

Post-Apartheid IsiXhosa Written Poetry's Commentary on the Neoliberal Policies of the Democratic South Africa

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary article analyses and interprets selected isiXhosa written poetry texts published during the post-apartheid era. The texts are contextualised in order to expose the poets' concerns about: the influx to South Africa, after 1994, of American and European companies and industries; the increase of foreign "financial aid," which makes the country permanently indebted and dependant; foreign dependence of South Africans who have abandoned the traditional economic activities like agriculture and co-operatives; concern for materialism and consumerism, which have led to lack of ethics, Africanism, and Afrocentrism values; and the abandonment of the socialist programme, which promised upliftment of the poor and was substituted with a neoliberal programme due to foreign influence. A call is made by the poets for Afrocentrism and sustainable development of South Africa. The poets warn that failure to confront the challenges by the self-centred elitist leadership may result in the resumption of a second revolution. The study, which employs a general Marxist approach, therefore, goes beyond text-based exegesis as selected texts are examined against the background of international geopolitics. This methodology locates the texts within the framework of their context, analysing and interpreting them to expose the post-apartheid poets' commentary on the neoliberal strategy led by America, which, scholars argue, is directed towards the Global South. The liberal democratic model promoted in South Africa by the above-mentioned country, which was adopted by the African National Congress-led South African government, according to the poets, raises grave concerns as it provides political freedom that is devoid of economic freedom.

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Keywords: isiXhosa written poetry; commentary; neoliberalism; African National Congress; post-apartheid South Africa; neoliberal strategy led by America

Introduction

The end of the apartheid regime and the birth of a democratic new South Africa which ushered in a discourse of national reconciliation (Mona 2018a) are celebrated by isiXhosa poets. The support of the international community in the transformation process in South Africa is acknowledged and recognised (Mona 2021). Some post-liberation isiXhosa poets have, however, cautioned South Africans about the apparent neoliberal strategy of the former colonial masters who are led by America. Poets warn against neoliberalism, a phenomenon that is described by Dumenil and Levy (2013, 5) as a “a new phase in the evolution of capitalism ... under U.S. world hegemony.” The complex phenomenon of neoliberalism is not easy to define. Nonetheless, a simple definition is provided by Manning (2024):

Neoliberalism is a policy model that encompasses both politics and economics. It favours private enterprise and seeks to transfer the control of economic factors from government to the private sector. Neoliberalism involves the belief that greater economic freedom leads to greater economic and social progress for individuals.

What makes the study on neoliberalism and isiXhosa literature relevant and appropriate is the coincidence of the emergence of the new South Africa with the highest watermark of neoliberalism internationally. Cahill, Edwards, and Stilwell (2012, 3) state:

By the early 1990s there was a widely held belief that neoliberalism was the dominant political economic paradigm across much of the capitalist world, even though its practical applications varied considerably from country to country.

The early 1990s were a period of deliberations about the political and economic policies that would be followed by post-apartheid South Africa. The process was monitored closely and profoundly influenced by the former colonial powers under the leadership of America.

Subsequently, the “emergent policy doctrine and its hallmark measures—floating currency markets, reducing trade barriers, privatising public sector activities and deregulating industry” (Cahill, Edwards, and Stilwell 2012, 3)—found their way into the policies of the new democratic government. International institutions that would play a significant role in the new government, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which “required recipient nations to comply with the ‘Washington Consensus’ on neoliberal governance and economic development principles” (Cahill, Edwards, and Stilwell 2012, 3), ensured that the new South Africa would comply.

Dumenil and Levy (2013, 9) observe that:

The international neoliberal order—known as neoliberal globalisation—was imposed throughout the world, from the main capitalist countries of the center to the less developed countries of the periphery, often at the cost of severe crises in Asia and Latin America during the 1990s and after 2000.

Post-apartheid South Africa, according to the poets, is also going through a severe neoliberal crisis.

Literature Review

There is a long-standing tradition of scholarship on oral and written isiXhosa poetry. The scholars in both oral and written isiXhosa poetry have highlighted its functional role in society.

According to Gérard (1971, 60), the modern literate traditional poets are descendants of the primitive bards who sang the *izibongo*. An isiXhosa equivalent of the term “bard” is *imbongi*. In many studies the traditional African bard has been presented as a praise poet whose special function is to praise the chief. The *imbongi* was an important official whose profession was the recording of the praise names, victories, and laudable characteristics of his master. Gérard (1971, 60) says:

The main function of the bard (*imbongi*) was to strengthen the cohesion of the group, usually by celebrating the glorious figures of the past and extolling the authority of the reigning chief. ... The *imbongi*’s role was not simply to praise the chief. As his major concern was with the welfare of the nation, he often felt called upon to criticise any abuses by the powers that be.

This view is supported by Jordan (1957, 4–5) who intimates that *imbongi* was not limited to the “praising” or “adulation” of the chief. He says:

But it must not be thought that these bards were mere flatterers, while they drew attention mainly to the good and praiseworthy, they also had the licence to make sharp criticism of the habits of their subjects. It is here that the bard found the greatest scope for this.

Jordan reiterates the foregoing assertion in the *South African Outlook* (1973, 102) by stating, “One of the essential qualities of ‘*ubumbongi*’ was true patriotism not blind loyalty to a person or the chief, but loyalty to principles that the chieftainship does or ought to stand for. On public occasions ‘*imbongi*’ had not only to praise the chief but also to criticize him.”

Mafeje (1967, 195) sums up the role of the traditional poets as follows:

[H]e celebrates the victories of the nation. He sings songs of praise, chants the laws and customs of the nation, he recites the genealogies of the royal families and in addition he

criticized the chiefs for perverting the laws and the customs of the nation and laments their abuse of power and neglect of their responsibilities and obligations to the people.

Having had a look at the role of traditional poets it may be claimed, then, that traditional poetry is alive, positive, assertive, and functional. It is functional in the sense that it serves a purpose within communities and cultures that is much greater than simply that of entertainment. Banham and Wake (1976, 2) say the following about functionalism:

Any art form if it is to have strength, vigour and relevance, must be seen to have purpose, and to be generated by a clear sense of function.

Kaschula (1991, 50) alludes to this reality:

The contemporary *imbongi* continues to act as a social and political commentator. The socio-economic and political environment has changed dramatically over the last couple of years in Southern Africa.

The argument of this article is that contemporary isiXhosa poets have followed on the footsteps of the oral bard, their predecessor, as being a critic of the society and a guard of the nation against exploitation and oppression. Qangule (1979, 65) shares the content of a letter he received from Westphal, which reads as follows:

Literature must be related to the social, cultural and political circumstances from which and out of which it is created at any given time. Just as it receives inspiration from these circumstances so also can it throw much light on the spiritual ideas and motives of these circumstances.

This influence comes out clearly in the scholarship of contemporary isiXhosa poetry. The above literature review demonstrates that isiXhosa oral poetry has had profound influence on the form and content of contemporary written isiXhosa poetry.

Stylistic Devices Used by the Poets

For the above-mentioned functionalism to be realised, stylistic aptitude is necessary on the part of both traditional oral and contemporary poets. Thus, in their works they employ many stylistic devices, which make these poems fascinating. The language used by isiXhosa poets is engaging and exciting, yet the figures of speech might elude the reader who is not grounded in isiXhosa language and culture. These strategies are used to evade the censor. The conservative reviewers of the apartheid era continued to work for South African publishing companies beyond the apartheid era. These reviewers were trained to censor perceived political and anti-apartheid commentary by writers. Inadvertently, they enriched isiXhosa poetry. The poetic style of these poets emerges more fully when one considers the language and form of expression in some detail. This will be done at the end of the analysis and interpretation of each poem.

In the post-apartheid period, the majority of isiXhosa poems are produced in the indigenous style used by oral poets who produced *izibongo* or “praise poems.” The aesthetic ideology of these poets, which is referred to by Udentia (1993, 22) as the revolutionary aesthetic path, is compatible with the socio-political content of their poems.

Theory and Methodology

The article examines isiXhosa written poetry from an alternative perspective, namely a Marxist point of view. Marxism aims “to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history” (Eagleton 1976, 3). This entails the adoption of a dialectical conception of the form-content relationship (Eagleton 1976, 23). This approach acknowledges the primacy of content in determining form, but underlines that form also impacts on content. Ngara (1990, 15) is of the opinion that:

As a unity of content and form, poetry appeals to the reader or listener by the weight of what it says (content) and how it says it (form).

The study adopts a qualitative research approach because of its strength in studying people (in this instance, writers) in terms of their own definitions of the world. It also exposes the subjective experiences of writers and is sensitive to the contexts in which writers interact with other people, be they members of civil society or government. The texts are examined against the background of the South African society and contextualised by bringing them into contact with other inter-contributory disciplines, namely, history, political science, and philosophy. Ngara (1990, 4) acknowledges the contribution of the discipline of philosophy to literary criticism. He attributes this to the fact that “literature and philosophy have much in common with each other” (4).

The adoption of a general Marxist approach allows the study to go beyond the methodology of practical criticism, as the focus is on the social and not the universal and the individual. It goes beyond text-based exegesis as selected texts are examined against the background of international geopolitics. This means a methodology of locating the texts within the framework of their context and analysing and interpreting them to expose the post-apartheid poets’ commentary on the neoliberal strategy led by America which, scholars argue, is directed towards the Global South (Cahill, Edwards, and Stilwell 2012, 27).

The researcher analyses and interprets selected texts only. The selection is not arbitrary but is based on texts that expose post-apartheid isiXhosa written poetry’s commentary on the neoliberal policies of the new democratic South Africa. The texts are selected from the poetry of eminent isiXhosa authors. The scope of research is analysis and interpretation of selected written poetry published during the period 1994 to 2024. The article fills a gap in isiXhosa literature scholarship as it moves further than all research

that dealt with the colonial and apartheid era. The article deals with the converging views of poets, historians, and political scientists about the contemporary political and economic situation in South Africa. Additionally, the article promotes interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary studies in South Africa. The following detailed discourse on the concept of neoliberalism is aimed at presenting the context as clearly as possible to the literary critic who is not familiar with the current economic, historic, and geopolitical developments.

A Brief History of Neoliberalism and Its Link with South Africa

Historians trace the emergence of the phenomenon of neoliberalism from the end of World War II. The leaders of this movement, it is stated, are America and the United Kingdom. Harvey (2005, 39), a distinguished professor of anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, asserts that the neoliberal revolution can be attributed to Reagan and Thatcher after 1979.

Harvey (2005, 25–26; italics added) elaborates:

Ronald Reagan's victory over Carter in 1980 proved crucial, even though Carter had shifted uneasily towards deregulation ... as a partial solution to the crisis of stagflation. ... The Reagan administration then provided a requisite political backing through further deregulation, tax cuts, and attacks on trade union and professional power. ... The deregulation of everything from airlines and telecommunications to finance opened up new zones of untrammelled market freedoms for powerful corporate interests. ... *Finance capital increasingly looked abroad for higher rates of return.*

The link between America and the new South Africa of 1994 is explained by Terreblanche (2012, 26), who argues that the American-led neoliberalism was launched by President Reagan in the 1980s at the request of

American-domiciled TNCs [transnational corporations] and IMIs [international monetary institutions] to be empowered to infiltrate Southern countries with greater aggressiveness and with greater freedom. An important implication of Reagan's deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation measures was that TNCs became able to enter into partnership in Southern countries to ensure that the US did not lose control over EOI [export-oriented industrialisation] in these countries.

Against this background it becomes clear why Terreblanche (2012, 3) further argues that the South African transformation process orchestrated by the minerals energy complex (MEC) and American pressure groups on the future of the economic system in South Africa followed a neoliberal direction. Describing the South African transformation process, Terreblanche (2012, 3–4) says:

This compromise spelled out the conditionalities that would be applicable to the ANC government. Before the elite compromise was agreed upon, the MEC [mineral energy complex] and the American pressure groups made hyper-optimistic promises of how

economically advantageous it would be for South Africa if it were to become integrated into the structure of global capitalism/corporatism and if the ANC (an erstwhile socialist organisation) should accept the ideologies of neoliberal globalism and market fundamentalism.

The neoliberal policy, introduced in the 1980s, which was aimed at countering the revolution in the Global South that fought for freedom from colonialism and apartheid and socio-politico-economic independence, seems to be counter-revolutionary. The policy entailed deregulation, liberalisation, and privatisation that enabled the transnational corporations to partner with corporations in South Africa, a strategy that ensured that America keeps control of export-oriented industrialisation in South Africa and other countries in the Global South. The transnational corporations now enjoyed a favourable environment. According to Terreblanche (2012, 26), “They were now ‘free’ and empowered to act especially in the global south—as they pleased.”

Neoliberalism and the New South Africa

The early 1990s was a period of deliberations about the political and economic policies that would be followed by the post-apartheid South Africa. The process was monitored closely and profoundly influenced by the former colonial powers under the leadership of America.

According to Harvey (2005, 3):

Post-apartheid South Africa quickly embraced neo-liberalism. ... Furthermore, the advocates of the neoliberal way now occupy positions of considerable influence in education (universities and many “think tanks”), in the media, in corporate boardrooms and financial institutions, in key state institutions (treasury departments, the central banks), and, also those international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade.

Harvey’s view is echoed by African organic intellectuals, amongst them Meko (2017, iv) who, in his preface to *Re-imagining Africa*, asserts:

The problems of an independent Africa have been a combination of the legacy of colonial rule and problems imposed by influential international economic bodies like the IMF and World Bank. This international economic order has been very hostile to Africa, particularly after gaining its independence. Thus, when African leaders gained political control the economic order was controlled by international (most Western) institutions. They had to preserve the political independence of their national state, preserve their national integrity and promote peace and well-being for their people but at the same time adhere to the dictates of hostile international economic institutions.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (in Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ngcaweni 2022, 27) intimates that the outcome is “a convoluted post-1994 transformation initiative based on wrong

ideological frameworks, wrong power-structures, wrong developmental path, and integrated into the nexus of wrong and criminalised global structures.” Jeff Rudin (2024) captures this era as follows:

The market, having been made king, orphaned the meeting of urgent, post-apartheid societal needs. The replacement of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) by Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (Gear) policies in 1996 provided an official date for this.

It is against this backdrop that this article is conceptualised.

Observations by IsiXhosa Poets in the Post-Apartheid Neoliberal Era

IsiXhosa poets have observed the policies of the new democratic government and their impact on the economy of the country over the past 30 years and caution the leadership of the new democratic South Africa, which adopted neoliberalism policies, to tread cautiously. The following observations of the poets concur with Harvey (2005, 168), who asserts that “[n]eoliberalisation seeks to strip away the protective coverings that embedded liberalism allowed and occasionally nurtured.”

The Influx to South Africa after 1994 of American, European, and Asian Companies and Industries

Mndende (1998, 44) in “Ntengu-ntengu Macetyana” (Bee-catcher bird) in *Siyacamacusha* (We propitiate ancestral spirits), digs into folklore to launch a critique that the interest and support given to the new democratic South Africa by the international community is motivated or driven by economic interests. Says she:

Ntengu ntengu macetyana	Bee-catcher bird,
wath’umMelika ndimntloko,	The American said the head is mine,
Ntengu-ntengu macetyana	Bee-catcher bird,
wath’uMtshayinandimhlubulezi	The Chinese said the neck is mine,
Ntengu- ntengu macetyana	Bee-catcher bird
Lath’ iNdiya ndimfuba,	the Indian said the chest is mine,
Ntengu-ntengu macetyana	Bee-catcher bird
wath’umYurophu ndimnqe,	The European said the sirloin is mine,
Hazi xa umnini ntak’eshiyeke	I am concerned when the owner of the bird
nemilenze uya kutya ntoni na?	is only left with the legs, what will he eat? ¹

According to Kropf (1915, 408), the bird “Intengu” is “the fork-tailed drongo or bee-catcher, *Dicrurus afer* (*A Licht.*),” so called from its cry, “*tèngu, tèngu, “macetywana*, to which is sometimes added: *kazi ukuba benze-ntonina abantwana benkosi...*’ (I wonder what the children of the chief have done...).” Mndende makes use of this allegorical folktale to paint a picture of a scramble for the natural resources of the new

1 All translations are provided by the author.

under-developed and poverty-stricken democratic South Africa by the developed countries. She identifies flaws in the new regime, which she says are clearly visible. The first one identified is that the South African freedom is supported by international capitalists and conglomerates who are more interested in the land and the wealth of the country. Mndende is left wondering what South Africans will be left with, when all these wealthy countries have a major share of the resources of the country. Mndende's concerns echo the words of other critics of the neoliberal capitalism of America and Europe, one of whom is Sampie Terreblanche, who is described by Drucilla Cornell (2013) of Rutgers University as "[a]n economist, critic of neoliberal capitalism, and a veteran in the struggle for justice." Terreblanche argues that the role of the United States government and its allies in the negotiated settlement in South Africa is part of "the devastating story of the ANC's capitulation" to being what he describes as "a satellite of the neoliberal empire of the United States" (Cornell 2013). Terreblanche asserts that there was an elite compromise that was to a large degree controlled by United States and British-dominated interests, and not by the economic interests of the people of South Africa. Mndende asks:

Hazi xa umnini ntak'eshiyeke
nemilenze uya kutya ntoni na?

My concern is, when the owner of the
bird is only left with the legs, what will
he eat?

Mndende's question is, "What will the South Africans be left with?" The context of the question in her poem is that after the end of the disinvestment policy, which barred international companies from operating in South Africa, American companies returned to South Africa in droves. By 10 March 2024, Adeyemo in *Daily Maverick* (2024, 2) estimated that there are more than 600 American businesses operating in South Africa. Note Mndende's use of animals from folklore: colonialism, neoliberalism, and oppressors are referred to as *gilikankqo* (a huge animal in folklore that devours families and communities). Traditional belief and characters from folklore abound in traditional poetry. Through metaphors and similes, comparisons of people to characters and monsters from folklore are used abundantly (Damane and Sanders 1974, 40). Mndende's poem is a typical example explication through the use of cultural customs, traditions, and practices. This device is also intended to hide the meaning from a person who is a foreigner and who is not grounded in the cultural practices of amaXhosa. The form and content of Mndende's poem resemble the oral poems of the indigenous bards.

The Increase of Foreign "Financial Aid" and Investment that Makes the Country Permanently Indebted

Khininda (2007, 62) in "Sibanye" (We are one), a poem in *USiba lukaDubul'edizeni*, writes:

Mayibuye i-Afrika ayatsho
amaQabane,

Africa must return, say the
Comrades

E-Afrika sikhanye isibane zitsho
iimboni,
Ukusuka eKapa ukuya eKhayiro
bathi sibanye
Sohlulwa yimida yabaphambukeli
ukuze
basoyise.
Inkcubeko, lilwimi, amasiko
nezithethe,
Ibala nempucuko mazingaxabi
endleleni.
Esingisa **kwibuyambo** lendlu
eNtsundu,
uMbeki ulubethe lwavakala udaba
lobumbano
Sitsho i-Afrika eyabonwa
nguNkwame wase Ghana
i-Afrika kaNyerere noKaunda
noLumumba,
I-Afrika kaMacheal, uMugabe
noGadaffi,
I-Afrika kaSobukwe, Luthuli
noMondlane
Yibambeni apho mafanankosi
ningayiphonculi,
Oongxowankulu mabakhulule
Amatyathanga
Bangathi bayasikhulula ngapha
kanti bayasiqamangela
**Ngamatyala angasoze aphele
ngenxa yabo.**
“Black man you are on your own.”

The light must be on in Africa, so
says the visionaries
From Cape to Cairo they say we are
one

We are divided by boundaries
created by foreigners who want to
defeat us.
Culture, languages, customs and
traditions
Skin pigmentation and civilisation
must not be a stumbling block
On the way to renaissance of the
Brown Race
Mbeki emphasised the value of
unity.
We mean the Africa of Kwame of
Ghana
Africa of Nyerere, Kaunda and
Lumumba
Africa of Micheal Mugabe and
Gadaffi
Africa of Sobukwe, Luthuli and
Mondlane

Hold on patriots and hold firm

The capitalists must loosen the
chains
They pretend to be liberating us
While they are binding us
With debts that will never be paid up

The poet uses unfamiliar terminology: *ibuyambo* (renaissance) and *oongxowankulu* (literally translated this means those with huge bags to be filled or filled with money or wealth/capitalists). This is a reference to America and Europe that give loans to the South African government and private sector. The view of the poet is that it is not the people of South Africa that benefit from these loans but the owners of capital and their South African collaborators. These loans and/or “investments” are designed to ensure that South Africa is in perpetual debt as the terms and conditions are not favourable.

The concern of the poet is serious in the light of Terreblanche’s (2012, 2) observation:

We could describe our post-apartheid politico-economic system as a neo-colonial satellite of the American-led neoliberal global empire that systematically excludes the poorest part of the population from participating in the global economy. The political side of our new politico-economic system is also conspicuously weak in relation to the

powerful position of global capitalism/corporatism and the American-led neoliberal global empire. The ANC government is in an obviously weak position, as its sovereignty was fairly seriously restricted by the conditionalities that were made applicable when our economy was integrated into the structures of global capitalism.

The poet may have observed the rise of global capitalism from the 1980s to the post-apartheid era. This is also the observation of Stiglitz (2003; *italics added*) who intimates:

we have a system that might be called *global governance without global government*, one in which a few institutions—the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO—and a few players—the finance, commerce and trade ministries, closely linked to certain financial and commerce interests—dominate the scene, but in which many of those *in the Southern World affected by their decisions are left almost voiceless*.

IsiXhosa poets use a great deal of original isiXhosa words that might not be easily understood by the present generation, both rural and urban, for example, *ibuyambo* (renaissance) and *oongxowankulu* (capitalists). Lestrade (1937, 296) observes that one of the features of traditional poetry is the extraordinary difficulty of their language, which, in the case of the older poems, is often to the extent that the poem is partly intelligible, and which even in the case of quite new poems contains many archaisms and obscurities of other kinds.

An important factor in understanding isiXhosa poetry is knowledge of the people's past and present way of life. Khininda concludes his poem by citing the words of Bantu Biko, "Black man you are on your own." About the introduction of foreign words, in this instance English in an isiXhosa text, Finnegan (1970, 132) says that they add colour to the poem.

Foreign Dependence of South Africans Who Have Abandoned the Traditional Economic Activities like Agriculture and Co-Operatives

Dandala (2006, 74) in the poem "Zikhuliseni ma Afrika" (Develop yourselves, Africans) in *Umnyama* intimates:

Ama-Afrika! Ama-Afrika!
 Izinto ezintliziyo engadinwayo
 Izinto ezophisa kodwa zivume.
 Kuba zinethemba
 Lokufika kwengomso!
 Apho amandla aya kutshintsha-
 izandla
 Ibe 'ngophantsi nongaphezulu!

Vukani ma-Afrika nizikhulise!

Africans! Africans!
 Those who are perseverant
 Those who suffer injuries but agree
 because of the hope
 for reaching the next day
 When there will be exchange of
 power
 Both the superior and inferior get
 together
 Wake up Africans and develop
 yourselves

Okumasingcwabane makaquzele!	If in burial society, you must work hard!
Onentsimi makalande ikhuba!	One who has arable land must get a plough!
Abathandazi mabathandaze bevule amehlo	Those who pray must pray with eyes open,
Bangabhidwa nguGilikankqo!	Those must be careful of the Ogre
Zenithi ke nakugoduka	When you go back home
Nitheth'intetho enye!	Speak in one voice
Zenivume ingoma enye,	Sing one song,
Niphuphe iphupha elilodwa! Nithi	Dream a unique dream! and call
Mayikhule i-Afrika!	Africa must develop!

The poet calls for a return to communalism and not individualism. They call for revival of agricultural activities for food security, which contributed to food security and provided raw materials for industrialisation and manufacturing to thrive. Mbeki (2009, 79–80) argues: “The destruction of the manufacturing sector is at the root of growing impoverishment of South Africans, leading, as it does to increasing structural unemployment.” This is elaborated upon by Terreblanche (2012, 75; italics added), who says:

Although the South African internationalised corporations are making lucrative profits for their South African shareholders, their activities outside South Africa have in fact aggravated the problems of unemployment and poverty in South Africa quite considerably. ... The most harmful consequence of the Americanisation of the South African economy has been the de-industrialisation it has brought about through South Africa’s obligation to implement a free-trade policy and to abolish all forms of tariff protection. This has had a devastating effect on many industries that operated for decades behind tariff walls. The impact is heavy on *small industries and agriculture*.

According to the poet, it is Africans themselves who will extricate themselves from the bondage of neoliberalism. He says Africans must develop themselves (*nizikhulise*) and not depend on handouts. To achieve this, a united vision is emphasised (*ingoma enye*). Note the use of metaphorical diction. Dandala refers to the leader of neoliberalism as *uGilikankqo* (in folklore a huge animal that devours families and communities). As stated earlier, metaphors, similes, traditional beliefs, and characters from folklore abound in isiXhosa oral and written poetry (Damane and Sanders 1974, 40). Contemporary poets have adopted these devices.

Concern for Materialism, Greed, and Consumerism which Have Led to Lack of Ethics, Africanism, and Afrocentrism

Mpukwana (2019, 63–64) in the poem “Konakele phi na?” (Where did we go wrong?) in *Ndiyekeni Ndihambe* asks interrogational questions:

Kutheni nje singqongwe
 ngabarhwaphilizi?
 Sekwenzeke ntoni kwagcwal'
 amabhedengukazi?
 Sekwathini **sajikelezwa**
ngoohlhlesakhe?
 Kutheni kwaxhaphaka
oozungul'ichele?
 Kwenzeke ntoni sacinezelana sodwa
 nje?
 Kutheni naphakamelana nedwa nje?

Sekwathini nangafuni kuphuculana
 nodwa nje?
 Kutheni elowo ezamela yena nendlu
 yakhe nje?
 Kwathini imfundo ayabinasidima
 ngenxa?
 yenu nje
 Kwenzeke ntoni nazenza intlekisa
 Ngabengcinezelo

Kutheni nje umnyobo niwuthathele
 phezulu?
 Kutheni nje ukwazi abantu kuyint'
 etyisayo
 Konakelephi mzi kaPhalo?

Why are we surrounded by corrupt
 people?
 Why the abundance of liars?

Why are we surrounded by selfish
 people?
 Why the preponderance of
 opportunists?
 Why are we oppressing our own
 people?
 Why are we aloof to our own
 people?
 Why do you not want to uplift one
 another?
 Why each and every one seeks to
 enrich himself and his relatives?
 Why cause education to lose its
 value?

What happened? You made
 yourselves laughingstock of former
 oppressors.
 Why are you so willing to accept
 bribes?
 Why is it through knowing certain
 people that one can get a job?
 Where did we go wrong House of
 Phalo?

Mpukwana is alarmed by the high level of corruption of an aloof and self-centred leadership that exploits its own people. Her question "Where did we go wrong?" can only be answered when one looks at the national and international socio-politico-economic context. The imposition of the neoliberal order at the highest level of rich capitalist countries to the lowest level of poor underdeveloped countries has dire consequences. The main cause of this ugly situation is exposed by Dumenil and Levy (2013, 9) who assert that, "[a]s in any stage of imperialism, the major instruments of these international power relations, beyond straightforward economic violence, are corruption, subversion, and war. The main political tool is always the establishment of a local imperial-friendly government. The collaboration of the elites of the dominated country is crucial." It is in this environment of "imperial-friendly elites" that bribes flow from the highest level and go down to the lowest level.

The poet says these activities are against and opposed to the construction of Africanity whose values reject lies, selfishness, exploitation, oppression, and bribes. The diction used makes reference to the self-centred and opportunists as *oohlhlesakhe* (literal translation, those only concerned with filling their stomachs/selfish people) and

oozungul'ichele (those seeking easy targets for exploitation/opportunists). The compound noun *hlohlesakhe* means “to fill one’s own stomach” (stomach is not mentioned but understood). This means the self-centred and corrupt who are co-opted by the multinationals and used as agents of oppression. The use of compound nouns is prevalent in isiXhosa poetry. According to Nkondo’s (1973, 18) definition, “[a] compound noun can be said to be a noun which consist of two or more words or free forms.”

A Call for Afrocentricity and Sustainable Development of South Africa

Mtumane (2006, 66–68), in his poem “Iyemk’ i-Afrika” (Africa is going away) in *Sanya Izapholo*, registers his concern for the economic and cultural domination of the new democratic South Africa by America. He says:

Yabuy i-Afrika sancoma,	Africa returned and we applauded
Yaphel’ ingcinezelo saphumla	Oppression ended and we found rest
Lwaphel ulawulo Iwamakolonyali	Colonialist rule ended and we rejoiced
kwamnandi,	We were granted our rights and felt at
Safuman’ amalungelo kwasekhaya,	home
Yahlonitshw’ imiDaka kwalunga,	Blacks earned respect and it was good
Kodwa ngath’iyemka yon’iAfrika	But Africa seems to be going away

Mtumane’s view is that although Africans are free from apartheid, oppression, and colonial rule, and enjoy human rights and the restoration of dignity, and have thus achieved their aspiration for Africa to be returned to them, they are gradually losing Africa due to their submission to enculturation, acculturation, and subsequently domination by America. This skilful writing builds from an introduction to rise and develop up to a climax, then suddenly an anti-climax is presented, as after the building up of expectations, the reality is “Africa is going away.” This device is intended to attract the attention of the reader and to draw their attention to the impending catastrophe, due to a decision of the post-apartheid government to embrace neoliberalism.

Mtumane (2006) asks:

Kanti sakha i-Afrika na okanye sakha iMelika?	Are we developing Africa or developing America?
Ngaba besibuyis i-Afrika na okanye besisamkel’ iMelika?	Were we returning Africa or welcoming America?
Ukuze ibuye ngenene iAfrika Ayikuphelela kupolitiko lodwa	For Africa to have truly returned It will not be political victory only She will return with economic development
Iya kubuya nangoqoqosho, Mayibuye nenkcubeko yayo, Mazibuye neelwimi zayo,	Her culture must also return. Her languages must also return

Mtumane's view is that the socio-politico-economic policies of the new South Africa serve the interests of America, not those of South Africa. He intimates that the reality is the new democracy was a welcome to America, hence South Africa is Americanised. He argues that for Africa to return, Africa must be politically, economically, and culturally developed and independent. Mtumane's concern is echoed by Terreblanche (2012, 35; italics added):

The Americanisation of the South African politico-economic system during the transformation of 1994/ 96 was based on the *wrong ideological* premises, on the wrong *power structures*, and put South Africa on the wrong *development path*. The Americanisation of the South African politico-economic system was integrated into the criminalised global structures and the criminalisation of the Apartheid regime was replaced by the criminalisation of the system by American-led global capitalism.

Terreblanche (2012, 66) further argues:

But one can see with the wisdom of hindsight that without doubt the opportunity to create a politico-economic system that could have addressed the deeply ingrained and deep-seated poverty problem was squandered when a neoliberal politico-economic system was institutionalised to serve the narrow interests of the white elite and the emerging black elite, and when the enabling conditions of a new system were moulded in such a way that the imperial aspirations of the American-led neoliberal empire would be satisfied while the capitalist-corporatist side of the new politico-economic sector has been extraordinarily powerful since 1994, the political side contained several constraints that deprived the ANC government of the capacity to execute governance with efficiency, effectiveness and compassion towards the impoverished majority.

The constraints, according to Mtumane, are the failure to create a fertile ground for economic and cultural renaissance, at the centre of which is the development and promotion of indigenous languages. Mtumane's poem emphasises that Africa will return when South Africans focus on African culture, history, and values, and understand their significance. I argue that Mtumane's poem resonates with Asante's (2003, 2) concept of Afrocentricity, which he defines as follows:

Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regard to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. ... In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. ... Thus, to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination.

I argue that Mtumane's poem seeks to reposition isiXhosa literary discourse. He locates Africa at the centre and explicitly rejects American socio-political and cultural hegemony.

The aesthetic ideology of Mtumane's poem is compatible with the socio-political content of his poem. The use of interrogative passages in the form of rhetorical questions, a device he inherited from the indigenous oral bards, strengthens and emphasises the feelings and emotions of the bard and the reader. These rhetorical questions give people an opportunity to contemplate or ponder over what has been asked. At the same time, the bard is assessing the thoughts of the people, while simultaneously directing their thoughts to his main argument. Gérard's (1971, 62) observation on Mqhayi's "ITshawe laseBritane" that "[t]he interrogative form ... suggest[s] the pathetic perplexity of the African in general" also applies to Mtumane's poem.

Concern over Abandonment of the Socialist Programme which Promised Upliftment of the Poor and Substitution by a Neoliberal Programme Due to Foreign Influence

Nolutshungu (2019, 13) in his poem "Isikhalo seAfrika" (The cry of Africa) in *Iingcamango zentliziyo* (Meditations of the heart) avers:

Sivakal'emazants'emathunjini <i>enkwaleko</i>	It comes from the bosom of suffering
Siphokoka kwimithombo yosizi	It overflows from the fountain misery
Ngaphaya kwemida nakumahlaba engcinezelo	Beyond the borders and pains inflicted by oppression From the blood of a black person
Kwigazi elintsundu	Pain is flowing
Kutsitsa ubuhlungu	Strangulation by slavery
Imbophakalo yobukhoboka	Desire for peace
Inkanuko yoxolo	Thirst for freedom
Nonxano lwenkululeko	A mind focussing on sufferings
Ingqondo esezimbandezelweni	Dependence on another race
Ukukholosa ngolunye uhlanga	Despising our pigmentation
Ukuzeya ngebala lethu	Africa is crying
Iyakhala iAfrika	...
...	
Kuba sihleli nje, sikhonza hlanga luthile	For we always worship a particular nation
Kothi kulunge, kunqwale lona	It will be fine if it agrees
Sibuhlungu esi sikhalo	This cry is painful

The background to this poem is the suffering of Africans during the post-apartheid era. This is caused by ideological shifts of the ruling party and its government, which is failing to improve the quality of life of the African majority in South Africa. The shift can be traced back to the early nineties. On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela said:

The white monopoly of political power must be ended, and we need a fundamental restructuring of our political and economic systems to address the inequalities of apartheid and create a genuine democratic black South Africans.

Unfortunately, this could not be achieved. Prashad (2012, 169–170) explains the challenges that faced the Global South:

Much the same process was going on in Brazil and South Africa. Each emerged from its particular type of dictatorship into the arms of a range of nationalists (from liberals to leftists). The governments faced acute financial challenges, not the least of which were fire-breathing international financial organisations eager to step in and offer the harshest medicine. The textbooks read in Brasilia and Pretoria were not from the Third World projects; they came from the World Bank and the IMF, as well as from their peers in the G15 orbit. ... The financial sector had them under their control.

According to the poet, this has resulted in the current cry of Africa—the reliance or dependence on other races or nations’ views, lack of self-confidence, and worshiping of a particular nation. He says that the mentality of Africans that things will be fine when a particular nation approves is the cause of the misery of Africans.

The context of this poem is the situation in South Africa post-apartheid. The inequalities of apartheid referred to by Mandela in the politico-economic sphere were the result of white political dominance and racial capitalism. The system enriched white people in South Africa. The expectation of Africans was that after 1994, the democratic government would introduce transformation and policies that would improve the quality of life of Africans, particularly the poor.

Terreblanche (1912, 63–65) attributes this failure to a compromise by the African National Congress (ANC), which abandoned the socialist and redistributive approach. He says:

The ideological shifts that took place in the ANC’s economic views from 1990 until 1996 can only be described as breath taking and even revolutionary. The ideological shifts from an explicitly socialist and redistributive approach towards embracing the American ideologies of neoliberal globalism and market fundamentalism was so radical. ... The ANC’s acceptance of the American neoliberal model reached a zenith when GEAR was adopted in June 1996.

The poet says Africans allowed themselves to be misled because of the weakness of lack of self-reliance and low self-esteem:

Ukukholosa ngolunye uhlanga
Ukuzeya ngebala lethu
Iyakhala iAfrika

...

Being dependent on another nation
Despising ourselves because of skin colour
Africa is crying

...

Kuba sihleli nje
sikhonza hlanga luthile

For we always
Worship a particular nation

Located within the historical context, the other nations and the other races are the American pressure groups and the South African white mineral energy complex. The American pressure groups argued that the American economic model was the best. This was at a time when the Soviet Union faced political and economic challenges. The world was a unipolar economic bloc. The acceptance of the American neoliberal model promised influx of foreign direct investment, higher growth rates, higher employment, and a trickle-down effect to alleviate poverty. The American pressure groups also threatened disruption of the South African economy by the United States if the ANC rejected American neoliberalism (Terreblanche 2012, 65).

Nolutshungu's free verse uses personification: *Sivakal'emazants'emathunjini enkwaleko* (literal translation: One can feel it at the lower intestines of suffering/detriment). This figure of speech means that the cry is intense, extreme, and severe. The metaphor *Imbophakalo yobukhoboka* (Strangulation by slavery) gives a vivid mental image of a person who is dehumanised by poverty due to oppression or slavery.

Emergence of a Self-Centred Elite and the Threat of a Second Revolution

Nolutshungu's (2019, 20–21; emphasis added) "Inkululeko" in *Iingcamango zentliziyo* (Meditation of the heart) avers:

Zagaleleka izikhundla
kumz'ontsundu
Lwenyukela ngentla lona
olumnyama uhlanga
...
Izithembiso zanganolwandle
Imvula yemfezeko yana pha napha
Bahlaziyek'ohlohlesakhe ngevumba
lamathuba
...
Urwaphilizo lwaqhelana nelanga
Umbutho wesizwe
mawulungis'ukuhlala
Hleze igazi labanye lizal'ingqumbo
...
Kuqalelwe emva futhi ukulwela
inkululeko.

Opportunities for blacks were
opened
The black nation ascended to senior
positions
...
Promises were as vast as the ocean
Fulfilment was enjoyed by a few
Opportunities resulted in selfish
leaders
...
Corruption became abundant
The National Congress must correct
the wrongs
Lest the blood of the sacrificed lives
be angry
...
And the struggle for liberation
resumes.

Nolutshungu is concerned about the dire post-1994 economic situation in South Africa, which may be attributed to the neoliberal policies of the government that resulted in corruption and unfulfilled promises. Self-centred capitalists emerged and greed and corruption became rife. This observation is shared by Terreblanche (2012, 127; *italics added*), who asserts that:

After forty fat years in biblical terms from 1933 until 1973, when the Afrikaners experienced their rise to the bourgeoisie, South Africa's poorest 50 per cent experienced forty lean years in biblical terms ... From 1994 to 2012 they experienced another twenty lean years during the period of *globalised corporatism*.

Nolutshungu's concern and warning about the future, *Kuqalelwe emva futhi ukulwela inkululeko* (Lest the struggle for liberation resumes), is echoed by South African academics. A resumption of the revolution is implied by Habib's (2013, ix) argument of a "suspended revolution." Terreblanche, according to Cornell (2013), predicts that things will get increasingly worse for the black majority, and the only remaining solution, given that the ANC has turned a blind eye to what the real problem is, would be a revolutionary transformation.

Conclusion

This interdisciplinary article analyses and interprets selected isiXhosa written poetry texts published during the post-apartheid era. The gap that is closed by the article is the limited interdisciplinary studies that bring together insights from political science, history, sociology, philosophy, and literature, hence the balanced presentation of observations from isiXhosa literature writers, political scientists, and historians. The article highlights the convergence of views of the above-mentioned scientists about the current political situation in South Africa.

The concept of neoliberalism is sufficiently defined, and a brief history of its origins is provided. IsiXhosa poetry texts are located within the framework of their context. The poems are analysed and interpreted to expose the post-apartheid poets' commentary on the neoliberal strategy led by America which, scholars argue, is directed towards the Global South. The neoliberal democratic model promoted in South Africa by the above-mentioned country, which was adopted by the African National Congress-led government, according to the poets, raises grave concerns as it provides political freedom that is devoid of economic freedom.

As background to the contemporary isiXhosa poetry, the article makes reference to the long-standing tradition of scholarship on isiXhosa oral and written poetry. A general Marxist approach is the tool employed for analysis and interpretation of the isiXhosa poetry as it exposes the form, content, and context of literary productions. The theory emphasises the dialectical relationship between content and form, but recognises that the primacy is on content in determining form (Eagleton 1976, 25). The texts are therefore historically contextualised in order to expose the poets' concerns about the

neoliberal policy of the democratic South Africa. There is an attempt to balance the attention to the content and form, hence the identification of the literary aspect of each poem. The finding is that the aesthetic ideology of the poets is compatible with their revolutionary content. Stylistic devices, which demonstrate the richness of isiXhosa language, are abundantly deployed. Attention is given to these in each of the cited poems. Mona (2018b, 98) comments on the isiXhosa poetry of the Glasnost era:

The majority of isiXhosa poets of this period seem to have realised the strangulating effects of this western technique (rhyme and meter) and discarded it in favour of free verse. ... Their revolutionary content which yearns for change, condemns injustice and oppression and demands fundamental human rights, might have influenced their choice of techniques that derive from African oral traditions. A significant outcome of this aesthetic ideology is freedom from the extraneous constraints and unearthing of creativity and innovation.

This shift away from Western Victorian aesthetics continued to the next epoch, the post-apartheid era, which is the focus of this article.

Despite the concerns by South African writers and international academics, the African National Congress-led government has for the past 30 years not expressed an intention to review its neoliberal trajectory. The changing international geopolitics, which have brought about a change from a unipolar world order led by the United States of America to a multipolar world order created by the rise of China (Mearsheimer 2019, 30–31) and the establishment of BRICS (Abdulle 2024; Thussu and Nordenstreng 2015, 1–9), may provide a fresh socio-politico-economic context for commentary in poetry of the unfolding decade.

Chivvis, Usman, and Geaghan-Breiner (2023, 1) argue that:

South Africa wants a more multipolar world order where developing countries have more influence. It therefore views counterweights to U.S. power, including China and Russia, as friends rather than enemies.

The study is, nevertheless, significant as it vindicates isiXhosa writers as posterity may say, “Writers in indigenous languages kept quiet/silent while South Africa was burning.” The outcome of the 2024 elections, which saw the African National Congress settling with 40% of the national votes, is a partial realisation of the prediction of some isiXhosa poets.

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