Micro and macro
8 intergenerational oral communication in the Zion Christian Church

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Introduction

This chapter looks at the cultural significance of poetry that is presented orally within the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). While such poetry belongs to the African-Initiated Church's oral tradition, my method of analysing this mode of oral tradition is one that assumes that as a source of oral history, oral data are situated within specific cultures. It is as a result of this vantage point that historians like Prins (1991: 119) could observe that historians should not presume serial time in dealing with oral traditions of different peoples. He cautions that 'serial time is not the only sort of time that men use' (1991: 119). The other Western hegemonic approach of history writing that Prins (1991: 119) would like to see changing is one in which change is seen as the main index of historical content because 'there are other things than change to explain'.

My approach is thus a close analysis of the poetry aspect of the ZCC oral tradition, using the oral historical method. Leavy (2011: 4) separates the oral tradition from other kinds of traditions that people may have by stressing that 'an oral tradition is one in which stories are passed down through the generations'. Oral history is 'a method of collecting narratives from individuals for the purpose of research' (Leavy 2011: 4). Ontologically oral history as a research method assumes that 'research is a process, not an event' where 'we build meaning through the generation of an interview narrative, and the analysis and interpretation of that narrative' (Leavy 2011: 7). Epistemologically, in the oral history method 'researchers and participants are placed on the same plane' and researchers are 'not conceptualized as “the knowing party” with full authority over knowledge production' (Leavy 2011: 8).

Prins (1991: 120) makes a helpful distinction between two major types of oral source. The first is 'personal reminiscence' which he
describes as 'oral evidence specific to the life experiences of the informant' (1991: 120). The second is oral tradition that is 'systematically and dependently related to the reproduction of social structure', which he adopts from the theorist Durkheim (Prins 1991: 121). As the ZCC is an organization and not an individual, my focus in analysing the content of its oral tradition will be on its usefulness in reproducing the social structure of the organization. It is from looking microscopically at the ZCC social structure as it is reflected in its oral tradition that I shall proceed macroscopically to look for reflections of the culture of the people who belong to its majority membership and thus give the organization a specific cultural identity.

Oral tradition can be further subdivided into four types according to whether it is free and formulaic as in names and proverbs, free and narrative as in recollections of historical and other information by research participants, frozen and poetic as in poetry learnt by rote and passed from generation to generation, or free and epic as in poetry composed by a creative mind using data from the oral tradition (Prins 1991: 121). The ZCC oral poetry I shall be looking at is preserved in audio recordings and transcriptions published in its official newsletter named ZCC Messenger will be analysed using the criteria outlined earlier. It is important to note that 'the main problems of use and misuse of oral tradition relate to traditions not learned by rote: epics and narratives' (Prins 1991: 123). Narratives transmit 'traditions of genesis, dynastic histories and accounts of social organization' (Prins 1991: 125).

It will be interesting to check the content of the narrative parts of the oral poetry of the ZCC against the authoritative historical accounts by writers such as Mafuta (2010), Lukhaimane (1980) and Anderson (2001), which employed 'modern' historiography. In order to check the modern historical accounts by the writers mentioned here, oral accounts by elderly members of the ZCC, narrative in their form collected by ZCC leadership and published in ZCC Messenger, will be explored. ZCC poetry analysed in this chapter was recorded by the church across the three generations of its leadership since its founding in 1910.

**Signs of continuity in the praise poem of the current ZCC bishop**

The title of this poem recorded on audio tape and published in the official newsletter by the ZCC is 'Ramarumo Mohwaduba'. Ramarumo is a praise name for the current ZCC head, His Grace the Rt. Rev. Bishop

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Dr Barnabas Lekganyane. Mohwaduba, too, is not the bishop's surname. It is a clan name of a broad cluster of Sotho families who venerate the buffalo, whose domestic equivalent is a cattle head. For this reason, when the Lekganyane family members are praised in a manner aligned to Northern Sotho cultural practice, references to them by the totems of cattle head and buffalo are used interchangeably.

Such a traditional emphasis on the clan name or totem in praising African leaders of outstanding stature like each of the ZCC bishops coming from the Lekganyane dynasty serves seamlessly to superimpose the lauded attributes of earlier leaders on to those succeeding them. For this reason, traditionally praise poems do not belong to individuals. Although some parts may be added or subtracted as the praise poems pass down generations, some formulae remain constant, thus paying tribute not only to the individual but also to the entire clan or dynasty. The very same poem now used to pay tribute to the current ZCC head was used to pay homage also to his father, Bishop Edward Lekganyane, except for a few lines that the gifted praise singer adapts from time to time. The praise singer, Petrus Molelemele, lived from the days of the founder Bishop Engenas Lekganyane, through to Bishop Edward Lekganyane's reign, up to the early parts of Bishop Barnabas's period. The lines of the oral epic alluding to the founding of the church in 1910 by Bishop Engenas Lekganyane bear testimony to the fact that the same praise poem was used to praise Bishop Engenas during his days, followed by minor adaptations when Bishop Edward Lekganyane assumed leadership of the ZCC in 1948 upon his father's death.

When I compared the taped (ZCC Choir Volume 1 & 2, 1992) and printed (ZCC Messenger, September 1985: 4–5) versions of the praise poem, I noticed that three lines from the original oral rendition were omitted in the printed version. These are:

- Gola mogolo ramalala a gola,
- Ramahlwa a gola,
- Ramahlwa a bolela ditshaba go loka.

Crew, one who grows all night, 23
One who grows all day,
One who teaches right all day to nations, 25.

These omitted lines are preceded by and organically expand on the lines:

- Ge e le go thakga o thakgele,
- O thakgetse Molepo le Mamabolo.

As for doing good you have done good, 13
You did good to Molepo and Mamabolo,
to be associated with the holiness of Zion Jerusalem in Israel is significant. This not only reveals that the ZCC headed by the bishop is, as Lukhaimane (1980) observes, a supra-tribal structure. It stretches the influential sphere of the bishop and ZCC globally, though with an African identity exemplified by words like 'king' and 'thobela', whereby the notion of a great leader cannot be divested of majestic supremacy similar to that of a traditional king. Hence, we have references by ZCC followers to the three generations of bishops starting with Engenas Lekganyane both as bishop and as kgoši/king (see Lukhaimane 1980).

When in line 20 the praise singer describes the huge Israeli city of Jerusalem as baffled by the transference of Christian glory historically associated with her to a tiny city in rural Mamabolo in the northern recesses of South Africa, cohesion weaving the long praise epic together is achieved. Allusions to Jerusalem of biblical fame cohere with images elicited by phrases from earlier lines like 'exuding Zion glory' and 'sprouts while we slumber' in lines 3 and 7, respectively. After lines 14 and 15 have credited the bishop and ZCC with use of the Gospel to banish darkness from South African blacks and whites, represented respectively by the phrases 'Molepo and Mamabolo' and 'red whites', the lines 'Reverberates across the seas' (18), 'America and Europe groan' (19) and 'By he, nations’ sanctuary' (21) yield an overriding image of the ZCC as expanding her mission inexorably from the soil of King Molepo and King Mamabolo to America and Europe. From being a supra-tribal black South African Christian church, the ZCC is now painted as a multi-racial, multi-national organization.

After the ZCC praise singer has charted the demographic constituents and contours of the ZCC thus, the lines that follow revert to the beginning of the ZCC in 1910 by its founder Engenas Lekganyane. Makgoka is the praise name by which Bishop Engenas Lekganyane is known immortally.

E re nka e o be Makgoka
Wa go kgoisaela ruti;
O the Sitha le kae Makgoka,
O tla boela gape dithabeng tla Sione,
Go yo rapela, go phuta sethhaba,
Ge e le mo sethhaba se timela,
Go timela baepele?

O that you had been aTier, 23
Who ties for ever;
With what people shall you remain, Tier,
Shall you clamber again the
mounts of Zion, 26
To supplicate, to amass the
throngts.
For congregants go astray,
It is leaders who wander away? 29.
The central lines 26 and 27 state the historical fact of Engenash, after his call in 1910 (see Lukhaimane 1980; Mafuta 2010) praying on the mountain of Zion in Moria, South Africa. Zion is not the original name of the mountain. Engenash renamed the mountain Zion after founding the church to signify Christian ties with Zion in Israel. In the ZCC founder’s prayers on Mount Zion, he asked God to send his people that he could teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to (Lukhaimane 1980; Mafuta 2010). As congregants (line 28) and leaders (line 29) within the congregation typically veer into aberration despite the ZCC founding bishop’s hard work to show them the way of the Lord, the performer expresses a paradoxical wish that after the ZCC bishop had converted people to Christianity such people would not have remained with a choice either to continue following Christian ways or to revert to dark ways. It is an aspect of the Christian Gospel that human beings differ from all other creation by virtue of having a choice. The praise singer’s complaint thus serves to reveal a thorough knowledge by the ZCC bishop of Christian principles.

The previous lines are followed by the oral performer’s request for forgiveness from God, trusting this to the ZCC bishop’s prayers. He advances as a mitigating factor the fact that unlike heaven, the earth is a place of sin, tempting the children of God to forsake the teachings of Christianity:

Re rapelele Morena Lekganyane,
Legodimo le lefa ga di tshwane;
Re a go lochla;
Tebernikele ya Sione re re e tlife,
Tebernikele ya Sione e tlife
e se na nsaepego,
E tla bogwa ke bohle,
E tla bogwa ke meloko le meloko,
E tla bogwa le ke ngwana wa lehea.

Pray for us, King Lekganyane, 30
Heaven and earth are not the same;
We humble ourselves before you;
The tabernacle of Zion is here with us,
The tabernacle of Zion came without form,
To be beheld by all,
To be beheld by this and coming generations,
It shall catch even the eye of a babe, 37.

The oral performer’s metonymic hallowing of the ZCC bishop to the point of bestowing on him a halo of holiness should be interpreted in the African cultural convergence of respect for a good leader with a godlike worship, as explicated in Lukhaimane’s (1980) study of the ZCC. From an African cultural perspective such a regard for the king or any leader accorded the stature of a king is ethical. That is why Shai’s (2006) biographical study of the Rain Queen Modjadji points the reader to the traditional belief of Modjadji’s subjects that the Queen’s unhappiness could lead to famine or other kinds of pestilences plaguing the nation, for a benevolent African monarch is traditionally seen to possess god-like supernatural powers. The praise singer understandably asks the ZCC bishop vicariously to forgive congregants’ sins.

Pervading biblical allusions continue to tie the black South Africa–founded Christian denomination to the mission of Christ and sanctity embodied in Israel’s Jerusalem/Zion, seen in the repeated word ‘tabernacle’. According to the oral performer the new tabernacle of South Africa–based Zion is of mystical beauty perceived more by the human soul than physical eye (shown in the phrase ‘catch even the eye of a babe’ in line 37), with supernatural power to rivet all mankind due to its quality to transcend physical form. As the ZCC tabernacle is ‘to be beheld by this and coming generations’ (line 26), through its historical Christianity is heightened to invoke the ideal in order to satisfy the human need to hope for a paradise by means of which the frailties of this world will be defeated. According to Africanist writers like Abraham (1962) and Mphahlele (2002), the African cultural view of human life and death is that of life continuing beyond death, wrongdoing being corrected by intervention of ancestors during the carnal life of the ancestors’ progeny, and an afterlife that is fantastically of ever-lasting bliss. It is not difficult to see that the ZCC notion of an afterlife portrayed by the oral performer is the Africanist one in which sins are cleansed from the congregation by the bishop while the congregants are still alive, so that in their idea of death there is no alien cultural notion of hell.

The redeeming nature of ZCC-style Christian Gospel is depicted in hopeful terms that lean on the traditional mission of the Gospel to banish darkness. Lines 38 to 76 that follow testify to this.

Taba yena
A e ke e ngwalelele meloko
Ye e sa tlago go tsvalwa,
Le re go bona,
Bolego bo fedile,
Ga bo sa tla hlwela bo e ba gona;
Bohale bo hloka maelelo,
Ditau di fedile meno,
Kganya e rewa ke bohle;
Morena Lekganyane,

May this matter 38
Be written down for generations
Yet to be born,
Tell them,
Night is finished, 42
It won’t be any longer;
Wit is frozen stagnant,
Lions’ teeth are filed,
All extol light;
King Lekganyane,
Ke nto ya go ja bana le batho ba bagolo, Thing gorging young and old, 81
Yo e tla go mo feta, One whom it spares,
O tla ba le lehlagonolo, Will be lucky,
Gobane o tla dula le baha, For he will live with the dead,
Empanadimo ba sa dule le motho, Though the dead live with no one 85

Apart from these lines conjuring up the shape of an anthropomorphic monster sent by the ancestors and Supreme Being to bring back balance among human beings with the harmony of the universe they also paint a picture true to the Africanist understanding of a reality that does not separate the physical from the spiritual, the animate from the inanimate, the empirical from the mystical, etc. That is why line 84 contains the phrase 'live with the dead' bridging the phenomena of life and death, normally known to exist in mutual exclusion. The phrase 'live with the dead' not only defies western Manichean binaries, but reveals that the world view represented by the oral performer is steeped in African cultures that put human beings and the 'living dead' at the centre of their cosmology (see Mphahlele 2002). This, according to African writers like Rafapa (2010), is the fabric of African cosmology which leaders of South African African-Initiated Churches are known to invoke in order to show Christianity is devoid of an African outlook.

In the lines that follow, the oral rendition sketches the anguish caused in non-ZCC members of ambient African communities, whose unmediated belief in traditional religion leads to temperamental anguish. The combined effect of the phrases 'an inyanga' (line 89) and 'we have lost it' (line 90) is that of associating unmediated traditional religion with loss, in the light of the advent of the new Jerusalem of ZCC and the gospel heralded by it. This is seen when a visit to the traditional healer yields no respite from rampant deaths dealt human beings by the God-decreed monster:

O ile go e kwa a clala pelo, Someone got vexed to hear this, 86
A hlanola dinao, And then hurried,
Moroma a gara thogwana, Till speed tossed up the skirt,
Ra re ge e le ngaka, And we opined if an inyanga,
E ka hloela re palale; Were to stop the deaths we have lost it;

Mme a boa a nyanile pelo, Yet he returned with a sad heart,
Gobane a hloki le motla, For he had not found one in agreement,
motheši a ditaba,
A ditaba tau ya go ja e sa kgore,
Sebata se se nako boya;
Tšebi legodimo,
Ga le a ka la shihlowa le batho.
Re a go lotšha,
Morena wa kganya ya Stone,
Re re tšebela Morena,
Makwathora a Kgomo,
Lepelle la Mmanegodii,
Ba ile ba re ge ba go bona,
Ba ikhuruteša ditšalogha ba re,
Kgomo mma 'a ditšhaha o ye tla.

One with agreeing ears to listen, 92
News of lion eating with leaping hunger;
Predator without body hair;
Know that heavens,
Can never be judged with men.
We salute you, 97
King exuding Zion glory,
We say tšebela King,
Breaker of bull hump.
In Lepelle River of Mmanegodi,
As those nearby witnessed,
They hid their faces saying,
One with Cow totem, mother of nations, is coming.

The imagery of motherly love and protection in the words ‘Cow’ and ‘mother of nations’ in the closing line of the long oral praise epic signifies that if human beings were to defer to the conquering crusade of God’s new kingdom coming through the ZCC leader, a paradise would be experienced on earth.

The content of this praise epic departs from some deeds of the present generation leader of the ZCC in order to recall the history of how the Church was founded in 1910 and later heightened during the reign of the second bishop. Timeless formulae that transcend individual ascription are a vehicle for transporting the memory of the audience to the past. These are what Prins (1991: 123) describes as ‘crystal of wording’ that ‘remain unchanged within a changing kaleidoscope of structures adopted to particular purposes’. These are words like ‘Mohwaduba’ ‘Mmphakaza’ ‘Monare’ (line 16); ‘Stone’ (lines 26, 33 and 34); ‘Makgoka’ (lines 22, 23, 24, 25, 54, 55 and 98); ‘Morena Lekganyane’ (lines 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 30, 47 and 55); ‘Tšebela Morena’ (lines 4, 5, 10, 56 and 99); ‘Re a go lotšha’ (lines 1, 32 and 97); ‘Morena wa kganya ya Stone’ (lines 3 and 98) and ‘Kgomo’ (lines 100 and 104).

With regard to narrative parts of the epic that by their nature are not constant but vary in keeping with the purpose of the poem’s structure that is adapted to the present times of an organization, these stand out and perform a separate function from that of the history conjuring formulae. The present-reconstructing narrative parts of the ZCC praise epic below distinctively dwell on Bishop Edward Lekganyane’s second-generation segment in the continuum of ZCC leadership now in its third generation. Clearly there are bound to be in the praise epic individual leader-specific qualities that set the achievements and character of the specific leader apart from his predecessor and successor. These are parts that offer the performer leeway to apply his or her creativity and expertly compose lyrics of his own, which the historical formulae should only serve to frame within the epic mode.

**Continuity and rupture during the second-generation ZCC leadership of Bishop Edward Lekganyane**

The poem below has not been reduced to writing by the ZCC, forcing me to transcribe from a taped oral rendition of it. The oral performer starts by naming it ‘Sereto sa Bishop Edward Lekganyane’ (Praise poem for Bishop Edward Lekganyane’). Bishop Edward is the second-generation ZCC leader who took over after his father’s death in 1948 (Lukhaimane 1980; Anderson 2001). When Bishop Edward died in 1967, his son, the current ZCC bishop ascended the throne (Lukhaimane 1980; Anderson 2001; Mafura 2010).

Ga e le ka direto,
Re a mo phopholeša,
Re re ke Edward ke Morena
Lekganyane,
Ke Mohwaduba wa Mmphakaza
Monare,
Re re a a ratana morena,
Bosago a a etelana,
A a re sephiring,
A reka lebitido le gago.
Morena Lekganyane,
Re ka maloho ke e bone kgotli,
E apere lesaka e tšana e letša lenkglo,
With praises,
We merely grope for him,
We say he is Edward he is Lord
Lekganyane,
He is a Hwadubs of Mmphakaza of
buffalo,
We say rulers lick each other, 5
Paying each other visits by night,
They conspire underground,
They rue your name.
Lord Lekganyane,
We say I saw a ruler with naked
eyes, 10
Clad in sack and blowing plaintive
horn,
Declaring anguish among people,
Cursing the green pot sowing gulls,
Ripping us from parents,
Blasting wind down,
Raking in nation,
We orphans too low to gain,  
Shelved to live prophecies,  
Amid Zion throns, 19
For we believe in black man Lekgananyane;  
For whites came with truth,  
Nothing but the truth,  
We greet you Lord Lekgananyane,  
King that erects and breaks,  
Resident in the Kwenane pass, 25  
Between Kings Molepo and Mamabolo;  
With mission to boast laurels  
Green flag of Reuben of Makgasa regiment,  
Sibling of judge wielding rain and clouds,  
We prostrate to your verdict Lord Lekgananyane,  
Trail or rain rests in you,  
Only storms we latche, 32  
Storms of broken boulders,  
Stripping land naked,  
Were it not of eating and dark string gullet,  
Initiation healers would prophesy to us,  
Tearing ground to pitted furrows,  
Digging herbs for our healing,  
Diviners bones baffle their namers,  
They predict defeat, 40  
Remedy bones point to,  
Is perusal of Bible of cautions,  
Cautions for King Morawisi,  
Pointing the rulers towards life,  
Speaking of Cow totem from the north,

E a getlagetsa e phutha se hlotshago,  
Le se ometlego githo,  
E se bokelela GaLeshasha,  
Ga Willie ga morwa lekgowa;  
white man;  
Kgomo e buka ka go etsha leje pele;  
Ge e le yena Engenase o boelela ka lesho,  
O boelela GaMamabolo Bopeci  
Thabakgone,  
Thabakgone of Pedi,  
Go yo phetha dikano,  
Re re Edward Morena Lekgananyane,  
Go cla ba lehlogonolo,  
Ba 'a dang go o bona mnuo wo wa gago,  
Gobane batho re a bitswa a bitswa  
ke lehu,  
Lehu maula a bogwa lehu nka  
be le thatele,  
Nka be le a apela dila,  
Mohlala e dologa lefasekga lo lekuela,  
column, 60  
Ra bina kgotsogo tšo ya mpha,  
Kola ya e se nabo lepo.  
Edward Morena Lekgananyane,  
A o tla re rapela go yo fihla  
Le wena mafielong Morena,  
Ge e le mona re eja ke seja,  
Lehu madula a bogwa Morena?  
Ge e le sebe sona mphapanthla,  
Se mphapanthla le wena,  
Morena wa kganya ya Sione,  
Ge o re bileditše go loka,

Se re ntho letsheng la gago;  
Mnuo wa gago morwa Khutane,  
Re be re o letsetse ka go sa feleng,  
Empa go e le lefase le re thetsetise,  
Le re fapanthla le wena morwa  
Khutane.

Actively saving that which limps,  
And those with stiff joints, 47  
Gathering all at Leshasho's abode,  
At shelter of Willie son of the  
The Cow reigning with the rock;  
As for Engenas he speaks through the word,  
Turning back to Mamabolo in  

To live the covenant.  
We say Edward Lord Lekgananyane,  
Blessed are those,  
That will see your kingdom,  

For we are beckoned by death,  
Death ever puzzling were it  
scrutable,  
We would adorn in trophies,  
Upon departing earth and wind in  
And chant born song mpogo,  
Song with no vile tale.  
Edward Lord Lekgananyane,  
We beseech, pray for us to reach  
With you the end of time's Lord,  
For we fall in the eater's mouth,  
Death living always with us!  
As for divider sin,  
It makes me differ with you,  
King excusing Zion glory, 70  
After you have redeemed us to  
righteousness,  
It pulls me out of your kraal;  
Your kingdom son of Khutane,  
We have always awaited,  
Yet as for the world, it has tempted us,  
It makes you cross with us son of Khutane.
In the preceding praise epic, dedicated to the second-generation ZCC bishop Edward Lekganyane, there are formulae already encountered in the analysis, earlier, of the praise poem for the third-generation ZCC bishop Barnabas Lekganyane. Some of them are ‘Morena Lekganyane’ (lines 3, 9, 23, 30 and 54); ‘Mohwaduba wa Mmaphaka Monare’ (line 4); ‘Kgomo’ (lines 45 and 50); and ‘Morena wa kganya ya Sione’ (line 70). The bulk of Barnabas’s praise epic, except for the narrative sections that are attributed specifically to him, was also used to praise the first and second-generation ZCC bishops. The present poem, though dedicated to second-generation Bishop Edward, was used to praise the founder Bishop Engenas, but for the narrative parts referring specifically to him. That this is the case is borne out by the presence of the same formulaic phrases that are in Bishop Barnabas’s praise poem.

In the same way as third-generation Bishop Barnabas is uniquely credited with expanding the church beyond South Africa and the continent of Africa in non-formulaic parts of his praise poem, similarly non-formulaic parts of the present poem spell out second-generation Bishop Edward’s specific achievement. Lines 1 and 2 of this poem reveal that there is more than meets the eye in Bishop Edward Lekganyane. Although this quality of inexplicable spiritual power is true also for Bishop Edward’s predecessor, it has heightened and intensified during Bishop Edward’s rule. Hence the content of the two opening lines of the poem. Bishop Edward’s reference as ‘morwa Khutane’ (lines 73 and 76), using second-generation Bishop Engenas’s nickname of Khutane instead of the formal Engenas, signifies such a deepening of inscrutable spiritual power, for the meaning of Engenas’s nickname is ‘One who hides’. In other words, Engenas and Edward prefer to appear in front of their followers like ordinary men while they are actually masking their true, celestial identity. Parts of the taped poem that single out Edward’s most outstanding achievement of drawing his followers away from the spell of traditional healers known also for their use of divining bones are lines 35 to 49. One reason for traditional healers having lost their former noble role in society, now overtaken by the ZCC leader, is that they started lying to their patients and spreading unwarranted malice to thrust battles in the midst of society, as long as they extorted money to satisfy their own greed. This is described in the lines ‘Mola e se ke ya ba ko ga tho po ye nsbo mogolo’ (‘Were it not of eating and dark string gullet’) and ‘Nka be a te porofetela mangaka a koma’ (‘Initiation healers would prophesy to us’).

In the way described earlier, both rupture and continuity are represented by parts of the praise epic dedicated to Bishop Edward Lekganyane.

**Conclusion**

Rafapa (2010) describes the Zion Christian Church mores at the least as an abrogation of Western Christianity to imbue it with African Humanist values that have, through history, proven to be the survival-kit of Africans whose identity was being smothered by the alien cultural sensibility of the perpetrators of apartheid. Hence the basic commonness with Shembe’s Church of the Nazaretes, which Fongweni (2000: 195) and Anderson (2001: 101) credit with attempts at spiritual and cultural survival of the underprivileged in its heyday. Anderson (2001: 101) furthermore highlights this culturally and economically affirming tenet of the ZCC throughout its existence in his observation that the ‘ZCC has emerged from the fear of a powerful and oppressive regime to attempt to play a role in the radical changes that have taken place’. As a result of this place of the ZCC on the fringes of power and its holistically salvaging message for the underprivileged, Mafuta (2010: ii) is able to describe the consequences of this in his remark that

empowering its adherents economically through a religious soteriology, the ZCC has become an example of a trend that is shaping the Global South and is reviving the interest of social scientists and theologians to further investigate the impact of religious and theological formulations on the economic conduct of individuals.

Because the ZCC is a church, all the social and nation building roles described earlier start with spiritual salvation borne of a distinct African cultural identity that excludes the traditional use of healers, drinking of traditional and other beer and taking of any drugs including smoking. The reality constructed by the ZCC among Africans is forged through adjustment towards insights the praise epics discussed earlier contain. As a researcher my approach was that of reconciling my horizon, categories and values with those of the poets and the organization they present. A horizon is ‘a set of cultural and personal categories and values’ which any researcher shapes an understanding of researched entities ‘based to a certain extent on them’ (Michrina and Richards 1996: 28). Values reveal to a person what his or her culture ‘prefers, what is allowed, rejected, or is forbidden; they indicate what is beautiful, good, fun, helpful, distasteful, bad, boring, or destructive’, while ‘categories indicate the most important qualities of things’ (Michrina and Richards 1996: 28).
This is the oral history approach outlined at the beginning of this chapter, which in my view is reconcilable with what Michrina and Richards (1996: 28) refer to as a 'systematic investigative method called dialogical hermeneutics'. According to Michrina and Richards (1996: vii), the word 'dialogical' refers to 'the use of dialogue – dyadic conversation, negotiation of an understanding' where the word 'hermeneutics' refers to 'the construction of a description of a whole scene or phenomenon through an incremental analysis of information', leading to a holistic description through incremental analysis of dialogue. Dialogue in this case is the semantics of the formulaic parts of the praise epics signifying historical and cultural continuity, as well as the meanings of the lyrical parts of the poetry performances defining the character and achievements of a specific ZCC leader and the body of the ZCC at a certain juncture. These complementary functions of ZCC epic poetry coincide with Prins's (1991: 123) definition of the epic as 'heroic poetry composed orally, according to rules ... written down subsequently' with a structure that is 'strong enough to transcend' the process of writing and later oral modifications, having a 'fixed form'. In keeping with Prins's definition, the ZCC oral poetry analysed in this chapter performs the category of researched data called the 'narrative' in the oral tradition analysed by means of the oral history method.

Of significance is the achievement of ZCC micro intergenerational communication by means of the endemically recognizable epic structure of the poems analysed above to magnify into a macro intergenerational communication that is an index of the evolving cultural outlooks of the African communities in its ambience, who are not necessarily members of the church. This is achieved by means of the extragstantial cultural content of the ZCC oral poetic performances, hinted at by the descriptions of the ZCC represented by the writers Lukhaimane (1980), Mphahlehle (2002), Mafuta (2010), Rafapa (2010) and Anderson (2001). It becomes clear from the writings of these researchers on the ZCC that to talk about the evolving cultural identity of the ZCC is to talk about the cultures of the African communities around it that have evolved across generations. The communication of these cultural traits internally within the ZCC by means of the oral tradition is tantamount to macro intergenerational oral communication of the greater community within which the ZCC operates.

References

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