mind at considerable personal risk.

While criticism in oral literary discourse has always been acknowledged, the importance of caustic commentary on social injustices in the field of written literature is frequently neglected. It is interesting to note that early Xhosa writers tried to use humour to expose the vices and frailties of their communities, as well



as of the colonists, instead of the harsher method of direct denunciation.<sup>3</sup> For example, Sigila's book *Ndalikhenketha elaseNtla* includes unfavourable descriptions of Afrikaans farmers and policemen, but the book is written in a self-deprecating<sup>4</sup> and humorous style that belies its more sinister undertones. Thus in the following extract in which the author describes the housewife's reaction to him, there is a careful description of his own humility but little elaboration of the woman's insensitivity. This lack of description successfully creates the impression that the woman is controlled by a larger evil force, although the writer intimates that the woman does, at first, show some kindness:

Uthe ukuthi thu kum kwangalaa mnyango, ndenza kwa eso simbo ukubulisa, ndisithi "Molo nkosikazi!" (*Môre Missis*). Wandihlangabeza ngobubele obundithembisileyo lo, kangangokuba ndikhawuleze ndibonise ukuzithoba ngokuzibika ukulamba nokucela ukhoko lwesonka. Okunene le nkosikazi yalubonakalisa usizi kodwa ndakuqonda kamva lwalungelulo lokundihlangula endlaleni endandizi- bika yona, kodwa lulolokuqonda intshabalalo eyayise iphezu kondi- hlela. Impendulo yakhe ngesicelo sesonka yasuka yaba kuncinciza athi khwitshi emva koko abuyele kwalapho abevela. (Sigila 1953:8-9)

(Just as she appeared in the doorway, I greeted her likewise, saying "Good morning Ma'am!" She met me with promising kindness, so much so that I quickly showed humility by mentioning my hunger and asked for a little bread. Really, this woman did show pity, but I understood later that it was not to rescue me from the hunger which I had mentioned, but because she knew the destruction that was about to befall me. Her answer to my request for bread was just to turn on her heels and go back from where she had come.)

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3. This kind of denunciation appeared frequently in newspapers such as *Isigidimi samaXhosa* in the form of letters criticizing alcoholism, witchcraft and other so-called vices of the Xhosa.

4. Linda Hutcheon in *Irony's edge* (1994:50) argues that self-deprecating irony can be

seen to replace the aggressive with the ingratiating: it acknowledges the opinion of the dominant culture - even appears to confirm it - and allows the speaker or writer to participate in the humorous process without alienating the members of the majority.

The irony implicit in the Afrikaans translation in parentheses (*Môre Missis*) refers to the extreme servility which was demanded by many employers of their employees, and the word *intshabalalo* (destruction), while appearing to be a hyperbole, does in fact convey an idea of the kind of brutality that was often meted out to Blacks on farms.

In another example from the same book the absurdity of the pass system and the insensitivity and stupidity of those who administer it are exposed and satirised:

Kwabonakala ukuba eli lam ipasi linokwahluka kwamanye ngokuba umLungu walitsalela amehlo ukuliqwalasela, wawakala endibuza elalapha eWepener ipasi. Ndiphendule ndathi andinguye mntu walapha, ndingumhambi, nto ndiyenzileyo kukulinyathelisa emapoliseni.”

“Nini?” wabuza.

“Kusasanje.”

“Hayi, eli pasi linyatheliswe ngomhla wama-24, ngoLwesine.”

Kwathi mere uvalo, ndazi apho konakele khona — eliya polisa, mhlawumbi ngokungafundi, aliwunikanga umhla ube ngowama-26 phaya esitampini. (Sigila 1953:32)

(It was obvious that my pass was different from the others because the white man scrutinized it, and then asked for my Wepener pass. I answered that I was not from Wepener, that I was a traveller, and that I had had my pass stamped at the police station.

“When?” he asked.

“In the morning.”

“No, this pass was stamped on the 24th, Thursday.”

Fear gripped me, I knew what had gone wrong — that policeman, maybe because he hadn’t read, had not changed the date to 26 on the stamp.)

While White farmers and policemen are obvious subjects for satire, those Black people who embraced the culture of the colonizers were also afforded a certain amount of derision in Xhosa novels. Thus the fact that priests are often depicted as morally weak is evidence of a critical awareness of the inadequacies of

institutionalized western religion. T. Bahadur (1986:236) argues this point by drawing on the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Frantz Fanon:

Because the white Christians believed themselves to be the people of the Book and of revealed truth, they denied Africans a sense of metaphysics, ethical values, social organization and finally humanity itself. To quote Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The psychological wound inflicted on a generation of us by colonialism and Christianity [was] a hidden wound and hence more dangerous." It is therefore logical that the priest, the religion and at times the saviour himself form the butt of the African writer's humour. Walter Allen's suggestion that "humor is a form of charity" is unlikely to fit the African context. Rather it is Frantz Fanon who illumines facets of the modern African artistic sensibility when he says, "Sometimes this literature of just before the battle is dominated by humor and allegory; often it is symptomatic of a period of distress and discovery. We spew ourselves up, but already from underneath laughter can be heard."

This observation is born out by the implicit criticism of the clergy in Mtuze's novel *Indlel' ecand' intlango*, which includes the following description of the ministers of a certain rural parish:

Akalibazisanga uMamCube, uthe rhuthu isonka embizeni, wathulula amasi, wabeka phambi koNablayi oye wavuzisa izinkcwe eshwantshwatha esithi, "Usando ubethelwa ukuxoka, uMalibenje ubethelwa ukuthelekisa, uMqwebedu ubethelwa ukulwa, umfundisi ubethelwa ukunxila." Yeka ke ukuhleka kamnandi kukaMamCube lo gama uNablayi aphosa emqaleni loo mvuzo wakhe ... (Mtuze 1981:24)

(MaMcube quickly took out some bread from the pot, crushed it, added some sour milk from the calabash and placed it in front of Nablayi, whose mouth was already drooling at the sight of the food. He mumbled "Sando is beaten for telling lies, Malibenje is beaten for instigating, Mqwebedu is beaten for fighting and the priest is beaten for drunkenness." The way MaMcube laughed nicely while Nablayi threw that reward down his throat ...)

While criticism in textual discourse may be indirect and implicit, it has been noted in Chapter One that conversational humour often appears to be deliberately

confrontational, brave wit having the power to reduce the possibilities for recrimination. For example in Chapter One I quote an anecdote from a woman who defiantly gave a policeman a name full of clicks in order to befuddle and (hopefully) humour him. Similar records of domestic workers challenging authority with comic, cheerful ingenuity are to be found in S. Gordon's collection of the life stories of South African domestic workers. In one of the chapters a woman recounts how her employer draws up extensive, impossibly long lists of things for her to do each day. When the employer asks her why she does not finish the tasks, she replies:

“Please, can *you* try to do that job for the whole day. I'll just stand outside and see if you can do that in the whole day.”  
[laughs] (Gordon 1985:256)

The more oppressive the situation, the more important it is for humour to subvert rank and question authority. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* Nelson Mandela (1994:419) notes that giving an unpleasant warder a nickname was one way of coping with his cruelty:

One of the few ways prisoners can take their revenge on warders is through humour, and van Rensburg became the butt of many of our jokes. Among ourselves we called him “Suitcase”. Warders' lunch boxes were known as “suitcases” and normally a warder would designate a prisoner, usually his favourite, to carry his “suitcase” and then reward him with half a sandwich. But we always refused to carry van Rensburg's “suitcase”, hence the nickname. It was humiliating for a warder to carry his own lunch box.

The playfulness as well as the incisiveness of Xhosa humour was strengthened by the knowledge that the greatest power over those in authority was the ability to speak freely and openly in an African language with little likelihood of being understood. This led to a culture of secret, almost cabalistic humour which at the

same time could operate openly. In the following cartoon strip from the *Madam and Eve* series (figure 1) this situation is wittily represented:

Figure 1



(from *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 5-11 August 1994:25)

Bakhtin's thesis on folk laughter (summarized by Gardiner) has direct bearing on the comedy created by Xhosa domestic workers:

Bakhtin stresses that laughter in this "festive-comic" sense cannot be understood as a form of trivial ribaldry or light-hearted jesting. Rather, folk laughter expresses a distinctive ideological viewpoint which is diametrically opposed to the "monolithically serious" world of officialdom: it is

“universal”, it heals and regenerates, and it is linked to essential philosophical questions. Whilst in ancient society, the comic and the official co-existed in an environment of mutual tolerance, when the feudal system became consolidated these comic forms came under attack as a form of heretical paganism. Folk culture was driven underground, where it came to be marked by an exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness. (Gardiner 1992:49)

It could be argued that in pre-apartheid Xhosa society, humour was a normal aspect of everyday criticism of authorities which would have been open and publicly acknowledged. Once people were confronted by a new order, however, an order which saw criticism as subversive and punishable, humour acted against the officials, and not with them. When figures of authority were no longer chiefs and headmen, but employers and policemen who did not understand African languages, public complaints peppered with humour were no longer possible — thus the “driving underground” of folk culture.

The individualization of what would previously have been a communal activity — the satirization of authorities — is evident in the cartoon genre, which Mulkey (1988:198) maintains is “known to be overwhelmingly negative and critical”. Gerry Kulati<sup>5</sup> often explicitly satirized known political figures, but because the cartoon only *suggests* a certain opinion and interpretation he was, in a sense, freer to express judgement. Nevertheless censors were never far in South Africa and in the following cartoon (Figure 2) he even represents himself as being threatened for his depictions:

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5. A prominent Xhosa cartoonist working for the Xhosa newspaper *Imvo* in the 1970s.

Figure 2



You'll get hurt if you play with fire.

(*Imvo* 9 June 1973 p.4)

The fact that Kulati was able to inject humour into his cartoons depicting the adverse circumstances under which Black people in South Africa toiled is evidence of his particular genius. The current editor of *Imvo*, Eric Gqabaza, notes that Kulati has been the only truly representative Xhosa cartoonist — subsequent cartoonists have only managed to portray political events, not to comment with satiric intent. L.H. Streicher (1967:432) argues that political cartoons

deal with the ridicule, debunking or exposure of persons, groups and organizations engaged in power struggles in society.

Mulkay (1988:202-203) contends that the political cartoon

enables and encourages its readers to “see the funny side of” their rulers’ activities. But there is always some implicit reference to their actions in the real world, and one effect of such cartoons is to question whether these actions are not more suited to the world of comedy.

### 3.2.2 To communicate on taboo topics

This function is very similar to that of 2.1 in that it allows for statements to be uttered without fear of reproach. However, the communication of information on taboo topics goes further than just criticism — it allows the speaker or writer to “take more of a risk in discussing embarrassing topics or in self-disclosing anxieties, fears or other intimate feelings which are difficult to communicate” (McGhee 1988:128-129). J.P. Emerson (1973:269) describes humour as being “a useful channel for covert communication on taboo topics” while Zijderveld (1983:15) refers to the ability of what is known as black humour<sup>6</sup>, for example, to violate taboos which he says surround those human situations which we have banished to the fringes of our consciousness — sexual intercourse, fatal illnesses, murder and death. Freud, in *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious* (1905), deals extensively with this aspect of humour, arguing that through jokes, unconscious wishes are expressed in a socially acceptable manner. In a similar vein G. Legman (1969:13) contends that:

The ordinary dirty joke (or limerick, or ballad) engages directly and apparently therefore pleasurably with taboo themes: sex, scatology, incest, and the sexual mocking of authority figures, such as parents, teachers, policemen, royalty, nobility ... clergymen, and gods.

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6. This category of humour, normally written “black humour” (defined further on in this chapter), should not be confused with “Black humour”, which term would refer to the humour of Black people.



V.I. Zelvys (1990:326), making reference to Bakhtin, argues that although laughter may

play a great role in freeing man from his inner censorship, from the awe he experiences meeting with the sacred element of his ego, as well as from “outer powers”, the establishment, the ruling mores, etc. (Bakhtin 1965:105) ... laughter in this case often helps to fortify the existing order of things, though on the surface it may look exactly the other way.

Zelvys (1990:328) concludes:

As a result of the evolution of modern civilization, two human natures, man’s spiritual “upper parts” and his corporeal “lower parts”, instead of uniting into a harmonious whole, are torn apart and even fighting for supremacy.

Explicit reference to the “lower parts” in Xhosa is taboo. Unlike in some societies where sex has been demystified as a result of open chat shows, pornography and explicit scenes in films and books, in Xhosa society explicit reference to sex is still, on the whole, frowned upon, with the actual names of genitalia being avoided even in medical examinations. Little wonder then that speakers need an outlet for mentioning the unmentionable — humour providing the necessary mode to perform this taboo-challenging communication.<sup>7</sup>

As has already been noted, Xhosa mineworkers who have to be separated from their wives and families have provided some of the funniest and most bawdy references to matters carnal and sexual. This can be ascribed to the fact that

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7. Of seminal importance, however, is the notion of the “in-group” providing a context for even non-humorous reference to taboo subjects. A group of close women friends could discuss normally embarrassing topics together either humorously or non-humorously.

separation from their wives meant that they would have to form new, and often more fragile, sexual relationships, often in a far more explicit and exploitative environment. Constantly being in the presence of other men would also increase feelings of group solidarity and the need to gain peer approval through humour.

Kulati's cartoon of workers being sent home because of violence on the mines skilfully captures the misery of the miners' predicament (figure 3).

Figure 3



♪ ♪ Leave us, for a long time we have been digging gold on the mines.  
Leave us, it's been a long time. ♪ ♪

Hey, men, this fighting has helped us, because now we have a chance to see our babies and wives.

(Imvo 9 March 1974 p.4)

The caption indicates the invidious choice that rural men had to make — it was either poverty at home or loneliness and violence away from home. Zelvys's comment (1990:323) is pertinent to the potentially dangerous context of the mine:

With the help of obscene humor man succeeds in "achieving the unachievable", that is, manages to vent his aggressive aspirations without doing much damage to communal peace. The increase of the use of obscenities in a community may indicate the development of dangerous aggressive tendencies in that community.

D. Horner and A. Kooy (1980:4) give a grim account of miners' living conditions:

While on the mines they live in compounds, which have been described as a kind of bachelor barracks in which workers retire when off shift to bunk beds in communal dormitories and receive their food in specially provided communal kitchens.

It is obvious that in such an environment, in the absence of perceived female opprobrium, reference would be made to bodily functions and sexual needs. Apte (1985:55) observes that when work in industrialized societies

involved hard physical labour and was hazardous ... joking encounters were harsh, sustained, and marked by many obscenities and vulgarities.

Vulgar reference to buttocks occurs frequently in the Xhosa oral poetry of mineworkers:

Ungandibuzi, mbhem, izibunu zomkakho!  
Ndamgcina eyintombi ethanda mna!

(Don't ask me, fellow, about your wife's buttocks!  
I last knew her as a girl who loved me!)

'Zibunu zomkakho, uzibuza kum?  
Akuzazi na mhla libandayo?

(The buttocks of your wife, you ask of me concerning them?)

Do you yourself not know them on a cold day?)

Izibunu zomkaMfundisi ziyintarhantarha!  
Ziyinduntsuma!

(The buttocks of the minister's wife  
Are large in plentiful abundance!)  
(extracts and translations in Wainwright 1979:147)

More obscene, however, is the treatment given to women's genitalia in the following poem performed by one Victor Thubeni:

Krexezani bafazi kuba amadod' enu  
asemukelweni!<sup>8</sup>  
UGantya-gantya kaMphanda  
Yankulu into yomntwana.  
Azi ukuba ingakanani na ekanina?  
Uvumba liyavutha, lisesicithini!  
(Wainwright 1979:151)

(Commit adultery, women, because your husbands are all at  
the shebeen.  
Those massive barrels of alcohol [induce them to say]  
Big are the private parts of the child.  
I wonder, then, just how big her mother's are?  
The smell becomes perceptible at the tuft of long grass!)

It is obvious that the performer of this poem is adopting a humorous mode, and as Wainwright (1979:166) notes:

Through the use of puns and bawdy language, the Xhosa *imbongi* serves as a very humorous entertainer. In his *izibongo* [praise poems] he maintains the spirit of his fellows, amusing and encouraging them and through his representation of their problems and attitudes, combined with his at times extremely salacious humour, possibly performs a cathartic function, relieving the tensions of the listeners.

As Opland observes (1983:264) Wainwright's *imbongi* is not the same in every respect as the *imbongi* who performs the praises of royalty and famous people —

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8. The term *asesmokolweni*, derived from the Afrikaans *smokkelkroeg* (shebeen), was incorrectly transcribed by Wainwright as *asemukelweni*.

the bawdy humour of the former not forming a large part of the creativity of the latter. Generally, however, scatological humour is more prevalent in oral than in textual discourse, suggesting that perhaps the very allusive nature of orality allows greater daring.

Inappropriate materialism is at least alluded to in Mtuze's *Indlel'ecand'intlango*, the author humorously and indirectly referring to the fact that parishioners are not only interested in the spiritual make-up of their priests:

Iintombi zizizigcodolokazi ezinga-hlalwa mpukane. Kucacile ukuba zikhuphe eyona iphambili impahla yakwamlungu. Iliso looyise lithi lisezintombini libe likumfundisi nakwiimpondo zeenkomo zekhazi ezivele ngaphaya kwakhe. Kambe wona amadoda akayifakanga nzulu ezingqondweni loo nto kuba ayazi ukuba abefundisi abathathi ntweni. Ngamakhosikazi abantu abanyeke ukuba iintombi zawo zendele kumfundisi kuba ayabona ukuthi gcobho kwabefundisikazi ukususela kumfundisikazi uNtlemeza kuyokuma ngomfundisikazi uNdukwana. (Mtuze 1981:10)

(The girls were so smart even a fly wouldn't touch them. It was clear that their best western clothes had been taken out. The fathers' eyes were wandering from the girls to the priest, hoping for the *lobola*<sup>9</sup> that was approaching. However the men didn't really take it too seriously knowing that priests have very little money. It was the women who were hoping that their girls would marry a priest because they had seen that the wives of priests had always led comfortable lives from Ntlemeza's wife till Ndukwana's wife.)

Personal calamities and tragedies resulting from accidents or violence are often considered undesirable topics of conversation, but when alluded to humorously, disabilities and disasters are permissible in oral and textual discourse. In "UZizi Uzuzwe NguZulu" Burns-Ncamashe relates the story of a one-eyed man, but his description of the way in which the man copes with his disability is both witty and

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9. *ukulobola* is the practice whereby a man wanting to marry a woman has to pay cattle in compensation to her father.

unsentimental, the author changing from the first to third person to effect greater objectivity:

Ndindim ndizithe male ngeqhina mihla le. Ezihlangwini ndikholwa zezi bhutsi zilukhuni, ukuze ke imitya ibe lithwathwa. Zisulwa kwandim wena, ndingaboni nje, yonke le mihla ezi bhutsi ngamafutha enkomo. Ipolishi le yeyaxa asaphelileyo awenkomo. Zakugqitywa ukusulwa wothawuza ke umnene, ufike selebhenile ukuya kuthi "ji ekoneni" ngabula yena. Akulazi kambe incoko, umfo eyimfama! (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:16)

(I put my own tie on almost every day. With shoes I prefer hard boots with leather shoelaces which are cleaned by me every day, blind as I am, cleaned with dripping. Polish was used when there was no dripping. After being cleaned you would see him walking in a dignified way, "following the corners", according to him. You don't know how that blind man jokes.)

In another one of his stories "Ukubhubha kukaNdabemfene" Burns-Ncamashe at times resorts to humour in his description of the burial process and in so doing lightens an otherwise serious topic:

Akukhova ukubeka indlu yenkosi yawo amaphakathi akrozile ukusinga emnyango. Athe selephandle amanye wavakala ebuza ngegunya elivakele elizwini lakhe apha unozitshixwana lowa ebesivulele le ndlu:

"Ngubani kuni apha oza kusayina? Ukuba anisayinanga aniyi kuwuva lo mzimba naxa senifuna ukuwungcwaba."

"Uya kungcwatywa phofu nanguwe lowo ukuba unokumangala nawo," utshilo okaMzamane bujwaqeka, ngokwemvakalo yelizwi. Utsho ephuma engabheki nokubheka, efunzele emotweni phandle.

"Uthi amadoda angaka ngootsotsi? Angashiya umntu apha inkosi nokwenza, aze angasayini?" Utshilo lowa kaBhokhwe selethe qhiwu ipensile ayirhutye phantsi komnqwazi apha, emva kwendlebe. Usayine igama lakhe kuloo mqulu wabafi abasemzini wezidumbu. Avakele ehlekela phantsi amanye kula ethu, intsini apha enendelelo, ngenxa yalo gunyaziwe ubonakala ukuba selemaxhakana ngokusayinisa abantu endlwini yezidumbu. Hayi ngewonga ukuthandwa ke bethu! (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:83)

(After putting down the chief's coffin his men went out. The others were outside already when the gatekeeper asked in an angry voice:

“Who amongst you is going to sign? If you don’t sign you won’t get this body even when you have to bury it.”

“But he will be buried, even if he is buried by you if you refuse us the body,” said Mzamane with an angry voice, heading straight for his car outside with out a backward glance.

“Would you say these old men are tsotsis [thugs]? How can they leave a body here — the chief’s, of all people — without signing?” Thus spoke Mr Bhokhwe, holding a pen that he took from behind his ear, signing his own name in that big book of the deceased from the mortuary. Some of our men laughed an undermining laugh because of this man who forced people to sign in the mortuary — “How they like power!”)

Before coffins were used, traditional Xhosa burials were in fact often tinged with an affectionate humour for the deceased. Sityana (1978:31) paints a picture of a fond, and gently bantering, farewell:

Mamela ke xa kuphoswa ezi zinto amazwi akhutshwayo kuloo nto iphoswayo ngale ndlela. Kuqala kuphoswa ingxowa yakhe kuthiwe, “nantso ingxowa yakho; hamba ugcine zonke izinto zakho”; kuphoswe idosha kuthiwe, “Hamba uzakhele umlilo usotha, utshaya ungagodoli”; kuphoswe inqawa kuthiwe, “Hamba kakuhle unganqanqatheki endleleni mfondini ukwazi ukutshaya apho uthe waphumla khona” ...

(Listen to what would be said when the thing was being thrown in. First his bag would be thrown in with the words “Here is your bag; go and keep all your things”; his tinder-box would go in with the words “Go and make a fire for you to warm yourself by so that you can smoke and not get cold”; then his pipe would be thrown with “Go well and when you have the urge to have a smoke on the way you will be able to have a puff while you rest” ...)

### **3.2.3 To increase the morale of the in-group and to introduce or foster a hostile disposition towards the out-group**

W.H. Martineau (1972:119) notes that humour which performs this function is often needed to increase the morale of a group which is being oppressed or

victimized. Research on gallows humour shows how the Czechs under Nazi occupation were able to cope with the situation and maintain morale through the use of humour, which at the same time sustained hostility toward the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> According to Martineau, “the sharing of jokes poking fun at the Germans sustained group cohesion and helped coalesce resistance.” J.H. Burma (1946:710-15) argues that racial humour is primarily created to attain gratification at the expense of the other racial group: its purpose is to cause one’s adversary to appear ludicrous in his own eyes.

The psychological imprint left on South African Blacks by the apartheid system cannot be underestimated, as even an examination of this function of humour demonstrates the extent of its control. The establishment of separate homelands such as Transkei, Bophuthatswana and Venda successfully created divisions amongst the Black majority, which, in its unified state, would have posed too much of a threat to a White minority government. The result of such a policy was that people began to see other groups, once regarded as friends, as a threat, and animosities and misunderstandings developed. It is for this reason that we can understand why much of “formalized”<sup>11</sup> Xhosa humour concentrates on criticizing the stupidity (and any other perceived weakness) of the Zulus, the Mpondos, the Shangaans, the Coloureds<sup>12</sup> and other groups of Blacks and only to a lesser extent refers to the failings of Whites (usually in the *persona* of the

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10. See Antonin J. Obrdlik, “‘Gallows Humour’ - a Sociological Phenomenon”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.47 (1942) pp.709-16.

11. Xhosa humour permeates daily discourse and it is thus difficult to separate the kind of humour that would appear in joke books and anthologies of humour from the humour of everyday conversation and observations.

12. The term “Coloured” is used to describe those South Africans of mixed racial descent.



“Boer”).<sup>13</sup> It would seem that the most barbed and incisive criticism of Whites and the Government was left to the political arena<sup>14</sup>, which was removed from the daily lives of ordinary people, who did not even possess the right to vote.

Kulati's cartoons are the exception, however, with various leaders of the apartheid regime being caricatured and their policies relentlessly mocked. While the physically weak, powerless Black is a principal image in Xhosa humour, Kulati uses this image to highlight the cruel inequalities of the South African situation. In the following cartoon (figure 4) the then young Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi asks Vorster for a place next to the fire.

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13. A similar situation occurred in America when Black slaves made jokes about the Irish, who occupied a lowly position in society. (see L.W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, N.York, 1977, p.304)

14. In his article “The Social Functions of Political Humour” (*Journal of Popular Culture* vol.24:3 1990 pp.39-48) Don F. Nilsen quotes Robert F. Priest's theory of “Moderate Intergroup Conflict Humour”:

When there is a moderate level of conflict between two groups, there will be hostile joking, but if two groups are closely allied, such joking will not occur: the members will not get a feeling of pleasure from hearing hostile feelings expressed. And if two groups are engaged in open bitter conflict, members of each group will tend to regard derogatory jokes about the other group as unsatisfactory forms of emotional expression, too weak and inhibited to be really enjoyable.

Nilsen further quotes from Itzhak Galnoor's “Humor and Politics”. Galnoor observes that

jokes as such are not a real threat to a political regime. They reflect anxiety, opposition and misery, but do not lead necessarily to action - to the revolution itself

and concludes that when people are not joking about politics they are busy doing something else:

They don't have the time - and the mind - to relieve anxiety through political jokes. They have started the revolution and have substituted one form of passive participation with a more active one. (Nilsen 1990:45)

Figure 4



Hey, my friend, please move up, I am also from here, I also want to get warm.

(*Imvo* 27 October 1973 p.4)

By having Buthelezi refer to Vorster as *mfondini* (my friend/old chap), Kulati deftly indicates the equality of the relationship. While the Zulu leader adopts a physically subservient posture towards his White colleague, this is not reflected in his intellectual attitude: he does not, for example, address him as “Baas” (Sir).

It is interesting, too, that neither leader is dressed in conventional western style. Vorster, draped in a blanket, enjoys the warmth of an African fire, while Buthelezi wears a traditional loincloth, in an allusion to the nationalist tendencies of Zulu leaders. The latter’s glasses, however, symbolize learning and western civilization.

It should be noted that in the 1970s Buthelezi's reputation as a champion of Black rights was not as equivocal as it has since become.

In the next cartoon (figure 5) the White lorry driver's interpretation of the oil boycott reveals his ignorance and lack of insight. His slavish repetition of the official government line is rendered ridiculous by the patently obvious fact that his vehicle is infinitely more dependent on, and wasteful of, oil products than that of the Black cyclist.

Comparing the utterances in the two cartoons (figures 4 & 5) one notes that the words of the Black person are restrained and courteous, while those of the White are brash and rude.

*Figure 5*



You're playing with oil! The Government of the Republic says that the Blacks especially are going to suffer from the Arab boycott.

(*Imvo* 12 January 1974 p.4)

It is important to note that although these cartoons seem to express the individual opinions of Kulati, he could not have operated in a vacuum — he would have been in daily contact with people who were the victims of the system and their sarcastic commentaries would have been incorporated into his own graphic discourse. It can be argued that his work is doubly derivative — partly from the tradition of political cartooning that he would have absorbed from the White press and partly from the popular tradition in Xhosa conversation of caricaturing personal failings.

Most Black South Africans prefer to use anecdotal humour (showing Whites in a bad light) in order to cope with the daily trials they suffer as a result of racism. Kulati does the same thing by exaggerating and caricaturing the perceived superiority of Whites and the dependence of Blacks upon them (see figures 6 and 7), but his strongest message is that of the supreme arrogance of the White rulers. Kulati's representation of Blacks, on the other hand, elicits rather subdued laughter because the poverty, emaciation and bondage he depicted was often both metaphorically and literally all too true. Considering the political situation in the 1970s one can understand his apparent pessimism.

Figure 6



(This cartoon is based on a speech made in Alice recently by Mr Siyo, who said that if a person was bound hand and foot he had to be fed.)

You eat soul, my pipsqueak.

(Imvo 20 October 1973 p.4)

Figure 7



It is a sin to take the Whites' land by force.

(Imvo 2 February 1974 p.4)

Kulati is aware that many of those who, like the Mr Siyo quoted in figure 6, stressed the need for the central South African government to come to the aid of the homelands had, in fact, advocated independence and the hand-outs that came with it (graphically represented by the hand offering the spoon). In effect, however, these hand-outs did little, if anything, to benefit the economies of the homelands, which were in reality only created to serve the ideology of apartheid. The upbeat tone of the utterance “*Utya iSoul my laiti!*” (“You eat soul, my pipsqueak!”) belies the desperation of the situation, but its callousness is apt. “Soul” presumably refers to the misconception cultivated by those in authority that Black South Africans were, at best, quaint primitives with rhythm, soul and earthiness — hence neither qualifying for nor requiring genuine economic power.

In the second cartoon (figure 7), Kulati depicts ordinary Black South Africans very differently. The isolation, weary emaciation and resigned dependence of figure 6 are replaced by solidarity, youthful energy and assertiveness. The White figure is physically powerful, but dull and brutish. In this context, the statement “It is a sin to take the Whites’ land by force” is an absurdity, in fact ridiculing attempts to justify the wholesale occupation of land by Whites.

The following Xhosa joke<sup>15</sup>, which pokes fun at the alleged incapability of Coloureds to keep a secret, underscores Burma’s argument that much racial humour can be linked to “racial competition and conflict” (Burma 1946:714)

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15. The joke comes from the only collection of Black South African humour I have been able to find. All the material, however, appears in (not always correct) English.

since Coloureds in South Africa were, historically, afforded more political rights than Blacks:

It was in Matsieng, in the district of Maseru in Lesotho. There was a stray fat ox. Certain men of the village decided to slaughter the ox. However, they all knew that stock theft had no fine. In actual fact these people were not thieves but they just decided to take a chance since the stray ox had been there for a long time. They were sure that they would not be arrested. Nobody would ever suspect them. Among them there was a Coloured man. They warned him that he should never reveal the secret that they slaughtered that ox because they knew that Coloureds had no secrets. The Coloured man was very much annoyed by this. Two days after they had slaughtered the ox the Coloured man was still thinking about how he was being doubted. As he was thinking about this, while sitting with the villagers who had slaughtered the ox there arrived three men who asked whether they had seen an ox describing it like the one they had slaughtered. The Coloured man burst out with fury, "Here are Basotho men revealing the secret you said would be revealed by a Coloured man!" They were all arrested, since the man who had asked the question was the owner of the ox who had come with two policemen. (Mongooato n.d.:40)

Another joke from the same collection by Mongooato refers to the gullibility of the Tswanas and the cunning of the Xhosas:

Somewhere in the Transvaal in the vicinity of Messina there was at one time a building contraction. There were Xhosa, Tswana and Sotho speaking fellows there. One Tswana chap went to a Xhosa fellow. He asked from that Xhosa fellow a herb to make him cunning. There is a belief that Xhosas are cunning. That fellow charged him one pound, i.e. R2.00. So that shows that at that time R2.00 was worth a lot. The Xhosa fellow took money to Maradebe who was a Shebeen queen. He bought a bottle of brandy. The poor Tswana chap did not get a sip from that brandy. He complained to the Xhosa fellow that at least the piece of herb he gave him was small for the price paid. The Xhosa fellow patted him saying, "You see my herb is working right away, you have started being clever now." The Tswana chap was happy to hear that. From that day on he was always among Xhosas. On a certain Friday evening of the pay day after the Xhosa group together with a Tswana chap had consumed a lot of liquor they felt that they needed something salty. They decided to go to Mr van der Merwe's farm. They took away with them the fattest sheep.

When they got to their tent they slaughtered and cooked it. They ate a lot of it and hid the remaining one. But before they hid it they offered a big piece to a Mosotho fellow. He refused saying that he was not a thief like the Thembus (when Basothos refer to all Xhosa speaking tribes they call them the Thembus, though Xhosas living among the Basothos do not like that) The Tswana fellow was praised once more for having turned to be cunning of late. A Mosotho fellow was classified as a blind, meaning not to be clever. The cunning group woke up very early. They started consuming their liquor and also played cards. A Mosotho fellow woke up later and started eating his dry mielie pap. He asked the cunning group to offer him some gravy. They said he should help himself up in the pot. That he did. When he was still doing that there came policemen together with Van der Merwe. The policemen shouted at the group playing cards, "You Xhosa chaps, where is van der Merwe's sheep?" "Ask that Mosotho fellow next to the pot he knows better", replied the Xhosas. The Mosotho guy was arrested as a culprit. The Tswana fellow was once more assured that he was now clever. He was very happy to realize that. (Mongato n.d.:43-44)

Analysed closely it is evident that this joke pokes fun not only the gullibility of the Tswana man, but also the cunning of the Xhosas and the passivity of the Sotho chap who finally gets duped.

From the above examples it would appear that conventional humour was generally applied to groups of a similar social and political status, but this historically inward-centered humour has in recent years changed to include the foibles and limitations of Whites. Apte (1985:134) observes:

Ethnic humor is influenced significantly by the socio-cultural changes that may occur, especially if by such changes the social status of subordinate ethnic groups is altered. Sociocultural change may also be reflected, however, in the societal attitudes towards ethnic groups as a whole.

Contemporary Xhosa writers have also been able to use satirical humour in order to expose the injustices of segregation and apartheid as well as the arrogance and ignorance of Whites. A good example of this kind of satirical humour is found in



Zotwana's novel *Imijelo yegazi*. In one scene we have Pletseni, symbol for the arrogance of many Whites, who is not able to pronounce the Xhosa names of his employees, and who "christens" them instead with farcical and humiliating ones. The preposterous assumption of Whites as to the blanket illiteracy of blacks also emerges in this text. Zotwana writes:

Babizelwa esichengeni banikwa iimali zabo. Wayefunda amagama abo (la matsha) ephepheni, ize indoda kuthiwe mayenze unongxabalaza ecaleni kwegama layo. Uninzi lwala madoda lwalukwazi noko ukubhala amagama alo, kodwa uPletseni akazange ayibuze nokuyibuza le ndawo; wasuka wabenzisa unongxabalaza kula magama bawaphiwe nguye aba bachebi. Yabangu: "Slem." "Yha bhasi!" "Amapurudoti." Yha bhasi!" "Forivili." Yha bhasi!" (Zotwana 1992:36)

(They were called to the yard and given their money. He read their names (the new ones) from the paper and each man had to make a cross next to his name. The majority of these men knew how to write their names, but Pletseni never even asked them about this, he just made them put a cross next to the names he had given them. It was: "Slem." "Yes baas!"; "Amapurudoti." "Yes baas!" "Forivili." "Yes baas!")

Zotwana successfully turns the tables of the traditionally funny scene of the Black person not being able to speak English. Here the the stupidity of the boss is exposed not only by the suggestion that he is not able to pronounce the Xhosa names but also by his peculiar choice of "new" names. This inability of Whites to speak Xhosa or even pronounce Xhosa names is often mocked by Xhosa speakers, many of whom have a host of examples of this kind of linguistic incompetence. As Apte (1985:200) notes:

Individuals whose linguistic performance, for whatever reasons, is consistently and noticeably defective in some way often become the butt of humor.

### 3.2.4 To control behaviour

Before (and, to a lesser extent, after) colonialism Xhosa society had specific institutionalized controls which clarified political, familial and gender roles. These roles were severely challenged by the colonizers, who undermined not only the authority of the chiefs, but also the very structuring of society itself.

While the political drama was being acted out, ordinary people were both repelled and attracted by the trappings of westernization, which threatened to undermine the very essence of Xhosa culture. Thus Xhosa humorists had to extend their satire to include not only the social reprobate, but those who sought to appear superior by too readily adopting the morality and habits of the colonizers. Disrespectful children, aggressive wives, vain anglophiles, drunken priests and lazy schoolteachers were now singled out to become the fools of the new order.

In much of Xhosa humorous writing, therefore, there is a person or character whose foolish actions and behaviour serve as a warning to the rest of society. O. Klapp (1950:157-162) notes that the fool, through the ridicule of his behaviour, “acts as a control mechanism (i.e. a negative example) enforcing the very propriety which he violates”. In a similar vein Powell (in Paton and Powell 1988:99) observes that humour can be seen as

the baseline of social control, an initial defining mechanism which clarifies and differentiates for the users the “normal” from the “abnormal” or socially deviant.

Powell (1988:100) goes on to argue that formalized humour generally fulfils an ideological function in supporting and maintaining existing social relations and prevailing ways of perceiving social reality.

In simple terms, humour operates to set apart and invalidate the behaviour and ideas of those “not like us” by creating and sustaining stereotypes and often projecting their practices to a presumed “logical”, but of course absurd, conclusion. Powell (1988:93) notes that humour can be seen either as delineating group norms or as negotiating and maintaining group notions of reality.

Leaders in Xhosa society, whether they be chiefs or political leaders, are watched closely and any sign of weakness is quickly seized upon and burlesqued in anecdotal or joke (and occasionally cartoon form). The tellers of this kind of joke, in which a major figure is reduced to fool status, are transmitting a message similar to those of cartoonists in other cultures. They are simply warning those with power that people expect certain things from them, and that failing to act with dignity and intelligence will result in their ridicule. The following joke, which could have been used to deride any political leader, is here used to criticize the perceived stupidity of a particular leader not favoured by the joke-teller:

UGatsha uthi, “KungoLwesingaphi namhlanje?”  
 UCyril Ramaphosa uyaphendula ngokuthi, “Jonga kwiphephandaba elisetafileni.” Kuphendule uGatsha, “Hayi, akuncedi. Liphephandaba lakwizolo.”

(Gatsha asks, “What date is it today?” Cyril Ramaphosa replies, “Look at the newspaper on the table.” Gatsha retorts, “It doesn’t help. It’s yesterday’s paper.”)

The joke-teller’s political leanings are obvious from the roles taken by the two men, the one from the ANC being portrayed as intelligent while the Inkatha leader manifests the characteristics of a fool.

While Xhosa humour continues to reflect the political realities of the time, there is also humour which is aimed at maintaining the *status quo* of traditional society. When the hierarchical order of Xhosa society is disrupted or threatened by junior members of the community, writers such as Sinxo are able to use humour and satire to expose the anti-social behaviour of the deviants. Mkonto (1988:102) explains that the

supreme authority to discipline the children and especially boys is vested traditionally in the head of the family. The flouting of this authority by women is taken in a very serious light because it is regarded by men as one of the major reductive objects of their manhood.

This idea is echoed by Burns-Ncamashe in “UZizi uzuzwe nguZulu” in which he reveals the fact that not only children, but even recently initiated men, need to be disciplined by their elders. The story, which warns that those who joke with authority may themselves be ridiculed, has the joker, Dlamini, begging for mercy:

UDlamini ujwede wenjenjalo ecela uxolo, ezixela negama, engxengxeza shushu. Ude waphakama phezu kwakhe uZulu engadanga amlimaze emehlweni noko. Koko usuke wamthi hlasi wamthi jwii phaya oku kosiba lwenkuku. Uthe kuba ejongole lathi eli liso lisenofifi lagungquza langa liza kuthi phundlu phandle. Uvakele umduna esithi:

“Kakade kwedini ubushoba ntoni kakade? Hi?”

“Ameva Mhlatyana, bendidlala.”

“Uqhele ukudlala nam kakade?”

“Hayi bawo, ndi ...”

“Bawo, bawo! Uyihlo ungathini ukumthi chu ngomlenze ngathi yinkwenkwe?” “Andikhange ndikhumbulele ...”

(Burns-Ncamashe 1991:19)

(Dlamini cried out pleading for mercy, even calling out his own name, begging vehemently. Zulu picked him up without harming his eyes, instead throwing him like a feather. His dim eye was so weak it seemed likely to pop out.

“Actually, what were you up to, young man?” asked Zulu.

“I’m very sorry, Mhlatyana, it was a joke.”

“Do you usually joke with me?”

“No, sir, I ...”

“Sir, sir! How dare you treat your father like a boy, holding me by the leg?” “I didn’t realize ...”)

With regard to the issue of gender and control, Mkonto (1988:104-105) notes that in both *Umzali wolahleko* and *UNojayiti wam* the wives Nojaji and Nojayiti display behaviour and use language that is contrary to Xhosa expectations of femininity, in that

both female characters flout the order that relates to authority and discipline.

Sinxo's aim of exposing what he would consider the absurdity of a woman assuming the authoritative manner of a man is effectively achieved by way of Nojayiti's hyperbolic invective. Similarly, in *Umzali wolahleko* Nojaji disrespectfully admonishes her husband with regard to her son's upbringing:

“Hayi 'sekaNdopho, mus'ukuzamana nomntwana! UNdopho ngumntwan'amayeza, andifuni ukuba makaxatyaniswe mna.”  
 “Hayi, isile le nkwenkwe, Nojaji, mandiyohlwaye.”  
 “Into engasayi kuhla ke leyo”, selezele ngumsindo uNojaji.  
 (Sinxo 1986(b):3)

(“No, Ndopho's father, don't shower the child with many questions! Ndopho is a sickly child. I don't want him to be given a reprimand!”  
 “No, this boy is very silly, Nojaji, I must punish him.”  
 “That will never occur.” Nojaji is filled with anger.)  
 (translation in Mkonto 1988:103)

Sinxo's humour itself relies on the fact that his readers will recognize the incongruity of a situation in which a woman berates her husband. The impact of this kind of humour is, however, reduced when the reader believes in the equality of the sexes and thus would expect a wife to have a say in her child's development. The fact that a reader might not find anything wrong with Nojaji's position would reduce not only the impact of the humour but also of the message that is behind it. It is the shock value that counts — the incongruity, the unexpected behaviour that makes one laugh.

As has already been noted there are many examples of comic characters in Xhosa writing whose main characteristic is their pomposity in trying to appear very English. Xhosa writers often warn their readers against such behaviour (or against being impressed by such behaviour) by creating characters who are obviously expected to be regarded as funny frauds. A good example is Sinxo's "Zinobee Jameson", whose real name is Zinkobe Jomsini. When describing his home to a new friend (who is Xhosa speaking) he declares, in English:

And, my boy, that's a little heaven because, andeh, andeh, because there's mutual understanding, andeh, andeh, peace and concord between myself and my wife. (Sinxo 1986(b):25)

Great drinkers (such as Zinobee Jameson) are often the most verbose pretenders to virtue, and it is this sin of hypocrisy which is indirectly criticized in W.N. Mbovane's story "Ebukhweni" in *Isagweba*. A man who has declared himself a teetotaller to his in-laws is exposed as a fraud by getting drunk on the beer that was brought to his accomplice. The in-laws and the bride are alarmed and disappointed at the way in which this so-called teetotaller consumes the beer. Finally he collapses:

Kwangenisw' ibhekile ukuze bathobe uthuli. Yazibik'int'enkulu ukuba ayithathi. Yatshintshwa ibhekile banikwa ngengqezane. Waman'ebetha umkhaphi, umyeni ekrunkile. Abaphaki baba bade, intombi idlisela. Bathi bakuthi gwiqi, yangen' intak' endlwini. Wafak' irhony' umyeni, yagungxuk' ibhekile. Walunguz' umkhaphi enga ujong' ilanga. Ukubuyel' izitya bafik'ibhekile izele ngumoya. Bajongana abaphaki, bekhuzza ngeentliziyo. (Mbovane 1991:36)

(A big tin was brought for them to wash down the dust. The noble chap distanced himself, explaining that he didn't partake of the stuff. The tin was replaced with a smaller one. His companion sat sipping slowly while he, the husband, felt resentful. The cooks took their time while the bride-to-be

showed off, so he was caught in the trap. As soon as they were all gone he grabbed the tin, and threw it back, suprising his wide-eyed companion. When they came back for the dishes there was nothing left in the tin and they looked at each other with amazement in their hearts.)

While comic characters are often portrayed as social fools whose behaviour is not to be emulated, some writers make a conscious effort to criticize more serious and yet less obvious vices. Thus non-productive resignation is challenged by Zotwana in his book, *Imijelo yegazi* which has a courageous character declare:

“Ndithi nokuba sendifile, ndingagqushalaza kuqhum’ uthuli nakwelo ngcwaba ukuba ukhe wafeda apha, abafunda aba bantwana.” (Zotwana 1992:71)

(“I mean even when I am dead, I will kick around and make dust at that grave if you make the mistake of failing to send these children to school.”)

In order to cope with the life he is living, a life of illiteracy and suffering at the hands of a White farmer, the man threatens to cause chaos at his grave if his grandchildren are subjected to the same fate. By mentioning the taboo subject of his death together with education the author is challenging his readers to face aspects of their lives they might not wish to confront. It is as if, by mentioning death and education together, the author is threatening his readers with a possibly unrestful hereafter if they do not become more pro-active in taking responsibility for their children’s education, despite the difficulties they may encounter in achieving this end.

### **3.2.5 To cope with despair, defeat and failure**

Historically Black people in South Africa have had to cope with an inordinate amount of despair and defeat resulting from colonial imperialism and the harsh

policies of separate development which created poverty and homelessness. Little wonder that many of the early Xhosa essay writers were, according to Jordan (1973:56) “serious and didactic”.

He later notes, however, that “it must not be thought that the essayists of this period never wrote for entertainment”. He observes that Tiyo Soga is often, even in his didactic essays, “very humorous” and goes on to commend this writer for introducing humour into a very bleak tale (“Emlungwini phakathi”) about a ghastly journey by ox-wagon through a drought-stricken area in the Eastern Cape.

The humour that Soga injects into this tale can be seen as a way of encouraging people to view the vicissitudes of life in perspective and to be on the look-out for humour in the most depressing of situations. Thus at the end of this story there is a very funny description (see Chapter Four of this thesis) of a man falling asleep in church, but the humour is broken by a reflection on the hardships suffered by the people of this drought-stricken area:

Zinjalo, Mcokeli, iinto endike ndazibona ngaphakathi eKoloni. Yala abantu bakowenu, abanamathemba ezinto emasimini, ukuba baze, kokweminye iminyaka, bagqithisele ukugcina ukutya. Inkulu, inkulu, iyoyikeka indlala yobusika obuzayo. Maze uThixo asincede, asibone! Siya kuya ngaphi na? (Soga 1935:47)

(Editor, that is the way things were in the Colony. Exhort your people who are hoping to get good harvests from the fields, that they should, as in other years, keep food. The famine of an approaching winter is great, it is huge and frightening. May the Lord help us and may he see us. Where are we going?)

The seriousness of this comment is highlighted by the previous paragraph, which acts as a light-hearted diversion.



Fry (1963:106) cites authors who have identified humour functioning as a simple mitigation of failure, a redemption of unpleasant situations, a means of establishing harmony in the face of loss and generally as a means of coping with defeat. S. Linstead (1988:126) refers to Davies' conclusion that ethnic jokes in particular have the capacity

to reduce anxiety over failure *vis-à-vis* large, perplexing institutions, to provide moral guidance and reduce anomie, and to provide legitimation of an individual's situation in relation to others' failures or successes.

In his analysis of Black American humour, Levine (1977:360) notes that the comedians James Cross and Harold Cromer, who often satirized the naive Black rustic migrant, "enabled their audiences to laugh at themselves, their fragile hopes and the absurdities of the American racial situation". While there were virtually no "public" Black comedians in South Africa during the apartheid era, most comic Xhosa writers and raconteurs had the same effect on their audiences as Cross and Cromer. For example the absurd pass laws, which regulated the presence of Blacks in urban areas, led to the creation of a number of jokes by those who had to live with the constant anxiety of being picked up by the police. One joke tells the story of a man who goes to work in Johannesburg for the first time:

Indoda eyayiqala ukuya kufuna umsebenzi eRhawutini yayalwa ukuze ilumke ingabanjwa ngamapolisa ngenxa yokungabi nalo ipasi. Yachazelwa ukuba sinjani na isinxibo samapolisa. Yamana ibona abantu beCawe iZCC, ibhene ukubaleka oku kuba icinga ukuba ngawo lawo amapolisa. Ngenye imini yadibana kwanabo bantu bexhentsa becula yathi nqa kuba ngala mapolisa yawabaleka oko yafika kwelo Rhawuti. Ukususela loo mini yatsho yalibala ukuba kanene yayiyaliwe ngamapolisa, ayawabaleka nawokwenene yabanjwa. Yachaza ke ukuba ibicinga ukuba ngabantu benkonzo yaseZCC.

(A man who had gone to Johannesburg to look for a job was warned to be careful of the police as he had no pass, and they

described a police uniform to him. He used to see the members of the ZCC<sup>16</sup> and would start to run, thinking that they were the police. One day he met these people singing and dancing and realized that he had been running away from them since he had come to Johannesburg. From then on he even forgot about the police until he was arrested. He explained that he thought they were from the ZCC and not the police.)

Another joke tells of a soccer game with a mixed team consisting of players from Nyanga, a township near Cape Town, and the police force. When one burly policeman shouted "Pass, Pass" to his black team mate, the poor chap became terrified and ran off the field, thinking the policeman wanted his pass. The fact that Black South Africans, only too well acquainted with the terrors of the pass system, can find this joke amusing parallels the ability (described by Levine above) of African Americans to laugh at the incongruities of their own social situation.

Yet another example of this kind of humour which enables people to cope with despair is the joke told about a rural couple arriving in a city for the first time. The confusion and bewilderment of people arriving in Johannesburg from villages in the Transkei and Ciskei and other rural areas has been well documented and has been a theme exploited by both White and Black novelists, most of whom concentrate on the tragedy of the situation. In this anecdote, however, the comic side of the predicament of novices to the town is highlighted. The joke teller informs us that the wife did not have a pass and was therefore arrested. The police took her and went on looking for people without passes. Meanwhile the husband went to the police station and reported that he had been attacked and robbed of his wife. The police went with him looking for the supposed thugs. When the man showed them the robbers they were shocked to see that they were their colleagues.

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16. Zionist Christian Church

They questioned him: "Did you not know these are the police?" He answered: "I did not really look at their clothes, but what stunned me most was their behaviour, Sir." "So what do you say now that you know?" "I can only thank them for taking care of my wife and giving her a free ride around the city, but unfortunately I do not have money to pay them for their services."

This joke also illustrates the way in which Black South Africans had to think on their feet in order to get themselves out of serious situations. As in folktales in which physically weak characters are shrewd and cunning, so too in Xhosa jokes the power (but also stupidity) of the authorities is often contrasted with the powerlessness (but cleverness) of the victims.

Occasionally the cruelty of racism can only be reflected by a category of humour known as "black humour", which makes "a joke of tragic or unpleasant aspects of life" (*The Chambers Dictionary*). G.S. Budaza's essay "Hayi inkohlakalo yomntu emntwini" in *Khawufan' ucinge* is an excellent example of this kind of humour. We are told of a man who had been a farm-labourer for a long time with the same employer and who was one day ordered to make a fire seven times stronger than usual in the oven. The employer had visitors whom he wanted to entertain and Swartbooi, the labourer, thought the fire was for a braai. When the fire was ready he went to call his "master", who was in fact young enough to be his son since Swartbooi had worked for his father. All this he did with great respect and loyalty for his faultless master. When he announced that the fire was ready, the strong men who had come to the party came forward and grabbed him. At first he thought it was a joke, but he realised the seriousness of the situation when they threw him into the fire. The next part of the narrative reveals the utter cruelty and inhumanity of the Whites:

Emva kwethutyana wayivula i-onti, wakhutshwa uSwaartboi sel' eqhotsekile ubuso buthe ntsinalala amazinyo ethe ntlubu ngaphandle kukutsha. Wathi akulukhangela olo sizikazi lwesidumbu, wasondela uMbezo wasikhaba saya kuthi mba phantsi phaya, eshwabula esithi:-

“Jy lag nog, Kaffir!”

Yaba yintswahla phakathi kweso siqhu samaBhulu, kwatsho kwagigitheka nosana olusebeleni. Yangumgobo nyani kuwo. (Budaza 1980:3)

(After a while Swaartbooi was taken out of the oven quite roasted, his face stiff and his teeth sticking out. When he looked at that poor carcass Mbezo came nearer and kicked at it and with a thud it fell down, and cursing he said, “So you still laugh, Kaffir!” There was a roar of laughter from that group of Afrikaners, there was even laughter from the babies. It was a real celebration for them.)

The appalling nature of the crime and the insensitivity of the guests are highlighted by the author, who ironically questions the very nature of servitude, as well as the notion of blind loyalty to employers. The validity of these concepts would have been questioned by many employees in South Africa, although it would have been considered almost treasonable to articulate these doubts. The author satirizes the absurdity of servile devotion by the awful and incongruous representation of the smiling skull of the employee — a telling symbol of the reward for accepting oppression and apartheid.

### 3.2.6 To subvert the social order

M. Douglas (1975:98) argues that whatever the joke, however remote its target, the telling of it is potentially seditious:

Since its form consists of a victorious tilting of uncontrol against control, it is an image of the levelling of hierarchy, the triumph of intimacy over formality, of unofficial values over official ones.

Mulkay, however, argues that Douglas is guilty of oversimplifying the relationship between humour and social structure. He further claims that different types of humour have varying effects on the social structure, arguing that there is not merely one social structure, which means that

different types of structure may create different sorts of structural joke, may provide different social contexts in which these jokes have to be handled and may, thereby, generate quite different reactions from participants. (Mulkay 1988:156)

Thus the apartheid system in South Africa was satirized by both Whites and Blacks, but in completely different contexts and ways. Whites opposed to the apartheid system had the time and the resources with which to deliver biting public attacks against the “structural joke” of apartheid, while Blacks had to *live* the joke, and by living it, created their own comic discourse. This comic discourse was not given written or media exposure, mainly due to the fact that Blacks were seldom allowed to perform at public theatres or on national radio and television programmes, a factor which proved a major deterrent to the development of important forms of political satire.<sup>17</sup> The fact that the majority of Whites did not understand the languages of the people they were oppressing also excluded them from this discourse. On the other hand many Blacks refused to comment (using conventional methods) on the system because by doing so they would be indirectly

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17. In his study of the Afro-American jester Sambo, published by Oxford University Press, New York, Joseph Boskin concludes that it was only once African Americans had access to the mass media that the nature of comedy in America changed:

Not that Sambo had suddenly ceased to exist within the depths of the white mind - do cultural forms totally evaporate into historical vapor once removed from the material culture? - but that he could no longer be used as a lever of social control. Control had passed into African-American hands for the profoundly simple reason that, in having access to the mass media, they were quite able to project the kind of humor, the type of image they desired, a jester included. (1986:224)

giving it some legitimacy. N.S. Ndebele (in J. Schadeberg 1990:179) quotes Steve Biko as saying:

Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish.

While the transformation of the South African political system isolated many leaders and commentators from ordinary society as a result of bannings and detentions, in America the system of slavery inspired comedians who openly criticized the system. Levine (1977:311) observes that jokes told by African Americans during the slavery period

robbed the American racial system of any legitimacy long before the courts and the government began that still uncompleted task.

This argument would seem to support Douglas's claim (1975:100) that

the experience of a joke form in the social structure calls imperatively for an explicit joke to express it.

Even in South Africa, where there was so little freedom of speech, ordinary Black South Africans were constantly reflecting on the absurdity of the situation, and creating humour out of it. The pass law jokes quoted under 3.2.5 are evidence of the truth of this assertion. Powell (1988:103) argues that it is unlikely that humour would precipitate real social change. He states that while humour might have consciousness-raising potential, "perhaps ultimately it is a resigned expression and cheerful demonstration of the subordinate's very weakness."

Zijderveld's opinion (1983:42) is that

humour and laughter in particular fail to function as truly revolutionary forces in society. On the contrary, a humorist who was out to destroy the dominant values and traditional meanings of his society would be like a small child who destroys its toys ... the meanings and values of society are in a sense the toys with which the humorist plays his funny games.

However, in *Imijelo yegazi* Zotwana successfully subverts the social order by recording the reactions of Genter, a White employer, and would seem to be suggesting to his readers that revolutionary actions and ideals *are* possible, particularly when seen against the backdrop of the stupidity of those in power:

Kwathi kanti uGenter wazikhuphela phantsi njengoko zinjalo eziya zinto zazithethwe nguMhlabunzima. Wath' uPletseni: "Dyongo, Silem, uyayiva le nto ithethwa apha? Unyana kaMeisie (kuba yayiligama ababembiza ngalo elo uNodemke) uvile ukuba kuthiwa akafundi phaya, wenza izinto zobuKomanisi, en-e norho kuthiwa uyi-opstoker ufuna abanye abantwana babhetowurhe phaya." Watsho, watsho uPletseni ebaxa, exoka ngokuxoka, ebala izinto ekwakusithiwa zithethwe nguMhlabunzima. Wathi: "Kuthwa norho yena uthi le nkululeko iza kubakho eTranskei ngo-Oktobha inenyekireyi into yayo. Ngaba uyayivuma nawe loo nto? Mhlawumbi lo mntwana uzive apha kuwe ezi zinto azithethayo. Kudala ndisitsho kuwe, ubudyakophu unabo, *maar jy dink jy's slim*. Le nkwenkwe yona andifuni nokuyibona apha kweli plasi; ukuba ikhe yathi nje cakatha ndiyifak' amapolisa zisuka, ndikugxothe nawe ngaphezulu. Kuthiwa sayina pha ucele uxolo." (Zotwana 1992:79)

(So Genter repeated everything that had been said by Mhlabunzima. Pletseni said, "Dyongo, Silem, do you hear what is being said here? Meisie's son (that is what they called Nodemke), do you hear how they are saying he is not studying there, that he is a communist, and what's more, they say he is a troublemaker, he wants the other children to protest there." Pletseni said lots of things, making it worse, telling lies and counting all the things he said he had heard from Mhlabunzima. "They even say he says this Transkei independence which is taking place in October is problematic. Do you agree with that? Maybe this child is saying things that come from you. I have been telling you for a long time that you are full of politics. But you think you are clever. As for this boy I don't ever want to see him on this farm. If he sets foot here I will get the police onto him, and I will sack you on top of it. They say sign here and ask for forgiveness.")

The book also ridicules the creation in 1961 of the Republic of South Africa. The farmers had promised the people that it would be better after 31 May, the date on which South Africa left the Commonwealth. The people saw no difference in their suffering and so started making jokes about it, subverting its importance and significance. People on the farms, when asked how they were, replied, “*Ngaphandle nje kwezi zipelithi zenkululeko zisuke zajika zaba zezengcinezelo.*” (“Fine, apart from these freedom badges that have turned into oppression badges.”) Responses to greetings in Xhosa often have the structure: “Fine, apart from the sun/the heat/the work” etc. This variation is therefore syntactically normal but conceptually unexpected, creating incongruity and humour.

Xhosa authors and poets use their writings to express not only their personal feelings but the general feelings of their respective communities. Choosing the comic mode makes their particular attitude to the state or the social order more accessible to the majority of people, who choose to read for pleasure rather than edification. By getting people to laugh at the social order, however, they subtly subvert it, questioning the validity of its institutions and values. For example, the widespread practice of Whites receiving preferential service from officials (both Black and White) is exposed to ridicule and therefore subverted in the following extract taken from “*Izinongo zobomi*” in *Amavo* by J.J.R. Jolobe:

Ngenye imini efestileni yamatikiti kaloliwe ndinqonqozile. Onikela amatikiti unge angeza koko uthe akubona ukuba ngumdaka watyhila ncwadana wabhala-bhala kuyo wazenza oxakekileyo. Ude emzuzwini wazicenga weza kubuza oko ndikufunayo; ndacacelwa ukuba ngelakhe uthi undibonisile ukuba unguthile apha. Ndithe kanti le nto ndisaza kuyifumana nakumfo webala lam. Wabe emi ngaphaya kwetafilana yokuthengisela. Ndabe ndiye kufuna incwadana eyimvume yokuhanjiswa kweenkomo ukusuka kwesinye isithili ukuya



kwesinye. Naye unge akandiboni ithuba elidana lo mAfrika kwada kwangena umfo oMhlophe othe wabuza kuye ukuba lo mntu ufuna ntoni na. Ndinge ndiyasibona isifuba ukukhukhumala phambi kokuba avule umlomo abhavumle ngezwi elaba ngathi lelenjengele yomkhosi esithi, “Ufuna ntoni?” Ndakuba ndimxelele uqalile ke ukuyenza le mvume. Yini le! Amayolisa maninzi. (Jolobe 1970:44-45)

(One day I went to buy a train-ticket and knocked at the window. When the man looked and saw that I was Black he opened a book and wrote something so as to appear busy. After a while he pulled himself up and asked me what I wanted. It was clear to me that he wanted to show me who he was there. On another occasion I even received the same type of treatment from someone of my colour. I was standing by the small counter where I had gone to get a permit to move some cattle from one district to another. This African also made as if he didn't see me for a long time, until a White person came in and asked him what I wanted. I saw his chest puffing out before he opened his mouth to roar out like an army cannon, “What do you want?” After I told him what it was that I required he started to make out the permit. Goodness! There are so many jokers!)

Sometimes, however, the most audacious (and often most self-deprecatory) humour occurs not in written comic discourse, but in its oral counterpart. Thus in the following extract taken from a recorded conversation with an ex-domestic worker (known as an eccentric wit by her friends) it is clear that the social order is being subverted and that the very process of subversion is considered humorous.<sup>18</sup> The speaker is remembering her working days in Sea Point:

Kwenzeka ndiseSea Point. *I dress to kill*. Ndim lo ndimhle mnta kabawo ndisezifigeni. Tyhini! Popo-popo-popop. Ndathi ndakuthi tyhin' ngumlungu lo. Wathi “*Can you jump in?*” Ndathi “*With pleasure.*” Wahamba nam lo mLungu, indoda yomLungu ndahamba nayo sayokuhlala endlini yayo.

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18. Apart from their relevance as social commentaries, I believe that the stories of domestic workers need to be analysed as creative communications. Apte (1985:74) observes that there seems to be a lack of interest in the expressive behaviour of women:

A greater awareness of the relevance of women's roles and activities to cultural systems should lead to extensive research on women's humor in the future ... Such research may indicate that possibly women have developed certain types and attributes of humor generally not found among men.

NguNeville waseOverseas. Sahlala, wathi “*What’s your name?*” Ndathi “*Nomalizo.*” Wathi “*What’s your English name?*” “*Grace.*” Wathi “*Let me tell you Grace, I do love you.*” Ndathi “*It’s so funny, you’re White, I’m Black, you say you love me, how come?*” Wathi “*Grace, I cannot help it, through this apartheid of South Africa you’re not allowed to be in love with an African.*” Ndathi “*It’s so funny, for your information, these boere in the night time they do love us, they sleep with us at night.*” Nditsho kulo mntan’ omlungu. Ndathi balala nathi, ngakumbi amapolisa la. “*Even these policemen, they do sleep with us, but when it’s the daytime they don’t like us.*” I’ve seen so many girls, aph’ estratweni ebusuku, abeLungu bawamisayo bathi “*Jump in*”. Why ebusuku basithande emini basicaphukele? Nditsho kulo mntana, lo womlungu, ngowaseOverseas. *He was such a nice, nice, very nice boy.* Ndahlala naye *the whole night through sasela utywala, wandiqonda ukuba shame,*<sup>19</sup> *I’m a nice somebody.*

(It happened when I was in Sea Point. I dress to kill. That was me with my beautiful figure. Wow! Beep-beep-beep-beep. When I looked, wow it was a White man. He said, “Can you jump in?” I said, “With pleasure.” I went with that White man to his house. He was Neville from overseas. We sat down and he asked, “What’s your name?” I said, “Nomalizo.” He said “What’s your English name?” “Grace.” He said, “Let me tell you Grace, I do love you.” I said, “It’s so funny, you’re White, I’m Black, you say you love me, how come?” He said, “Grace, I cannot help it, through this apartheid of South Africa you’re not allowed to be in love with an African.” I said, “It’s so funny, for your information, these *Boere* in the night time they do love us, they sleep with us at night.” That is what I said to that Whitey. I said they sleep with us, especially the policemen. “Even these policemen, they do sleep with us, but when it’s the daytime they don’t like us.” I’ve seen so many girls, here in the street at night, and the Whites stop them and say, “Jump in”. Why do they love us at night and hate us in the day?” That is what I said to that child, that White from overseas. He was such a nice, nice, very nice boy. I stayed with him the whole night through and we drank and he realized that shame, I’m a nice somebody.

By referring openly to prostitution, and particularly to the hypocrisy of White policemen who would arrest Blacks for being in the city but then take advantage of their services at night, the speaker ironically sketches a picture of a social order

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19. In South African English “shame” can express almost any combination of sympathy and endearment.

characterized by widespread defiance of apartheid laws even by the supposed upholders of such laws. The notion of romantic love is also challenged in that the man from overseas pronounces his “love” very soon after they have met, and after he has refused to acknowledge his “lover’s” real name. His declaration is further followed by her humble assertion that after a night together he could see that she was simply “a nice somebody”.

Also of importance in the above extract is the speaker’s adroitness in switching from Xhosa to English in order to give a truly verbatim account of her encounter with the policeman. Code-switching, however, apart from being realistic, is also an informal speech form which is suitable for humour (see Apte 1985:195).

### **3.2.7 To make social interaction easier and more enjoyable**

In South Africa, particularly during the apartheid years, Black people often had to leave their homes and families in order to find work in the urban areas. People were thus forced to create new “families” and close social ties with complete strangers, often in difficult situations. For example, many people would have to live with distant relatives in crowded houses, others in all-male hostels or in squatter settlements. In these circumstances, in the absence of an intimate kinship network, humour was, and still is, a way of creating new ties, of asserting special friendships and of easing communication with strangers. Zijderveld (1983:47) notes that joking and laughter unite people, even bringing together people who were previously unknown to each other, or otherwise had little to say to each other. McGhee (1988:123) contends that humour serves as a “social lubricant”, making social interaction easier and more enjoyable:

The individual who knows when and how to use humor puts others at ease and creates an environment in which all forms of communication are easier.

Mulkay (1988:92) observes that humour can be offered and received purely as an “agreeable diversion” and as an initiator of “that special form of enjoyment which finds expression in collective laughter”. This kind of “frivolous” humour for humour’s sake often manifests itself in creative word play, the situation with Xhosa being even more interesting because there is a unique interaction and relationship between Xhosa and English. Apte observes that “interlingual puns” occur

when individuals use a lexical item from a language that is phonetically similar to a lexical item from another but has a different meaning. Such puns are especially noted when one of the meanings is obscene. (1985:181)

Thus, in Xhosa, the singer Teddy Pendergrass may be referred to as *Utheth'epheth'iglas*i (He speaks holding a glass) and (somewhat lasciviously) “Newspaper Canada” (an obviously fictitious rag) is *Inyo ipheph'inkanda* (the vagina is ducking from the penis). This kind of comic creation allows people to get closer together, and to share their wit in common. What often happens in a situation like this is that one person will have one interlingual pun which will then prompt someone to tell another, and so on. The subsequent laughter and interaction breaks down previous walls and encourages people to get to know one another better.

Another example of humour functioning as a “social lubricant” can be found in Xhosa beer-drinking ceremonies, which, according to P.A. McAllister (1988:86),

dramatize the social norms and values on which social organization is based — respect for the elders, the importance of good neighbourliness, obligations to kin, and so on — and they relate these values to social practice.

The function of humour in this kind of setting is in direct opposition to the type examined in 3.2.6, since here it is used to reinforce and sustain the status quo, instead of to undermine it. McAllister (1988:86) moreover observes that the beer-drinking process includes dramatic oratory:

Senior men frequently vie with each other in trying to make forceful, effective or *amusing* speeches. [my emphasis]

An example of a speech which elicited much laughter was the one delivered by Shoti of the the Ntlane clan and addressed to Mgilimbane, who had recently returned from work where he had managed to save a great deal. Shoti says of Mgilimbane:

He would harvest more maize than people who used six oxen.  
(Truly!) [Laughter]  
When the sod fell on its face he would stop his oxen, even if he was alone, and turn it so that it lay on its side. (Truly!)  
[Laughter] (McAllister 1988:92)

Some people use coarse, provocative and humorous language in order to cover up social embarrassment. My research assistant recorded the following conversation between himself and an old acquaintance he had not seen for some time. The acquaintance knew that my assistant was interested in getting some jokes from him (as he was a well-known wit) but was obviously feeling a little uneasy by the encounter. Note how his conversation starts in a humorous self-deprecatory way and is punctuated by an almost constant flow of references to the body and bodily functions:

“Val’umnyango sana. Uyabona ke mfowethu ndikhulile ngoku. Iindevu zintath’ ezimhlophe. Ndingaphezu kwamashum’ amane eminyaka kodwa ndikhula izinyo lokugqibela lomhlathi, endandilikhuphile.”

“Iyenzeka loo nto?”

“Ewe, nantsi. Nal’ izinyo liphumile kum. Yiza, faka umnwe wakho apha emlonyeni uve.”

“Hayi, andicingi, uza kundiluma.”

“Andisoze. Nyhani, ndingakuprovela.”

“Hayi, ayikho loo nto.”

“Kangangokuba kuqala ndandicing’ ukuba ndiza kuba ne ... nesilonda esikhulu apha emlonyeni. Utheni lo mngxunya mkhul’ ulapha? *The next thing* xa ndifak’ umcinga ndisithi, tyhini, kukhul’ izinyo. Awu, yakhohlela laa nto. (Utsho ekhohlela) Kufunek’ ukhohlel’ okweBhulu. Ibhulw’ elinemali.”

“OkweBhulu, likhohlela njani?”

“IBhulw’ elinemali xa likhohlelayo alikhohleli njengawe usisilambi. Uyeva, yindlala leyo. IBhulw’ elinemali xa likhohlelayo lithi (uyakhohlela) kuphum’ sisikhohlela. Lithi, “*Bastard!*” Nyhani ke, isikhohlela yibastard kuba akukh’ apho sifunwa khona.”

“Ngoku lithuk’ esiya sikhohlela?”

“Ewe, kodwa siphuma kulo.”

(Close the door baby, do you see my chap how I’ve grown? I’ve got three white hairs in my beard. I’m over forty but I’m still growing my wisdom tooth, the one I had taken out.)

“Can that happen?”

“Yes, here it is. Here is the tooth that has come out. Here, put your finger in my mouth and feel it.”

“I don’t think so, you may bite.”

“I won’t. Look I can prove it to you.”

“There is no such thing.”

“So much so that at first I thought I had a big ulcer in my mouth. What’s this big hole here? The next thing I put a

match in and I said hey, it is a tooth. Oh, there he goes coughing. (coughs) You must cough like a Boer, a Boer who has money.”

“Like a Boer? How does a Boer cough?”

“A Boer who has money doesn’t cough like you poor people. That is famine. When a Boer coughs, spit comes out. It sounds like “Bastard!” His spit is a bastard because it is not wanted.”

“He curses his spit?”

“Yes, but it comes out of him.”)

As Chiaro (1992:118) has noted, people can choose to recount an event in a serious or a humorous way. Often we know that a person has adopted a humorous mode by the fact that they poke fun at themselves — which is what the narrator in the above extract does. This is often done to ease an otherwise tense social situation. But how does the wit in the above extract make what he says humorous? Firstly the style is casual and chatty, he refers to the other person as *sana* (baby) and *mfowethu* (my chap). He also acknowledges his age and refers to his teeth, all intimate details which are usually omitted in serious discourse. He even asks the recipient to put his finger in his mouth — thus attempting to break down further social barriers and inhibitions.

In the sequence about the Boer’s cough, the narrator is assuming a knowledge of a stereotypical kind of “Boer” and a knowledge of the word “bastard”, the meaning of which he uses creatively and humorously. There is also an instance of incongruity and absurdity when he exhorts the recipient to “cough like a Boer who has money”. Coughing and wealth do not usually go together, but we are aware that we are participating in humorous discourse and so do not question the logic of the remark.

It is also significant that the speaker, like the woman narrating her encounter with the policeman in the example cited above, in this instance frequently code-switches. Apte's observation (1985:194) on code-switching in America has some relevance for the South African situation:

Code switching for the development of humor seems more prevalent among blacks in the United States, who emphasize verbal skills and performance more than other groups in American culture.

Although Xhosa society is traditionally highly structured and hierarchical, the urban influence has introduced greater licence and ease of communication between the old and the young and between men and women. Therefore because in the past it would have been very uncommon to hear a woman talk casually with her father-in-law, examples of such laxity, though less unusual, are still regarded as shockingly incongruous and thus funny. An announcer on Radio Xhosa recently noted that these days you might even hear a woman say to her father-in-law "*Undiphe amanzi wena mntu sele umile*" (Could you get me some water while you're up) or criticize his smoking habit thus: "*Ho tata, lo mzi soloko ungathi kubasiwe!*" (Wow dad, this house looks as if there is a constant fire being made [inside]!) Taken out of context, these examples are not humorous, but examined within the cultural paradigm of Xhosa culture they are inappropriate and thus comic in their crudity. This further underlines Apte's thesis (1985:16) that an analysis of the humour of a particular culture provides important insights into the workings of that culture. He comments that

humor is by and large culture based and ... can be a major conceptual and methodological tool for gaining insights into cultural systems.



Adopting the humorous mode in Xhosa, as in most cultures, allows for much playful criticism to be directed petty vices or eccentricities, as well as more culpable sins. Another light-hearted example is the observation of a certain man, who, having seen his skinny neighbour walking in his pyjamas, tells him “*Ndikubonile kusasa mmelwane. Uyincutshe yemilingo, ndibone indlela ohamba ngayo ngeengalo ude ube ngathi uhamba ngemilenze.*” (“I saw you this morning walking with your arms as if they were legs — you are an excellent magician.”) In a similar vein, an old woman was overheard criticizing her lazy grandson: “*Hayi ungalunga ukuba ngumantshingilane uhlale ehekeni imini yonke.*” (“You should be a nightwatchman and sit at the gate all day long.”) While the obliqueness of the insult inhibits the degree of offence that can be taken, the sarcasm is transparent and effective. A person who is suspected of stealing may be the recipient of this remark: “*Bayeba abantu baseNgcobo. Beba nompha lo ungasenambona.*” (“The people of Engcobo steal. They will even steal any empty mealie cob.”) A member of one clan might say to a member of another “*Ayayithanda inyama amaZizi*” (“The Zizis really like meat”) to which the response could be “*Akakho mntu oyilahlela kuthi*” (“Nobody throws it to us” — i.e. everyone likes it).

Giving people names that aptly describe some defect is a common way of saying what you want to say without hurting anyone’s feelings since it will be understood that you are “only joking”. A man with a big stomach could be referred to by his friends as *Usisu-sikhulu* (The big-stomached-one), someone who smokes a lot of marijuana is *UNtsangweni* (The one in marijuana) and a person with bad pimples is *UNdubula* (The toad-one).

Jolobe (1970:70-71) provides some good examples of the type of name that would be bestowed on White shopkeepers in the rural areas:

Okuya bezingekandi kakhulu iintsimbi zamehlo phakathi kwabaNtsundu ubesakuthi oMhlophe ofike enxiba zona kwaoko kube sekuthiwa nguMehlomane ukubizwa kwakhe. Umfo osisiqololwane enengxeba isiqingqi sendodana ebenganyali ukuzizuzela igama lokuba nguMafutha. Umfo oyindlezane ububele ubesele eya kubizwa ngokuba nguThandabantu.

(In the days when the wearing of spectacles was not so common among the brown people, a white person who wore these on his arrival among them would, quite frequently, gain for himself the name of Mehlomane, i.e. Four-eyes. A strong hefty man with plenty of "beef" about him would be given the name of Mafutha, i.e. Fatty. A gentle man with a kindly disposition would be named Thandabantu, i.e. Lover of the people.) (translation in Mahlasela 1973(b):13)

Mr Eric Gqabaza, the editor of the Xhosa newspaper *Imvo*, informs me that sometimes new names are created to replace old ones with bad connotations. Thus the (formerly all-White) Springbok rugby players are now referred to as the *amabhokobhoko* — a playful yet meaningless corruption of the word "bok". Names not only allow for playful criticism but also encourage closeness and honesty in personal relationships and provide a way of reinventing history.

## SUMMARY

As Zijderveld observes,

humour and laughter are essential to human existence and social life. (1983:1)

In this chapter I have discussed the many functions of humour, particularly with reference to Xhosa life, culture and history. It has been shown that humour provided an indispensable tool during a time of great oppression in South Africa, and that, while not providing the revolutionary function that Mulkey would have it

perform (Mulkay 1988), it nevertheless frequently enabled people to transcend the debilitating effects of apartheid. The functions of Xhosa humour should moreover be seen as being continually in flux, as new problems and new realities require fresh critical and creative perspectives.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TECHNIQUES OF XHOSA HUMOUR

Nash (1985:13) argues that the technique of humour relies greatly upon compression and brevity:

Metaphors that link laughter and explosiveness (“erupt”, “burst out”) touch on an interesting paradox: that the energies of humour, like those of a detonation, are both contractive and expansive. The quickfire gag, the punch-line, the dry aphorism, are irresistible because they compress so powerfully, imply so much in a little compass — a phrase, or even a single word.

He adds (1985:13) that comedy also depends on expansion:

Wit is planted, comedy flowers. Sometimes it flowers amazingly from a single witty seed; sometimes it is a pricking out of many varieties; sometimes it is wit grafted onto other humorous stock.

Nash’s thesis, as expressed in the second quotation, would seem to have particular reference to Xhosa comedy, for it is invariably the characters and situations that we find funny — Nojayiti, Dr Zinobee Jomsini, Sosobose and others are not created in a single sally. The comedy is often contained in a single episode, a character revealing ridiculous traits or getting involved in a sequence of farcical events. Analyzing this episodic nature of Xhosa short stories<sup>1</sup> in particular, Mtuze (1986a:84) observes that the authors

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1. Odun F. Balogen argues: “In some respects, the short story resembles drama with its emphasis on action and dialogue, concentrating as it does on the minimum of actions, making them permanently memorable by dramatizing them.” (1991:52) I would add that it is this dramatization that encourages humorous character portrayals and comic dialogue.

do not always deal with one issue through the exposition, rising action and climax and/or denouement. Instead they narrate a number of episodes or incidents.

This evaluation of Xhosa short story writers would tend to suggest that humorous expansion is cut short since each episode or incident is self-contained and does not lead on to another, so there can be no “flowering” of wit. However, the fact that the episodes are often brief and pithy would suggest that they fulfil the “brevity” prerequisite, although Mtuze (1986a:84) also berates writers for their lack of verbal economy and notes:

Despite the long history of the Xhosa folk tales, its basic structure which is characterised by a high sense of verbal economy, does not seem to have influenced the writing of the Xhosa short story.

It is important not to assume that written texts will naturally incorporate the styles and forms of oral discourse. As E. Julien (1992:46) argues,

when we abandon the search for influence, we cease to be guided by the misleading urge to prove continuity, the preservation of some authentic element from one mode to another.

Thus although in this chapter Xhosa oral and written discourse will be treated together under each heading, (acknowledging the fact that techniques of oral discourse are often incorporated in texts), they are nevertheless viewed as distinctly separate genres. I also bear in mind the fact that writers include oral techniques because

they solve or help to solve a formal or aesthetic problem that the writer faces, and they suggest at the same time facets of a particular social situation. (Julien 1992:45)

In this chapter an attempt will be made to establish how the essential techniques of humour, which are brevity, compression, expansion and “the punchline”, are incorporated in both written and oral comic discourse, and to what extent other, more culturally specific, elements are manipulated.

#### 4.1 BREVITY AND COMPRESSION

There are various extremely effective ways in which Xhosa writers and artists can compress descriptions or statements, such as the device of using names (including nicknames, praise names and names given to newly married women), insulting designations, proverbs and ideophones. It will later be shown that these witty compressions often help to expand comic texts, with certain words being suggestive of something funny, thus facilitating humorous elaboration.

##### 4.1.1 Naming

Koopman (1986:15) notes that:

The European concept is that the name *refers* to a person; the African concept is that the name *is* the person.

While names are regarded in a very serious light, they also serve as the quickest way to elicit laughter by characterizing someone as comic or as having ridiculous attributes. These names also serve as witty compressions which the author can exploit later in the narrative. Thus we have Mbhodamo (Confusion), a man whose religious beliefs are somewhat inconsistent, in Sinxo’s play “Umprofeti owacima

ilanga'' (*Imfene kaDebeza*), Ketile (Kettle) the glutton in *UNojayiti wam* and the dog loving Njengenja (Like a dog) in Siwisa's *Ndibuzen' amathongo*, to name but a few. These names allow the author to hint at characteristics and to point to certain eccentricities or traits without weakening the story. The names are, in fact, satisfying to the reader because they help to create stereotypical or stock characters who, as Abrams (1993:201) observes, are traceable to Greek comedy and persist in comic plots up to our own time.

Xhosa folktales exploit the phenomenon of stock characters, but at the same time these characters are endowed with creatively expansive names:

Amagama abantu basentsomini ayathanda ukwenziwa abe mbaxa. Isizathu soko kukuba la magama akholisa ukuba ngamagama achaza iimpawu ezithile okanye izimbo ezithile apha kubaniniwo: uSikhulumakathethi, uNomehlomancinci, uSihambangenyanga, uMangangezulu, uSiswanasibomvana, njalo njalo. (Zotwana, in Satyo et al. 1992:15)

(The names of people in *iintsomi* are often very long. The reason for this is that the names describe certain traits or habits: The-One-Who-Speaks-does-not-speak, Small-Eyes, Go-by-Night, He-is-great-and-respected, Greedy-one, etc, etc)

This tendency to use names in order to reveal characteristics is also evident in Xhosa written literature, for instance Sinxo's story "Mhla Sancama" in *Imbadu*:

Elalini apho kwangasatshiwo ukuthiwa nguNovenkile; kwakuse kusithiwa nguNomacuntsu. Elo gama wayelinikelwe eso simo sokufika emzini, athi nokuba na into ayikho, makayicuntsulelwe; ulubone ke olo gqajolokazi luphethe loo macuntsu, luyithunga elali leyo. (Sinxo 1960:10)

(In that vicinity nobody called her Novenkile, they called her Nomacuntsu. She was called this because of her habit of arriving at a household looking for a hand-out. Even if told the thing she was looking for was not available, she would just ask for a pinch of that; then you would see that tall useless one with all those pinches that she got as she wove around the location.)

The verb *ukucuntsa*, from which the name *Nomacuntsu* derives, means “to take a little of”, and thus the author is able to intimate character type from the outset. In addition, without needing further lengthy elaboration of the woman’s nature, he is able to exploit the semantic properties of this name by observing that it was her habit to expect handouts, using the verb *ukucuntsa* in *makayicuntsulelwe* to demonstrate her particular failing.

D.S. Izevbaye (1981:171) refers to the relevance of names as follows:

They draw attention to the main attributes of the characters or the aspects of their personality that are active in the story, and the characters fulfill a set of expectations in the sense that there is limited variation in their behaviour.

Praise names may also be humorous. The comic elements, according to Turner (1990:58) in her discussion on Zulu praises,

may even originate from a person’s childhood days, when he may have been known by such *isithopho* or nicknames as “the one with bandy legs” or “the one with flapping ears.”

Xhosa writers often refer to a person’s praises by way of witty characterization, as in Jordan’s story “Iindonga ziwelene” (in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*), in which the following praises of the main character introduce the story:

Lirhamba lasezixhotyeni,  
Iqotha-qikili, umalala-ngomhlana,  
Iseph’ empuncu-mpuncu,  
Unanko-nanko! namhl’ angenzanga nto.

(Puff-adder of the rocks,  
Cunning one who lies on the back,  
Slippery soap,  
There he is! Even when he has done nothing.) (Jordan n.d.:4)



In the humour of everyday conversation, nicknames (*iziteketiso*) are also used for great comic effect:

Many individuals, perhaps even most, carry nicknames or petnames by which they are fondly known to others. (S.J. Neethling 1994:88)

The revelation of someone hearing their own nickname for the first time can serve as the punchline to a story. For example, there is an anecdote about a vain and egotistical man who had been nicknamed *GqwidiSpoil* (roughly translatable as Narcissus) by the village. One day someone announced his arrival “*Nanku uGqwidiSpoil esiza*”, (“Here comes GqwidiSpoil”), and was asked by a woman, “*Ngubani onguGqwidiSpoil?*” (“Who is GqwidiSpoil?”) When he entered the house the same woman asked, “*O, unguwe onguGqwidiSpoil?*” (“Oh, are you GqwidiSpoil?”) to which the man replied crossly, “*Ngubani onguGqwidiSpoil?*” (“Who is GqwidiSpoil?”) and was furious to learn that he had a nickname of which he could not be proud. Examples of other illustrative nicknames are *UMnqayulambile* (Hungry-stick) for a person who loves fighting; *USilangentungo* (Grind-with-the-shinbone) for a person who is reluctant to make beer but goes around on foot looking for it; *Nyawolwambethindlela* (Foot-hits-the-road) for someone who likes walking.

Xhosa literature, like Russian literature, exploits the culture’s naming system. Thus in the first chapter of *UNojayiti wam Sinxo* refers to his wife, Nojayiti, in eight different ways. He initially shortens her name to *Jayiti* (p.5: para.1), then he refers to the name the children call her by, *Nogqwashu* (p.5: para.1), -*gqwashu*-meaning “to act or speak with vehemence”. She is also *maMngwevu*, (a clan name) and later in chapter four she is *umNgwevukazi* (the Grey lady) and

*Tshangisa* (another clan name) (p.5: both para.4). When she is very angry (p.6: para.5) she is *loo ngwekazi* (that tigress), but when he tries to soften her (p.6: para.8) he calls her *Fazile*, *Sikhomo* (both endearments) and *molokazana kabawo* (daughter-in-law of father).

The second, third and fourth names (*Nogqwashu*, *maMngwevu*, *umNgwevukazi*) all give important clues as to the nature of Nojayiti's character, and allow for any subsequent (comic) actions by her to be fully appreciated by the reader. However, the names that Koranti uses when he is trying to console his wife — *Fazile*, *Sikhomo* and *molokazana kabawo* — contrast sharply with the previous ones, and hint at a certain degree of hypocrisy and even confusion on his part, characteristics that are subsequently expanded upon in the narrative.

The names *Jayiti* and *Fazile* are particularly humorous when uttered by a man, since such endearments are inconsistent with the Xhosa notion of masculine discourse, while the paraphrase *molokazana kabawo* (daughter-in-law of father) is a witty overstatement of the more simple *nkosikazi yam* (my wife). While the author plays with the character of Koranti, he at the same time allows Koranti to "play" with Nojayiti. By extravagantly flattering his wife, Koranti mischievously attempts to amuse her, to charm her, to appeal to her vanity and to win her over. In addition, the cumulative effect of his using every one of his wife's clan names (an excessive performance by normal standards) is that of high comedy.

All these names point to the fact that while Nojayiti is a comic character, she is not a flat character, as her temperament and motivations are as complex and, at times, as enigmatic as her names suggest. Izevbaye (1981:173) notes that the author may choose to use many names for a character because

it is one way of acknowledging, through the use of multiple names, the hundred and one facets of the personality of individuals in different roles and with different motives.

Koranti himself plays many roles — those of husband, father, neighbour and uncle — but still suffers some indignity when his son, returning from Johannesburg, chooses to call him *Khehle*, an appellation which could be taken literally to indicate ‘a man past middle age’ or, in its more pejorative figurative sense, could refer to the ideophonic expression *ukuthi khehle* (to be quite useless). It is obvious what meaning Koranti senses because he muses that:

kusithiwa, ‘Khehle’, ndibe mna ndingaboni nyene indawo  
ethe khehlele apha kum. (Sinxo 1986a:22)

(I was called Khehle, but I did not see anything that was  
useless about me.)

#### 4.1.2 Insults

The Xhosa lexicon abounds with insulting expressions which can be amusing and are extensively used by writers of Xhosa comedy, particularly in the development of comic characters who often exhibit quick tempers. For example the word ‘fool’ can broadly be translated as: *isidenge*, *isibhanxa*, *isirhangarhanga*, *isiphukuphuku*, *isiyatha*, *umuncu*, *umuncwane*, *isityhakala*, *isihakahaka*, *isityabulongwe*, *isanya-mtya*, amongst others. Insulting words often contain more than one syllable and are frequently reduplicated or compound nouns. It is also important to note that insults and even more coarse expressions were (and still are) common in the speech of the *amaqaba* (unconverted). Missionary and other western influences were successful in censoring the more extreme forms of Xhosa

abuse, resulting in a tension between those perceived as rough and unsophisticated (the *amaqaba*) and those who had adopted the more “polite” style of the west. Also significant is the fact that committing words to paper seems to militate against the authentic expression of abuse — abuse, it would seem, is best expressed orally because gesture, facial expression and tone of voice are important indicators of intent.

Using *UNojayiti wam* as an example, I will show that insulting and negative terminology can help in creating comic situations. In Chapter One Koranti refers to his son Balafuthi as *esi silekehlana sigezayo* (this naughty rascal) (p.6: para.2), while his wife calls her husband *vilandini* (a lazy man) (p.6 para.7). Later on (p.7: para.7) Koranti even attributes foolishness to himself when he says *ndandijonge loo mbiza ngawesidenge amehlo* (I had looked at that pot with foolish eyes), and also notes that his wife sees him as *esi sidlakudla sendoda* (this glutton of a man) (p.8: para.1). One of Koranti’s friends, who gives the impression that he has his wife firmly under control, is revealed as a liar when Koranti overhears her shouting at him: “*Hamba! Hamba apha, sibhanxandini<sup>2</sup> sendoda...*” (“Go! Get out of here you fool of a man...”) (p.11 para.8).

Jordan, too, makes use of the humour implicit in insults in his essay “Imasi” in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* when he relates the following humorous incident:

Esakha senza into enjalo sinomfazi sayifumana into esasiyifuna. Sasisiya kwintlanganiso yezilumko ezo, saza ke sathabatha itikiti sakhwela uloliwe. Sithe xa siphi-phi-phi, suka salibala shici ukuba kanene besisiya phi na. Kwabonakala ukuba masikhe sihle kwisikhululo esithile sibethe ithelefone sibhekise ekhaya sibuze emfazini ukuba kanene besisiya phi

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2. The *-ndini* suffix can indicate pejoration or impatience.

na. Waphendula ngomsindo umfazi, wathi, “*Sibhanxandini sendoda! Akunatikiti, ungakhangeli kulo nje?*” Zininzi ke ezinye iimbali zezilumko ezabe zinesi sifo semasi. [my emphasis] (Jordan n.d.:88)

(The one who made this mistake was a married man. He was going to a meeting for the wise men, so he got a ticket and boarded the train. On the way he tried to think about where he was going, but he could not remember. He decided to get off at the next station and phone his wife and ask her. His wife was very furious and replied, “*You stupid fool of a man! Haven’t you got a ticket? Can’t you look at your ticket?*” There are many other stories of these wise men who had this disease of forgetfulness.)

In *UNojayiti wam* there is a violent exchange of invective when Nojayiti fights with Nosamani, a woman whose son she suspects of being a bad influence on her son. Each of the women is convinced of the innocence of her own child, and both use language in order to demonstrate the extent of their ire. For example Nojayiti exclaims: “*Akuyiboni into embi kunene eyenziwa leli hilihili lakho lenkwenkwe ukuphikela ukuhilizisa usana lwam!*” (“Do you not see the bad things that have been done by this layabout boy of yours who tried to corrupt my baby!”) (p.41). Later she refers to the same boy as *eli tshivela* (this cheat) (p.41), at which point her rival rises to the occasion and responds by calling Balafuthi *elaa geza lakho lomntwana* (that lunatic of a child of yours) (p.41). The words *ixoki* (liar) and *menemenekazi* (rogue) are also brandished about as the women are finally separated by Koranti, who is extremely worried that this unseemly squabble might discredit the reputations of the women, who are both respected members of the church. Koranti is also shocked at some of the things his wife has been called and notes, “*Amazwi okugqibela kaMaRhadebe ayendenze umsindokazi omkhulu, lawo wayesithi umkam endimthanda kangaka limenemene.*” (“The last words of MaRhadebe which really angered me were those that referred to my beloved wife as a rogue.”) (p.42). This reflection is humorous because the author is able to

make subtle ironic reference to Koranti's own ambiguous relationship with his wife.

Siwisa's characters also use highly disparaging language when angered, such as in the outburst "*Yinile, eli vuku-vuku lenkwenkwe!*" ("What is this, this low-down vagabond of a boy!") (*Ndibuzen' amathongo*:65), while in Satyo's *Etshatile engatshatanga* Simeli's wife calls his mistress *nyakunyakundini* (scum) (1990:79).

It is evident from all the above examples that vitriolic exchanges and expressions are used effectively in the creation of lively dialogue in Xhosa narrative, and that this dialogue is an important aspect of the development of character. It is also significant that most of the belligerent outbursts come from women and it is as much the incongruity of their behaviour (with traditional stereotypes) as what they actually say that elicits laughter.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Comic dialogue

As has been noted, dialogue is an indispensable aspect of Xhosa comic discourse since it is essential for the creation of real characters. Much of what is said by comic characters in Xhosa fiction is recognizable — it is the speech of ordinary people, only somewhat exaggerated. The brilliance of Xhosa dialogue can be attributed to its liveliness, its naturalness, its capacity to allow the reader to

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3. It could be argued that to a certain extent, Xhosa male writers create some of their comedy by trivializing women's talk (see D. Cameron 1985:157). Thus while women's speech in comic Xhosa texts often opposes and challenges male dominance, the authors highlight its ludicrous and outrageous nature, rather than its gutsy and courageous opposition to the masculine conception of genteel, respectful women's speech.

“hear” what is being said. Writers such as Jordan, Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe are, in addition, able to make the “two voices” of Xhosa discourse heard through the creation of comic exchanges between apologists for westernism (such as school inspectors and priests) and those who flout authority and imported conventions and religion. Take for example the speech of Jordan’s old man Tolo (“Ixhego lasemaTolweni” in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*), who gives his reasons for not wanting to convert to Christianity and his opinion of his brother who, he feels, has been indoctrinated:

“Hayi, aniyiqondi nina le yomninawa wam. Loo ndoda yasuka yaphandlwa! Ukuphandlwa ke asiyiyo nento ukubuphanga ubudoda emntwini. Anikhe nibabone na abantu abaphandliweyo? Nokuba indoda ihlutha kangakanani na, ukuba ikhe yaphandlwa, *Nomagaga!* uza kuyibon’ iwohlaka, iboqoka ngoku, ubuso obu bungamathambo, kugongqoke iintlafuno nezidlele, intamo le seyiphume yangaka! Kungaba njalo ke bupheli le ubudoda. Yiloo nto qha egqobhokise umninawa wam!” (Jordan n.d.:44)

(“You don’t understand how my younger brother was dazzled. And once a man is dazzled his manhood goes away. Have you ever seen people when they are dazzled? No matter how rich the man is, if he is dazzled, *Nomagaga!* You will see him losing weight with a bony face, even the cheeks and temples are just bones and the neck sticks out like this. Once things are like that his manhood is over. That is the only reason my brother is like that.”)

This outburst contrasts effectively with his friend’s cool reasoning as to why he shouldn’t convert (after all his brother is a preacher and isn’t one enough?):

“Hayi, asibobulumko ukuba amadoda omzi aphelele ntweninye. Kwanele xa aphaya umkhuluwa wam. Nguye oza kundiyaleza apho ezinkosini.” (Jordan n.d.:44)

(“No, it is not wise for the the men of the household all to do one thing. It is enough that my elder brother is there. He can send the message about me to the chiefs.”)

As has been shown, some of the best comic dialogue in Xhosa fiction can be found in indignant outbursts, angry arguments and vitriolic criticism. It would seem that when dealing with situations that require passionate emotions, Xhosa writers excel in rendering such emotions comic. A classic example is the conversation of the “barking woman” with the priest in “Umfazi Okhonkothayo” (*Masibaliselane*):

“Phofu umyeni lo wakho ungumntu onomsindo imo le yakhe?”

“Yeka! Liphimpi! Ungambona engathi umbuna, lihanahanisa elinkone, ndifung’ uMxumbu!”

“Unjani kodwa wena, nkosikazi, ukukhathazwa ngumsindo?”

“Xa sendinawo akungethandi, Mfundisi. Ndaziwa ngawo mna kwasebuntwaneni. Noma ondizalayo wayengunomadudwane. Thina siluhlobo lomsindo! Makangagezeli kuthi umshumayeli wakho! Umdikonana wakho!”

“Ngumshumayeli wakho nawe, ngumDikoni nakuwe, yindoda yakho, yinkosi yomzi wakho, nkosikazi.”

“O-o-o! Kuba kanene usitsho nje Mfundisi, ngumzalwana wakho, ligosa lakho, unyana wakho ke, mTshawe!” Utsho ekhwaza ke lo mntu. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:71)

(“But, by the way, is your husband aggressive by nature?”)

“What do you mean! He is a cobra! You might see him and think him tame, but he is an outright hypocrite, I swear by Mxumbu!”

“And what about your own temper, lady, are you troubled by anger?”

“When I am angry you wouldn’t like it, minister. I have been known for my temper since childhood, even my own mother was like a scorpion. We are an aggressive family. Your priest must not play those silly tricks with us! Your little deacon!”

“He is also your priest and your deacon, he is your husband, the lord of your house, lady.”

“O-o-o! You say that because he is a member and elder in your church, your son Mtshawe!” she said this shouting.)

The brilliance of the above exchange derives from the fact that the dialogue is so good the author does not need to include any extraneous descriptions of how the words were said — this only occurs right at the conclusion with *Utsho ekhwaza ke lo mntu* (She said this shouting). The fierceness of the vocabulary the woman uses



is enough indication of her temper and bellicose disposition. Also important in this exchange is the way in which the woman's rage is contrasted with the priest's mild, soothing manner. His simple, rather understated remark "*Unjani kodwa wena, nkosikazi, ukukhathazwa ngumsindo?*" ("And what about your own temper, lady, are you troubled by anger?") is complemented by the woman's hyperbolic response "*Xa sendinawo akungethandi, Mfundisi. Ndaziwa ngawo mna kwasebuntwaneni. Noma ondizalayo wayengunomadudwane.*" ("When I am angry, you wouldn't like it, minister. I have been known for my temper since childhood, even my own mother was like a scorpion.") Other significant humorous devices evident in the dialogue are the woman's use of animal terms for her husband and herself — he is an *iphimpi* (a cobra) and her mother, whom she resembles, is referred to as *unomadudwane* (a scorpion) — and the rhythmic mirroring of possessive phrases in the final two exchanges when the priest's "*ngumshumayeli wakho...yindoda yakho, yinkosi yomzi wakho*" ("he is your priest ..., he is your husband, the lord of your house") is counterbalanced by her "*ngumzalwana wakho, ligosa lakho, unyana wakho*" ("he is a member and elder in your church, your son").

Mtuzze is also noted for his use of dialogue as an effective way of describing character. Botha (1986:136) reflects on his particular techniques:

Mtuzze maak in sy verhale tot 'n sekere mate suksesvol gebruik van dialoog as karakteriseringstegniek. Benewens die meer konvensionele vorme van dialoog, eksperimenteer hy egter ook in 'n verhaal soos *Umsinga* (1973) op uiters geslaagde wyse met gemeenskapsdialoog as karakteriseringstegniek. Voorbeelde hiervan kom op verspreide basis in die teks voor en dra oor die algemeen daartoe by om 'n duideliker beeld van die hoofkarakter op te bou en te ontwikkel.

(In his stories Mtuzze uses dialogue as a characterization technique with some success. Besides the more conventional

forms of dialogue, however, he also experiments most successfully in stories such as *Umsinga* with community dialogue as a technique for characterization. Examples of this are distributed through the text and generally contribute to building up and developing a clearer picture of the main character.)

Botha (1986:137) gives examples from *Umsinga* to illustrate his analysis:

Tydens Philabadane se verblyf in Stellenbosch doen hy homself as 'n swierbol voor. Die indruk wat dit by die plaaslike gemeenskap laat, word van tyd tot tyd effektief weerspieël aan die hand van opmerkings en kommentaar. Met verwysing na Philabadane se uitspattige kleredrag merk 'n onbekende vrou bv. op: "Ngebesithi nguFather Christmas, ..." (p.58) ... Wanneer Philabadane met sy uitspattige kleredrag op straat verskyn, roep die mense telkens uit: "Tshintsha, Ntozodidi!" (p.57) ... Tydens die geleentheid waar Philabadane in die openbaar vir Nothozamile ignoreer en in sy motor wegry, roep 'n onbekende bruinman ontsteld uit: "Hamba minyaka!"

(During Philabadane's stay in Stellenbosch he passes himself off as a playboy. The impression which this makes on the local community is effectively reflected from time to time through remarks and comment. With reference to Philabadane's flamboyant style of dress, for example, an unknown women remarks: "He looks like father Christmas..." (p.58) ... Whenever Philabadane appears in the street flamboyantly dressed, the people cry: "Change, you dandy!" (p.57) On the occasion when Philabadane ignores Nothozamile publicly and drives off in his car, an unknown coloured man cries out in agitation: "Things haven't changed!")

By contrast, the dialogue in Xhosa comic dramas is often fairly slapstick and its success relies to a great extent on the actor's ability to mimic and exaggerate. For example in the play "Iqhingha aliphekwa" (in *Imidlalo yokulinganiswa*) Siwisa (1963:83) has the terrified and guilty teacher react to the school inspector as follows:

Longwe: (etsala isitulo, ehlala) Masiqalise ke, zinkosi! Baphi abantwana? (ebala abantwana) Baphandle?  
Nzingo: Ab-b-ba-kho! nk-n-m-m-hl-hloli! Ab-b-be-zanga, n-n-amhl-....!

Longwe: Uthi baphelele apha abantwana bakho? (enikina intloko) Nc...nc...nc... Ayinakho ukulunga le nto! Bangaphi kuwe titshalakazi?

Qoqosho: (umi ngasetafileni, engcangcazela, esonge izandla) Abakho, mhloli! (evova)

Longwe: Ngekhe ilunge le nto Mnumzana Nzingo! Akukho sikolo apha! (ebajonga bobabini) Akafundisi nto konke utitshalakazi namhlanje! Uthini ngaloo nto?

Nzingo: B-b-ba-y-yeza, m-m-hloli! Ba-ba-dla ng-ngokufika em-mi-ni, k-k-ka-khulu!

Longwe: (ebhala) Bafika emini? Kungokuba besingene nini isikolo?

Nzingo: Ng-ngo-9!

Longwe: (emjonga) Ubungatsho ukuthi ngo-8?

Nzingo: (esonwaya intloko) Mna! O! Ewe, hayi, ewe! ng-ngo-, n-n-na-yi-e-yi-yit! Be-be-ndi-pha-zama! (ekhangela ixesha)

(Longwe: (pulling a chair and sitting down) Let us start gentlemen. Where are the children? (counting the children) Are they outside?)

Nzingo: Th-th-ey a-a-re n-n-n-o-o-t here si-in-n-n-sp-ector. Th-th-ey d-id n-n-n-o-o-t c-c-c-o-o-me t-t-t-o-d-...!

Longwe: Do you mean to say that these are the only children you've got here? (shaking his head) Tsk, tsk, this is not going to work. How many have you got ma'am?

Qoqosho: (standing at the table shaking, with folded arms) None, inspector! (curtseying)

Longwe: This will never work, Mr Nzingo. There is no school like this. (looking at them both) Your lady teacher is teaching absolutely nothing today. What do you say about that?

Nzingo: Th-th-e-e-y are c-c-c-c-o-o-o-ming in-n-n-n-s-s-sp-e-c-c-tor. Th-th-th-e-e-y al-l-ways c-c-ome v-v-e-e-ry late!

Longwe: (writing) They always come very late? What time does the school start?

Nzingo: At-at-9 o'clock!

Longwe: (looking at him) Didn't you say 8 o'clock?

Nzingo: (scratching his head) Me, oh, yes. No, yes, a-a-t 9, 8, I made a mistake! (looking at the time))

The panicky stuttering of the teacher effectively contrasts with the serious, authoritative tone of the inspector and succeeds in making this exchange amusing. At times, however, Siwisa tends to over-indulge this technique with the result that it becomes predictable and thus less funny.

#### 4.1.4 The folktale influence

C. T. Msimang (1983:183), in his seminal study *Folktale influence on the Zulu novel*, observes that:

In most cultures, folktales are characterized by very little description. This is true also for Zulu folktales. The reason is that the artist dramatizes rather than narrates ... Events are revealed rather than described. The pace of the story is very fast and there is utmost economy of words.

Msimang also notes the importance of dialogue (p.184), song (p.191) and humour (p.185) in folktales and quotes Cope as saying that animal stories "...give a critical yet tolerant and humorous assessment of human nature." (p.185) While the positive contribution of folktales on Xhosa literature in general may be controversial (see Botha, 1986:287; S.O. Iyasere, 1972:108) I would argue that in the field of Xhosa comedy the influence of oral narrative is evident in the vibrant dialogue, the vivid descriptions of movement and physicality and in the themes which to a large extent exploit and invert the good/bad, strong/weak dichotomies. Comic works that have been analysed in this thesis bear witness to this — for example in *UNojayiti wam* the traditional roles of strong man/weak woman are inverted, in "*USosobose*" (*Masibaliselane*) the author introduces a song (*USosobose uyafa!* "Sosobose is dying"), with the movement of the dance being vividly described as if for performance (p.56).

Themes such as marriage, greed, arrogance and stupidity, which are common in folktales, are reflected in comic fiction in which the author is best able to satirize and ridicule by way of dialogue and character description. In written literature, however, the description of the "fool" is often sufficient, while in the folktale he

is given some physical or moral punishment. M.H. Abrams' definition (1993:97) of the *iron* and the *alazon* is thus more appropriate for Xhosa folktales than it is for written literature:

In Greek comedy the character called the *iron* was a "dissembler", who characteristically spoke in an understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the *alazon* — the self-deceiving and stupid braggart.

The little child who is kept in the monster's bag but who bravely sings of her fate (see Zotwana 1992:31) can be seen as the *iron*, a character who, although weak, eventually triumphs because of her cunning. The same is true of the tortoise, who, although slow and ponderous, is frequently the hero of Xhosa folktales, while the lion and large monsters are duped because of their stupidity and vanity. In Xhosa comic fiction the characteristics of the *alazon* are emphasized and ridiculed and the contrasting figure of the *iron* is not always present. Thus the gluttons, drunks, layabouts and egotists already mentioned in this thesis get their come-uppance more frequently as a result of their own actions than by the doings of some intelligent *iron*.

The fate of folktale characters is moreover often revealed in episodes which, according to Msimang (1983:71), are

series of events which are loosely connected; each one having its own story with its conflict and resolution.

The episodic narrative structure is employed by writers of comic fiction because, like tellers of folktales, their primary aim is entertainment. Characters need to be sharply and comically drawn (as they are in folktales) and the action (the plot) must evolve rapidly. Abrams (1993:23) maintains:

Characters are the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with moral, dispositional, and emotional qualities that are expressed in what they say — the *dialogue* — and by what they do — the *action*.

The episodic folktale format allows the author to increase the comedy of the situation by compression through dialogue and action, rather than detract from it by lengthy explanations. This technique is largely adhered to in all successful comic writings in Xhosa. Writers such as Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe introduce us to easily identifiable characters whose foibles are satirized in a series of amusing incidents which, to quote from B. Lindfors' comment (1971:48) on T.M. Aluko's similarly episodic novel *Kinsmen and Foremen*, "are skilfully strung together and knotted at the end into a hilarious climax."

A parallel can be drawn between the episodic writings of Xhosa writers and those of Herman Charles Bosman and Perceval Gibbon (both successful South African short story writers in English of the early and mid 20th century). C. MacKenzie (1994:318) comments on the success of this style of narrative:

The success of the formula they adopted clearly encouraged them to produce successive stories with the same narrative structure.

MacKenzie also notes, as further evidence of the folk tale influence, that

the introduction into the written story form of fictional narrator and his or her narrating "voice" constitutes an attempt to capture the ambience of the spoken word on the written page. (1994:312)

This "voice" is often not that of the author, but of a different character, such as Koranti in *UNojayiti wam*. In this regard it is important to bear in mind Bakhtin's

distinction between “simple *skaz*” (*skaz* = speech) and “parodistic *skaz*” as summarized by MacKenzie (1994:312-313):

In simple *skaz* no attempt is made to stylize another person’s individual manner of speech, the narrative is monologic in nature (in other words, direct authorial discourse prevails), and the narrative therefore “directly expresses the intention of the author” ... Parodistic *skaz*, on the other hand, introduces a storyteller figure precisely because of the individual attributes, attitudes and intonation that he or she brings to the story.

Sinxo parodies the kind of henpecked man Koranti represents in *UNojayiti wam* and in so doing is able to produce stories with a greater degree of irony than those of Siwisa, in which simple *skaz* is employed. Below are extracts from Siwisa and Sinxo with the responses of the first person narrator in italics in order to facilitate comparison:

*Siwisa* (from “Utshatile uNjengenja” in *Ndibuzen’ amathongo* n.d.:73):

Emarikeni eMonti ngenye intsasa ndiva ngomntu endibetha egxalabeni, ebulisa.

“Tyhini, hello Teach. Ufike nini apha?”

“Ungubani kanene mfo?” *ndibuzile, phofu ubuso obu ndibunakana.*

“Tyhini ulibala msinyane, uyaguga ngoku bo Teach’, ndingu-J.J.”

(One morning while I was at the market in East London I felt somebody tapping me on the shoulder, greeting.

“Oh, hello Teach. When did you come here?”

“By the way, who are you?” *I asked, vaguely recognizing the face.*

“Really, you forget very quickly, or are you getting old, Teach, I am J.J.”)

*Sinxo* (from *UNojayiti wam* 1986:51):

“Ewe, unyanisile, Tipha...” *Kodwa andizange ndibe namandla okugqitha apho ...*  
 (“Yes, you are quite right, Tipha...” *but I could not finish my speech because I was weakened ...*)

Both of the above extracts are representative of the particular style of narration adopted by the storyteller. In Siwisa’s case the impact of the amusing character “J.J.” is lessened because of the author’s own rational response to him. It is only at the end of the story that we learn of J.J.’s deception of his bride-to-be and of his true relationship with his employer. In Sinxo’s story, however, Nojayiti’s character is constantly offset by Koranti’s (the main authorial commentator) reactions — he is frequently taken aback by her fury and emasculated by her temper. Because we are able to identify comfortably with the rationality of Siwisa’s authorial commentator the humour is less intense than when we hear Koranti’s neurotic, often feeble, inner voice. It is of course clear that the narrative role played by Koranti is quite different from that of the traditional storyteller, but what is important is, as has been noted above, his function as *a storyteller figure*.

In contrast to the above argument, the negative influence of the folktale on Xhosa fiction is, according to some critics, most noticeable when authors inject a storyteller into the narrative. Botha’s analysis (1986:286) is illustrative of this type of critique:

Dit wil dus voorkom asof die meeste van die vormlike verskynsels wat in hierdie studie t.o.v. die moderne Xhosaverhaalkuns bespreek is, direk verband hou met beïnvloeding deur die tradisionele letterkunde en dat baie van die tegniese tekortkominge wat hier aan die lig gekom het, die primêre gevolg van beïnvloeding deur die tradisionele letterkunde kan wees. Aangeleenthede soos die prominente rol van die verteller in die verhaal en die subjektiewe vertelhouding wat hy openbaar, kan bv. grootliks hieraan toegeskryf word.



(It would therefore seem that most of the formal features which have been discussed in this study with respect to modern Xhosa fiction relate directly to influence by traditional literature and that many of the technical shortcomings which have come to light here could be the primary consequence of influence by traditional literature. Aspects such as the prominent role of the narrator in the story and the subjective narrative attitude which he displays, for example, can be ascribed largely to this.)

While Botha's comment could be true for certain works of Xhosa fiction, I believe that the comic genre in Xhosa has a specific character that distinguishes it from humorous writings elsewhere in the world. It is the peculiar interweaving of voice and performance with narrative that enables the folktale to provoke laughter, and the transformation of these techniques into written narrative allows this highly satisfying comic format to endure.

#### 4.1.5 Idiomatic expressions

In *Masibaliselane* the author uses the expression *Uyinyathele ke emsileni* (You have stood on his tail) (p.17) to indicate that someone was made angry, while in *UNojayiti wam* Nojayiti scornfully observes that "*Amahash angaphum' iimpondo likhe laza lakhuthala ivila elinjengawe*" ("A horse can grow horns before such a lazy oaf as you becomes diligent") (p.7). The first expression is humorous because the implied comparison of the angry man to an animal reduces his dignity, while the second is so because it conjures up an incongruous image of a horse with horns.

Another comparison to an animal occurs in the following saying, uttered by Koranti (in *UNojayiti wam*) after he has humiliated himself by extolling the virtues

of a woman not his wife: “*ndiyinkuku esikwe umlomo ndingenanto ndingayithethayo*” (“I am a chicken whose mouth has been cut unable to utter a word”) (p.61) This expression contrasts nicely with Sinxo’s previous description of Koranti’s non-stop praises of the woman.

Another expression which uses the image of the chicken is found in Siwisa’s *Ndibuzen’ amathongo: Kaloku isisila senkuku sibonwa mhla ligquthayo* (The tail of a chicken is revealed on a windy day), figuratively meaning “Secrets are revealed in heated debates.” The expression is comic in that the image of a chicken with its tail exposing its hidden parts seems incongruous in the light of the seriousness of the intended meaning.

In “*Inxila lakwantselamanzi*” in *Masibaliselane* we have the following utterance whispered by a young man besotted by a lovely girl who ignores his attentions and walks about with an atlas covering her face: “*Hayi, manene, nokuba indityise amatye, ndiza kuyithoba kweli kratshi layo*” (literal: “No, gentlemen, even if she has made me eat stones I will reduce her pride”; figurative: “No gentlemen, even if she has dumbfounded me I am going to take her down a peg or two”) (p.113). The image the young man uses to refer to his own inarticulacy, *indityise amatye* (she has fed me stones) conjures up an appropriately comic image of a love-struck fool.

Mbovane’s story “*Ebukhweni*” in *Isagweba* contains the expression “a bird entered the house”, meaning that someone was “trapped” — *Bathi bakuthi gwiqi, yangen’ intak’ endlwini. Wafak’ irhony’ umyeni, yagungxuk’ ibhekile* (As soon as they were all gone he was caught in the trap. The groom grabbed the tin

and threw half of it back) (p.36). The saying increases the tension of the scene while at the same time compressing the action and accelerating the evolution of the plot.

Mtuze similarly employs the expression *ungabokudela umqulu iiyadi ungazibalanga* (literal: never take for granted the size of material without counting the yards; figurative: don't judge a book by its cover) in order to refer to the impression a young priest had made on his fellow travellers (in *Indlel' ecand' intlango* 1981:2). As with the example from Mbovane's work, the saying is both humorous and suggestive since it implies further revelation of character. It is useful to see this expression in context in order best to understand its well-placed wittiness:

Amaxhala aye athi hu xa loo madoda amxhawula ngezandla embungezelela kunene, emva kokugilana ethabatha ezo mpahla aziphetheyo. Le nto ibe ngummangaliso kwabo babukeleyo kuba la madoda angamaqina omabini.

“Vuya, Ndevana, kuza kuwe ukukhanya!” Itshilo enye yaloo madoda, kwatsho kwathi xum kwelo khareji bagqitha kulo. Kucacile ukuba kukho abathi *ungabokudela umqulu iiyadi ungazibalanga*. [my italics] (Mtuze 1981:2)

(When those men shook hands with him kindly after helping him with his luggage, they were relieved. All who were watching were suprised because these men were both middle-aged.

“Be happy, Ndevana, the light will come to you!” Thus spoke one of those men as the carriage which they were passing suddenly fell silent. Obviously there were those who said that *one should not judge a book by its cover.*)

Serious sayings may be included in a text in which the author's intention is ironic. Consider for example the following description of a man who has forgotten his familial responsibilities and takes up with new people away from home:

Kwicala lomxhesho sekunyanga ninzi uxam aphasile, kwathiwa elowo makazibonele. Kuzibonela ke abantu

abaxakene neentsapho ezinkulu, izindlu zizele ngabazukulwana nabatshana. Ngelo xesha oonyana namakhosikazi abo bambamba eqhuma uloliwe oya emazweni apho bafika bahlale khona balibale ngabo basemakhaya. Ongemkanga nenkosikazi ufika ahlale emasokeni, athi *yonwaba ntliziyo* kusekhaya nalapha. [my italics] (Mtuze 1986b:42)

(As for food rations, it had been months since they had had anything given to them, they had been told to look after themselves. To think those people were struggling with big families, houses full of grandchildren and nephews and nieces. And by that time their sons had left with their wives to go by train to big cities where they stayed and forgot about everyone at home. The one who did not bring his wife would live in the bachelor quarters and say “*My heart, rejoice, this is also home.*”)

Another of Mtuze’s characters in the same novel takes a well known saying *natya iinyosi*<sup>4</sup> (literal: you ate bees; figurative: you are always on the move) and wittily extends it in order to elaborate on her own situation:

“Mhlawumbi ke nina madoda natya iinyosi ningabakhwetha. Uza kuthi ke thina makhosikazi satya ntoni xa sesiphinda sifuduka nalapha?” litshilo elentombi yasemaRhudulwini xa isiva loo mphanga. (Mtuze 1986b:26)

(“Maybe we could say about you men that you had honey from the hives when you were initiated. But what are you going to say to us women, what did we eat that we have to move again from here?” asked the girl from the Rhudulwini clan when she heard about this notice.)

On the same page the author uses another expression *athi shu nonkantsi* (literal: you will feel the pain of cramp; figurative: you will regret it) to describe the consequences of resisting the move. The warning, conveyed by such a lighthearted expression, is highly ironic:

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4. Boys undergoing initiation are traditionally not allowed to eat honey since it is believed that if they do they will take on the habits of bees, “buzzing” from one place to another, never settling down. In the quotation from Mtuze the woman is saying that she understands why the men have to move (they must have eaten the forbidden honey) but she cannot understand why the women have to move since the honey taboo does not apply to females.

Yonke into engumXhosa kufuneka iphume iphele apho kuba kuza ilixa awothi ngalo ongahambanga ebemele ukuba uhambile *athi shu nonkantsi*. (Mtuzze 1986b:26)

(Every Xhosa-speaking person must get right out of here because there will be a time when the ones who did not move but were supposed to move will *feel the pain as if they had cramp*.)

#### 4.1.6 Ideophones

Finnegan (1970:64) describes the ideophone as

a special word which conveys a kind of idea-in-sound and is commonly used in Bantu languages to add emotion or vividness to a description or recitation. Ideophones are sometimes onomatopoeic, but the acoustic impression often conveys aspects which, in English culture at least, are not normally associated with sound at all — such as manner, colour, taste, smell, silence, action, condition, texture, gait, posture, or intensity. To some extent they resemble adverbs in function, but in actual use and grammatical form they seem more like interjections. They are specifically introduced to heighten the narrative or add an element of drama. They also come in continually where there is a need for a particularly lively style or vivid description and are used with considerable rhetorical effect to express emotion or excitement.

The ideophone is effective in immediate and direct descriptions, particularly of actions, but these tend to lose much of their effect in English translation, mainly because of the many words needed to translate a single Xhosa ideophone.

In Chapter Three we showed how Tiyo Soga in ‘‘Emlungwini phakathi’’ (in *Imibengo*:1935) included lighthearted descriptions in an otherwise very serious essay. His description of a man falling asleep in church benefits from the inclusion of highly descriptive ideophones, in italics below:

Abantu bayozela kwiityalike zonke; kude kodwa kwakho ndodana, ndithi angathi amathongora equkwe ndawonye, ihlale yona isentloko. Ibihleli phantsi kweqonga, phambi koNonjiba. Ibonakele umzuzwana emva koko isithi *yekethise* ngentloko, yabuya *yee balulu* amehlo, yakhangela encwadini. Kume loo mmangaliso, lada lavunywa iculo lagqitywa. Uthe umfundisi, akuqala ukuthetha, yafa kwaphela. Athi uNonjiba ukushixiza<sup>5</sup> ngonyawo, ukuthi makancede loo mntu wonakalayo, asuke athi *yalulu* amaqhula eenjongolo zamehlo, abuye athi *gile*. Ude wanga uNonjiba angakhe umntu acofe ngesipeliti, mhlawumbi ngosiba endlebeni. Uthi fan' ukuba bekuya konakaleka, kuba bezikho izithutyana zamaxesha ebimana ukudumzela, ithuka. Ide yaphela inkonzo, loo ndodana, ibe ize kuva iLizwi likaThixo, ingevanga noko lilinye. Intloko yalo mfana ithe *mome tu* bubuthongo, njengeqanda lizele ngumthumbi. [my italics] (Soga 1935:46-47)

(In all church sermons people get drowsy, but there was one who would beat all the sleepy ones put together. He was sitting just below the pulpit in front of Nonjiba and after a few minutes you could see him *knocking* his head down, and then *dragging open* his eyes again to look at the book. This carried on until the hymn was finished. As soon as the minister started preaching he was finished. When Nonjiba started *making noises with his feet*, trying to help him, he would just *roll* those big, dull eyes and *close* them again. There was even a time when Nonjiba wished for somebody with a pin just to give him a little jab or even a feather in the ear. He also thought he could get into trouble because he was mumbling and swearing. Finally the sermon ended, and that youth who had come to listen to the word of God went home not having heard a thing. His head was *full* of sleep, like an egg filled with yolk.)

The similarity in sound of *balulu* and *yalulu* enhances the description of the man's fight against sleep as well as contrasting nicely with the subsequent ideophones which are shorter, particularly with *mome tu* when he finally succumbs to sleep.

In a folktale about the decision of the animals to build a communal dam, reproduced in *Sasinoncwadi kwatanci* (Satyo et al. 1992:21-24), six of the ten

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5. There is an ideophone *ukuthi shixi shixi* meaning "to shuffle", as well as a noun *ushixi-shixi* (class 1a) "shuffling sound like that of dragging one's feet" (*The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa* 1989:175)

ideophones in the story occur in the final paragraph. In the beginning of the story we have: *watsho, watsho, wee tyaa*, (he talked and reported) and *kwathi khwasu uDyakal Ashe* (then the Jackal stood up). Once the story progresses, however, there are few ideophones until the duiker antelope is tricked by the jackal and tied up *wasiqinisa nkqi* (secured it tightly) — and dies — *safa fi* (died completely). Then suddenly, when the jackal himself is tricked by the tortoise, the ideophones are very frequent, giving the impression of fast, almost slapstick and therefore comic, action — *uFudwazana umthe nyi ngeliso* (Tortoise looked on out of sight) ... *Wathi uDyaki xa esathi nkxu impumlo weva esithiwa khinxi empumlweni ngokunga ubanjwa ngumgibe ... Kwathi kusithi qheke ... Zafike uDyaki ebanjwe nkqi nguFudwazana ...* (As the jackal dipped his nose he felt something like a trap holding it... At the crack of dawn...they found the Jackal held tight by the tortoise...)

This use of the ideophone to describe fast, violent action (often very effective in comic narratives) is also evident in the following passage taken from Jordan's story "Idabi laseMpindweni" in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* (n.d.:2), in which boys go hunting for honey:

*Kuthe kusenjalo kwee gqi yanye, yee leku yee rhiwu kuNtulo ebusweni, wayithi qwaka...* [my italics]

(At the same time one came suddenly, pranced and punched on Ntulo's face, he struck it...)

Siwisa also makes use of ideophones in his stories in *Ndibuzen' amathongo*. Often the comedy of the moment is heightened by the repetition of ideophones, as in the following extract:

*Zaqatyelwa iinkabi zamahashe xa lithi tshoco, ukulandela olo dwayi. Ngentelekelelo aye eya kulufumana lungekafiki*

ezibukweni lezigigaba ... *shixi ... shixi ... shixi ... dyulukudu ... dyumpu.*) [my italics] (Siwisa n.d.:21)

(At *sunset* they got on their horses to follow that weakling. They guessed they would catch up with him before he crossed that fateful river — *dragging ... dragging ... dragging ... faster ... plop.*)

Ideophones are often used to describe facial expressions, particularly with regard to the eyes. For example in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* Jordan notes that after being stung by bees, the boys *bavaleke amehlo mbha* (had their eyes closed tight) (p.3). Koranti in *UNojayiti wam* lusts after a woman in church *amehlo am athe nca* (my eyes are stuck) (p.60) while (in the same story) Tawuse *ethe ndlu amehlo* (stared with wide eyes) (p.60). Siwisa in *Ndibuzen'amathongo* has the following: *wayithi ntsho ngamehlo* (he stared straight in the eyes) (p.12), *phofu akuthi jezu ngaloo mehlo* (but when he glanced with those eyes) (p.16). Satyo's character Nomvelelo (in *Etshatile engatshatanga*:1990), a friend of Simeli's mistress, asks Yoliswa how Simeli found time to chat with her, and we are told that she asked this *selethe nta amehlo* (with wide eyes) (p.18). In the same book we have *Athi qhunya nje amehlo uSimeli engavumi engali ethe qhunya nje amehlo* (Simeli stared with his eyes not saying yes or no, just wide-eyed) (Satyo 1990:88).

## 4.2 EXPANSION

Nash (1985:13) notes that, when compressed, meanings

erupt and laughter bursts out, its waves and echoes persist, and one outbreak is only the signal for the next. The effect of a joke is often to put us in a state of pleasurable instability that welcomes, craves, indeed *courts* the impact of another joke. This is a requisite of comedy that depends on *expansion*.



He continues:

It is largely through the study of texts then that we are able to observe the modes of humorous expansion. (Nash 1985:21)

In this regard he refers to expansion as generic, interactional, and linguistic (Nash 1985:21-22).

The following discussion will focus on each one of these modes of expansion with examples taken from Xhosa texts. I have included analyses of humorous digressions and free-anecdotes which respectively illustrate interactional and generic expansion.

#### 4.2.1 Generic expansion

An example of generic expansion<sup>6</sup> can be found in Satyo's novel *Etshatile engatshatanga*, which refers to *isithembu* (polygamy). This theme is expanded upon in the novel, and as the irony of the flawed and hypocritical nature of modern-day monogamy is revealed, the comedy of the situation is exploited. An extract from the beginning of the book (when this theme is first mooted) will be contrasted with one from a later section in which the notion is expanded upon:

“Kodwa ke noko xa sithethela phantsi sinengxaki enkulu  
thina bantu baNtsundu, bantu bangamadoda ...”

“Njani, Mkwena?” Kubuze uMabhovu.

“Kaloku ekuqaleni phaya sasingabantu besithembu ...”

Utshilo uMkwena.

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6. Nash explains generic expansion as “allusion to facts, social conventions and traditions, culture, literary works”. He also notes that it can be “parodies of styles ... or parodies of social conventions and attitudes”. (1985:21)

“Ewe, bawo, ...” usengile uMabhovu. Lonke eli xesha uSimeli uphulaphule ngomdla.

“Uyabona ke kule mihla izinto ziqhutywa isiLungu, ... umfazi mnye kwindoda nganye, ...” ucacise watsho uMkwena. (1990:30)

(“But even if we Black people, Black men, play it down, we do have a problem ...”

“How Mkwena?” asked Mabhovu.

“In the beginning we used to have as many wives as we wished ...,” said Mkwena.

“Yes, father,” Mabhovu milked him all this time, while Simeli listened with excitement.

“You see these days things are done the White way, ... with one wife for each man, ...” explained Mkwena.)

“Heyi kodwa nokuba andikayiva le kaSimeli ukuba ihambe njani na, aba bantwana bajinga ezibhatyini zethu bayasithwaxa.” Kutsho ilizwi lendoda. Kuvakele nelinye ilizwi kwalendoda lisithi: “Ibe khona ngoku sisuke safana neekhomputha ezi zilibalayo; uthi ubuyihlohle umsebenzi othile, uvuke kusasa uwufuna, ithi yona iwulibele.”

Uhlekwe kunene ke lo mzekelo wekhomputha elibalayo ibixelelwe. Emva koku ibe kwanguNomvelelo owenza awakhe amazwi.

“Ukwenzeni na, Simeli, lo mntwana njengokuba ngathi umzonde ngokoyikekayo nje ngoku?”

Uthe qhuzu qhuzu nje ezama ukuba omeleze ilizwi aze kubalisa kakuhle.

“Watya imali yam!”

“Tyhini! ... Yhu? ... Hi, bafondini!” Kuvakele amazwi amathathu ekhuza ngokukhuza.

“Wandixabanisa nomzi wam.”

Kuvakale iincwina.

“Umzi wam wona awazi ngoku ukuba sixabene noYoliswa.”

Kuvakale iincwina.

“Umzi wam wona usaxabene nam.”

Zithso iincwina.

“Ekugqibeleni ndim osala engenanto esandleni.” (Satyo 1990:88)

(“Hey, even if I don’t know how Simeli’s affair started, these children who hang on our jackets are whipping us,” a man’s voice said. Another man chipped in, “And moreover we are like forgetful computers that you feed with your work but in the morning when you ask it, it says it has forgotten your work.” There was a lot of laughter from this reference to a computer forgetting a special job. After that it was Nomvelelo who started to speak. “What did this child do to you, Simeli, it looks as if you have a very bad feeling towards her. It looks as if you have a terrible hatred against her now.” He laughed a little bit, trying to strengthen his voice so that he could tell his story.

“She used up my money!”  
 “What! ... Oh! ... No, man!” Three astonished voices in unison.  
 “She made me quarrel with my family.”  
 There was a sigh.  
 “My family doesn’t know that the problem with Yoliswa is continuing.”  
 Another sigh.  
 “My family is still angry with me.”  
 More sighs.  
 “In the end I am the one who is left with nothing in my hands.”)

In the first extract the protagonist, Simeli, is dissatisfied with monogamy, while in the second he is clearly disillusioned with his experience of unsanctioned “polygamy”. The author plays with these two notions throughout the book, as well as with other apparent ironies and contradictions such as the foolishness of the educated, the weakness of men and the childishness of parents. The implied “joke” of all these contradictions relies upon the expansion of certain themes and ideas, all of which make reference to social and cultural conventions with which the reader would be acquainted.

In his essay “Isiko” (Custom) in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* Jordan makes use of generic expansion by openly parodying the social conventions and attitudes of various ethnic groups in South Africa. In the following passage about the difference between Ndebele and Xhosa milk-drinking customs, the author wisely parodies not so much an unusual (to the Xhosa) practice, but the stupidity of ridiculing such a practice:

Sidelene sithiyana nje kukungavumi ukuzikhathaza ngokuphanda intsingiselo yamasiko ezinye iintlanga nezizwe. Kukho ititshala yaseMatshona eyakha yandixelela ukuba kumaNdebele ayililo hlazo into yokutyiwa kwezapholo ngamadoda. Yada yathi yona ngokwayo xa iya esikolweni ngebhayisekile yayihamba iphambuka isarha izaphola kubasengi, ithi isiya kufika esikolweni ibe ihluthi mpu

zizapholo. Ndahleka ndalila iinyembezi. Ndhleka ntoni? Izapholo zinasizathu sini? Umahluko phakathi kobisi oluza emlonyeni lushushu lungcwele nolukhe lwenziwa muncu, lwenziwa ngqindilili ngokuthiwa eselweni yinto engade indenze ndidele amaNdebele — isizwe esikhaliphe kangaka sikaMzilikazi? (n.d.:110)

(We find ourselves despising and hating each other by not agreeing to take the time to research the customs of other tribes and nations. There is a Shona teacher who once told me that amongst the Ndebele it is not a disgrace for men to eat *izapholo*<sup>7</sup>. He said when going to school on his bicycle even he would make a detour to cadge some milk off the milkers, adding that when he arrived at school he would be nicely full of *izapholo*. I laughed till I cried. But why did I laugh? What is wrong with men drinking *izapholo*? The difference between milk that comes into the mouth hot and pure and that which is made sour by putting it in a calabash for a long time — why should that make me despise the Ndebele — the extremely brave nation of Mzilikazi?)

On one level Jordan's depiction of a school teacher trying to get full from sucking the dregs of milk from a cow's udder is amusing, particularly to Xhosa men to whom such a practice is taboo. He even notes his own mirth on hearing the story: "*Ndahleka ndalila iinyembezi*" (I laughed till I cried). But on another level Jordan ironically mocks mockery by turning the laughter against himself and others who thoughtlessly scoff at the traditions of others. The practice of drinking hot milk fresh from the udder and that of leaving it to get sour are compared in a way which makes the latter custom — rather than the former — seem somewhat odd. It is this juxtaposition which suggests that the author is poking fun at preconceived ideas of normality. He completes his censure of xenophobic reactions to the conventions of others by noting the irony in allowing such a petty difference to influence one's opinion of a great and brave nation.

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7. After cows have been milked, uncircumcised boys sometimes drink the remaining milk straight from the cow's udder. This milk is known as *izapholo*.

#### 4.2.2 Interactional expansion<sup>8</sup>

Sinxo controls his reader's responses in that he frequently "signals an intention to joke". However, while the common introductory formulae to jokes, eg. "Have you heard the one about ...", are explicit and predictable, comic signalling in novels is more subtle and varied. For example, Koranti, in *UNojayiti wam*, regularly refers to a characteristic of his wife in a way which suggests to the reader that a further comic elaboration will follow. Even the titles of the chapters in this book are revelatory, as if the author is deliberately intimating a lack of seriousness. For example Chapter Two is entitled "Ndicetyiswa ukululeka Umfazi" ("I am advised to discipline the Wife") (Sinxo 1986a:9), Chapter Five is "Ubhedesha Abantwana" ("She worships the Children") (Sinxo 1986a:21) and Chapter Fourteen is "Ukuncoma Okuyingozi" ("Dangerous Flattery") (Sinxo 1986a:59). The opening paragraphs of these chapters provide further comic expansion:

*(from opening paragraph of Chapter Two: "Ndicetyiswa ukululeka Umfazi")*

Into endayenziwa nguNojayiti, umfazi wam, yaba linxeba elinzima kunene kum. Into yokundiphoxa phakathi kwenyambalala yabantu — abafazi bomthandazo nakhona — andenze inyoluka elidla iimbiza, ibhada nesela ilibulala abantwana ngendlala, yandikhathaza kakhulu. (Sinxo 1986a:9)

(What Nojayiti, my wife, did to me was a terrible wound to me. She made a fool of me in front of a lot of folk, church women of all people. She made me out to be a greedy person scavenging from pots, a robber, a thief that starves children. I was very hurt about that.)

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8. According to Nash interactional expansion includes the pragmatics of response, being "the writer's control of his reader; the signalling of an intention to joke; the predictability or otherwise of reactions." (1985:21)

(from opening paragraph of Chapter Five: “Ubhedesha Abantwana”)

Andingeze ndazi nokuba mandithi isimilo sikaNojayiti ngokubhekiselele ebantwaneni sesibi na nokuba sesihle kusini na. Lo mntu, njengokuba ndimana ndisitsho ngoyena ungomnye wabantu abanengxolo emhlabeni, kanti noko kunjalo loo ngxolo idlula oku komoya; kudlula umzuzu ubemnye, abe sekukudala wayilibalayo loo nto ebeyilwela. (Sinxo 1986a:21)

(I can never tell with Nojayiti’s behaviour towards the children if it is good or bad. This person, as I have always said, is one of the most scolding people in the country, but although she is like that, she can also change like the wind. After a minute she will have forgotten what she was shouting about.)

(from opening paragraph of Chapter Fourteen: “Ukuncoma Okuyingozi”)

Zizinto zikaTawuse ke ezi. Akakayazi konke na usibalikazi lo into yokuba le nto ilulwimi asikuko kuphela ukuthetha into engekhooyo, koko ikwalulwimi nokuthetha ekhooyo xa ubungayithunywanga. Ngenxa yaloo nto ke waphantse ukundihlisela isihelegu esikhulu ngenye imini. (Sinxo 1986a:59)

(These are Tawuse’s things. Will my sister-in-law never know that telling lies is not only saying what did not happen, but that it is also lying if you go around talking about things you are not meant to talk about. Because of this she nearly landed me in hot water one day.)

In each of the above passages Koranti intimates that something relating either to the character of Nojayiti or her sister will cause him distress. In the first passage it is *into yokundiphoxa* (she made a fool of me), in the second *ngoyena ungomnye wabantu abanengxolo* (she is one of the most scolding people in the country), in the third *waphantse ukundihlisela isihelegu esikhulu* (she nearly landed me in hot water one day). Apart from these intimations of calamity the author frequently suggests confusion by contradiction, eg. *sesibi ... sesihle* (good ... bad), *ilulwimi asikuko kuphela ukuthetha into engekhooyo, koko ikwalulwimi nokuthetha ekhooyo xa ubungayithunywanga* (telling lies is not only saying what did not happen, but that it

is also lying if you go around talking about things you are not meant to talk about). In each case the author is engaging the reader in Koranti's own inner dialogue — a dialogue full of comic contradictions.

A good example of interactional expansion in Xhosa comic literature is the use of the paradigmatic structure locative demonstrative copulative (eg. *nantso ...*) + participial (There is/are he/she/it/they ... -ing). Consider the following (the relevant structures are in italics):

*Nanko esinqakula ngemilenze isidumbu, esirhola, esifaka, esigqumelela ngomhlaba emana ebhekabheka.* [my italics] (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:33)

(*There he was holding the body, pulling it, dumping it, and covering it with soil, looking around nervously.*)

*Nazo, iintokazi zomthandazo zibeka, zihlala. Nanko uNojayiti eshiyeka emi yedwa edwabulula izandla, ekongathethekiyo umoya, ethetha, esithi:* “Ewe, bafazi bokuthandaza, nibizwe ndim. Imithandazo yethu iyeviwa nguMdali. Ewe, siyabaphiwa ooSamweli nooDebhora. Nanku ngku nale ntwana uMbokreni iyiyekile imfeketho — iyekile ukuthenga amahashe, izinto ezingatywayo, omalahlwanofole. Namhlanje siyambonga uMdala, umfo wodade wethu uthenge inkabi yehagu, soze ke ngenye imini sintsentsethe isipeke sayo.” (Sinxo 1986a:30)

(*There are all the prayer women, looking behind them and sitting down. There is Nojayiti standing alone with her hands outstretched, moved by the spirit, saying, “Yes, women of prayer, you were called by me. Our prayers are heard by the Creator. Yes, we are given Samuel and Deborah. And now here is this young man, Mbokreni, who has stopped playing around — he has stopped buying horses, things that cannot be eaten, useless things. Today we thank the Creator because the child of our sister has bought a pig and one day we will be relishing its bacon.”*)

*Nantso ke inzwinini yeempempe lingekaphumi nelanga, kuba kaloku xa niya kuingca endlwini injongo kukuba utshaba nilufikele lusenomkhinkqi, lungekacombuluki.* (Jordan n.d.:2)

(*There was the sound of the whistle going off before sunrise, because when you go to attack an enemy's house the aim is to get there while they are still sleepy and stiff.*)

### 4.2.3 Linguistic expansion<sup>9</sup>

A good example of a joke-bearing syntactic structure is Jordan's two opening paragraphs in the story "Iindonga ziwelene" in *Kwezo mpendo zeTsitsa*:

"Lirhamba lasezixhotyeni,  
Iqotha-qikili, umalala-ngomhlana,  
Iseph' empuncu-mpuncu,  
UNanko-nanko! namhl' angenzanga nto."

Yayisitsho enye ititshala yasemaMpondomiseni xa izibongayo. Urheme lo wayeliqili lokwenene. Zisitya zisula nje ezinye iititshala kwizinto ezinjengoomibholorho<sup>10</sup> noomabil' ebanda, hayi yena, wayexhapha ame ngeendlebe. (Jordan n.d.:4)

(Puff-adder of the rocks,  
Cunning one who lies on the back,  
Slippery soap,  
There he is! Even when he has done nothing.)"

That is what one of the teachers of the Mpondomise used to say when he praised himself. He was a really crafty man. The other teachers used to try to hide the fact [lit. eat and wipe] that they went to the wedding practice parties where there would be alcohol, but he never worried himself about anything even if he had eaten or drunk and his mouth was dirty to the ears, that didn't matter to him.)

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9. Nash (1985:22) notes that humour is achieved via linguistic expansion through the recurrence and variation of joke-bearing syntactic structures, coupling mechanisms (such as rhyme, rhythm and alliteration and antitheses) and semantic concords and dissonances such as synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy.
10. An *umbholorho* was a practice meeting (usually singing) held before weddings. These sessions, which occurred in the evenings, could get quite lively since alcoholic beverages (*noomabil' ebanda*) would have been provided to enhance the proceedings. Teachers were not supposed to attend these functions. There is also reference to such occasions in *Ukuqhawuka Kwembeleko* (Jongilanga 1960:20), where the author notes *Njengombukeli wawunokuqonda ukuba namhlanje kuxhelwe eXhukwane kwaba bantu. Ngumbholo ke lowo othandwayo nguwo wonke umfane - udlalani nesishumane*. (As an onlooker you will realize that there is great feasting in Xhukwane amongst these people. It is an occasion that is loved by every young man - the playboy and the hardened bachelor.)



The praises of the teacher, which refer to him both as a puff-adder and a piece of soap (*irhamba* and *isepha*) are syntactically linked to the subsequent paragraph, where the syllabic content of the first appellation (*rh-*) is repeated in *urheme*, (cunning person) just as the palatal clicks in *iqotha-qikili* (cunning one) are echoed in *wayeliqili* (he was a crafty man). The verbs *zesitya zisula* (eating and wiping), containing both alliteration and figurative meaning, foreground the next sentence and are amusing since the image they conjure up contrasts with the usual (upright) disposition of teachers. It also prefaces the next reference to their meetings which are referred to as *ezinjengoomibholorho noomabil' ebanda* (wedding practice parties with alcohol), the repetition of the *b* sound creating a comic effect. The position of *hayi yena* (not him) before *wayexhapha ame ngeendlebe* (his mouth was dirty to his ears) serves to break the two phrases and introduce the contrastive second image of the protagonist with a defiantly dirty face.

In another of Jordan's stories 'Idabi laseMpindweni' (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa* n.d.:1-3) the author, by effectively employing semantic concords and dissonances, tricks the reader into believing that a battle between factions of boys is taking place. The attack is described in such a way that the reader is in no doubt that the anonymous aggressors are boys. However the penultimate sentence suddenly informs us: *Eza nyosi litsili elidala* (Those bees were from an old hive) — the first time that the bees (*iinyosi*) have actually been referred to as such. Even at this stage the use of the word *itsili* is ambiguous, for although it means "an old hive", it also can also refer to very vicious bees and even to an expert in a certain field (cf. *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa* 1989:420).

At the beginning we are informed *nantso ke inswinini yeempempe* (there goes the sharp whistle) (p.2) which is followed by *utshaba nilufikele lusenomkhinkqi*,

*lungekacombuluki* (you will get to the enemy when it is still stiff and tangled) (same para. p.2). Even when the leader of the group puts his ear to the ground and says “*Niya yiv’ ingoma?*” (“Do you hear the singing?”) (p.2) and the author remarks *Saluva nathi ulwandile lusitsholo phantsi, kubonakala ukuba asikabonwa* (We hear a low sound in the distance. It looks like we have not yet been spotted) (p.2), the reader is still under the impression that the sounds are from other people. The word *ulwandile* is often used to describe the sound made by bees but, ironically in this context, its more figurative meaning is suggested.

The boys also refer to their attackers in terms that suggest human qualities. One shouts “*Ziintw’ ezaba namamenemene kudal’ eziya*” (“These old crooks have been going for a long time”) (p.2). Reference is also made to the fact that the enemy has some special, secret weapon: *Ziman’ ukuphindel’ endlini nje ziyayaz’ intw’ eziqamele ngayo* (literal: They always come out of the house again because they know what they are resting their heads on; figurative: They know what they have got) (p.2).

Although the boys try to smoke their enemy out, they suffer a terrible defeat and come out badly wounded. The writer notes *Andizibali ke iingongoma esasinazo — abanye bevaleke amehlo mbha* (I will never forget those bumps which we had, some swelling so much the eyes closed) (p.3). The joke is revealed by an onlooker, with whom the reader can now identify and who notes disparagingly: “*Kakade, makwedini, nizinganga nje kuxa beningobani nina. Eza nyosi litsili elidala. Zancanyw’ ukuphakulwa nathi sisengabantwana ngenxa yengcwangu yazo!*” (“Truly speaking, you boys, who do you think you are? Those bees were from an old hive. We were also defeated by them when we were children because of their ferocity!”) (p.3)

Botha (1984:112), in his analysis of this story, notes:

Although a dramatic effect is pursued by the narrator on a constant basis, this does not affect the continuous presence of humor throughout the story. Comic events appear frequently during the course of the story and provide the reader with some diversion from the otherwise tense and concentrated nature of the plot. A good case in point is the main scene of the story (cf. p.3) which abounds with humor and which is also depicted very vividly and realistically.

Burns-Ncamashe in his story "Inxila lakwaNtselamazi" (*Masibaliselane*), by employing semantic dissonances and antonymy, succeeds in creating comedy by describing two very different people who, suprisingly, are attracted to each other. By giving a contrasting physical description of each, the author manages to stress the incongruity and thus the humour of the attraction:

Ehombe enkone nje umfana intombi yona inxibe ijimdresi yayo neblawuzi emhlophe qha. Yantle intwanazana kanye injalo, ingahlonyelwanga bubuyokoyoko. Wambi umfana waseGcuwa nezo suti zakhe, — le nto abomvu amehlo, inenyheke elukuluku, ihleka nangeendlebe xa ihlekayo. Izithe tshwe amafutha apha ukuthiwa yiZinc Ointment, asuke ahlala apha emisebeni nasemadevini kobo buso bumnyama bunamaqhakuva antlantlalu. NguNdabakazi ke lowo. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:113)

(While he was dreadfully adorned like that, the girl was wearing her gymslip and a white shirt. And she was so beautiful like that, without being fancily clothed. The youth from Butterworth was really ugly in that suit, with red eyes, laughing with his thick, swollen hare-lip. He also had zinc ointment showing on his eyelashes and on his beard, and his black face was full of rough pimples. That was Ndabakazi for you.)

Analysing the lexicon in the above extract one notes that the girl is referred to as *intombi* (girl) and then *intwanazana* (little girl), the second word being a positive semantic extension of the first. The young man on the other hand is an *umfana*.

(young man) but is later demoted to *le nto* (this thing). The girl does not wear *ubuyokoyoko* (beautiful pendants), while the young man attempts beautification with zinc ointment. These words contrast effectively, those being ascribed to the girl having a serious sense while those used for the young man are non-serious.

Burns-Ncamashe also makes use of linguistic expansion by elaborating on action via sets of synonyms, or near-synonyms, in which the syllables of the first are duplicated or transposed. For example in the story “Izimo ezingangqinelaniyo” (*Masibaliselane*) a murderer’s wife reacts in the following way to a prayer being said for her husband [my italics in all examples]:

Hayi yena, *ubebezile, usebezile, uswiswizile, utyizisile* wada wabonwa khahlahla ejuba. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:39)

(No, he carried on whispering, mumbling and sobbing until she was seen dropping down.)

Apart from the repetition of the perfect tense suffix *-ile* the second verb changes only by the *b* becoming *s*, while with the second pair of verbs the vowels of both syllables in the tri-syllabic stems remain the same: *-swiswiz->-tyizis-*.

Other instances of syllable reduplication and transposition in *Masibaliselane* are the following:

Kubonwe ngengunga iphahle uNdabakazi isithi gqi ngaseDouglas Smit, nantso isinga eTraining School *iwahwazela, itsibatsiba* ... (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:112)

(A crowd was seen around Ndabakazi, coming from the direction of Douglas Smit going, noisily and excitedly towards the Training School.)

Yamrhola *imtywabazisa, imrhintyelisa, imthuntuthisa*. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:119)

(He pulled him out, knocking him, catching him with a loop and rushing him around.)

*Angqinibene, ethalana, ebethana, ekhabana, esithi engapha abe engapha ekoyini apha.* (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:26)

(They elbowed each other, and beat and kicked each other all over the place in the mealie crib.)

#### 4.2.4 Free-anecdotes

In literary narrative of a more ambitious kind, anecdotes are as a rule more flexibly constructed, and their turns and transitions are not so clearly evident. Though guidelines certainly exist, the literary art consists in masking them, presenting what is on the face of it a casually-told tale. (Nash 1985:64-65)

By way of example he cites Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men In A Boat*, a book which, like *UNojayiti wam*, has anecdotes that

sometimes grow out of one another, or even cluster within one another, a short anecdotal comment interrupting a larger anecdotal process. (Nash 1985:65)

Here, from the first chapter of *UNojayiti wam*, is an example of Sinxo's narrative method:

Namhla, sekungayiminyaka engamashumi amabini satshatayo noNojayiti wam, kodwa kukhona uthando lwethu lusavuthayo. Andimazi phakathi kwethu oyena ubangela le mpumelelo. Phofu ndiyayazi into yokuba uJayiti lo akukho mfazi ungxolo ingangeyakhe kweli limiweyo; nabantwana bethu sabada bamthiya igama, bathi nguNogqwashu.

Ngekungasahlaleki endlwini, kubantwana nakum, ukuba ebengaphiwanga eso siphosihle kunene, isiphosokuswela inqala. Mna apha endlwini ndandingutata olunge kunene, into kuphela emana iteketisa. Ngokuzibona oku kulunga kungaka ndada ngenye imini ndamana ndibuza abantwana aba, engekho unina, uNojayiti, ukuba bathanda bani na, mna nonina, ndiqinisekile ndaqamela yimpendulo endaye ndiza

kuyifumana. Ukudana kwam ndakuyiva loo mpendulo! Kuba bonke baphikela ukuthi bathanda umama bona. Yandixelela yona intwana yam yamagqibelo, uBalafuthi, esona sizathu — ngumama obapha ukutya. Ndibe ngacacisa ukuba ndim osebenzela oku kutya, hayi, walandula ukuyazi loo nto.

Phakathi kwezam iziwo neziphoso, sikho kakhulu esokuthanda kakhulu amanz' obhelu, into ke leyo endingqubisene futhi noNojayiti, kuba yena ngumtempile wamanzi okuqala. Esinye isiphoso kukuhiliza, ndibuye sekusebusuku kakhulu ezimbuthweni zam namanye amadoda.

Ezi ndawo ke zombini zandihlalisa ubomi bentshontsho kumaNgwevu lo, imihla le ndihamba ngemiba ukugoduka, ndide maxa wambi ndingene ngefestyle endlwini, ndisenzela ukuba ndibe ngathi kudala ndafikayo. Andibhaqe apho uTshangisa, uyive intswahla, endifanisa naso sonke isilo kulo mhlaba, ngokokude ndithi nqa ndakuzibuka esipilini, ndakungafumani nesijungqana esi somsila kum. (Sinxo 1986a:5)

(It is twenty years since I got married to my wife Nojayiti, but still our love burns. I don't know which one of us is responsible for this success, although I know that there is no-one who shouts like Nojayiti; even our children have given her the name Nogqwashu.

If she did not have that gift of shouting and then forgetting about it afterwards, we would not be staying in this house, I mean the children and I. I was the one who would always play and talk to the children. Seeing myself thus as a good parent, one day when Nojayiti was not at home I asked the children which of us they loved best, convinced of the answer I was going to get. However, to my disappointment they all said they loved their mother. The youngest one told me straight that it was because their mother was the one who gave them food. I tried to explain that I was the one who provided that food, but no, he did not want to listen to that.

Of all my faults and failings the worst was drinking — something that constantly pitted Nojayiti against me because she was a member of the holy temple which was opposed to drinking. My second fault was my habit of roving around, coming home in the middle of the night from my gatherings with other men. These two faults made my situation very uncomfortable — I was like a chicken afraid of a hawk. Every day I had to creep in dark places, trying to avoid being seen or heard by Mamngwevu — even resorting to entering the house through the window sometimes, and then making as if I had been in the house for a long time. But Tshangisa would always catch me. You would then hear her shouting, comparing me to all the animals on earth. Sometimes I would be suprised not to

find even a bit of a tail on me when I looked at myself in the mirror.)

In his analysis of *Three Men in a Boat*, Nash (1985:67) is able to highlight what he refers to as “foregrounded sentences” that frame the narrative, marking the boundaries of episodes or phases within the anecdote. In the above extract we can highlight the following foregrounded sentences:

- i) *Phofu ndiyayazi into yokuba uJayiti lo akukho mfazi ungxolo ingangeyakhe kweli limiweyo; nabantwana bethu sabada bamthiya igama, bathi nguNogqwashu.* (I know that there is no-one who shouts like Nojayiti; even our children have given her the name Nogqwashu.)

This sentence contrasts with the author’s initial suggestion of marital bliss between the two protagonists, and links in a similarly contradictory manner with the phrase in the following paragraph which states that the children say they love their mother best. The author also introduces the children’s name for their mother, “Nogqwashu”, meaning “She who speaks with vigour or vehemence” — an intimation about her character to be confirmed later in the book by Nojayiti’s actions and reactions.

- ii) *Phakathi kwezam iziwo neziphoso, sikho kakhulu esokuthanda kakhulu amanz’ obhelu, into ke leyo endingqubisene futhi noNojayiti, kuba yena ngumtempile wamanzi okuqala.* (Of all my faults and failings the worst was drinking — something that constantly pitted Nojayiti against me because she was a member of the holy temple which was opposed to drinking.)

This sentence again seems to contradict the first declaration of their great love, as well as offering a humorous and incongruous metaphor for the noisy, feisty Nojayiti, who is likened to a “temple” of pure water. Also it comes as a surprise to the reader that Koranti admits he has faults, as the previous paragraph intimates that he is sure his children should love *him* best. An amusing contrast is also drawn between the two waters that Koranti chooses to symbolize both his wife and himself — he loves *amanzi obhelu* (literal: yellow water; figurative: alcohol), while she is described as being *ngumtempile wamanzi okuqala* (literal: a temple of the first water; figurative: a member of the holy temple opposed to drinking).

iii) *Andibhaqe apho uTshangisa, uyive intswahla, endifanisa naso sonke isilo kulo mhlaba, ngokokude ndithi nqa ndakuzibuka esipilini, ndakungafumani ngesijungqana esi somsila kum.* (But Tshangisa would always catch me. You would then hear her shouting, comparing me to all the animals on earth. Sometimes I would be surprised not to find even a bit of a tail on me when I looked at myself in the mirror.)

This sentence shows the awe in which Koranti holds his wife — he tries to creep into the house unnoticed — again contrasting with the initial impression of their perfect love and prefacing much of what is to come in the novel. The noise that Koranti makes contrasts with the noise (in the first paragraph) his wife is renowned for making. Sinxo effectively makes use of the diminutive of a word which already has diminutive status, by referring to *isijungqana* (*isijunge* = the last little bit + *-ana* = diminutive suffix).

All three sentences reveal the antagonistic relationship of Nojayiti and Koranti — a relationship that is fraught with hostilities, misinterpretations and inverted roles.



As Nash (1985:70) concludes:

It is this meticulous cultivation of style that most obviously distinguishes the literary anecdote from the narrative of popular culture — the jokes told in pubs and clubs, the strip-cartoon sequence, the folk tale in the oral tradition. Humorous narrative in the popular vein necessarily marks its presentation with readily perceptible conventions of structure and expression. Literary anecdote, with its apparently “free” structure, both acknowledges and revises conventional methods of patterning, and allows for the play of individual creativity in style.

#### 4.2.5 Humorous digression or asides

Digression enables the author to expand comedy by introducing material which is unexpected and does not contribute directly to the flow of action. Such digressions are humorous in themselves and also tend to add to the comedy of what follows.

Siwisa’s story “Siyagoduka” in *Ndibuzen’ amathongo* starts off with a parody of the *intsomi* format:

Kwaye kukho ... hayi kwaye kungekho ... ewe kwaye kukho, kuloo lokishi yaseRini, kanye kule ndawo kuthiwa kukwaLoki, ngeemini zamandulo — iimini ezizizo kwisixeko seeNgcwele, iimini zamhla-mnene, ubomi isebubo, uyolo luselonke — ewe, kwaye kukho indoda endala. (Siwisa n.d.:15)

(Once there was ... no there was not ... yes there was, in that location of Grahamstown, exactly in that place called Loki, in the olden days — in those days in the city of Saints, those pure days, when citizenship was good with great happiness — yes, there was an old man.)

Here the author has also indulged in interactional expansion in that he has, with *Kwaye kukho ... hayi kwaye kungekho ...* (Once there was ... no there was not ...)

signalled his intention to be light-hearted and funny. Every single statement made by the author in this opening paragraph is given extensive elaboration, the reader being brought into conversation with an infuriating speaker who insists on rambling and digression. Comfort and amusement come as a result of knowing that the author is in fact parodying and satirizing this kind of oral narrative.

An amusing digression right at the beginning of Mtuze's *Indlel' ecand' intlango*, in which two men superstitiously discuss the existence of a ghost, succeeds in highlighting the incongruity between the new priest, with all his western ideas, and the rural parish he is about to serve. At the same time the author plays on the inconsistencies of the protagonist by vividly describing his reaction to the story:

Oku kutshintsha kwencoko kumtsho wabila xhopho umfundisi. Inggondo yayimxelela ukuba naye ukhe wawubona umbono engadanga aqonde nokuba yintoni na, wendoda emfiliba ehamba phambi kweenkabi. (Mtuze 1981:3)

(This change in the conversation made the minister wet with sweat. His imagination told him that he had also seen the sight, and although he did not understand what it was, [it seemed to be] an invisible man going in front of the oxen.)

Part of what writers do when they indulge in humorous digressions or asides is acknowledge the fact that reality, and discourse about reality, is unpredictable and non-linear. The ambiguity present in life means that there is always more than one interpretation of natural events.<sup>11</sup> For most of us, apparitions are relegated to the realm of the unknown, and like the priest, we are confused by our own lack of interpretative skill. Writers of Xhosa literature are able to exploit the rural/urban mindset, and when they digress, it is to show us that the rural mind, although

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11. Wilson observes: "We seek to describe the world as being composed of consistent and discrete 'things'. When a 'thing' is revealed as ambiguous, then our discrete conceptualizations have proved invalid." (1979:167)

seemingly absurd, is often more logical and secure than its urban counterpart. As readers, however, we, together with the authors, are tempted to laugh at a logic alien to our own.

### 4.3 CHARACTER REVELATION AND THE “INQUIT”

In Xhosa humorous texts it frequently happens that a certain character is the main focus of the comedy. Failings or eccentricities are introduced in stages, until finally the full frailty of the character is revealed in a crescendo of comedy. The author often attempts to confuse the reader by describing the character as having some positive attributes, only to contradict these subsequently. A good example of such character revelation can be found in Siwisa’s story “‘Yiyek’ iMonti neento zayo” (in *Ndibuzen’ amathongo*) — a narrative loaded with translational malapropisms. The author acquaints us with a certain Dr Miza, who is being introduced by Mr Mpinga:

“Good again! Dr. Miza! Good again, gentleman.” uvakele uMpinga eqikileka ngomhlana esitulweni esitofotofo, kowakhe umzi kweyakwaNongqongqo ilokishi. (Siwisa n.d.:79)

(“Good again! Dr. Miza! Good again, gentleman.” Mr Mpinga was heard saying, stretching back in a soft chair in his house in the Nongqongqo location.)

The doctor’s response is then recorded:

“No, no, gentlemens! I’m not what’s name! I’m not what you call it, er-er-what’s ’m ... crooker.” (Siwisa n.d.:79)

His English being far from perfect we assume there might be less to this man than meets the eye, and this is confirmed in the following:

Ndifundisa mna umdaniso poqo, ndaye ndinyanga into eza ngecala. Imoto yona, you'll driver it as you driver 'em ... what you call it ... skotch kari." (Siwisa n.d.:79)

(I teach dancing just so, and I heal. As for a car, you'll driver it as you driver 'em ... what you call it ... *scotch kari*.)

However the description of the man in his dapper attire does suggest, even to the suspicious, that there is something remarkable about this "gentleman":

Uchwenene wokwenene enkangelekwani, umfo ofanelwe ngamabhovu akhe aphothiweyo, aza ajijwa ngendembu ukuze angacombuluki. Inene lakwabani, elitsho ngempahla emnyama, nehempe emhlophe qhwa, umdiza otshaywayo ungasuki emlonyeni. (Siwisa n.d.:79-80)

(An immaculate-looking gentleman, a very handsome chap with twisted whiskers, greased so that they should stay in place. A real gentleman, you could see from his black clothes and bright white shirt, and the cigarette which did not leave his mouth.)

The above description nevertheless begins to suggest some humorous expansion because of the "*umdiza otshaywayo ungasuki emlonyeni*" ("the cigarette which did not leave his mouth"). Nash (1985:170) refers to this kind of description as "counterstatement", which has the effect of

constantly shifting or unsettling the frame, disturbing perspective till the audience is not quite sure how to respond to a narrative.

The image of the cigarette is expanded upon in the following sequence in which the "doctor" is forced to dish out his cigarettes to the crowd since it is evident he has no car to take the people to the next location:

You see gentlemens, ma car is in de galaji. I told ma boy, to what's name ... what you call it ... to ... to..." Waqhawulisa uMpinga ebona le ngxaki ingaka kugqira waphazamisa, phofu amanye amanene esathe manga. "Good again! Good again!

de driver will garage em a'right." Wayephithizela ugqira ephakama ephakamile enikezela ngemidiza yakhe etshaywayo kula manene. Yatshaywa yonke yaphela ngeso sithutyana. Amyeka awaseMonti amakhwenkwana wazithulula, akamndwebisa. Iinto zona ezaman' ukuphakama ngalo lonke ixesha akhupha umdiza eza kutshaya zithi, "Give us yours while it's handy doc!" Zitsale nje ibe mibini imisi, ziwucime ziwufake engxoweni yebhatyi. Wothuka ngoku ugqira seleman' encazelwa izitimpi ngala manene, seyimphelele yena imidiza. (Siwisa n.d.:80)

(You see gentlemens, ma car is in de galaji. I told ma boy, to what's name ... what you call it ... to ... to..." Mpinga broke off, realizing that the doctor had a big problem, that he had blundered, and that the other gentlemen were amazed. "Good again! Good again! de driver will garage em a'right." The doctor was really confused getting up and down, passing his cigarettes around to the others. They smoked all the cigarettes in a short while. The East London lads just let him carry on, they didn't correct him. All the time they were in fact just taking two puffs and then keeping the rest in their pockets and asking for another one, saying "Give us yours while it's handy doc!" In the end it was the doctor who was given stompies by these gentlemen, since there were no cigarettes left.)

What is particularly amusing in the above extract is the reversal of roles — the pompous, so-called "doctor" being robbed of his dignity, he who is a cheat now being cheated. However, even this humiliating experience is not able to dampen the man's spirits, and the author skilfully underlines his vanity by having him refer to American cocktails:

"Dr Miza, gentleman, Dr. Miza! Hear! Hear!!" Wathi nje ukuba angene ugqira kwakhala kru-kru-kru, endlwini yintsini. Akhawuleza kodwa onke amanene azazisa kuye. Kwarolwa izinto-yinto zokuzonwabisa, yangu "Hi!" "Hi!" kungqutyani swa iindebe, nogqira esemsingeni, "You know gentlemens, in America, we, we what's name ... er ... er ... we whatyou call it ... er ... make 'em co'tails!" wavakala esitsho umf'omkhulu ethiwe lwale amehlo ngamaqhinga akhe. (Siwisa n.d.:81)

("Dr Miza, gentleman, Dr. Miza! Hear! Hear!!" As the doctor<sup>12</sup> entered the house was full of suppressed laughter.

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12. It is interesting to note that the appellation "Doctor" is very often used to mark a comic character - see also Dr Zinobee Jomsini in Sinxo's *Umzali wolahleko*.

The men quickly introduced themselves to him. Refreshments were brought out, people saying “Hi!” “Hi!” as the glasses clinked together, with the doctor also in line, ... “You know gentlemen, in America, we, we what’s name ... er ... er ... we whatyou call it ... er ... make ’em co’tails!” said this chap blinded by his own cunning.)

This kind of authorial comment found in *ethiwe lwale amehlo ngamaqhinga akhe* (blinded by his own cunning) is referred to by Nash as the “inquit”, a frame<sup>13</sup> or device which is found in the reporting of a speech “that often includes some note on the disposition, etc of the speaker” (Nash 1985:168). In the following outburst of the unwilling convert in *Imbadu* the verb “-bhonga” (bellow) is effective in describing the fury of the man:

“Hayi, hayi”, *esabhonga* njalo umfomkhulu,  
“andigqobhoki: Ndililiswa yinto inye, amabhovu alo  
mVangeli andikhumbuza iimpondo zenkabi yam eyafa  
ndiyithanda. [my emphasis] (Sinxo 1960:67)

(“No, no,” *bellowed* the man, “I am not converting. I am crying because the whiskers of the evangelist remind me of the horns of my beloved ox which died.)

In Mtuze’s *Alitshoni lingaphumi* a White official informs Phangindawo that he is to move to the Ciskei. Apart from having serious reference to the apartheid policy of forced removals, the exchange is, on another level, humorous. This is largely because Phangindawo’s responses reach a climax of disbelief, and it is the author’s choice of words to describe his reactions which consolidate this effect:

“Sifuduka siya phi?” *ubuze* watsho.  
“Niya eCiskei,” *itshilo* impendulo engenalusini.  
“Kuphi eCiskei?” *kubuza uPhangindawo emangaliswe  
ngakumbi ziindaba azivayo.*  
“EMsobomvu”, *libuye* liseyinkohla njalo kuPhangindawo.

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13. According to Nash a “frame” is a “humorous intention ... made apparent through the construction of a setting, or frame, which sanctions the joke (‘given these conditions, you may laugh’) and also suggests an interpretative process.” (1985:164)

“ECiskei, eMsobomvu!” *ukhuze watsho*, “Kuphi apho mhle?”) [my emphasis] (Mtuzze 1986b:26)

(“Where are we moving to?” *he asked*.)

“You are going to the Ciskei,” came the grim answer.

“Where is the Ciskei?” *asked Phangindawo, really shocked at the news he was hearing*.

“In Msobomvu!” Once again this was very strange to Phangindawo.

“To the Ciskei, to Msobomvu!” *he groaned*, “Where is that, sir?”)

Phangindawo’s first response is recorded simply as *ubuze watsho* (he asked) but his second statement is extended to *kubuza uPhangindawo emangaliswe ngakumbi ziindaba azivayo* (asked Phangindawo, really shocked at the news he was hearing). When he is told he has to go to Msobomvu, the dismay of Phangindawo’s reaction is captured by *ukhuze watsho* (he groaned), and this is humorously set off by his next question, which challenges the sincerity of his horror — “*Kuphi apho mhle?*” (“And where is that, sir?”)

#### 4.4 THE USE OF POMPOUS OR PIDGIN ENGLISH

Also of importance for the comic success of the above extracts is the constant use of English. Discussing the stylistic function of pidgin English in African literature T. Obilade (1978:442) notes that the Nigerian writers Achebe and Soyinka use pidgin English for humour as well as for character portrayal, but he adds:

In Soyinka, however, it is very subtly employed to explore deeper meanings, to explain the reasons behind a character’s actions, and to project and foreground certain themes that are central to the plays concerned.

This statement is certainly true of Sinxo, who uses English (generally in dialogue) to show up not only the pomposity and lack of education of the speaker, but also

the tension between traditionalists and those who uncritically embrace western culture and language. In a sense, the injection of English into Xhosa texts also serves to remind readers of a society divided by conflicting aspirations. Those who use English are outsiders and individualists who seem to distrust the authority of their own language and who stand apart from the rest of the community of Xhosa speakers.

Apart from the anglophile Dr Zinobee Jomsini in *Umzali wolahleko*, Sinxo has created other characters who lapse clumsily into a foreign tongue. A good example can be found in “Lafa ilizwe ngedonki” (in *Imfene kaDebeza*) in a scene in which the headman is challenged by Manzimdaka and replies:

USibonda: Looko here, Manzimdaka, kudala ubhoxa wena apha. Ndim isibonda apha, uyayazi loo nto? Uthatha indawo yam ngoku? You is silly.

UManzimdaka: Ungandixeleli ngobo bubondana bakho mna. Ndize kuthetha amatyala apha. Andifuni bubonda bakho.

USibonda: Uyabufuna! Uyabufuna! Tyhini, what is the matters with these red mans? (Sinxo 1991:31)

(Headman: Looko here, Manzimdaka, you have been creating confusion here for a long time. I am the headman here, do you know that? Are you taking my place now? You is silly.

Manzimdaka: Don't tell me about your little headmanship here. I have come to discuss offences. I don't want your headmanship.

Headman: You want it! You want it! Really, what is the matters with these red mans?)

Even the statement “You is silly” is loaded, in that its ungrammaticality points to the silliness of the headman, not Manzimdaka, who appears articulate and educated by comparison.



Jordan's essay "Nakwelomntwana" (*Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*) makes specific reference to the adoption of English kinship terms when more appropriate vocabulary exists in Xhosa. He ridicules the youthful desire to ignore one's own culture:

Kulutsha oluninzi yinto ephantsi ukuthi "udade wethu", "umsakwethu": se kusithiwa "usister wam". Xa ubuza kwinkosazana enguNobani ukuba izalana ngantoni na nomnumzana uThile, yothi ukuphendula, "hayi, ndingusister ka Mrs wakhe", endaweni yokuthi, "Ndimlanyakazi wakhe." (Jordan n.d.:106)

(It is beneath the dignity of many of the youth to say "udade wethu", "umsakwethu"<sup>14</sup>: they just say "usister wam" (my sister). If you ask Miss Whoever how she is related to a certain Mr Somebody, she will just reply "no, ndingusister kaMrs wakhe" (I am the sister of his Mrs, instead of saying, "Ndingumlanyakazi wakhe" (I am his sister-in-law))

It is Siwisa, however, who uses English most often to create purely comical characters. Apart from Dr Miza (referred to above) Siwisa has also created the buffoon Njengenja, who enjoys the sound of car names, not to mention the noise of their engines:

"Ziphi iimoto ezizizo, imigrugra nemiracaca yamanene aseMonti? ... Iphi iBuick kabhut'T into ethi xa isukayo ar! ar nx ... Hem! Hem ... m ... m! Ukhe uyive yona iDodge kabhut'J xa ithi Hap! Hapu ... u ... u! (p.71)

(Where are the posh cars, the most expensive cars owned by the East London gentlemen? ... Where is Bra T's Buick, which starts with an ar ar nx Hem! Hem ... m ... m! Have you ever heard Bra J's Dodge when it goes Hap! Hapu ... u ... u!)

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14. Although both of these terms refer to a sister, they are more specific. For example *umsakwethu* is given the following definition in *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa*: "my/our sister, said by a girl/girls, or woman/women of a younger sister or a cousin younger than herself/themselves who is the daughter of a paternal uncle." (1989:154)

The Nigerian writer T.M. Aluko also uses English in order to satirize and ridicule. Lindfors (1971:44) discusses this tendency and provides an example from one of Aluko's books:

When Aluko has his characters speak or write English, he sometimes satirises the bombast employed by the semi-educated African. A typical letter to the editor of a Nigerian newspaper begins:

Sir,

Permit me a space in your widely and voraciously read journal to bring to the notice of the readers of your most widely read and voraciously digested newspaper domiciled in this great dependency of Nigeria some curious and wonderfully strange incidents and events that have been transpiring and occurring in one village in the District of Idasa, to wit Isolo.

Lindfors goes on to criticize Aluko's overuse of this technique of humour, and although Siwisa could sometimes be blamed for this lapse, in Xhosa literature English is generally used appropriately and to great effect.

In the following extract from L. Kakaza's "Izinto ngezinto esinaleni" in *UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka*, reproduced in Opland, and Mtuze's *Izwi labantu* (1994:127), it is not the English that provokes laughter, but the reaction of the character to it. The scene follows a discussion on the inedibility of the food at the institution:

Sithe sakuphuma istadi wangena uMiss Benson ukuza kuqhuba umthandazo wangokuhlwa. Ulicule yedwa iculo elo ebelixelile; kuthe akufika kula mazwi athi, "Hear us, Lord, for those who suffer. Ease their pain, and give them sleep" wathi uLily Qoba, ngosebezo oluphakamileyo; "Ewe bawo, mve, uthothise oku kulamba kwethu, silale kakuhle."

(When we came out of the study Miss Benson came in to conduct the evening prayers. She sang the evening hymn by herself. Only when she came to the words "Hear us, Lord, for those who suffer. Ease their pain, and give them sleep"

did Lily Qobo utter in a loud whisper “Yes Lord, listen to her and ease our hunger so that we can sleep in peace.”)

It could be suggested that by employing English for comic effect Xhosa writers are at the same time removing it from its pedestal — are allowing their readers to laugh at it, to enjoy their parodying of it. Bakhtin (1981:76) has suggested that

in parody two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects.

It can be argued that the buffoons who favour English choose a style, rather than a language, and in so doing show the extent to which they unquestioningly promote a foreign culture.

#### 4.5 ACTION AND THE SYNTACTIC FRAME

Nash (1985:166) observes that writers of comic prose often consciously manipulate syntax by a combination of word-play and matching constructions. A good example of such manipulation can be found in Jordan’s description of a notorious thief, Velebhayi, in *Kwezo mpindo zeTsitsa*. The physical description of Velebhayi suggests an action and cunning which is subsequently supported by the tale of his father’s adventures:

UVelebhayi sisiganyonyo sesigaqa, ngoziphika, ngoziquluba zingamagade. Ngokomelela nobuqili akanandoda kwezi mpindo zeTsitsa. Umvundl’ uzek’ indlela ke, kuba kambe uzalwa liqotha-qikili letutu elalidume kunene ngeentsuku zalo. (n.d.:8)

(Velebhayi is a well-built, stocky man, with a broad chest and calves as hard as a rock. No man in the district of Tsitsa can top him for strength and cunning. Like father, like son [literal:

the hare is married to the road] because he was the child of the most notorious and brilliantly cunning thieves of those days.)

The author uses compressed phrases to describe both Velebhayi and his father — Velebhayi is *sisiganyonyo sesigaqa* (literal: a well-built figure of a stocky man) and his father was *liqotha-qikili letutu* (literal: a cunning rascal of a brilliant thief). The copulative-noun + possessive-noun constructions suggest the comic ambiguity of the author's praises as well as setting the scene for the subsequent ruse and its execution:

Awaloo maxesha ke amadoda ebekwazi ukusuka ebaThenjini awele iGqili, aye kuba ibhokuva epheleleyo emaBhulwini eFreyistata, ayithwale emagxeni, eze nayo nganeno kweGqili. Nina bantwana beli xesha ningathi into enjalo yintsomi, kanti lichele kumadoda anezibindi. Bekuqhutywa ishumi elinesine leenkabi ngeedyokhwe zalo, ngamadoda aneziphika angaphaya kwamashumi amabini. Kufikiwe eGqili, bezishiywa iinkabi nabalusi bazo, isininzi samadoda siwele, sisinge kwifama yeBhulu eseyahlolwa kwamhlamnene, afike apho amadodana onde ngenqwelo, kuba iyaziwa apho ihlala khona, ayikhulule iivil' ezi, zithwalwe ngamanye amadoda, amanye athwale isisu esi, awunyathele ke umhlaba, ahambe ephumzana ukuza kuwela iGqili. Kubotshwe iinkabi kusingw' ekhaya. IBhulu liya kufuna lincame, kuba kaloku lona lifuna umkhondo weevili zenqwelo. Uzalwa yenye yaloo madoda ke uVelebhayi. (n.d.:9)

(The men of those days were able to go from Thembuland, cross the Orange River and steal a whole wagon from the Boers in the Free State, carry it on their shoulders and go back to the other side of the Orange River with it. You children of today might say this is far-fetched but it was nothing to brave men. A span of fourteen cattle were driven by over twenty broad-chested men. When they got to the Orange River, they left the cattle with their herders and most of the men crossed and headed for a Boer farm that had been spied some time previously. When they got there the young men would head straight to the wagon because they knew where it was, and they would take off the wheels which would be carried by some of the men, and others would carry the middle section and they would dash off and go, sharing the load as they walked and crossed the Orange. The cattle were spanned and they would head for home. The Boer would look in vain because he was searching for the tracks of the wheels of the wagon. Velebhayi is the child of one of those men.)

The humour of this passage derives not only from its trickster theme, but also from its unrelenting and hectic activity. The whole wagon-stealing operation is described in only two sentences, which are packed with eleven different verbs of motion: *bekuqhutywa ... kufikiwe ... bezishiywa ... siwele ... sisinge ... afike ... onde ... ayikhulule ... zithwalwe ... awunyathele ... ahambe ...* (they [cattle] were driven ... they arrived ... they were left ... they crossed ... they headed for ... they arrived ... they made straight for ... they removed ... they were carried ... they dashed off ... they went..). An impression is given of a well-devised plan brilliantly and effortlessly executed.

At the beginning of the story the author notes that it might be difficult to imagine men being able to carry a whole wagon on their shoulders, so when the lateral thinking of the men is revealed (the whole may be separated into parts) the reader is surprised and admiringly amused. After the plan has been executed a short sentence follows — “*Kubotshwe iinkabi kusingw’ ekhaya*” (“The cattle were spanned and they headed home”) — suggesting that to the men this was just part of a normal day’s work to be completed before going home. This ease of action due to cunning and wiliness (the men had already spied the farm, the already knew where the wagon was) is comically contrasted with the duped Boer who is unable to find the tracks of his wagon.

The following passage from Satyo’s *Etshatile engatshatanga* is also action-packed, the syntactic framing including various counterpoises, parallels and antitheses:

Ibe yenye indumanga ukusukelana kwaba babini besiya  
elucangweni: uNokwanda wayesiya kuvulela abantwana,  
uSimeli yena esiya kuzama ukuba bangavulelwa. Ibe

yindumanga nyhani abantwana besiva ngaphaya kocango ukuba abazali naba ngoku bengxola apha elucangweni ... Ibe sisijwili macala ngoku abantwana bekhala kwelabo icala nonina ekhala ngaphakathi apha. Ibe ngunomji kujijiswana ngebholithi le yocango ngabazali baba bantwana. Kuthe sekukudala bholithindini yagwebela uNokwanda. Luthe ukuvuleka kwalo ucango zaza kuthi khahlahla phantsi ezaa zilekehlana bezikhala kanti sezayame elucangweni. Into ebe simanga apha kula maqekelana mabini bathe bakuvuleleka kwee xum, akwabikho ujijisa omnye; akwabikho nothetha nomnye; kwathi cwaka. Isimanga sento. Izilekehlana ezi zibini ziphene amathuba zimana zibajika-jika ukubajonga. Zincamise. Zifune ukusingathwa. Zitshintshiselane. Lide lalala iquku eli linguyise. (Satyo 1993:80)

(It was like a mad house, the two of them at the door: Nokwanda wanting to open up for the children, Simeli trying to keep them out. There was total pandemonium, as the children listened to their parents fighting on the other side of the door ... There was wailing on both sides now ... the children on their side and the mother crying inside. Their parents were struggling with the bolt of the door. Suddenly the bolt gave in to Nokwanda. As the door opened the little tots tumbled in, still crying and pressed against the door. The strange thing was that as soon as the little ones came in there was silence — no-one fought — no-one spoke, it was dead quiet. The little ones kept on looking at their parents in turns. They kissed them. They wanted to hug them. They went from one to the other. Eventually, the boss, who was their father, fell asleep.)

In the sentence *uNokwanda wayesiya kuvulela abantwana, uSimeli yena esiya kuzama ukuba bangavulelwa* (Nokwanda wanting to open up for the children, Simeli trying to keep them out) there is the antithesis of *wayesiya kuvulela* and *esiya kuzama ukuba bangavulelwa*, while with the sentences starting *Ibe yindumanga/Ibe sisijwili/Ibe ngunomji* (There was total pandemonium, etc) there is a paralleling not only of syntactic construction, but also of semantic association. With *akwabikho ujijisa omnye; akwabikho nothetha nomnye; kwathi cwaka* (no-one fought — no-one spoke, it was dead quiet) there is the counterpoising of the verbs *-jijis-* and *-theth-*, which both serve to highlight the extreme quiet after the storm. In final comic juxtaposition there is the comment that their father, like a baby, just falls asleep *Lide lalala iquku eli linguyise*.

#### 4.6 REPETITION AND THE PROSODIC FRAME

In ‘‘Uzizi uzuzwe nguZulu’’ in *Masibaliselane* there is a detailed description of a blind man, Zulu:

Utsho wacela indlela uZulu, umsindo sewusele ebusweni apha, ngokukodwa elisweni phaya, — liletsheza, lidanyanza, lilukuza, ligungquza. (Burns-Ncamashe 1991:20)

(Zulu asked to leave, anger already spreading across his face, especially in his eye — it was gadding about, flashing, weaving, jolting.)

The repeated use of tri-syllabic verb stems in the passage: *-letshez-*; *-danyanz-*; *-lukuz-*; *-gungquz-*, words with almost the same meanings, is a good example of prosody working in order to create humour. Although the actual topic being discussed (a blind person’s anger) is not obviously funny, it is the prosody which is able to transform it into a comic depiction.

It is in the *intsomi* however that the comic possibilities of repetition are best in evidence. Zotwana (in Satyo et al. 1992:14) observes:

Luxhaphake kakhulu uphinda-phindo lwamagama, lwamabinzana amagama okanye lwezivakalisi. Uphinda-phindo luyagxininisa, luzoba imifanekiso-ngqondweni, kanti lukwasetyenziselwa ekurhaliseleni abaphula-phuli ngokuza kulandela, into ke leyo ewugcina uphezulu umdla. Oku kuphinda-phindwa kukholisa ngokuhamba nokujikwa-jikwa kokunyuka kwelizwi nokutsalwa kwamalungu athile apha emagameni.

(It is very common to have the repetition of words, and of the syllables in words, of sentences. Repetition emphasizes, it creates mental images, but it is also used to focus the listeners’ attention and to maintain their interest. Tonal repetition is also used as is the repetition of certain morphemes.)

In the following extract from an *intsomi* the use of lexical, prosodic and syntactic repetition increases the tension and farcical nature of the scene:

Zaliphinda-phinda kabini-kathathu, noDyakal Ashe, umbhexeshi encoma esithi uya kuvuya kakhulu ukumkani ngokokude mhlawumbi abe nawo nomvuzo azivava ngawo. Nako ke kuxhatyashwa ngabantw' abakhulu ukuya kupha ukumkani ingoma, kungathi akusafikwa. Lithini iculo? Lihamba ngolu hlobo:

Iqela lokuqala (ezibhinqileyo):  
Kazi ngubani na oty' abantwana bengonyama?

Iqela lesibini (ezingamadoda):  
Sithi, si-i-th' abaty' abantwana bengonyama.  
Si-i-i-ithi.

Iqela lokuqala:  
Asiva, asiva! Nithini na? Asiva!

Iqela lesibini: Sithi, sithi, sithi sith' abaty'  
abantwana bengonyama. Sithi si-i-i-ithi. (Satyo et al. 1992:27)

(The baboons repeated this twice, thrice, with the jackal as conductor encouraging them, saying that the King would be so pleased he might even give them a salary. So they all rushed to sing for the king as if he had arrived. What was the song about? It went like this:

First team (Women):  
Who ate the children of the lion?

Second team (Men):  
It is us, it is us, we ate the children of the lion. It is us-us-us.

First team:  
We didn't hear, we didn't hear! What did you say?

Second team:  
It is us, it is us, it is us, it is us who ate the children of the lion. It is us, us, us!)

The fact that even the repetition does not help the baboons to realize their folly is comic, and the humour is further augmented by the fact that they seem to be proud and willing to sing this song, unaware that they have been tricked.



## SUMMARY

Xhosa writers use the phonology, syntax and semantics of the Xhosa language in order to create both expansive and contractive humour. Names, insults, idiomatic expressions and ideophones compress humour, while authors achieve generic expansion by referring to cultural and traditional practices. Writers such as Sinxo and Burns-Ncamashe create comic discourse by interacting with their readers, alluding to personal idiosyncrasies in a certain way and then expanding on such allusions by employing recognizably funny syntactic structures, thus engaging in interactional expansion. Linguistic expansion is easily achievable through the exploitation of the alliterative possibilities of concords and reduplicated noun stems, such repetition being extended in synonyms, hyponyms and antonyms. Humorous digressions and asides complete the witty web the author weaves as the characters tease us with the curious nature of their foibles and follies.

While this chapter has referred extensively to the way in which Xhosa humorists make language work for them, it is just as important to remember those performers who work for language. There are comedians who can take a simple, straightforward sentence and make others laugh because of the *way* in which they utter it. The following observation by Nash (1985:171) is particularly relevant to the Xhosa performer, whose delivery and dramatic skills are essential for the creation of comedy:

The language of humour is powerless without the *speech* of humour. Jokes are *told*; somewhere beyond the text is a voice, telling, delivering, timing. Just as we can never love or understand poetry if it is not heard — heard in the imagination at least, given its phantom performance — so we can never know the bliss of humour until we can recognize its voices.

## CONCLUSION

One of my primary aims in writing this thesis was to collect and record as much Xhosa humour as possible. I now believe that I have only just begun to tap an immense resource. Although I studied many works of fiction and non-fiction in the course of my research, I am sure that there are still many more examples of Xhosa humour in both historical and contemporary texts.

In addition, the wealth of performance humour, evident in the storytelling genre, requires further analysis, particularly if this is understood to include the anecdotal art of the street-wise wit. Collections of "authentic" Xhosa jokes would obviously aid any such review,<sup>4</sup> but the very dearth of such collections at the time of writing this study is itself an important socio-cultural indicator.

Whenever such research is conducted, it will be important to include contextual information, for as Apte (1985:128) observes:

A major drawback of textual analysis based on published collections ... is that the contextual information is often lacking, so that it is difficult to relate the analyses to external historical events and to sociocultural reality.

It is moreover important to see Xhosa humour as being part of the larger corpus of African humour, which needs to be documented for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison (see Apte 1985:121). For this reason I believe that future research must concentrate on the systematic recording of the most vibrant and yet elusive genre of all, Xhosa oral humour.

I hope that the study will also provide new theoretical tools for the general analysis of oral and textual literature in this language. When looking specifically for examples of irony, parody, and punning, I found that although Xhosa literature does manifest these categories of humour, they are often used in an entirely original and unexpected way. Who, for example, would expect public praises of royalty to be wittily ironic, or, for that matter, to be parodic? How delightful to notice that the pun in Xhosa is commonly manifest in an intricate interplay of the phonologies of English and Xhosa!

Besides the findings mentioned above, this thesis has led me to the following conclusions:

- \* Xhosa oral humour is personal and playful - but also critical - and, at times, obscene (see Chapter One, with its references to nicknames, praise names, praise poems, riddling and anecdotal humour).
- \* Xhosa humour in texts explores the comedy of characters as well as the irony of socio-political realities (see Chapter Two's references to comic characters in texts, ironic commentaries by authors and satirical descriptions of social institutions).
- \* Xhosa humour functions on many levels (see Chapter Three), some more serious than others. It has always had a stabilizing role in Xhosa cultural life, exhibiting a tendency to control deviants and misfits. Changing political and social realities, however, indicate that not only the nature of Xhosa humour, but also its significance and function, will change.

- \* Xhosa humour, while manifesting many of the techniques of English humour, nevertheless exploits its own phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, creating a humour which, although apparently artlessly playful, is, in fact, richly patterned and finely crafted (see Chapter Four).

Xhosa writers themselves see humour primarily as being a pleasurable thing, an enjoyable and creative process, an uplifting phenomenon and a richly satisfying form of communication. I hope that this study, far from diminishing Xhosa humour by being serious about it, will inspire others to continue with its documentation and research.

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