

Reinstating Cultural Beliefs and Ubuntu in the amaMpondo Communities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa



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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to resuscitate Black African ubuntu ethics, which characterised the socio-cultural group of amaMpondo in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Ubuntu and cultural beliefs were inseparable and maintained as a heritage and pride, which was observed by children and transmitted orally by elders during the pre-colonial era. The political upheavals and the economic decline, which resulted in social unrest and industrial strikes in various sectors after the postcolonial period, resulted in the loss of jobs, corruption, crime, poverty, and the loss of the philosophy of ubuntu embedded in cultural beliefs. The ethnographic approach in qualitative research method was utilised to assess the individual experiences and social behaviours. The narrative analysis to describe and interpret in a story-like manner the social realities and cultural complexities was manipulated as explored by ethnomusicologists in the fieldwork. The researcher utilised semi-structured and open-ended questions to conduct observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings of this study revealed that poverty and unemployment were the major causes of the decline of ubuntu among communities. The interlocutors indicated that the extreme poverty was caused by political tension, economic decline and cultural changes. They suggested that there should be a merging of cultures, focusing more on redressing the imbalances of the past, such as social justice, inclusivity and equity to restore ubuntu. In the same breath, this study will contribute to the promotion and encouragement of cultural beliefs that contributed to the values, such as social learning from elders, which developed self-identity and pride.

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INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu and cultural beliefs, as explained by Idang, were inseparable and maintained as a heritage and pride, which was observed by children and transmitted orally by elders during the pre-colonial era.¹ Additionally, Kamga agrees that before the "Enlightenment" brought by Western civilisation, which believed in individualism, the Black African philosophy of caring for others, called ubuntu, was a way of living.² Idang and Gwerevende further mention the 'Concrete artifacts and intangible values as

¹ Gabriel E Idang, "African Culture and Values," *Phronimon* 16, no. 2 (2015): 97–111.

² Serges Djoyou Kamga, "Cultural Values as a Source of Law: Emerging Trends of Ubuntu Jurisprudence in South Africa," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 18, no. 2 (2018): 625–49.

irreplaceable social and cultural beliefs' which are engulfed in the heritage of all Black Africans.³ Although the amaMpondo have their own kingdoms, they form part of the amaXhosa and share numerous cultural traits with other nations.⁴ Despite the cited cultural beliefs which commenced time immemorial in sub-Saharan Africa, ubuntu, in the amaMpondo, was vanquished by 'hegemony and Western individualism' which resulted in poverty and undermined cultural beliefs as 'weird' and 'backward'.⁵ In addition, Ayorinde mentions the political upheavals and the economic decline, which resulted in social unrest and industrial strikes in various sectors after the postcolonial period in South Africa.⁶ These socio-economic and political factors mentioned by these authors contributed to the decline of ubuntu as the key foundation of the cultural values of amaMpondo. Matolino and Kwindiwi reiterate the revival of ubuntu in South Africa, which was rooted in the culture of humanity and dignity of Black Africans.⁷

The intangible values which mark the behavioural values, according to Batchelder-Schwab and Mali, are the pillars of Traditional Knowledge (TK), which constitute moral education and character building.⁸ Traditional Knowledge applies more often in the transmission of knowledge, which occurs in daily activities and in celebrating different stages of life. The stages of life, which are concealed in the rites of passage, are delineated by van Gennep in three phases such as the separation stage, alternatively known as the preliminal, the liminal or in between, and the postliminal phases.⁹ These stages are enveloped as part of life, which are celebrated as part of the cultural values in which ubuntu is facilitated. One of the vital stages which are celebrated as significant in the growth of a girl, and which constitutes cultural values, is the separation from childhood to adulthood after her first menstruation.¹⁰ In this stage, albeit considered the transitory stage to be incorporated into adulthood, the girl received severe training and warnings in preparation for marriage. Therefore, it is the intention of this paper that ubuntu, which characterises African humanity, could be resuscitated.

Culture, as explored by Idang, is a totality of cultural traits and characters that are peculiar to a people, to the extent of making each society distinguishable from others.¹¹ Jaap Kunst in Nettl defines culture as a 'complex whole' which comprises, among others, language, knowledge, beliefs, customs, religions, morals, laws and others.¹² Hai and Thanh mention the Khmer people in Vietnam in the Mekong Delta villages, who are the beneficiaries of a very rich culture that is displayed in festivals.¹³ The Khmer people are situated around the Buddhist Temples, which are centres of religious, social, and cultural activities.¹⁴ Beliefs, on the other hand, are sacred and natural, constituting religion and traditional values. Humans seek help and protection from the metaphysical space that they believe in. Based on the aforementioned facts, cultural beliefs as the core of humanity, enabling people to express

³ Idang, "African Culture and Values"; Solomon Gwerve and Zama M Mthombeni, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Synergies in the Transmission of Indigenous Languages, Dance and Music Practices in Southern Africa," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 29, no. 5 (2023): 398–412.

⁴ Benjamin Izu and Alethea de Villiers, "A Review of the Sociocultural Roles of Traditional Musical Arts in Xhosa Society," *ADRRJ Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (6) July-September (2021): 148–65; Nokuthula P Cele, "The Historiography of the KwaMachi People: A Frontier Community between AmaZulu and AmaMpondo in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 27, no. 1 (2009): 1–21; Mda Mda, *Struggle and Hope: Reflections on the Recent History of the Transkeian People* (African Sun MeDia, 2019).

⁵ Harris Berger and Ruth Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights* (Routledge, 2019).

⁶ Oladele Ayorinde, "Dizu Plaatjies and the Amampondo: A Case of Music, Agency and Social Transformation," *SAMUS: South African Music Studies* 40, no. 1 (2020): 156–84.

⁷ Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindiwi, "The End of Ubuntu," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (2013): 197–205.

⁸ Andre Batchelder-Schwab and Zoliswa O. Mali, "Initiation Rites of the IsiXhosa Culture Are Education Systems," *Journal of African Language Teachers' Association (JALTA)*, 2024, 147–63.

⁹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 2019.

¹⁰ Siziwe Sylvia Sotewu, *A Visual Narrative Reflecting on Upbringing of Xhosa Girls with Special Reference to 'Intonjane'* (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2016); Anita Padmanabhanunni, Labeeqah Jaffer, and Jeanette Steenkamp, "Menstruation Experiences of South African Women Belonging to the Ama-Xhosa Ethnic Group," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 20, no. 6 (2018): 704–14; Victor W Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *Ritual* (Routledge, 2017), 169–87; Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

¹¹ Idang, "African Culture and Values."

¹² Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions* (University of Illinois Press, 2015).

¹³ Nguyen Chi Hai and Nguyen Ho Thanh, "The Values of Cultural Beliefs from Traditional Festivals among the Khmer Mekong Delta-Study Typical Traditional Festivals," *International Journal of Philosophy* 4 (2020): 89–94.

¹⁴ Hai and Thanh, "The Values of Cultural Beliefs from Traditional Festivals among the Khmer Mekong Delta-Study Typical Traditional Festivals," 82.

love for each other, show respect, morals, behaviours, and care for others. Thus, cultural beliefs mark the heritage, pride, and identities of a people.

Ubuntu, on the other hand, is described by Metz as a term that resembles the major goal of humanity, which is to strive for excellence in creating ‘genuine’ relationships with others.¹⁵ Further, ubuntu, as expounded by Metz, is derived from the southern African Nguni linguistic group, such as the amaXhosa and the amaZulu. “To lack ubuntu is to be missing human excellence and to live like an animal.”¹⁶ Ajitoni, in augmenting the said statements, views ubuntu as a philosophical concept of humanity, which is built in the spirit of interdependence with others, in building relationships and the eagerness to support each other.¹⁷

Moreover, scholars mention the phrase which epitomised African people as genuinely caring for others.¹⁸ The phrase is, *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* in isiXhosa, whereas in isiZulu it is said *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Although these are different languages, the statement displayed the definition of culture, which is the way of life that cares for others.

Cultural beliefs and ubuntu ethics were portrayed in daily activities and expressed in communal gatherings called *imigidi*.¹⁹ Sotewu and Batchelder-Schwab, and Mali mention the performance of rituals such as the *ulwaluko* translated as the boy’s initiation, and the *ukuthomba* (girl’s initiation) in the isiMpondo language, which is known as the *intonjane* in the isiXhosa, where the family organise the community gathering for the ritual celebration of welcoming a girl child to another stage.²⁰ Further, the social gatherings in which ubuntu was portrayed were during the *imitshato* (customary marriages and weddings). Daily activities were enhanced with traditional music and different dancing styles to ease the work. Youth, both females and males, were assembled in the *ilima* (a group of people gathering to give support in labour activities such as the manufacturing of mud-bricks called ‘izitena’, and the collection of dried bunches of grass called *izithungu* (singular, *isithungu* and plural *izithungu*). Furthermore, the interconnectedness was revealed during the funeral to give support and comfort to the families. The ethics of ubuntu and the custom of *ukhlonipha* (reverence) marked the social foundations and the cornerstone of the Nguni speaking people from time immemorial, when there were human species. These were displayed in numerous traditional practices encapsulated in cultural and religious beliefs such as the slaughtering of animals and the shedding of blood as a sacrifice to the ancestors, which was accompanied by *umqombothi*, the pouring of libation, chanting and singing the related songs and dancing.²¹

AmaMpondo believed in collectivism, which was transmitted to children at an early age. Boys, after circumcision, were engaged in family gatherings whenever the family was planning to conduct activities. They were involved even in the local meetings to express their views on solving problems. After the circumcision ritual, boys were exalted to the upper level and recognised as men to participate in various activities such as the *lobola* negotiations and in ritual celebrations. Gatherings such as the unveiling of tombstones, where people would prepare African beer called *umqombothi* and slaughter animals to engage the ancestral spirits, were overwhelmed by ‘Western’ civilisation, which promoted divisions among the communities. The amaMpondo, after the colonisation of the land, were criticised and condemned for the ritual performances by Christian missionaries. The condemnation of gatherings in various cultural practices led to the dissipation of ubuntu.

Cultural beliefs and ubuntu were manifested by the amaMpondo communities when members of the family resided under one roof with extended family members. They enjoyed themselves and shared

¹⁵ Thaddeus Metz, “Ubuntu: The Good Life,” in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer, 2021), 1–5.

¹⁶ Metz, “Ubuntu: The Good Life,” 1.

¹⁷ Bukunmi Deborah Ajitoni, “Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony,” *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 7, no. 3 (2024).

¹⁸ Kamga, “Cultural Values as a Source of Law: Emerging Trends of Ubuntu Jurisprudence in South Africa”; Metz, “Ubuntu: The Good Life”; Adeoye O Akinola, “The South African Xenophobic Question: A Reflection on the Complicity of State Actors,” *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation* 7, no. 1 (2018): 53–79; Cornelius Ewuoso and Susan Hall, “Core Aspects of Ubuntu: A Systematic Review,” *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 12, no. 2 (2019): 93–103; Dirk J Louw, “Rethinking Ubuntu,” 2019.

¹⁹ Nomvo D Henda, “The Rites of Passage of AmaXhosa Revisited,” 2021.

²⁰ Batchelder-Schwab and Mali, “Initiation Rites of the IsiXhosa Culture Are Education Systems”; Sotewu, *A Visual Narrative Reflecting on Upbringing of Xhosa Girls with Special Reference to ‘Intonjane.’*

²¹ Sotewu, *A Visual Narrative Reflecting on Upbringing of Xhosa Girls with Special Reference to ‘Intonjane.’*; Batchelder-Schwab and Mali, “Initiation Rites of the IsiXhosa Culture Are Education Systems”; Henda, “The Rites of Passage of AmaXhosa Revisited.”

values, including traditional music. Posel amplifies the statement by giving the example of elderly people who lived together with ‘multiple’ members of the family in Black African households.²² This belief opposes the ‘White’ individualism culture in urban areas, whereby elders experience loneliness and are moved to the ‘adult home care’ in South Africa.²³ These challenges resulted in political instabilities in governance, a lack of jobs, and a high poverty rate. Francis and Webster resonate by describing the worst situation in South Africa, which is overwhelmed by inequality and a high poverty rate.²⁴ In this paper, the author examines the role played by the cultural beliefs and ubuntu in the precolonial era, and how the social welfare and economic development can be restored and maintained in the postcolonial period in the amaMpondo communities. In the same light, which strategies can be used to resuscitate ubuntu and ameliorate the socio-economic living in the current generation of the amaMpondo community? In this paper, the author examines the role played by cultural traits in developing the character of ubuntu in the current generation of the amaMpondo ethnic group. This study is guided by the following research questions and objectives:

- What are the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among the amaMpondo?
- How can ubuntu in cultural beliefs be restored in Black African communities?

The objectives of this paper were to:-

- Investigate the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among the amaMpondo communities.
- Establish how ubuntu can be restored in cultural beliefs by Black African communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural practices, conducted in families and public events, play an enormous role in facilitating and sustaining the culture of ubuntu, which promotes togetherness, genuine relationships, and communal responsibility. Although different scholars investigated and wrote about cultural beliefs and the concept of ubuntu globally, this paper emerged from my research study and, thus, focuses on the restoration of ubuntu in a specific group of people, amaMpondo in the Eastern Cape province.²⁵ The researcher, after observing drastic socio-political changes and economic decline, which led to the loss of ubuntu in South Africa, deemed it essential to sample with the amaMpondo group as a dominating nation in the Eastern Cape.²⁶ This study seeks to establish whether ubuntu, which was regarded as the pillar of the cultural values in the humanities, is still practised. The following subheadings divulge some of the cultural practices in which the ethics of ubuntu are revealed:

Culture as a dynamic subject is expressed in two ways by Abdulla: the level of expression, which involves music and concrete artifacts, and the second level, which covers the ideas and beliefs, including religious beliefs.²⁷ Despite the contradictory views that are often experienced between cultural beliefs and religious beliefs, there are human rights involved that scholars emerge with as significant.²⁸ These include, among others, the public events and the local meetings which are called by the local leaders to address members of the community when there are serious issues to be discussed. Festivals organised for competitions where various talents are searched, and the different recreational activities such as exercises, games, music competitions and ritual ceremonies would bring people together, reinforcing

²² Dorrit Posel, “Race Differences in the Loneliness of Older Adults: Evidence from South Africa,” *Social Indicators Research* 177, no. 1 (2025): 273–92.

²³ Posel, “Race Differences in the Loneliness of Older Adults: Evidence from South Africa.”

²⁴ David Francis and Edward Webster, “Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Critical Reflections,” *Development Southern Africa* 36, no. 6 (November 2, 2019): 788–802, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2019.1666703>.

²⁵ Barbara Nussbaum, “Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity,” *Reflections* 4, no. 4 (2003): 21–26; Metz, “Ubuntu: The Good Life”; Ajitoni, “Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony.”

²⁶ Dawn Joseph and Alvin Petersen, “Recognizing and Celebrating Xhosa Traditional Music in South Africa,” 2008.

²⁷ Mariam Rawan Abdulla, “Culture, Religion, and Freedom of Religion or Belief,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 4 (2018): 102–15.

²⁸ Bronwyn E Wood and Milica Homolja, “Strategic Solidarities: Cultural Festivals, Relational Encounters and Diasporic Youth Identities,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 42, no. 4 (2021): 377–93; Louise Wo, “Communitas: Building Community through Leisure and Collective Joy” (2022); Adrian Devine and Bernadette Quinn, “Building Social Capital in a Divided City: The Potential of Events,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 27, no. 10 (2019): 1495–1512.

social bonds and a sense of belonging. Family gatherings such as the evening moments for bonding with children, sharing love and solving problems, folktales combined with traditional songs and fairytales, opportunities to share stories, lullaby songs, ritual celebrations, and supporting one another.

Turner, van Gennep and Lan elucidate the importance of rituals and ceremonies: Traditional rituals and ceremonies often highlight the importance of community and collective well-being.²⁹ They mention the celebration of the imigidi (communal events) in weddings, rites of passage to celebrate the different stages of life, and funerals where families and communities come together to support members of families and friends.

Storytelling, according to Fernandez, Alvaro, and Cabeza, where oral traditions, values and customs are significant, was observed and imitated by children and passed down practically from one generation to the next.³⁰ It is through narrating stories that elders impart wisdom and reinforce the principles of ubuntu, which include, among others, respect, compassion, and mutual assistance. Bietti, Tilson and Bangerter explain storytelling as one of the significant ways of spreading cultural beliefs and ubuntu as part of passing down memories to young children.³¹ Ubuntu, as explained by Nussbaum, is a cultural philosophy of Africans which is misunderstood and considered inaccessible by Western people.³² This statement is based on the oral transmission of ubuntu, that is, “not written in books or articles” but lived and shared with others.³³

Child-rearing, as alluded to by Mokhutso, is a collective effort. In numerous African communities, raising a child was everybody’s business.³⁴ A child, should he or she be found committing unacceptable behaviour, would be disciplined by any community elders and as such, learn the values of ubuntu from members of the community. In many African communities, child-rearing was a collective effort.

Stokvels, which are communal savings according to van Wyk, are an example of ubuntu ethics.³⁵ Stokvels are organised by women to promote financial cooperation and support. These are communal savings groups which are organised to alleviate poverty and encourage mutual relationships. Van Norren cite the significance of support networks: Ubuntu is also demonstrated through support networks that assist families during times of need, such as bereavement.³⁶ As asserted by these scholars, the support networks provide emotional and practical support and comfort to the bereaved families and also when there is financial need during ritual celebrations such as the *imigidi* (ritual and wedding celebrations). These networks encourage interconnectedness and unity in communities. In happy events when groups are gathered in the imigidi, such as when the political leaders are entertained and during public events such as Christmas and New Year, ubuntu is shown when everybody is supplied with food and drinks. By engaging in these cultural practices, communities not only preserve their heritage but also strengthen the principles of ubuntu, fostering a society where everyone is valued and supported.³⁷

Hai and Thanh mention that Khmer adults should preserve their cultural beliefs by transmitting information to young children.³⁸ Culture bearers are encouraged to tell stories to be kept in the archives and are encouraged to divulge information about the sacred beliefs of African communities for accessibility to the upcoming generations. Fernandez, Alvaro, and Cabeza.³⁹ The ubuntu, as expounded

²⁹ Francis J Turner, *Social Work Treatment: Interlocking Theoretical Approaches* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*; Qing Lan, “Predicaments of ‘Rite of Passage,’” in *3rd Annual International Conference on Education and Development (ICED 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2018), 205–8.

³⁰ Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares and Mar Cabeza, “Rediscovering the Potential of Indigenous Storytelling for Conservation Practice,” *Conservation Letters* 11, no. 3 (2018): e12398.

³¹ Lucas M Bietti, Ottilie Tilston, and Adrian Bangerter, “Storytelling as Adaptive Collective Sensemaking,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 11, no. 4 (2019): 710–32.

³² Nussbaum, “Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity.”

³³ Nussbaum, “Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity,” 1.

³⁴ Jacob Mokhutso, “Ubuntu: A Countermeasure for Challenges of Child-Rearing,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 1 (2022).

³⁵ Micheal M Van Wyk, “Stokvels as a Community-Based Saving Club Aimed at Eradicating Poverty: A Case of South African Rural Women,” *The International Journal of Community Diversity* 17, no. 2 (2017): 13.

³⁶ Dorine E Van Norren, “African Ubuntu and Sustainable Development Goals: Seeking Human Mutual Relations and Service in Development,” *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 12 (2022): 2791–2810.

³⁷ Ajitoni, “Ubuntu and the Philosophy of Community in African Thought: An Exploration of Collective Identity and Social Harmony.”

³⁸ Hai and Thanh, “The Values of Cultural Beliefs from Traditional Festivals among the Khmer Mekong Delta-Study Typical Traditional Festivals.”

³⁹ Fernández-Llamazares and Cabeza, “Rediscovering the Potential of Indigenous Storytelling for Conservation Practice.”

by Ewuoso and Louw, dates back to the precolonial times in South Africa, although it spread globally to be considered a useful alternative.⁴⁰ Ubuntu ethics, although it is known as a normative approach in the sub-Saharan countries, does not embrace “other ways of thinking and behaviours from other continents”. Ubuntu can be viewed as subjective and objective as well, depending on the description and interpretation of the researcher’s research question. The researchers might sometimes be biased or objective, if the purpose is either to enhance the narrative or a systematic review.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In describing, interpreting and analysing the ways of life of individuals and groups, the researcher utilised the social and cultural theories as posited by the ethnomusicological theories.⁴¹ Further, the researcher explored Afrocentric theory to engage the marginalised participants and to address the intersectionality of oppressions and gender in the amaMpondo communities as suggested by Tamale.⁴² It would be impossible to learn and understand the individual experiences, social interactions and behaviours, which portray the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo communities if the theory suggested by the previous scholars in the field of ethnomusicology was not applied. Braidotti describes the extraordinary creativity and philosophical thinking of humanity in the case of anthropocentrism, which is based on the wisdom of humans in manipulating the creation.⁴³ This view can be referred to the tangible and intangible values explored in the above sub-headings in the ubuntu theory as cited by Braidotti. It is against this background that the social and cultural theories that establish a firm foundation, and concepts of ubuntu be closely viewed beyond the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo. Berger and Stone allude to the vitality of theories as follows:

Social life experiences and behaviours into conversations, ideas, and insights from research participants, colleagues, culture bearers, and others. Such a theoretical framework allows the researcher to understand the pitfalls, opportunities, and arguments from the owner’s point of view.⁴⁴

Most of the literature the researcher utilised displayed the view that socio-cultural practices are indispensable and invaluable as means of the cultural and social reality of lived experiences, which are transferred orally and practically, from one generation to the other. The amaMpondo are not exceptional to the views explored by other scholars, although there are distinct realities that characterise each cultural group.

METHODOLOGY

Patel defines research methodology as the systematic means for solving the research questions.⁴⁵ Research methodology, as manipulated by Leedy and Ormrod, is a broad strategy chosen to assemble data related to the study topic and questions.⁴⁶ For the objectives of the researcher to be met and a problem to be solved, the techniques for collecting the relevant data to be collected should be identified. In this paper, the qualitative approach was explored to investigate the ethics of ubuntu embodied in the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo. The qualitative approach, as described by Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, is the collection of data in the form of words for description, interpretation, and analysis.⁴⁷ The qualitative approach was the best method to employ in monitoring the social interactions, behaviours, and lived experiences of amaMpondo communities. Group practices were observed, and the social relationships and interactions with each other during practices and performances were noticed.

⁴⁰ Ewuoso and Hall, “Core Aspects of Ubuntu: A Systematic Review”; Louw, “Rethinking Ubuntu.”

⁴¹ Berger and Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights*.

⁴² Sylvia Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 2020).

⁴³ Rosi Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2019): 31–61.

⁴⁴ Berger and Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights*, 2.

⁴⁵ Mimansa Patel and Nitin Patel, “Exploring Research Methodology,” *International Journal of Research and Review* 6, no. 3 (2019): 48–55.

⁴⁶ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 7th ed. (Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2001).

⁴⁷ Loraine Busetto, Wolfgang Wick, and Christoph Gumbinger, “How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods,” *Neurological Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2020): 14.

Research Design and Approach

For the author to closely observe the ways of life and cultural beliefs of the amaMpondo, the ethnographic approach suggested by Kalthoff and Maanen van was explored.⁴⁸ This design assisted the researcher in immersing herself in the field to create healthy relationships with the interlocutors and the community at large. The approach helped the researcher to experience the individual experiences, social interactions and behaviours of the amaMpondo and to represent their views when writing the research paper. Additionally, the approach became useful in describing and interpreting the individual's behaviours, and the reaction of groups when they interact with each other. The approach also helped in the interpretation of cultural beliefs of individuals and groups when they reacted to the sound produced by the Maskanda 'Western' musical instruments, which dominated their indigenous musical instruments.

Research Paradigm

The researcher used the interpretive paradigm to gather individual experiences and understand the social behaviours in the social lives of amaMpondo communities. In concurring with this statement, Ma Junjie and Ma Yingxin define interpretivism as a research paradigm which "motivates the researcher to seek experience and consider different interpretations of a particular social context to gain further steps".⁴⁹ Interpretivism further allows the researcher to become subjective and observe and participate in the performance of activities and rituals without prejudice. Interpretivism, as affirmed by Pulla and Carter, is a paradigm that allows a variety of outcomes that the researcher could achieve after the observations, participation, and description without prejudice on the individual experiences, beliefs and the social interactions that consequently portray certain behaviours.⁵⁰

Study Population

The amaMpondo ethnic groups are located in the southeastern part of the Eastern Cape.⁵¹ They occupy the seven districts of the former Transkei Region, currently known as the Eastern Cape Province. It was difficult to collect data from individuals in the entire community of amaMpondo; as such, the researcher had to identify villages which are still underdeveloped with old people who lived during the apartheid era in the 1960s and participated in cultural practices. Moreover, sampling was based on the definition made by Leedy and Ormrod that sampling is "the subset or the selection of the population and site from a very large number of people."⁵² Therefore, to obtain rich data, 37 participants were purposively selected. Fifteen were culture bearers led by the Dungu village headman, who participated in the traditional practices during the colonial era and after the country had acquired democracy in 1994. Twelve were participating in the modern *imfene* (baboon) dance, which is the conglomeration of the "Western" Maskanda instruments and traditional dances of amaMpondo, four *Maskanda* leaders, and six storytellers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher utilised observations, interviews, and focus groups to collect data. Observations, as defined by Ciesielska et.al, are the most powerful tool in evaluating daily occurrences, trying to understand human interactions, behaviours, and sometimes indirectly observing the recordings and material collected by others.⁵³ After all the explanation and interpretation of the Protection of Information Act (POPIA) established in 2013, which protects the integrity of participants and maintains a code of conduct, the participants observed were free to engage themselves in the research project. They voluntarily participated in the open-ended and semi-structured questions.

⁴⁸ Herbert Kalthoff, "Field Notes: Ethnographic Writing Reconsidered," *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 14, no. 3 (2013): 271–83; van J. Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (London: The University of Chicago Press., 2011).

⁴⁹ Ma Junjie and Ma Yingxin, "The Discussions of Positivism and Interpretivism.," *Online Submission* 4, no. 1 (2022): 10.

⁵⁰ Venkat Pulla and Elizabeth Carter, "Employing Interpretivism in Social Work Research," *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice* 6, no. 1 (2018): 9–14.

⁵¹ Mda, *Struggle and Hope: Reflections on the Recent History of the Transkeian People*.

⁵² Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*.

⁵³ Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna W Boström, and Magnus Öhlander, "Observation Methods," in *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies: Volume II: Methods and Possibilities* (Springer, 2017), 33–52.

Data collection took three months to complete. Group practices were observed, and the social relationships and interactions with each other during practices and performances were noticed. Individual experiences and social practices, which were organised by families and the cultural events such as the intonjane celebrations during the puberty stage and the imbeleko (a ritual performed ten days after the infant's umbilical stump had fallen), as stated by Henda, were attended and observed.⁵⁴ In-depth interviews with individuals who were telling stories about the histories of Dungu village were videorised and photographs were captured during performances and community gatherings. The headman's stories about the events and rituals performed by the community were also documented. Focus groups in the festival were organised by the researcher, and meetings were conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Before the data collection process was undertaken, ethical clearance was applied for at Rhodes University, which was monitoring the research study. Ethical clearance with the reference number 2022-5182-6858 was issued at the end of June 2022 to commence the fieldwork on the first of July 2022. The researcher told the participants to voluntarily partake in the project without any obligations. Relevant gatekeepers, such as the leaders of traditional and modern dancers, were telephoned for permission to conduct the research; these included the headman, who was an overseer of the five villages under his leadership; the culture bearers, who were storytellers and the leaders of various cultural groups. For the benefit of the illiterate participants, the ethical guidelines were read and explained in their home language. Confidentiality was assured in that pseudonyms were used, although it was in their interest to use their real names.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objectives of this study were to investigate the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among communities. Another objective was how the concept of ubuntu, which is engulfed in cultural beliefs, could be restored. The themes that emanated from the first objective were poverty and unemployment, which led to a high crime rate, the decline of the economy, and political unrest. Themes that emerged from the second objective include the involvement of youth in community gatherings and recreational activities, and the revitalisation of abandoned cultural beliefs. The third theme that was identified was the concern about the influence of Western domination in the decline of ubuntu as the cornerstone of the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo.

Objective 1: To investigate the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among communities.

Theme 1: Poverty and unemployment

One of the findings of this study revealed that poverty and unemployment were the major causes of the decline of ubuntu among communities. Participants indicated that extreme poverty and unemployment were caused by political tension, economic decline and cultural changes, which resulted in high crime and mortality rates and the gradual loss of ubuntu. The interlocutors narrated their stories from the colonisation era, when their wealth from the land and livestock were taken away from them.

After the arrival of British settlers and missionaries during the colonisation era between the 1950s and the early 1990s, we were divided into two groups: those who attended churches and went to school, and those who resisted change. Those who accepted the 'Western' civilisation were told to change their names and clothes. We were told that our names were weird and ridiculous, and as such, we were given English names. Further, we were commanded to leave our big spaces of land and relocate to the new plots, which were allocated and reduced in size. We were even told to reduce and sell our flocks and exchange them for shining objects such as money, pins, knives, and others. It was then that people were divided in our communities, and as such, infighting started, which led to poverty. Some people were easily convinced to obey the commands, while others resisted (Participant A).

⁵⁴ Henda, "The Rites of Passage of AmaXhosa Revisited."

Resonating with the above statements, Mda expresses the cultural changes caused by the socio-political and economic decline in the former Transkei region.⁵⁵ Participants agreed that the extreme extent of the lack of jobs from the industrial mines increased poverty, which led to selfishness and a lack of ubuntu. They affirmed the increase of family conflicts, anger, and corruption, which resulted in intense poverty and an expanded high mortality rate.

Our loss of wealth and riches from our forefathers' land forced us to seek labour work in Johannesburg and the Free State mines. Some left to look for jobs in the sugarcane canes in Durban. Widows and single parents left their homes and were employed as domestic workers in the suburbs. We ended up joining the TEBA, an agency which transported us to the industrial mines. Life changed, and our cultural values were undermined and declined. We started to eat processed foods and drinks in the mines. We were undermined for our black skin colour and hair. In the mines, we bought skin lighteners and straightened our hair so that our appearance would look better. We were recognised as civilised and better people than those who lived in rural areas. During the weekends in the mines, when feeling nostalgic, we reminded ourselves of the traditional songs and dances called imixhentso, sigaja (shaking the upper body) and initiated financial investments called umgalelo to increase our wages. In our social gatherings, we were joined by other cultural groups from KwaZulu Natal, playing the Maskanda 'Western' instrument, which consisted of guitar and drum kits. It was in those social gatherings that, as different cultures, we had misunderstandings and started to fight. We called the combination of our traditional music and the Maskanda, the Uhubhe, which was changed to the Imfene (baboon) dance (Participant B).

Theme 2: The decline of the economy and the political unrest

In their stories, participants described the reasons for transformation and socio-cultural and economic decline in the amaMpondo communities. Participant B expressed the loss of wealth in the form of livestock and their land, which forced them to engage with the Agency called TEBA. The loss resulted in them leaving their places of birth and working in the industrial mines. Additionally, the participants mentioned the situation after the first democratic elections in the amaMpondo communities in 1994 as follows:

Although we have seen the transformation in the ways of life after 1994, whereby the South African Constitution recognised our cultural values and the importance of Human Rights and the respect of diverse cultures in the rainbow nation, however, we have noticed the power of Western influence, which transformed our traditional ways of living. Our children were highly influenced by Western civilisation and undermined their cultural values. Girls started to smoke and drink alcohol at a young age. Poverty in our communities resulted in high teenage pregnancy, crime rate and loss of ubuntu caused by lack of jobs and poor service delivery after the post-colonisation era. The brutal killing has caused fear to such an extent that we are scared to sleep alone in our homesteads (Participant C).

In augmenting the said statements, Masuku and Jili mention the high protests and poor service delivery in local municipalities, which are dominated by corruption and economic decline in South Africa after the post-colonial period.⁵⁶ These challenges resulted in political instabilities in governance, a lack of jobs, and a high poverty rate. Francis and Webster amplify by describing the worst situation in South Africa, which is overwhelmed by inequality and a high poverty rate.⁵⁷ “Half of South Africans continue to live in poverty, and there is little to indicate that the poorest will see a reversal in their misfortune in the coming years”.⁵⁸

We are still in profound anguish about the lack of jobs, which forces people to lose their ubuntu, steal other people's flocks, become corrupt and end up seeking money by killing other people,

⁵⁵ Mda, *Struggle and Hope: Reflections on the Recent History of the Transkeian People*.

⁵⁶ Mfundo Mandla Masuku and Nokukhanya Noqinisele Jili, “Public Service Delivery in South Africa: The Political Influence at Local Government Level,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2019): e1935.

⁵⁷ Francis and Webster, “Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Critical Reflections.”

⁵⁸ Francis and Webster, “Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Critical Reflections,” 1.

raping children, women, and very old women. We are appealing to the Government to restore projects that would develop skills and capacitate the youth to be self-employed. Poverty forced us to buy imported foods from other countries. That is why there are various kinds of diseases (Participant E).

The participants expressed their sadness when they thought of their lost lands and livestock, and the beginning of poverty after the colonisation, where they were encouraged to buy imported foods from the retailers. Participants described the significance of guiding principles, which are encompassed in the cultural values and norms. These include acceptable behaviours, caring for each other, and kindness, all those principles which mark the ethics of ubuntu. Adatara et al., cited the Bongo district, which is very remote, with poverty and far away from resources such as healthcare centres and infrastructure.⁵⁹ These are communities in remote areas of the Upper East Region of Ghana.⁶⁰ The curriculum in schools should include lessons that would develop learners' cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains for them to be self-sufficient and meet the global changes.

During childbearing, women deliver their children at home with the assistance of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and unskilled family members despite the intervention strategies granted by the Government. This resulted in a high mortality rate.

Concurring with this statement, Peprah, Williams, and Francis suggest that there should be public awareness of the dangers of overdosing the traditional herbs and disclosure of traditional herbs by traditional practitioners, while simultaneously capacitating with skills nursing mothers and traditional midwives in the villages of Ghana.⁶¹

Objective 2: How the concept of ubuntu, which is embedded in cultural beliefs, can be restored.

Theme 1: The involvement of youth in community gatherings and recreational activities

In supporting this objective, Gwerevende speaks of the importance of safeguarding the intangible values as essential to the African heritage.⁶² The participants suggested that Ubuntu, which was part of the cultural beliefs, can be resuscitated by considering the following:

The imbizo, local gatherings which allowed all genders in the past to resolve community issues, should be called by the headman. Before democracy, if there was a person who did not attend the meeting, the owner of the homestead would be charged by the community members. The imbizo was important to be attended to by everybody, even more than the individual achievements. Local gatherings were important to discuss important matters, which included team building and skills development projects. The projects kept the youth busy by planting vegetables in small gardens, playing football and netball in the playgrounds and engaging in recreational activities such as skipping ropes. If someone was suspected to be stealing people's livestock, even if it was a chicken, they were called to the imbizo meetings in front of the community members. If the problem was too heavy to be solved in the local imbizo, it was transferred to the regional court called the inqila. If it was beyond their scope, it was transferred to the Magisterial court. We suggest that the same principles should be brought back (Participant G).

The participants recalled the communal events and gatherings, which included, among others, the imbizo, which were organised to resolve problems and make decisions. The imbizo was regarded as more significant even more than individual achievements. The participants suggested that recreational activities should be encouraged to keep the youth busy.

⁵⁹ Peter Adatara et al., "Cultural Beliefs and Practices of Women Influencing Home Births in Rural Northern Ghana," *International Journal of Women's Health*, 2019, 353–61.

⁶⁰ Adatara et al., "Cultural Beliefs and Practices of Women Influencing Home Births in Rural Northern Ghana."

⁶¹ Prince Peprah et al., "'We Are Nothing without Herbs': A Story of Herbal Remedies Use during Pregnancy in Rural Ghana," *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 19, no. 1 (2019): 65.

⁶² Solomon Gwerevende, "Chilonga Cultural Landscape in the Shadow of Eviction: Living Cultural Heritage, Livelihoods and Minority Indigenous People's Rights under Threat in Zimbabwe?," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 29, no. 7 (2023): 627–42.

Objective 3: The decline in the ubuntu ethics and the custom of ukhlonipha encapsulated in the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo.

Theme 1: The influence of Western domination and the decline of ubuntu.

The decline of ubuntu is influenced and perpetuated by numerous factors which affect cultural changes, such as advanced technology, migration caused by political and socioeconomic factors, globalisation and industrialisation, environmental changes and generational shifts.⁶³ Participants deliberated on the decline of their cultural values as follows:

Western civilisation brought many changes which affected our values and customs. It came to us as a shock and a surprise to see girls tightening themselves in men's trousers. When we were still shocked about that, we saw girls drinking alcohol, and, to sum it up, smoking cigarettes and drugs, not to mention the disgrace of enticing men. Kwaphela nembeko. There is no respect at all (Participant D).

Some participants mentioned the advancement of technology and the migration of refugees due to economic and sociopolitical factors. They pronounced the migration of expatriates in the country and their settlement in their spaces.

In our local communities, we saw the arrival of people who introduced drugs and took our businesses. Some were dark in complexion, while others had light pigmentation like White people. They opened businesses such as saloons, shops, and some were selling clothes. They contributed a lot to changing our cultural beliefs. The outsiders influenced our religious cultures and values. As some of them opened cellphone shops, they could even fix them. There was a huge generational shift which was aligned with negative attitudes in our youth. The young generation undermined elders and their cultural beliefs and religion, and adopted more of Western civilisation. Our cultural heritage and African religion were undermined by the arrival of White people with education and the Christian religion, together with the expatriates. We also heard that our government is passing bills which constitute abominable laws and things that were pathetic, such as the acceptance of same-sex marriages and cohabitation. (Participant F).

Notwithstanding the loss of hope in the current political leadership and the judiciary laws embedded in the Legislation, the amaMpondo felt there should be a turnaround to restore ubuntu in their communities to the entire South Africa. Cherney and Jason cite a scenario of a 'fraught' relationship between the police and the community, and the interpretation of the Constitutional laws, which seems to display the top-down approach in resolving issues, regardless of what people say.⁶⁴ Interlocutors mentioned the effects of globalisation, and industrialisation, which resulted in the generational shift. They cited the increased interaction and exchange between cultures, which led to the blending and adaptation caused by acculturation.⁶⁵ These factors also resulted in the generational shift.

Discussion Summary

As it has been alluded to in the above subtopics, ubuntu ethics has been investigated globally by many authors. The amaMpondo, which were identified as a sample in understanding the reasons for the decline of ubuntu, revealed the power of hegemony and Western civilization in manipulating Black society. Moreover, the cultural beliefs asserted by the interlocutors were the cornerstone of the ubuntu philosophy. This was expounded in the observations and interviews conducted when utilising the qualitative research inquiry. The data collected from the participants allowed the author to represent the amaMpondo using narrative analysis and ethnographic representation to represent the individual's experiences and social behaviours in a story-like manner.⁶⁶ The social and cultural theory, as cited by Berger and Stone, was explored by observing the behaviours and accessing information from the

⁶³ Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁶⁴ Adrian Cherney and Jason Hartley, "Community Engagement to Tackle Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Challenges, Tensions and Pitfalls," *Policing and Society* 27, no. 7 (2017): 750–63.

⁶⁵ John W Berry, "Globalisation and Acculturation," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 32, no. 4 (2008): 328–36.

⁶⁶ Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*.

participants and the community at large.⁶⁷ Further, the research questions and the topic were responded to by the individuals and groups to reveal the importance of maintaining ubuntu in the communities which are encompassed in the cultural values. The participants suggested that there should be a merging of cultures. Their cultural values, which promoted respect for humanity, although they agreed that culture is not static, but alters with generations. However, there should be a balance between the past and present. They agreed that although the older generations tolerated the apartheid laws which divided them into groups, those who accepted Western values and those who resisted changes; nonetheless, they did not lose love for their generational roots and hard work for keeping themselves physically fit and healthy. They delved more into the restoration of ubuntu, which can be shown by supporting each other morally and physically. They mentioned the revitalisation of financial and material support as articulated by van Wyk.⁶⁸ These were referred to in the past as *izitshongo* whereby the homeowner would request a group of residents for labour assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having done the research, 'Reinstating Cultural Beliefs and the ubuntu in the amaMpondo Communities in the Eastern Cape Province,' the first objective, which was to investigate the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among communities, was examined. Furthermore, the second objective was how the concept of ubuntu, which is embedded in cultural beliefs, can be restored, and the third objective, which was the decline in the ubuntu ethics and the custom of ukhlonipha encapsulated in the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo, was discussed with the participants. Based on the findings attained, it is recommended that the **cultural beliefs that contributed to the values, such as social learning** from elders, which developed self-identity and pride, should be restored. It is further recommended that children, irrespective of gender and age, should be taught the importance of the cultural values that would assist them to develop self-identity and appreciate and tolerate other cultures. Understanding the values of ubuntu would assist in reducing xenophobic attacks and developing the custom of respect. Cultural groups such as the different traditional singing styles and dances, the dramatic arts, craft works, and graphic designs should be encouraged. To reduce the crime rate and hatred in the communities, parents and elders in the families must create bonds with children and tell stories which were educational in the past and motivate children to develop the culture of reading and work hard with their hands to make means for living. The cultivation of gardens and the making use of neglected pieces of land should be encouraged. These activities should be retained in schools as well.⁶⁹ Youth should be proactive and design programs that would engage them in talent search projects and facilitate recreational activities in the local communities.

In the same light, parents should develop means to reinforce acceptable behaviours by administering praises and small gifts from a young age. In the same vein, regarding the issue of the escalation of poverty and lack of jobs, it is recommended that community-based projects which would capacitate youth with skills should be prioritised. The activities, such as the *izitshongo*, alternatively called the stokvels, which are the financial savings as opined by van Wyk, should be encouraged and monitored. Local meetings and social gatherings should be encouraged to equip the youth with issues of well-being, which would reduce the crime rate and reinstate ubuntu.⁷⁰ The culture of collectivism, which encourages teamwork, should be promoted to increase job opportunities. Furthermore, the local leaders should be encouraged to call meetings which would enable youth to play a leading role in designing projects that would expose the young talents. In conclusion, it is suggested that all stakeholders, such as the Department of Education, the Department of Health and other sister Departments, Community-Based Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations, the support groups like the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs) should work together to fight poverty and unemployment and restore ubuntu as one of the utmost pillars of our heritage.

⁶⁷ Berger and Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights*.

⁶⁸ Van Wyk, "Stokvels as a Community-Based Saving Club Aimed at Eradicating Poverty: A Case of South African Rural Women."

⁶⁹ Malcolm Floyd, *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation* (Routledge, 2018).

⁷⁰ Van Wyk, "Stokvels as a Community-Based Saving Club Aimed at Eradicating Poverty: A Case of South African Rural Women."

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this qualitative inquiry were to investigate the factors that contributed to the decline of ubuntu among communities, how the concept of ubuntu, which is embedded in cultural beliefs, can be restored, and the decline in the ubuntu ethics and the custom of ukhlonipha encapsulated in the cultural beliefs of amaMpondo. Semi-structured interviews were administered to thirty-seven interlocutors in the amaMpondo communities. Also, the researcher used observations to examine the traditional practices embraced within the cultural values of the amaMpondo. Findings revealed that amaMpondo were a generous and considerate nation that was filled with humour and pride in their indigenous isiMpondo communication. In fulfilling the objectives of the research study, the researcher observed the traditional practices and interviewed individuals and focus groups. The researcher engaged the interlocutors such that their responses would unequivocally give reasons for the factors which caused the decline of the cultural values and ubuntu and the revival thereof. Their willingness and cooperation in the research project granted the researcher an opportunity to learn more from the individual stories and group experiences. Their expression of good memories of youth engagements in the *imitshotsho*⁷¹ and the *itimiti*⁷² traditional dancing clubs, and bad experiences regarding the decline of cultural values and ubuntu ethics, developed sensitivity to the researcher, while simultaneously, instilled the positionality of both the researcher and the interlocutors to engage in partnership for the purpose of development and continuity of the project, while avoiding biasness. The collaboration of the interlocutors further granted them democracy by addressing gender equity and ensuring the voice of the marginalised is heard and not seen as the object of information. In addition, the good working relations between the researcher and the interlocutors not only addressed the objectives of the study, which sought to restore the cultural beliefs and ubuntu, but deliberations resulted in the establishment of youth forums with the intention of safeguarding the communities. After listening to the traditional ways of local team-building, such as those stated above, the youth were revived to begin new projects, such as the identification of vacant plots to commence the agricultural and poultry farming. Further, they came with ideas of the formation of different genres of music clubs such as the traditional dancing styles, hip-hop, amapiano and all sorts of styles based on different local, national and global talents. All the deliberations were inspired by the research project, which showed the achievements of the objectives.

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⁷¹ Imitshotsho is the plural word of umtshotsho which was given to the unschooled youth traditional dance club.

⁷² Itimiti was a traditional dance club of the middle-aged single, liberated and free ladies called amadikazi, mixed with single and married men of the same age group.

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Mpondo woman have been central in shaping her scholarly focus. Her research primarily explores the musical heritage and traditional practices of the amaMpondo people—communities that have historically been marginalised and whose cultural expressions were often misrepresented as “strange” or “evil.” Committed to challenging such misconceptions, Mtsini aspires to extend her research to other African indigenous communities, with the aim of contributing to the preservation, revitalisation, and scholarly understanding of their musical and cultural traditions.