

# Thukela Poswayo's Poetry of Dwelling

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Geography as a discipline “speaks to how we both represent and create our place on the Earth” (Magrane 2015). In keeping with its origins in the industrialized West, geography’s modes of representation are predominantly visual; even within the shifting context of a digitizing world, maps, imagery and texts tend to be two-dimensional media based on the written word. In contrast, for many people around the world, speech remains the primary vehicle for transmitting knowledge and sharing culture and memory (Turin 2012). Such cultures recognize the performativity of speech, aware that “language is a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought”—it is experienced physically, as a corporeal function, and is often recognized as a way of conveying or exercising power over people and things merely by uttering their names (Ong 2002). Oral geopoetics are not only a powerful mode of communicating the nature and history of places and strengthening human connections to them, these art forms are also particularly vulnerable to disruption through changes to landscapes and cultures (Turin 2012).

At the same time, oral poetic forms are both adaptable and enduring and continue to hold an important place in countries and communities that have experienced profound disruptions. In South Africa’s Eastern Cape, several centuries of upheaval have brought changes to oral poetry, yet the tradition of izibongo, an ancient poetic genre practiced by amaXhosa people, has continued uninterrupted (cf. Kaschula 1993). Known in English as “praise poetry,” izibongo is part of a cluster of similar panegyric forms that are practiced throughout much of the region (Finnegan 2012). The English translation derives from its origins as a form of court poetry addressed to chiefs and kings, and to outsiders the poetry appears mainly to extol the virtues and accomplishments of its subjects. While this interpretation may be true in some cases, the most gifted and accomplished poets serve as community historians, political critics, entertainers and healers. Their nuanced performances, which these days may occur at a variety of events ranging from festivals and meetings to weddings and funerals, combine praise, genealogies, and even sharp criticisms of their subject (Opland 1983, 1998, Kaschula 2002).

The amaXhosa are a diverse group of isiXhosa-speaking peoples—including the amaRharhabe, amaGcaleka, amaMpondo, abaThembu, amaBomvana, amaXesibe, and amaMpondomise kingdoms—whose traditional homelands cover much of what is now South Africa’s Eastern Cape province. Iimbongi (singular imbongi) is the isiXhosa word for the poets who perform

izibongo. Since the arrival of the written word in the amaXhosa homeland, distinctions have arisen between iimbongi nosiba, who create written poetry during periods of quiet or solitary reflection; iimbongi namanhlange, who blend contemporary elements into their performances, such as rap, hip hop or slam poetry rhythms; and iimbongi zonthonyama, who compose their oral poems spontaneously during performance delivered in a more or less traditional style (McGiffin 2017).

Izibongo performed the traditional style are often deeply evocative both of place and of the ancestral presences that continue to inhabit those places, tying people into a lineage and form of dwelling that extends into past and future. Through the poet's voice, language becomes a healing medium that strengthens connections to land and lineage, often producing or enabling a flow of emotions in listeners. The poetry is active; it performs both spiritual and material work as umoya, the spirit that inspires the poet to speech, moves from the landscape through the body of the poet and into the air, travelling in linguistic form to listening ears. There is an earthly physicality to the poetry—spoken most often in the open air at public gatherings, it is by nature it is an inclusive art form that welcomes its listeners into the communal experience of cultured and attentive dwelling.

In this chapter, I discuss the work of one of the poets I met during the year I spent living and travelling throughout South Africa's Eastern Cape province studying the environmental politics of the izibongo genre. Thukela Poswayo is an imbongi originally from the rural areas near the town of Engcobo who now lives in the Eastern Cape city of Mthatha. Like other poets and healers, he accepted his poetic calling with reluctance following a period of psychic disturbances that made his vocation apparent. Over many years of practice, Poswayo has developed his reputation as a gifted poet and is invited to perform at locations throughout the province.

I travelled to South Africa as a geographer and ecocritical literary scholar interested in questions of colonialism, uneven development, and literature as a form of agency and identity that can help bind people to their environments and communities. When I arrived in the country, I found that the rich vernacular language traditions that have been practiced for centuries are almost entirely absent from literary and geographical scholarship alike.<sup>1</sup> I found this oversight to be of particular concern in environmental and ecocritical scholarship because this literature is intimately tied to histories of dispossession, disrupted environmental relationships, the imposition of foreign cultures and economies, and an ongoing struggle for land and dignity. As I am neither South African nor Black and have only a limited familiarity with the language and culture, I clearly run the risk of erring or failing to do justice to the poetry and its authors. Yet izibongo is a vital component of contemporary South African literature and culture that has not received widespread acknowledgment as such in large part

due to entrenched racial biases. It is a public medium, designed to provoke thought and discussion among its audiences, as well as a geopoetic medium particularly well-suited to consideration here.

## Izibongo, iimbongi, and audiences

I met Thukela Poswayo in the summer of 2015, during a year in which I lived in rural, urban, and peri-urban township areas of the South Africa's Eastern Cape Province while I carried out my research. At the time, I was staying in the village of Ngxotyana,<sup>2</sup> a rural community set in the rolling green countryside of the Eastern Cape coast. My research assistant and I had travelled nine miles in the back of a pickup truck that bumped slowly along the rutted coastal road to the town of Willowvale. There we climbed onto a minibus taxi and carried onward to the King's Great Place at Nqadu, some ten miles closer to the inland town of Idutywa that straddles the N2 highway. We had journeyed to Nqadu at the invitation of King Zwelonke himself, who suggested it as an opportunity to see an imbongi perform. Poswayo's performance that day was part of a festive and informal series of music and dance performances interspersed with official proceedings that marked the launch of a holiday season anti-drinking campaign. He was the final performer, delivering a poetic address to King Zwelonke before the latter addressed the crowd of about two hundred people.

The second set of performances took place on 11 March 2016 in the village of Gwedana, also in the Mbashe municipality, during a formal, traditional ceremony in honor of Chief Mthetho and his accomplishments. Poswayo performed two poems during this event, the first before King Zwelonke delivered his address to the assembled gathering of about five hundred people and the second before Chief Mthetho delivered his. In early December 2016, I attended a third performance that was part of the festivities of a large wedding of several hundred people held in a rural village near the town of Engcobo. Poswayo once again performed two poems at the event, addressed to the groom who sat at the head table on a raised platform in the centre of an enormous tent.

At each event, I made audio recordings of the poems, which ranged in length from three to eight minutes, and brought them back to Grahamstown where they were transcribed and translated by Dumisa Mpupha, a Grahamstown imbongi and mother-tongue isiXhosa speaker. I worked with these translations further, adjusting them for rhythm, clarity and musicality. Over the course of these performances, I was able to observe similarities and differences in Poswayo's performance style and the subjects, themes, and word choices of the various poems.

The context of the three performances varied considerably, ranging in formality and spirit from festive to official, contemporary to traditional yet they shared certain notable features. All were large gatherings of several hundred people who lived in the surrounding rural areas. These were not niche poetry events for a small highbrow audience, but performances that fit seamlessly into official proceedings at public events. Second, Poswayo did not fit the image of the imbongi described in much of the literature and shown in recordings I had come across. He did not wear any kind of head gear, nor a cape or skins, and did not carry sticks or spears, all of which seem to be fairly standard accoutrements for historical and contemporary iimbongi alike. Instead, at each of the performances, he wore a collarless button-down shirt, ordinary slacks, and a pair of polished dress shoes. Each of his izibongo were addressed to the honoured figures at the event and were performed in anticipation of that speaker's speech to the crowd. When I reviewed the translations later, I found repeated exhortations for leadership and strength of character, for King, Chief, and groom to be the eloquent and upright "men of backbone" that South Africa so badly needs.

My position as a White Canadian scholar travelling to rural amaXhosa communities to extract poetry for analysis raises problematic questions of ethics, power, and representation. I am an outsider not only to the communities and their cultures, race, and language, but also to the country and its history. Thus, one of my concerns in carrying out this study of Poswayo's poetry and of izibongo more generally was to begin to develop a decolonized approach to multicultural and multilingual literary scholarship that integrated the knowledge of people with a lived experience of the poetry. To this end, I interviewed fourteen practicing iimbongi and fifty community members. I spoke with poets living in the rural Mbashe municipality as well as the city of Mthatha in the former Transkei<sup>3</sup> region, in Zwelitsha township outside King Williamstown in the former Ciskei<sup>4</sup> region, in townships adjacent to East London, and in Joza township outside Grahamstown. Together, these research locations spanned the three pre-1994 jurisdictions that make up what is now the Eastern Cape Province. In both Joza and the Mbashe municipality, I spoke with 25 community members whom I selected purposively to reflect the diversity of ages and occupations in the community. During each interview, I asked poets and audience members to speak about their experience of izibongo, its subject matter, its role in the community, the frequency of performances, and where one is likely to see them. Overall, the research radically reconfigured my received ideas about poetry and literature, including my notions of what makes for "good" poetry and what poetry and poetic language is and does.

## Poetry of Dwelling

The results of the interviews were revelatory. A wealth of unexpected spiritual and linguistic complexities emerged, along with a near-consensus from rural and peri-urban people alike that these poets and their poetry are deeply important. As well as serving as community historians, entertainers, and prophets, their words “give people hope,” “revive a spirit of ubuntu,” or care for humanity, touch people deeply and remind listeners of the value of their shared language, culture, and identity as amaXhosa people. In particular, poets and audiences alike spoke about iimbongi as gifted healers capable of moving people with their words. According to one young man from Joza Township, “They heal us. Like when they talk isiXhosa, when they’re rhyming their words, they bring us a knowledge that comes from them to us.” Through my conversations with poets and their audiences, I found that iimbongi zomthonyama are widely considered to be gifted and even prophetic public orators capable of receiving and transmitting messages from ancestral or holy spirits. The receptivity to these messages enables iimbongi to burst forth with complex verses composed on the spot.

Along with the translated performances I gathered, these interviews affirmed that the affective power of izibongo derives from details of the craft: an imbongi’s choice of words and metaphor, the rhythm of the language, gesture and voice, and the layers of cultural significance that inhere in the poetic tradition and its performance. These elements combine to create a particular expression of society, culture, spirituality, and politics that is stronger and more powerful than the words alone would suggest. In this way, iimbongi help tighten connections to landscape and heritage not only by conveying information but also by enabling people to access deeper emotions about these things.

As with other literary genres, the meaning of izibongo is inseparable from its form. The acts of transcription and translation result in a fundamentally different text than the original performance. Not only the original language, but also sounds, rhythm, cadence, and gesture are absent from the printed English text. Also lost are the nuanced figures of speech that are particular to place and culture and do not translate well to English. Nevertheless, the translated lines remain rich in details that illustrate amaXhosa relationships to place and homeland, a place of layered, multigenerational dwelling. In Poswayo’s poetry, although each poem was original and composed spontaneously for the event at hand, various themes and repeated motifs emerged over the three performances. The excerpts below illustrate the themes of rivers, cattle, and genealogies that are central aspects of Poswayo’s poetry, of amaXhosa traditional culture, and of contemporary rural life.

The selection below contains the opening stanzas of Poswayo's first performance for King Zwelonke at the December 2015 event. With his opening lines, he draws his audience into active participation in the poem and He catches their attention again with the line "Ndithi ndimbi ngapha ndimhle ngapha," a familiar reference to the uthekwane, or hamerkop, an auspicious waterbird bearing layered cultural significance who hunts for its food by turning its head from side to side to peer into the water, first with one eye then with the other.

Imbongi: A Zwelonke!

Abantu: A Zwelonke!

Imbongi: A! Zwelooooonke!

Abantu: A! Zwelooooonke

Imbongi: Hail Zwelonke!

Audience: Hail Zwelonke!

Imbongi: Hail! Zwelooooonke!

Audience: Hail! Zwelooooonke!

Iyakhumbulana mntane nkosi.

Iyakhumbulana thole leduna.

Ndelula amehlo ndayibona imilambo,

Ndanga ndinga qhayisa ndixele uthekwane

Ndithi ndimbi ngapha ndimhle ngapha.

We miss each other, child of a chief.

We miss each other, son of a bull.

I stretched my eyes and saw the rivers.

I wish I can boast like the thekwane

Saying I'm ugly on this side, beautiful on that.

Ewe kaloku thole leduna

Siyinqamle imilambo.

Sawubona uMbhashe.

Sayinqaml' imilambo

Sawusel'uMgwali.

Sawubona uMthatha, sawubona uMthamvuna.

Salibona iThukela, salibona iCongo,

Salibona iZambezi, salibona iLimpopo,

Siyibonile imilambo

Ngoba neLubhelu siyibonile.

Yes then, son of a bull,<sup>5</sup>

We crossed rivers.

We saw the Mbhashe.

We crossed rivers

And drank the Mgwali.

We saw the Mthatha, we saw the Mthamvuna.

We saw the Thukela, we saw the Congo.

We saw the Zambezi, we saw the Limpopo.

We've seen the rivers,

why, we've even seen the Lubhelu.

Ewe kaloku ndibiza ngabom.

Ngoba kaloku ukuze kulunge

Ndithi Zwelonke

Funeka ndiyibiz'imilambo ye Afrika.

Yes, now I name them deliberately.

So that all may go well

I say Zwelonke;

I must name the rivers of Africa.

Ewe kaloku kwakudala,  
Le mini yayi saziwa iyakuz'ifike  
Ungeka qashulwa, engekakuzali unyoko  
Wawusele uzelwe.  
Ke kambe okwethu kukungqina  
Sithi nal'ithole lika Xolilizwe.  
Nants' inkonyane yohlanga  
Eyabizwa ingekaveli.

Yes, you see, even long ago  
It was known this day would come.  
Before you were conceived, before  
You were born to your mother, you existed.  
Now we need only witness,  
Saying that this is Xolilizwe's<sup>6</sup> calf.  
This is the calf of the nation,  
Named before he was born.

Ewe kaloku! Le ndawo ukuyo  
Kwakukhe kwahlala omnye umntu kuyo  
Kusezaw'hlal'omnyumntu  
Yiyo lo nto funek'uchul'ukunyathel'uchule  
Uwabal'amanyathelo  
Ngob'umlambo owela kuwo kwedini  
Uzele amatye agcwel'ucolothi.  
Ngentla ziziziba, ngezantsi ziziziba

Yes of course! The position you hold  
Was held by someone before you,  
As there will be someone after.  
That is why you must act with care,  
Counting your steps,  
For the river you're crossing, young man,  
Is full of slippery stones,  
Deep pools to the north, deep pools to the south.<sup>7</sup>

Chula ke ukhangele ngaphesheya  
Ngoba kaloku ukwenza kwakho namhla  
Kuyakulandela ngemihla sewungasekho

Be steady then and look across<sup>8</sup>  
Because what you do in this time  
Will follow you when you depart.

The second stanza of this selection is deceptively simple. Far more than simply a list of rivers, the lines carefully name the lifeblood of amaXhosa society that forms the essential point of connection between people and their landscapes and histories. Rivers are inhabited by ancestral spirits, thus by naming them, Poswayo makes an allegorical reference to the ongoing dwelling of these spirits on lands and waterways. Rivers also gave shape to historical patterns of amaXhosa migration, settlement and seasonal transhumance. By beginning with the names of nearby rivers and moving on to names of rivers progressively farther away, Poswayo maps both spatial and temporal distance, stepping backward through time and linking the present company to their forbears, tracing the amaXhosa migration from northern regions of the Eastern Cape and beyond. The sequence concludes with the mythical land of Lubhela from which the amaXhosa are purported to have travelled over seven hundred years ago (Gérard 1971).<sup>9</sup>

This second excerpt below is taken from Poswayo's first poem performed during the ceremony for Chief Mthetho. Once again, Poswayo begins with an opening that draws his audience into a call and repeat and once again he opens with the image of rivers. In this poem, however the imagery shifts immediately to that of the multi-coloured Nguni cattle, which hold deep cultural and ceremonial significance for amaXhosa. Cattle and rivers remain the central elements throughout the selection that the poem returns as it flows on to references to ancestral names and other creatures who inhabit the landscape.

Imbongi: A! Zwelonke

Abantu: A! Zwelonke

Imgongi: A! Zweloooonke!

Abantu: A! Zwelonke!

Imbongi: Hail! Zwelonke

Audience: Hail! Zwelonke

Imbongi: Hail! Zweloooonke!

Audience: Hail! Zweloonke!

Mntan'omhle

Amehl'am ath'akukhangela ndabon'imilambo

Ndathi ndakujonga ngaphesheya

Ndazibon'iinkomo zako kwenu

Ndazibon'iinkomo zako kwethu

Honorable one,<sup>10</sup>

Opening my eyes, I saw rivers.

When I looked across

I saw your family's cattle,

I saw my family's cattle.

Ndiyazaz'ezako kwenu

Ndiyazaz'ezako kwethu

Ndiyazehlula ngemibala

Kuba zingaphesheya kwemilambo zicacile.

Zicacile zizakuhle

Zibonakala ngok'tyhobo

I know those of your family

I know those of my family.

I know them by their colors<sup>11</sup>

for even across the river they are distinct.

They are beautifully distinct

They appear now, charging.

Ewe kaloku!

Yithi khe ndicaphule ndenjenje

Ngoba kaloku ukuze kulunge maLawundini

Vumani kuba sendiliphethibhozo

Ndabel'izizwe

Vumani kaloku

Ndabel'iQamata

Ndabel'umhlaba kalok'omagqagala

Yes then!

Let me say something

For in order for things to improve, maLawundini,<sup>12</sup>

Allow me, for I already have the knife.

I distributed among nations.

Allow me then,

I gave to Qamata.<sup>13</sup>

I gave the land with its dry boulders.

Ndabela kaloku umhlaba kaloku wakulo Daliwonga  
Kuba kaloku kulapho zaphuma khon'iinkomo  
Zaqweqwema zadl'amathafa  
Zafika kwaChotho zamila  
Zabuya nentombi  
Yafika yazal'amadodana

I gave the land from Daliwonga's<sup>14</sup> family  
From which the cattle came,  
Running to the fields.  
They reached Chotho and stopped,  
returning with a girl.<sup>15</sup>  
She arrived and gave birth to young boys.

Namhla ke kuthi mandithi  
Ukuze kulunge kum  
Zikho kalok'iinkomo zakulo Mvuzo  
Zikho kalok'iinkomo zakulo Thambekile  
Nawe nkonyana yakulo Thambekile  
Yithi ndithi rhuthu  
Nang'umwangalala ndikwabele

Today I want to say only  
That things are well with me.  
There are the cattle from Mvuzo's family,  
There are the cattle from Thambekile's family.  
And you, calf of Thambekile's family,  
Let me take out  
These scattered coins to share with you.<sup>16</sup>

Ewe kaloku!  
Ukuze kulunge maLawundini  
Vumani kaloku ndiwele kalok'imilambo,  
Ndiwel'uMbashe, ndiwele'iXuka  
Ndinyuke kaloku ngoMkhonkotho.  
Ndakufika phezu kwentaba  
Ndivul'amaphiko  
Ndime kaloku ndixel'intsikiz'im'emaweni  
Iqhayise'amahahane  
Isithi mna ndihluthi  
Ndihluth'amaqonya  
Kazi wena hahane uyakurhayisa ngantoni na  
Kuhluth'intsundwan'enje.

Yes then!  
So that things will be well, maLawundini,  
Allow me to cross these rivers.  
I crossed the Mbashe, I crossed the Xuka  
And ascended Mkhonkotho.<sup>17</sup>  
I arrived at the top of the mountain,  
Opened my wings  
And stood on the cliffs commanding as a hornbill  
Boasting to the hadedas,  
Saying I am full,  
I'm full of maqonya.<sup>18</sup>  
I wonder, what would you boast about, hadeda?<sup>19</sup>  
Since it is so full, that dark brown one.

Kulapho kaloku  
Zikhoy'iinkomo zakulo Biya  
Kulapho kaloku  
Zikhoy'iinkomo zakulo Mgangatho  
Ukuze kulunge kaloku

So that is where  
The cattle of Biya's family are.  
So that is where  
The cattle of Mgangatho's family are.  
So that things will be well then

Nawe nkonyana kaDaluxolo  
Vuma ndithi kuwe sendikho.

Even you, lamb of Daluxolo,  
Let me say it fell, but I am still here.

The first of the two poems performed at the wedding in December 2016 is addressed to the groom. This poem opens with the image of the poet as an old man calling for his stick to aid him in an arduous journey across rivers and valleys and the steep, rough ground of the Engcobo countryside, the groom's ancestral homeland as well as Poswayo's.

Amathun'anabile  
Thina nto zaziyo'ixesha lokulala lixesha lokulala  
Ndiniken'iintonga zam ndiwel'imilambo  
Ndiniken'iintonga zam ndiwel'imifula  
Ndithambek'amathambeka  
Ndixawuk'imixewuka  
Ndigob'izagobe  
Ndikhomb'imibombo kokwethu  
[...]

It is growing late.  
We who know the time to sleep, it is time to sleep.  
Give me my sticks to cross rivers,  
Give me my sticks to cross valleys.  
I walk down the hills,  
Stepping over the rough ground,  
Bending when I need to—  
I face the land that is ours.  
[...]

Ulumkile kwedini  
Usibonisi'izint'ezilumkileyo  
Kuba phakathi kwamadod'ubungakhetha kuwo  
Ukheth'ukukhetha kwaNxasana  
Thina nto zaziyo asothukanga nto  
Kuba siyaz'olu sapho  
Lwakhe lwenz'izimanga ngeny'imini  
Lalunguz'imilambo  
Lawela nezizwe  
Awel'amaMpondomis'ekhokelwa ngamaNxasana  
Awel'amaMfengu'ekhokelwe ngamaNxasana  
Zatshw'izinto zalunga

You are wise young man,  
You've shown us wise things  
For among men you could choose from  
You chose from the Nxasana family  
We who know them are not surprised  
For we know this family  
Who have done wonders in their day:  
They looked for rivers  
And crossed them with nations:  
The amaMpondo crossed, led by the Nxasana clan,  
The amaMfengu crossed, led by Nxasana clan,  
And things were well.

The poem's concluding lines below invoke the conjugal love that has brought together husband and wife and indeed the entire company gathered to celebrate their union. By speaking and sharing such love, the groom can display the same leadership with which his ancestors led the

amaMpondo and the amaMfengu and in doing so will bring the metaphorical benediction of rain to a suffering land.

Kwathi ngexesha lokuphila kwalo mihla	What happened during our lives in those days?
Zenzek'izint'ezintle kokwethu	Beautiful things took place in our country,
Kwamnandi kwaba chosi kwabahele	People were happy and well.
Thetha k'ukuthand'umfazi wakho	Speak about your love for your wife
Ukuz'iphind'ibuy'in'imvula	So that the rain may return,
Liphind'eli lizwe lintshul'intw'ezintle	So that this country can grow beautiful things
Siphinde sibuye kokwethu	So that we may be at home again.

What does it mean, “to dwell”? The Oxford English Dictionary lists various definitions, including its archaic usages, “to tarry, delay” and “to abide or continue for a time in a place, state, or condition” (OED 2018). In current usage, it can mean both “to occupy as a place of residence; to inhabit” and “to remain (in a house, country, etc.) as in a permanent residence; to have one's abode; to reside, ‘live’” (OED 2018). The OED notes that the most frequent current use of the word is figurative, as in “to spend time upon or linger over (a thing) in action or thought; to remain with the attention fixed on; now, esp. to treat at length or with insistence, in speech or writing” (OED 2018). Yet perhaps most notably, it is also “To continue in existence, to last, persist; to remain after others are taken or removed” (OED 2018). All of the various subtleties of meaning resonate in Poswayo's poetry, yet the last is the most poignant. Dwelling, for the amaXhosa of South Africa's Eastern Cape, is a verb fraught with struggle and tension. Over the course of a century and a half—from the nineteenth century wars of dispossession through the imposition of colonial and apartheid laws and mass relocations—the colonial and apartheid South African states disrupted and infringed upon amaXhosa dwelling to the extent of their considerable capacities. Their primary aim was to coerce rural, self-sufficient people off their lands to make both their land and, especially, their labour available for the pursuit of profit. As the Chamber of Mines noted at the turn of the last century,

An abundant supply of cheap labour drawn from the coloured races is of supreme importance, and without this aid there do not appear to be any great potentialities for the shareholder, the white mine *employé*, or the country at large. The burning question is how this vital factor in the general prosperity can be provided as the mining industry demands. The only remedies seem to be: (1) More legal and moral pressure to compel a great number of natives in British possessions to work, and for longer periods. (2) To extend the present recruiting area with the utmost rigour. (Bourne 1903)

Scholar Jeff Opland, who has written extensively about iimbongi and their shifting role through the colonial and apartheid period explains the ways in which izibongo articulate the tragedies of dispossession: “The names of their ancestors held particular significance within the system of ancestor veneration, for not only is an individual descended from individuals, ritually he *is* his ancestors, *and his ancestors are identified with their dwelling places*” (Opland 2005, 50, emphasis added). That is, to invoke ancestral lineages in the poems is to invoke their homelands, and vice versa. In his discussion of a poem by the late David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi about the ancestral chief Mfanta and his heir Manzezulu, Opland goes further:

The sacral chief is the people: his strength is theirs, and his well-being is ensured by the sympathetic attention of his ancestors to his affairs and to the affairs of the chiefdom. But this ritual relationship is ruptured because Mfanta lies buried on Robben Island, where he was dumped by the whites for resisting white encroachment and fighting for the rights of his people. And so Manzezulu's people are destitute, and they will remain destitute and troubled as long as Mfanta's bones lie restless in foreign soil, unappeased by sacrifice. (Opland 1987)

Through this lens, the violence and destitution wrought by apartheid and persisting in its aftermath can be seen as the direct result of a ruptured spiritual connections between people and their ancestral homes.

Poswayo's invocations of homeland and lineage are reminders of this past and of the sacred responsibilities binding families to their landscapes and the generations yet to come. His poetry contains features unfamiliar to English speakers—particular introductory and concluding phrases, genealogies and praise names, and unfamiliar idioms to name just a few. With these poetic devices, and the multilayered significances they contain, izibongo illustrates the fluidity of poetry and the ways in which it can act on people in material and tangible ways. Thukela Poswayo's poetry celebrates dwelling not as a fixed or permanent condition, but as a fluid state of being that encompasses the seasonal migrations and long, incremental migration that are part of amaXhosa history. Rooted in

traditions that see landscape, cattle, and people as a close triumvirate surrounded by benevolent ancestral spirits, Poswayo's poetry speaks to the simultaneous dwelling of entities beyond humans and the importance of each to the integrity of the whole.

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## Notes

1. The omission of Black South African writers (besides the darling of ecocritics, Zakes Mda) from a discussion of South African environmental writing published in a recent addendum to the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (Stanley and Phillips 2016) is particularly egregious.
2. The Roman letter “q” denotes a palatal click, “x” a lateral click, and “c” a dental click. Combinations of consonants (e.g., nq, ngc, xh) indicate variously voiced or aspirated clicks.
3. This former “Bantustan,” or Black land reserve, has a complicated political history that includes being offered nominal independence by the apartheid government. As a result of its history, it remains an almost entirely Black region whose culture, language, and settlement patterns differ markedly from other parts of the Eastern Cape.
4. The Ciskei is another former Bantustan area, located across the Kei River from the Transkei. Again, the history of this region can be seen in its contemporary geographies.
5. E.g., the son of a warrior, a brave person.
6. Zwelonke's father.
7. Mentioned by the imbongi because it is known that there are people dwelling at the bottom of the river pits (a site of initiation of spiritual people).
8. I.e., to the ancestral realm.
- 9 For a more detailed discussion of the poem and its geopoetics, please see McGiffin, E. 2017b, 2019.
10. Mntan'omhle: Literally, “Beautiful child.”
11. Cattle colors are particular to clan.
12. “MaLawundini” is someone without a tradition or custom who wants to fit in somewhere. The term is sometimes offensive but is not meant to be so in this case. It could mean that the King may feel like amalawundini because the imbongi is going to say things that he may not understand.
13. Refers to the town of Qamata (iQamata) rather than the god (uQamata).
14. The family includes Kaiser Daliwonga Mathanzima, who was installed as chief of the Transkei by the apartheid government.

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15. i.e., The cattle were the lobola (bride price) for the girl from Chocho.
  16. “Umwangalala” refers to dispersed objects generally; it is interesting to note the correspondence between money, grain and cattle in Kropf’s (1915) definition: “Grain thrashed out and lying spread on the floor; small money scattered about, cattle dispersed”. The word also captures the fact that the coins are abundant, befitting to the recipient’s status.
  17. Near the town of Centane.
  18. Amaqonya are large, green and silver caterpillars of the emperor moth that feed on the mimosa thorn-bushes (Kropf, 1915). Traditionally, the caterpillars, which can grow to ten centimeters, are an important food source for people and birds alike. As Kropf describes, “The boys kill it by inverting the head and thus pressing out the intestines; they then roast and eat the remainder”. Although a different species, amaqonya are analogous to the more familiar mopane worms, a major protein source throughout southeastern Africa.
  19. The mispronunciation in the isiXhosa (the correct word is uyakuqhaisa) is for alliterative effect, echoing the smoother aspirated h’s of “hahane” and “kuhluthi” rather than interrupting these mellifluous sounds with a hard palatal click.

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