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## ***The (ama)Ndebele of Africa and their name '(ama)Ndebele'***

**Abstract:**

*Some scholars still continue to confuse or to misunderstand the relationship within the (ama)Ndebele of Africa as a result of the divergent opinions propounded by scholars regarding the historical origin these ethnic groups. First, historians, anthropologists and linguists such as Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930), Van Vuuren (1983) and others regard the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa (which are divided into Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele) to be historically related. Others regard them as distinct ethnic groups. Secondly, while some consider the South African (ama)Ndebele and those of Zimbabwe to be distinct from each other, others regard them as related. What makes matters more confusing regarding the relationship of these (ama)Ndebele ethnic groups of Africa, is the fact that they share the same ethnic name '(ama)Ndebele' and the same language 'isiNdebele'.*

*The aim of this article is, therefore, twofold a) to investigate and discuss the historical background of (ama)Ndebele found within the borders of the Republic of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe and b) to examine and discuss the origin of the ethnic name 'Ndebele' or 'amaNdebele'. The name 'amaNdebele' or simply 'Ndebele' is a generic name used to refer to the Nguni groups found in and outside the borders of the Republic of South Africa. The historical origin of the name '(ama)Ndebele' is also re-visited, evaluated and discussed. In conclusion, the article shows that the (ama)Ndebele people of the Republic of Africa (i.e., Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele) are historically related but neither*

is related to those of Zimbabwe despite the fact that they share the same ethnic name '(ama)Ndebele' and the same language '(isiNdebele)'.

## 1. Introduction

The name '(ama)Ndebele' is a generic name used to designate three Nguni speaking nation found in Africa. Two of these (ama)Ndebele Nguni ethnic groups found within the Republic of South Africa are known as Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele and the third is in the Matabeleland in Southern Zimbabwe (Fourie, 1921; Van Warmelo, 1930; Ziervogel, 1959; Van Vuuren, 1983 and others. However, statistically the government of the Republic of South Africa makes no distinction between these two (ama)Ndebele groups. *Statistics South Africa*, for instance, only reflects the Southern (ama)Ndebele whilst the Northern (ama)Ndebele are counted under the Bapedi population for unknown reasons. The Northern (ama)Ndebele are, consequently, sometimes referred to as the 'Pedi-Ndebele'. According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (i.e., Act 108 of 1996) isiNdebele, which is the language of the Southern (ama)Ndebele, is entrenched as one of the official languages of the country. The so-called siNdebele (or Sumayela) which is the language of the Northern (ama)Ndebele is neither recognized as the official or regional language of the country. The Southern (ama)Ndebele speaking population is, statistically, found in all the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa and is mainly concentrated in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Gauteng and North West, while the Northern (ama)Ndebele population is only predominant in the Limpopo, Gauteng and North West Provinces. Geographically, the two (ama)Ndebele groups of the Republic of South Africa are approximately 150 km apart from each other and separated by the Springbok flats. Historians, anthropologists and linguists previously used the provincial name 'Transvaal' to distinguish between (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa (i.e. Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele) and those of Zimbabwe, (e.g., Transvaal Ndebele and Rhodesian Ndebele). The (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe are occupiers of the southern region of Zimbabwe, as already noted. What makes it difficult to understand the historical relationship of these Nguni ethnic groups is their historical accounts which are in piece meal and consequently replete with conflicting views. For instance, while scholars such as Van Warmelo (1930), Potgieter (1945), Van Vuuren (1983) and others regard the two (ama)Ndebele groups found within the boundaries of the Republic of South Africa as one and the same ethnic group, other scholars consider them to be distinct ethnic groups. However, while some regard the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa (i.e., Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele) and those of Zimbabwe as genealogically related, others consider them unrelated. Rettová (2004:95), for instance, states that

“The Khumalo people of Mzilikazi derive their origin from Mtungwa who was the brother of Manala and Nzunza. So it came that one and the same blood was shed on both sides of this conflict. Alas! Mzilikazi knew that the sons of his ancestor Musi who had settled down in Ndubazi were his relatives.”

The aim of this article is, therefore, twofold (a) to re-examine the historical background of the (ama)Ndebele Nguni people as they are found in South Africa and Zimbabwe and (b) to trace the derivation of their ethnic name 'Ndebele' or 'amaNdebele'. The different views of the historical, anthropological and linguistic scholars are summarized and evaluated under the historical background of the

- a) (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa (i.e. Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele)
- b) (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe, and
- c) the origin and meaning of the generic name '(ama)Ndebele'.

The argument shows that (ama)Ndebele peoples are different nations that have acquired the name '(ama)Ndebele' as an appellation because of their skilful and strategic attack during intertribal wars with the Sotho people.

## 2. The Historical Background of the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa

When one examines the historical background of the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa, two main different views emerge from the historians, anthropologists and linguists. The first can be referred to as the *popular view* while the second the *revisionists view*. The two different views contradict each other regarding the relationship of the two main (ama)Ndebele ethnic groups of the Republic of South Africa (i.e., Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele). While the popular view considers the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa as genealogically related, the *revisionists view* regards them unrelated.

### 2.1 The Popular view: genealogically the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele are related.

Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930), Van Vuuren (1983), De Beer (1986), Skhosana (1996) and others subscribe to the historical fact that the so-called Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa constitute a single ethnic group that claims its origin from the ancestral chief, Musi (or Msi). According to these scholars, the (ama)Ndebele originate from KwaZulu-Natal. Long before Shaka's wrath they parted as a bigger clan from their main Hlubi tribe circa 1552 under the chieftainship of Mafana and took their route northwards. The other clan also separated from the main (ama)Hlubi tribe and went south via Basotoland. The clan that went south ultimately became part of (ama)Xhosa Nguni people who are presently found in the Eastern Cape.

The first group that parted from the main Hlubi group (i.e., (ama)Ndebele) crossed the Vaal River and entered the then Transvaal and settled themselves around eMhlangeni, known as Randfontein, which is on the western side of Johannesburg (Van Vuuren, 1983:12). From eMhlangeni, they moved to KwaMnyamana (also known as Bonn

Accord) near Pretoria, and arrived there in 1610. At KwaMnyamana, (ama)Ndebele were under the chieftainship of Musi who, according to Fourie in Van Warmelo (1930:10), had five sons, namely Manala, Nzunza, Mhwaduba, Dlomu and Mthombeni. However, according to Van Warmelo (1930:10), Sibasa was the sixth son of Musi while Massie in Van Warmelo (ibid. 10) claims that the sixth son of Musi was M'pafuli (or Mphafudi).

Historically, KwaMnyamana is the most important settlement area of the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa, because it is the place where the (ama)Ndebele split into two main groups and numerous smaller sub-groups. When Musi died in 1630, the succession struggle ensued between two of his sons, namely Manala and Nzunza, and the tribe split into the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele, respectively, as well as other smaller tribes. The Southern (ama)Ndebele comprised the followers of Manala and Nzunza while the Northern (ama)Ndebele consists the followers of Mthombeni. Together with his brother, Nzunza, Mthombeni left KwaMnyamana until at KwaSimkhulu, north of Belfast in the present Mpumalanga Province. It is at KwaSimkhulu where Mthombeni, the founder of the Northern (ama)Ndebele, parted ways with Nzunza and strategically moved northwards along the Olifant until he reached his present place of abode, around Zebediela. On his way northwards, Mthombeni inherited a new name known as Gegana (or Kekana) and his followers were referred to as the 'people of Gegana (or Kekana)' instead of remaining the 'people of Mthombeni'. In explaining how Mthombeni changed his name to Gegana (or Kekana), De Beer (1986:34) states that

“Die naam Gegana is afgelei van die Noord-Ndebelewoord, *kugega*, wat beten om saam met of parallel met iets te beweeg en verwys na die feit dat Mthombeni en sy volgelinge in hulle noordwaartse migrasie al langs die Olifantsrevier op beweeg het. Daarom word daar ook na hulle verwys as Gegana nomlambo-dit wil se die gegana wat met die revier (mulambo) opgetrek het.”

### 2.3 The revisionists view : genealogically the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele are unrelated.

There are two scholars propounding the less prevalent view that (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa are unrelated. Ziervogel (1959) and Jackson (1969), contrary to the popular view, maintain that the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele are genealogically two separate independent ethnic groups. According to Ziervogel (1959:5) the Northern (ama)Ndebele originate from Zimbabwe whereas Jackson (1969: (i)) claims that they are from KwaZulu-Natal but genealogically unrelated to their southern counterparts.

#### 2.3.1 Ziervogel's view

According to Ziervogel (1959:5) the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele are two distinct Nguni ethnic groups that claim their origin from different ancestral chiefs called Musi and Nungu, respectively. Ziervogel (ibid. 5) propounds that the Northern (ama)

Ndebele (who comprise the Gegana, Mugombhane and Lidwaba sub-groups) are not of KwaZulu-Natal origin but from Zimbabwe and unrelated to their southern counterparts. After crossing the Limpopo River, from Zimbabwe, they went eastwards before coming to their present abode, Potgietersrus, since they themselves claim that they come from the east, in the country of Malaji. Their ancestral chief was Nungu who had a close contact with the (ama)Swati before coming to their present settlement area in the Limpopo Province (Ziervogel.op.cit:181).

#### 2.3.2 Jackson's view:

Jackson (1969(ii)) differs from the popular view as well as from Ziervogel's (1959) view in that he maintains that the Northern (ama)Ndebele are the descendants of their chief, Langalibalele, and are known as bakwaLanga (or 'Black (ama)Ndebele'). According to Jackson, the other Northern (ama)Ndebele sub-groups such as the Gegana, Mugombane and Lidwaba are not part of the Northern Ndebele (ama)Ndebele, as many scholars claim, but part of the Southern (ama)Ndebele. The Northern (ama)Ndebele group, which according to him, only comprises the Langa people of Zululand stock. They separated from their main Hlubi tribe around 1650 under the chieftainship of Masebe 1. Though the claim of the origin of the Southern (ama)Ndebele and Northern (ama)Ndebele is from (ama)Hlubi in KwaZulu-Natal, Jackson (1969) accentuates that they are genealogically unrelated. In arguing for their distinctiveness, Jackson (1969:(i)) states that

“The Transvaal Ndebele entered the Transvaal in at least two different migratory streams, namely, the Ndebele of Langa, on the one hand, and those Ndebele who claim ties with an ancient chief called Musi on the other. Some of the chiefdoms related to Musi, now form the Southern Transvaal Ndebele, whereas others are classified with the Langa as Northern Transvaal Ndebele.”

However, what scholars of the popular view also fail to agree upon with regard to the historical background of (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa is the exact place of origin when the (ama)Ndebele were still in KwaZulu-Natal.

### 3. The exact place of origin of (ama)Ndebele of South Africa

Historians, anthropologists and linguists advance four claims on this historical aspect of the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa. The first claim is the one by Massie (1905:33) and Trumppelmann (1936:38–41). According to these scholars, (ama)Ndebele originally dwelt on the border of Natal-Basutoland. The second claim is that (ama)Ndebele inhabited on area along the Thukela River (Fourie. 1921:31). Van Warmelo (1930:9) gives Ondini (or Lundini) near the Drakensberg mountains (i.e., uKhahlamba) as the third place of (ama)Ndebele settlement area whilst they were still in KwaZulu-Natal. Myburgh and Prinsloo (1985) mention uMndeni as the fourth place of (ama)Ndebele origin in KwaZulu-Natal.

However, on examining (a) the historical background of the popular and revisionists views on the origin of (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa as well as their exact place of origin when they were still in KwaZulu-Natal one is confronted with a conundrum.

#### 4. Evaluation of the historical background of (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa

First, in the popular view, Van Warmelo (1930) and Massie (1969) differ from Fourie (1921) in that they state that Musi had six sons and not five. Van Warmelo (op.cit.: 11) gives the name of Sibasa as the sixth son of Musi, whilst Massie in Van Warmelo (op.cit.: 10) opines that it was M'pafuli (or Mphafudi), and not Sibasa who was the sixth son of Musi. Both Sibasa and M'pafuli are said to have gone north and established themselves as chiefs in Vendaland. This historical point is, however, debatable and unconvincing.

Nothing much is said about the names (i.e., Sibasa or M'pafuli) except that they are both the sixth sons of Musi. According to the (aba)Venda history, no genealogical relationship is mentioned between Sibasa or M'pafuli and Musi or the Southern (ama)Ndebele. Van Warmelo in Schapera (1962:64), for instance, states;

“The royal clans of the Venda are, with few exceptions, genealogically related to one another, since most of them claim descent from a somewhat legendary chief, Thoho-ya-ndou, about whom there are many stories. His ancestors according to tradition crossed the Limpopo from Rhodesia, and took possession of the country. They and their descendants are really the Venda people. They found others in occupation already, for instance the big tribe of Lwamondo and the Ngoni, who survive in little more than name.”

The major tribes of (aba)Venda are the Vhasenzi, Vhalemba, Vhatavhatsindi, Vhambedzi, Vhangona, Vhanyai, Vhalea, Vhafamadi, Vhaluvhu, Vhatwamamba, Vhanzhelele and Vhangoni. Cultural and linguistic connections between the Southern (ama)Ndebele and (aba)Venda are also untraceable. However, most probably, the name 'M'pafuli'(or Mphafudi), which is also quoted as the name of the sixth son of Musi, is another name of Sibasa who is said to have moved northwards and settled himself in Venda. Van Vuuren (1983:13) states;

“Indien Mphafuli en Sibasa op dieselfde skakeling dui, het hy Venda to getrek waar daar vandag dan 'n splintergroep van die Ndebele woonagtig is wat verVenda het.”

When one analyses the so-called *popular view* as opposed to the less *revisionists views* regarding the relationship between the Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele of Southern

Africa it becomes discernible that these two clans are genealogically related as progeny of Musi. They had been a single united tribe since their migration from KwaZulu-Natal until the demise of their ancestral chief, Musi, at KwaMnyamana.

Ziervogel and Jackson's claims that the two (ama)Ndebele groups are unrelated are historically implausible. The claim by Ziervogel that the Northern (ama)Ndebele came from Zimbabwe implies that this Nguni group was dubbed '(ama)Ndebele' some time before they entered the then Transvaal, which is contrary to the historical origin of this name '(ama)Ndebele'. According to the historical movement of the Nguni tribes of South Africa such as the (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe and the Ngoni of Malawi and Nyasaland, for instance, they all parted from the main Nguni group in the south (i.e., in Natal) and moved northwards in fear of Shaka's rage. The claim that on their way southwards, to their present abode, they came into contact with (ama)Swati is not disputable. Linguists such as Ziervogel (1959), Msimang (1989), Wilkes (2001) and Skhosana (2009), have also proven the linguistic affinity of the Northern (ama)Ndebele language (i.e., siNdebele or Sumayela) with (isi)Swati. Both the Northern (ama)Ndebele language and (isi)Swati are classified under the Tekela Nguni languages because of their linguistic affinity. This is supported by the fact that both languages employ the (inter-dental) explosive phoneme /t/ instead of the Zunda Nguni voiced alveolar lateral fricative /z/ (e.g., **manti** instead of **amanzi** 'water', **mufati** instead of **umfazi** 'woman'), and both apply the so-called '*substitution of vowel –e– rule* instead of the vowel coalescence, (i.e. **a + u > o**; **a + i > e** and **a + a > a**) e.g. **na + munru > n~~g~~munru** instead of '**ng-umuntu > nomuntu** 'with a person', **na + manti > nemanti** instead of **na + amanzi > namanzi**, which is one of the phonological features of the Zunda Nguni languages. Ziervogel's claim concurs with that of Jackson (1969) that the Northern (ama)Ndebele came to their present settlement area from KwaZulu-Natal via Swaziland.

Thirdly, it is further notable that Jackson's view on the origin of the Langa Northern (ama)Ndebele and their southern counterparts corresponds to some extent with the popular view. Jackson (op.cit: (i) 's view that historically the so-called Northern (ama)Ndebele (known as 'Black' (ama)Ndebele or (ama)Ndebele of Langa) originate from the main (ama)Hlubi group concurs with the origin of the Southern (ama)Ndebele of Musi, as propounded by the scholars of the popular view. The inconsistency in Jackson's historical account is that the Northern (ama)Ndebele migrated later than their southern counterparts in KwaZulu-Natal and went via Swaziland before reaching their present abode, which is Mokolane and Zebediela. However, no historical account supports Jackson's view on the history of the Nguni tribes in the olden days in KwaZulu-Natal.

Lastly, the exact place of (ama)Ndebele origin in KwaZulu-Natal is also debatable. Three of the four main claims preferred by the historians, anthropologists and linguists above regarding the exact place of origin of (ama)Ndebele of South Africa when still in KwaZulu-Natal are not convincing. The claim of Massie (1905:33) and Trumplemann (1936:38), for instance, that the original settlement area of the (ama)Ndebele when still

in KwaZulu-Natal was at the border of Natal-Basotoland is questionable. Van Warmelo (1935:87) remarks that the name 'maTebele' is a name used by the Sotho speakers in Basotoland and Nquthu district in KwaZulu-Natal to refer to all Nguni people from Natal living in Basotoland. If the original place of the (ama)Ndebele in KwaZulu-Natal was Basotoland, the question is why Mzilikazi's clan was known as the Khumalo clan (bakwaKhumalo) when still in KwaZulu-Natal and only dubbed 'Ndebele' when he was in the then Transvaal. Historically, the (ama)Ndebele people who left KwaZulu-Natal and moved northwards were not referred to as (ama)Ndebele but as 'one of (ama)Hluni clans' that parted from their main (ama)Hlubi group and went northwards. Bryant (1929:425) states that

"Small fugitive bands, too, arrived from time to time from Zululand throughout the Shakan period... This motley and fearsome crowd now became christened by the suffering Suthu with a new name and a distinguished appellation. They dubbed them maTebele, which signify 'those who disappear or sink down out of sight (Sotho 'teba') behind their (to the Sutu) immense Zulu war-shields of stout cow-hide."

According to Bryant, it becomes evident that the name '(ama)Ndebele' at Basotoland started during Shakan period, whilst the Southern (ama)Ndebele who claim origin from chief, Musi, were long dubbed with the name. Most probably, Massie and Trumpelmann's claim refers to the small (ama)Hlubi clan that went south via Basotoland and eventually comprised (ama)Xhosa. The most convincing place of the Southern (ama)Ndebele is the one advanced by Van Warmelo (1930:9) that it was Ondini (or Lundini) near the Drakensberg mountains.

## 5. The (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe

The (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe occupy the southern region of Zimbabwe and form 20% of the population of Zimbabwe (Ndlovu, 2009:14). Historically, they are the direct descendants of Mzilikazi who left KwaZulu-Natal during the Zulu-Ndwandwe wars of 1818–1820 (Cobbin in Peirss, 1981:160).

Mzilikazi with his followers known as the Khumalo's people (bakwaKhumalo) left KwaZulu-Natal and entered the then Transvaal around 1822 and found Sotho tribes in possession of the land. Amongst these Sothi tribes there dwelt the tribes of the Transvaal (ama)Ndebele whose ancestors had already been in the country for years (Van Warmelo, 1930:7). When Mzilikazi invaded the then Transvaal, the split amongst the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa under the chieftainship of Musi at KwaMnyamana had already taken place. According to historical accounts, amongst the Nzunza and Manala sub-groups of the Southern (ama)Ndebele, Mzilikazi killed chief Magodongo and chief Sibindi, respectively. In the year 1826, Mzilikazi had completed destroying Bakwena, of the Batswana tribe, around Magaliesberg (Becker, 1962:67). Thereafter, Mzilikazi took his route fur-

ther northwards and crossed the Limpopo River. Ultimately, Mzilikazi settled himself and his followers in 1839 at Ntabazinduna near Bulawayo in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). Today, the (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe are the second largest population of the country and their language known as isiNdebele, and just like their South African (ama)Ndebele counterpart is one of the official languages of the state.

## 6. The relationship of (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of Africa and Zimbabwe

Some scholars confuse the relationship between the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe, most probably because they share the same ethnic name and language. However, historically Mzilikazi left KwaZulu-Natal long after the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa. When he was still in KwaZulu-Natal, north of the Nquthu hills between Mvunyana-Nondweni and Mzinyathi (Bryant, 1929:418), he was known as bakwaKhumalo 'the people of Khumalo'. The new name 'Ndebele' he acquired in the then Transvaal when he was on his way northwards. By the time he crossed the Limpopo River and entered the frontier of Zimbabwe they had already been labelled or referred to as '(ama)Ndebele' and his language known as isiNdebele. In the following paragraphs the relationship between the (ama)Ndebele of the South Africa and Zimbabwe is evaluated and discussed in a cultural and linguistic context.

### 6.1. Cultural perspective

Taylor (in Scupin, 1998:36) defines culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws and customs, as well as any capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Van Warmelo (1930:7), when defining (ama)Ndebele characteristics states that

"They were of Zulu stock as is shown by their physique, language and customs. Today they are divided into several tribes most of which seem to be offshoots from one original tribe that long ago migrated into the Transvaal and settled in the neighbourhood of the present Pretoria."

Van Warmelo emphasises the importance of culture and customs in tracing the history and origin of the tribe. In close observation of the cultural practices of the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe it is interesting to note that they demonstrate distinct Nguni ethnic group characteristics. According to Van Warmelo (1930:21) the circumcision practice had for many years been there amongst the Nguni tribes before the Shakan era. The most important and powerful cultural practice that symbolizes unity amongst the Southern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa, for instance, is circumcision of boys (known as *ukuwela* 'to cross over (the river)' and girls (known as *ukuthomba* 'to reach the age of puberty' in Southern Ndebele). This testifies to the fact that (ama)Ndebele of South Africa parted from their main Hlubi tribe long before Shaka emerged



and ended the initiation practices amongst the Zulu nation. The (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe, by contrast, do not practice this so-called initiation practice for boys and girls. Instead, they hold an annual national religious festival called *inxwala* 'first fruit festival' (Ndlovu, 2009:109). The *inxwala* ceremony is associated with the (ama)Swati tradition and culture for the female ceremony. This gives evidence that Mzilikazi and his people left KwaZulu when Shaka had already terminated the circumcision cultural practice amongst the Zulu tribes.

Historically, surnames such as Mabhena, Mahlangu, Sithole, Jiyana or Jiyane, Sikhosana (Rettová, 2004:95) which are common amongst the Southern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe do not justify the relationship between these two (ama)Ndebele groups but testify to Mzilikazi's invasion of then Transvaal tribes, particularly the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa, while on his way northwards. Interestingly, amongst the Northern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa none of these surnames exists. Amongst the Southern (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa, the Mahlangu (i.e., the clan name Mgwezani) and Mabhena (i.e., clan name... ) surnames are the royal surnames while amongst the (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe, Khumalo is a ruling surname.

## 6.2 Linguistic perspective

Linguistically, the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa, particularly the Southern (ama)Ndebele, differ radically from their Zimbabwean counterparts. Scholars such as Van Warmelo (1930:7), for instance, state clearly the language of the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa differs from that of Mzilikazi's followers. IsiNdebele of the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa is more influenced by Sepedi because of their close contact for many years, while that of the (ama)Ndebele of Zimbabwe is closer to isiZulu, most probably because they never stayed for long in close contact with the Sotho speaking tribes when they were on their way northwards. The following few lexical examples illustrate differences between the two languages.

IsiNdebele of South Africa	IsiNdebele of Zimbabwe	
ihloko	Ikhanda	'head'
ipumulo	ikhala	'nose'
umkghadi	ixaba	'skin blanket'
isiphila	ummbila	'maize'
umsana	umfana	'boy'
umntazana	intombazane	'girl'
ukuluma	inxwala	'first fruit ceremony'
isokana	ijaha	'young man'

## 7. The origin of the name '(ama)Ndebele'

Numerous scholars such as Fourie (1921), Bryant (1929), Van Warmelo (1935), Potgieter (1945), Coetzee (1980), Van Vuuren (1992) and others have dealt with the derivation of the generic name 'Ndebele' or '(ama)Ndebele'. According to these scholars, two main contrasting views emerged regarding the origin and the meaning of the name 'Ndebele'. The name 'Ndebele' is commonly used to refer to those Nguni speaking people who emigrated from KwaZulu-Natal into the former Transvaal in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century as well as the Zimbabwean (ama)Ndebele who left Zululand later on, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two main views regarding the origin of this name are the one propounded by Fourie (1921) and the other by Van Warmelo (1935).

### 7.1 Fourie's view

Fourie (1921:26) gives three etymological explanations of the name '(ama)Ndebele'. In explaining the first origin he states;

"*libele* en het meervoudig *amabele* beteken borst. Maar met een kleine verheffing van die stem in die uitspraak van de laaste lettergreep, betekent hetzelfde woord: kafferkoren. Het werkwoord – *anda* beten intransitief: toemen: en transitief: vermeningvuldigen of verspreiden. De tweede a van het verbum kan in perfekt-vorm een e zijn. Zodat het mogelijk is, dat de naam beteken: zij die de *amabele* verspreid hebben."

According to Fourie the name 'Ndebele' means '*people that scatter sorghum*' which, in essence, agriculturally originates from the way in which the name-bearers plant sorghum. Fourie's second explanation of the name is that it means '*people with long breasts*' where by *ama-* (is a class 6 noun prefix) plus *-nde* (an adjective stem) and *-bele* (the noun stem) meaning 'breast'. The third explanation takes the general common approach that applied to most African tribes such as the Nguni groups who name themselves after their first founder chiefs, e.g., Zulus and Xhosas, who named themselves after their ancestral chiefs, Zulu and Xosa, respectively. According to the last view, Fourie opines that in the olden days there might have been a chief called Ndebele, after whom the (ama)Ndebele named themselves.

However, from an African traditional point of view, when one examines Fourie's first and second etymological postulations that the name '(ama)Ndebele' means *people who scatter sorghum* or *people with long breasts* and consequently derived its meaning there from are doubtful and far-fetched. Regarding his first view none of the African tribes or people named themselves after an agricultural activity or crop. The second view that Fourie presents is impossible because a paternally organized tribe

such as (ama)Ndebele would never use a physical feature of a woman as its tribal name (Mare in Van Vuuren. 1992:72). Fourie's third view is also not convincing in that in the (ama)Ndebele genealogical line of the chieftainship there is no name called 'Ndebele' and amongst (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa no surname exists such as 'Ndebele' as is the case amongst the Zulus people. Currently, for instance, the two (ama)Ndebele sub-groups that comprise the Southern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa named themselves after their first founder chiefs (i.e., Nzunza and Manala). Hence, they are known as (ama)Nzunza (who are under the chieftainship of uMabhoko III) and amaNala (who are under Makhosoke II).

### 7.2 Van Warmelo and Bryant's view

According to such as Bryant (1929:425) and Van Warmelo (1935:87) the generic name '(ama)Ndebele' is a Sotho name that the Sotho people used to designate people of Nguni origin. Generally, when (ama)Ndebele of South Africa, for instance, set foot in what was then known as Transvaal and came into contact with the Sotho tribes, they were dubbed or referred to as 'maTebele' (plural) and 'liTebele' (singular). This name is also used by the Sotho speakers in the Basotoland and in the Nquthu district in KwaZulu-Natal to refer to all the Nguni people from Natal living in Basotoland, (Van Warmelo, 1935:87). Though Van Warmelo does not comment on the meaning of the name, the origin of the name '(ama)Ndebele' is convincing in that traditionally Nguni people such as (ama)Zulu, (ama)Ndebele and (ama)Swati, in particular, do carry big shields and assegais when going to wars and through skilful use of these shields it becomes difficult for an enemy to penetrate. The fact that shield is not a Sotho traditional weapon for protection, justifies the notion that during intertribal wars between these Nguni and Sotho tribes it was difficult for the Basotho to penetrate the Nguni warriors. The derivation of the name '(ama)Ndebele' is also supported by Coetzee (1980:206) who maintains that

“Die naam kom ook van die Suid Sothowerkwoor-ho tebela, wat beteken om te verdryf, afgelei gewees het. Die Ngunie stamme, waarmee die Sotho in aanraking gekom, sou dus as 'die verdrywers' bekend gestaan het.”

According to most scholars who debate how the (ama)Ndebele of South Africa and Zimbabwe acquired the generic name '(ama)Ndebele', it becomes clear that the first claim is flawed in that it implies that all the three different (ama)Ndebele nations, in and outside the boundaries of the Republic of South Africa, left their original area of abode known as (ama)Ndebele and not (ama)Hlubi or the so-called Khumalo's tribe. According to Bryant (1929:425), none of the three Nguni groups (i.e., Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe) was christened indebele (for singular) or aman-debele (for plural) prior to their exodus from KwaZulu-Natal.

### 8. Conclusion

In this article, the historical relationship between the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa only has been discussed and the relationship between the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South and Zimbabwe. The discussion has disclosed that the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa alone (i.e. Southern and Northern (ama)Ndebele) are historically and genealogically related as Musi's progeny while the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa and those of Zimbabwe are distinct despite the fact that they both originate from KwaZulu-Natal and share the same ethnic name and language. The (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa are the descendants of their ancestral chief Musi, the son of Mhlanga, while their Zimbabwean counterparts compose of the followers of Mzilikazi. The discussion has further shown that the common surnames (such as Mabhena, Sikhosana, Mahlangu, Sibiya, Sithole, Jiyana, and others) that occur amongst the (ama)Ndebele of the Republic of South Africa and Zimbabwe do not necessarily justify any genealogical relationship between the two (ama)Ndebele Nguni groups but testify to Mzilikazi's heroism and successes in attacking and invading during his passage through the then Transvaal on his way to Zimbabwe. The article has also explained how these Nguni groups, who were originally known as (ama)Hlubi and bakwaKhumali, acquired the new name '(ama)Ndebele' from the Sotho speaking tribes.

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## **Mawatle Jerry Mojalefa**

### ***The concept of an owl depicted in 'Makxothlo' [The Owls]***

#### **Abstract:**

*This article, argues that in his poem, 'Makxothlo' [The Owls] which is one of the shortest praise poems in Sepedi\*, Lekgothoane praises nature more than traditional leaders and tribes. He praises the importance of birds in the lives of people, focusing more on the owl's nature than on culture and tradition. According to Bapedi (a nation speaking Sepedi) tradition and culture, people associate the owls with the concept of death. Notwithstanding this, Lekgothoane confirms that the owl concept can also symbolize life. Therefore this concept is meaningful and significant in the lives of Bapedi. Lekgothoane tries to explain the term, the owls, so that it becomes a concept that surprises readers. The concept becomes alien in the minds of readers for the owls are no longer defined according to their custom and habit; they have been transformed into a species of living beings. Therefore readers start to observe Lekgothoane's intention about these owls. They are distinct from the owls the reader is familiar with. The poet employs paradox to interpret the symbolic meaning of the owls.*

*\* Sepedi is one the official languages of the Republic of South Africa.*

#### **Introduction**

Although an owl is a particular type of a bird, having its own customs and habits, its own way of hunting for food during the night, and so on, according to tradition and culture, people place it side by side with the concept of death. If an owl comes in the night and sits on top of the roof of the hut and hoots, then it is considered as an omen of death. As a result,