

# Indigenous Knowledge Systems: the case of isiXhosa intonjane and ulwaluko rites



Dr. Zoliswa Mali & Andre Batchelder-Schwab

# Outline

- 1 Introduction (us, and our topic)
- 2 Education: knowledge transfer, character development, social mobility
- 3 Ulwaluko, the isiXhosa rite for men
- 4 Intonjane, the isiXhosa rite for women
- 5 Then and Now: Who Undergoes these rites?
- 6 Why Does This Matter?

# What is education, anyway?

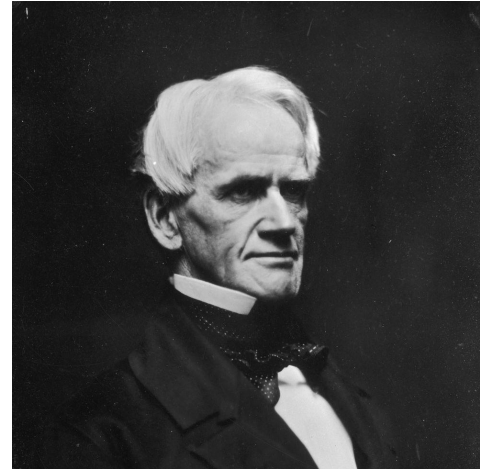
- Education is the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to **transmit, provoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities** as well as any learning that results from that effort. (Cremin 1976:27)
- It also is concerned with **values, attitudes, skills, and sensibilities**. Education is an activity which takes place in many diverse venues and is intended to develop **knowledge, understanding, valuing, growing, caring, and behaving**. (Chazan 2022: 16-17)
- Many authors explicitly state that education encompasses far more than contemporary K-12 schooling or modern university – but do not expand on examples, especially in **precolonial Africa**. (Chazan 2022; Siegel, Phillips & Callahan 2018).

# Our Criteria

- Knowledge Transfer
  - Mokgethi 2018: Defining *ukuthwasa* as pedagogy (becoming a traditional healer)
  - Typical legitimization strategy for precolonial education systems
- Character education
- Social Mobility

# Our Criteria

- Knowledge Transfer
- Character education: The primary reason for establishing contemporary education in the US and Europe
  - Benjamin Franklin 1749: Justified founding the University of Pennsylvania
  - Horace Mann 1839: Pioneered public schools in the United States (Downs 1974)
  - Current advocacy for *social and emotional learning* (SEL)
- Social Mobility



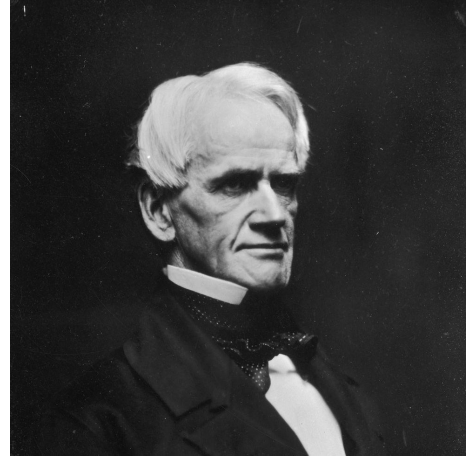
# Our Criteria

- Knowledge Transfer
- Character education: The primary reason for establishing contemporary education in the US and Europe
  - Benjamin Franklin 1749: The Idea of what is *true Merit*, should also be often presented to Youth, explain'd and impress'd on their Minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family . . . and should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all Learning.
- Social Mobility



# Our Criteria

- Knowledge Transfer
- Character education: The primary reason for establishing contemporary education in the US and Europe
  - Horace Mann: students benefit from an education which teaches the principles of piety justice and a sacred regard to truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation and temperance, and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society. (Downs 1974:37)
- Social Mobility



# Our Criteria

- Knowledge Transfer
- Character education
- Social Mobility
  - Educational achievement is one of the major factors in dowry (Munshi 2017:54 for Bangladesh; Smith, Emran & Maret 2009 for Vietnam)
  - Educational achievement plays a major role in marriageability in contemporary Europe (Neyt, Vandenbulcke & Baert 2019)
  - College degrees lead to higher income, called the “college wage premium” (Wolla & Sullivan 2017)



# Intonjane: traditional isiXhosa initiation for women

The authoritative academic source we are referencing is Siziwe Sylvia Sotewu's 2016 Masters' thesis at the University of South Africa.

Image: Sotewu 2016, showing her artistic process as part of her MVA thesis.



# Intonjane: initiation for women

- Typically involves girls around 16, or around time of first menstruation. (Sotewu 2016)
- Male relatives meet (*ibhunga*) and drink traditional beer (*umqombothi*) and announce the start of the initiation to her.
- A special reed hut *ejakeni* is built in the backyard of the house where she is isolated for 3-6 weeks. Only one person undergoes *intonjane* at a time.
- During isolation, she is only seen by older female relatives and a group of her friends called *amakhankatha*, who function as assistants and keep her company.



Figure 2.2: The initiate inside the hut

# Reintegration after seclusion

- A series of sacrifices: first a goat, whose leg she must eat off a stick held by a boy. A few days later, an ox is slaughtered at an event called *umtshato* 'marriage'. The initiate waits overnight then eats a piece the right shoulder (*ukushwama*) of the ox off the same stick.
- The stick is burned to symbolize the end of her childhood. She is now dressed as a bride and awaits marriage offers. She is trained in home maintenance (*ukusinda*).

Image: Sotewu 2016:23, posing as an initiate ready for reintegration.



# Intonjane is an education system

- Knowledge transfer: this is the mechanism through which girls traditionally receive sexual and health education to be prepared for adulthood. She is also trained in specialized chores such as floor-polishing (*ukusinda*). (Sotewu 2016:22-23)
- Character education: Many of the rituals like nudity during seclusion are intended to teach moral values like humility, respect, and obedience. (Rasing 1995:49) She is being married to tradition as a matter of identity. (Tyatyeka 2022)
- Social mobility: the *umtshato* ceremony involves a simulation of a marriage ceremony, hence the name. Completing *intonjane* generally results in a higher dowry (*ilobola*) and more marriage offers. (Mcimeli 1995:94)



# IsiXhosa Weddings

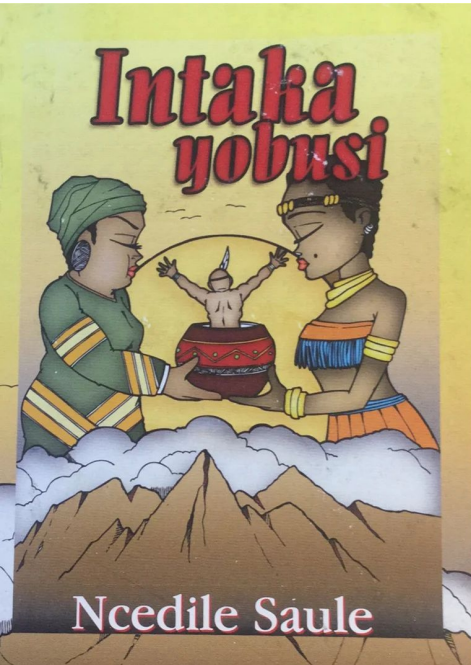
AmaXhosa women are only allowed to marry initiated men. This can be an obstacle for amaXhosa women wishing to marry men from other ethnicities.

Image: Simphiwe Nama, 2019.



# Intaka Yobusi: marrying amaSwati men

This complication for amaXhosa women marrying outside the ethnicity is discussed in popular/gray literature, such as in *Intaka Yobusi* by Ncedile Saule.



In this book, an umSwati prince is ineligible to marry an umXhosa woman unless he undergoes ulwaluko.

Image: Rhodes University,  
Ncedile Saule



# Men's initiation: Ulwaluko



AmaXhosa initiates (*abakhwetha*) during ulwaluko.

Image: James Nachtwey, 2019.

# Ulwaluko: Turning boys to men

- Ulwaluko is an *initiation rite* for amaXhosa boys to become men
- Cohorts of boys are initiated each winter in a process which lasts about a month.
  - The cohorts stay in grass huts far from the village in the wilderness, and are not allowed to be visited by any women.
  - The boys are circumcised by an *ingcibi* (traditional surgeon), and fed a special diet to speed healing.
  - The isolated boys are called *abakhwetha* ‘the learners/interns’ which clarifies that they are being taught during this time.
  - The exact details of the curriculum varies, but typically involves some combination of learning a special linguistic register, history, literature (especially poetry), theology, law, health education, and the arts (Vincent 2008; Magodyo 2013:4)
  - An important component is that they are introduced to the ancestors, and enables the individuals to become ancestors once dead. (Mavundla et al. 2009:402)



# Reintegration

- After the seclusion process, the families throw an *umgidi* (celebratory feast).
- The mothers play a major role in planning and preparing the feast, just as they play a major role in cooking for the initiates through seclusion.

Image: Kuhle's mgidi, 2022.





AmaXhosa young men after completing the ulwaluko process.  
Bongo Sibusiso, 2010.

# Ulwaluko is an education system

- Knowledge transfer: *abakhwetha* ‘the learners’ learn a special linguistic register, history, literature (especially poetry), theology, law, health education, and the arts (Vincent 2008; Magodyo 2013:4)
- Character education: “The ideal *ulwaluko* man is expected to be responsible, selfless and respectful to family, elders, and the society at large.” (Magodyo 2013:46)
- Social mobility: A male who has not undergone *ulwaluko* is not a man to amaXhosa, regardless of age or physical development. (Gwata 2009) An uninitiated male is barred from marriage, family, inheritance, ritual leadership, and local politics. (Stinson 2011; Mavundla et al. 2009:402)

# Then and Now

- Age for ulwaluko initiates has changed. In the past, some boys were initiated as young as 13 (Feni 2015). Modern law requires initiates be 18.
- Timeframe for ulwaluko has decreased significantly. Three generations ago, initiates stayed in isolation for six months. Two generations ago, it was three months. Today's initiates average around one month. (Bullock 2015)
- 'Isolation' is changing. Traditionally, initiates were taken far into the wilderness (in the mountains), with special huts burned at the end of the process. Now, some initiation schools run in permanent buildings located in town. (Msizi 2022)
- Intonjane has disappeared from the vast majority of families over the past century. (Sotewu 2016:55)





# **ZAJIK' IZINTO**

Inoveli yesiXhosa

**Siphokazi Vanessa  
Mpofu**



# **ZAJIK' IZINTO**

Inoveli yesiXhosa

**Siphokazi Vanessa  
Mpofu**



## Who can go to ulwaluko?

- Afrikaner boy has an umXhosa best friend who is about to go to ulwaluko
- Speaks the language and knows the culture, as they grew up together
- Afrikaner boy's girlfriend is an umXhosa girl who he would like to marry – needs ulwaluko
- After negotiation within both communities, he is accepted and undergoes ulwaluko

## This not only in theory: 2016



- Speaks isiXhosa
- Was adopted as an orphan by an umXhosa family
- More cases: Feni 2021
- Outrage in comment section: not about him being Afrikaner!



# Conclusion

- AmaXhosa initiation rites are educational systems by any metric. This is important because there is a lack of knowledge on what pre-colonial education looked like in much of Africa.
- Some aspects of these rites have changed in the past century, just like any educational system.
- Many important debates around traditional education are not yet engaged with in academic literature, but are discussed at length in gray literature.
- There are counterparts in many other African cultures, many of which likely fulfill the central criteria of educational systems.

Post-conclusion: Helicopter; transgender; focus on changes; what are the pillars?

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More abeLungu esuthwini

2008 (Michael Fairly)



2007

## Pushback:

Chief Inkosi Mwelo Nonkonyana is the Eastern chairperson of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa.

He is worried by the trend of “other cultures” undergoing ulwaluko.

*“It makes our customs lose their value and dignity. The ritual is our secret and we feel that it is being stolen from us.”*

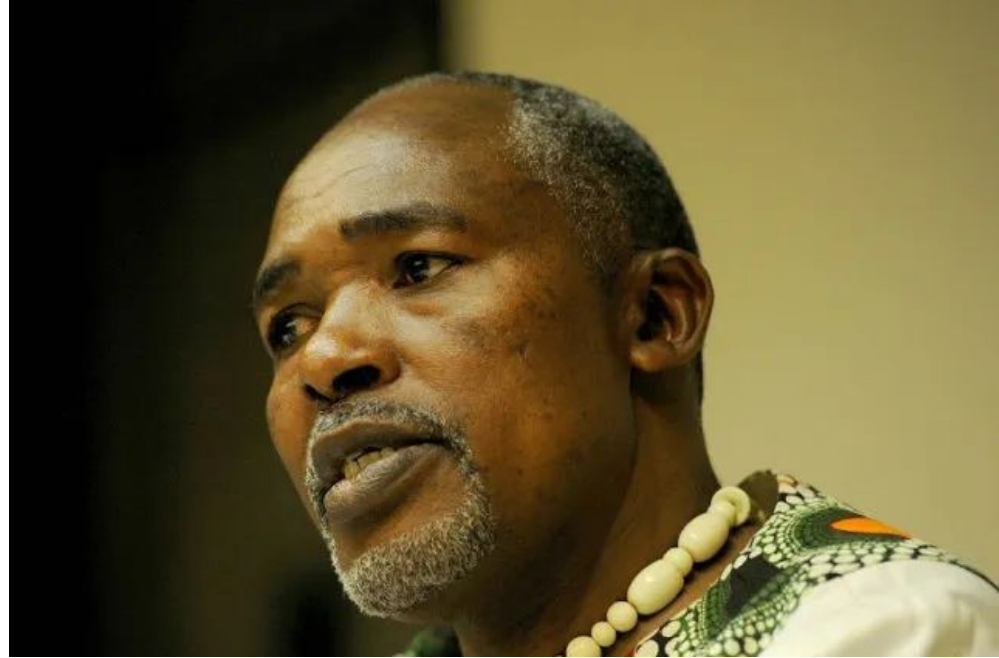


Image: Inkosi Mwelo Nonkonyana  
By Veli Nhlapo 2018

# Transgender Women and Ulwaluko

A young woman named Cwenga Titi went to ulwaluko in 2022.

She was raised as a woman since 4 years old.

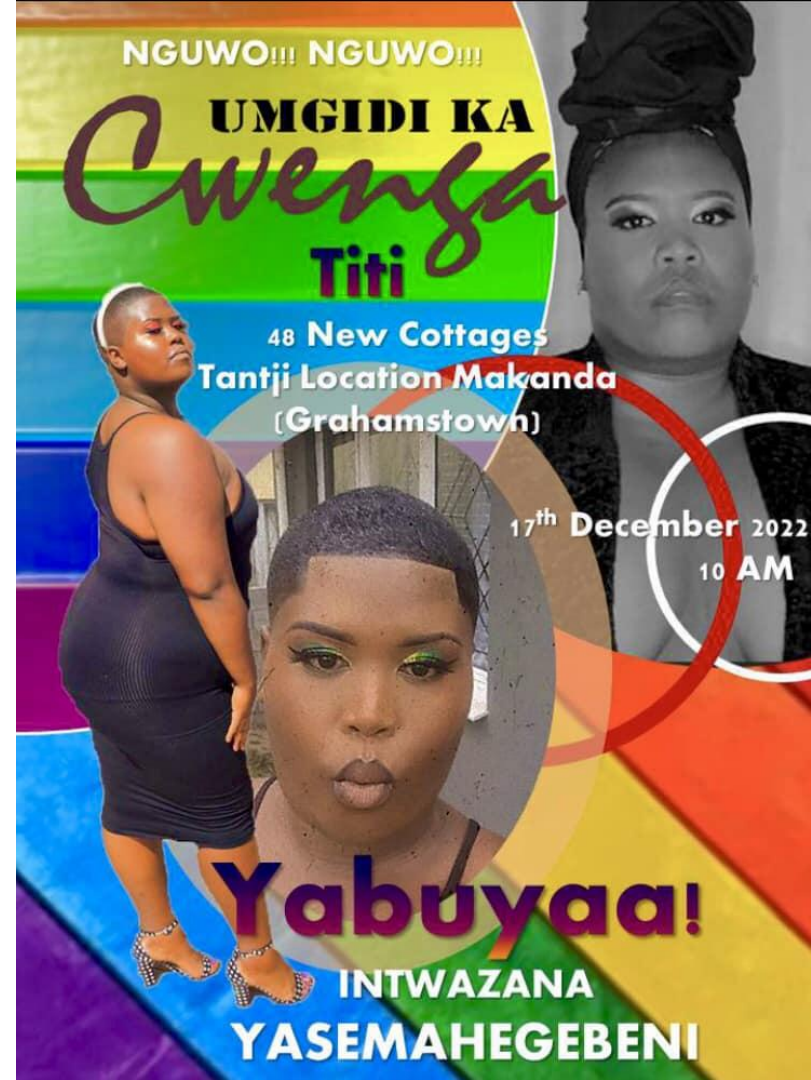
“As much as I am living as a trans woman, I understand that I was born as a male and in our society, one cannot be respected as a man if they haven’t gone through this process.





Nomonde Mafuna, leader of major LGBT organisation in the Eastern Cape:

*“I don’t understand how one can transition to be a woman and still want to undergo a ritual to become a man. I don’t see how this will help her. It’s complicated.”*





UMemulo kumaZulu uyafana nentonjane.



A daughter and her parents at *uMemulo*, a rite of passage ceremony in KwaZulu-Natal

# Iindlela zesiNtu Zemfundo: siqwalasela Intonjane noLwaluko kwaXhosa



Njing. Zoliswa Mali & Andre Batchelder-Schwab

# Ulwandlalo

- 1 Intshayelelo
- 2 Imfundo: ukufundisa ulwazi, ingqeqesho yesimo, ukuphumelela kwezentlalo
- 3 Ulwaluko lwamakhwenkwe
- 4 Intonjane yeentombi
- 5 Iingxoxo zanamhlanje: ziyajika izinto
- 6 Kubaluleke ngantoni ukwazi oku?

# Yintoni imfundo?

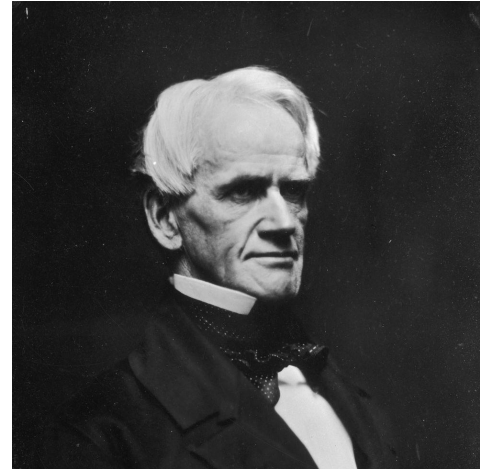
- Imfundo yimigudu yangabom, ecwangcisiweyo neqhubekayo yokudlulisela nokuxhokonxa nokufumana ulwazi, imilinganiselo, nezimo zengqondo. (Cremin 1976:27)
- Lo msebenzi kananjalo wokwenziwa ngabom awugqithisi nje ulwazi kuphela, kodwa ukuchaphazela izimo-ngqondo, izakhono kunye neemvakalelo. Imfundo ngumsebenzi owenziwa kwiindawo ezininzi ezahlukahlukeneyo kwaye uncede abantu ukuqonda, ukuxabisa, ukukhula, nenkathalo nokuziphatha. (Chazan 2022: 16-17)
- Ababhali abaninzi bachaza ngokucacileyo ukuba imfundo ibandakanya ngaphezulu kunemfundo ye-K-12 okanye iidyunivesithi. Kodwa ayaniki imizekelo ngakumbi eAfrika yangaphambili kobukoloniyali. (Chazan 2022; Siegel, Phillips & Callahan 2018).

# Imilinganiselo

- Ukufundisa ulwazi
  - Mokgethi 2018: *ukuthwasa* yimfundo ngenxa yokufundisa ulwazi
  - Indlela eqhelekileyo ukuthethelela izinto njengemfundo
- Imfundo yesimo
- Ukuphumelela ngobunono entlalweni yemihla ngemihla

# Imilinganiselo

- Ukufundisa ulwazi
- Imfundo yesimo: esona sizathu esiphambili sokuseka imfundo yangoku eNtshona
  - Benjamin Franklin 1749: Wasisebenzisa ukwakha UPenn
  - Horace Mann 1839: Wasisebenzisa ukudala izikolo zikarhulumente eMelika
- Ukuphumelela ngobunono



# Imilinganiselo

- Ukufundisa ulwazi
- Imfundo yesimo
- Ukuphumelela ngobunono entlalweni yemihla ngemihla
  - Ilobola linyuswa kukuphumelela kwezemfundo (Munshi 2017:54 eBangladesh; Smith Emran & Maret 2009 eVietnam)
  - NaseYurophu le nto ibalulekile ukufumana umfazi (Neyt, Vandenbulcke & Baert 2019)
  - Izidanga zasekholejini zikhokelela kwimivuzo ephezulu (Wolla & Sullivan 2017)

# Intonjane kumabhinqa

- Ngokwesiqhelo ngamantombazana aneminyaka eli-16. (Sotewu 2016)
- Ootata bayadibana basele umqombothi baxele isiqalo sentonjane.
- Indlwana ekhethekileyo eyenziwe ngeengcongolo (*ejakeni*) iyakhiwa ngasemva kwekhaya lentombi. Le ntombi iya kuhlala yodwa kuyo malunga neeveki ezintlanu.
- Ibonwa ngoomama namakhankatha (abancedisi bakhe) qha.



Figure 2.2: The initiate inside the hut



# Emva kokuba yedwa

- Ukuxhelelwa: ekuqaleni ibhokwe. Umlenze wayo utyiwa yintombi ngoluthi olubanjwe yinkwenkwe. Emva kweentsuku, kuxhelwa inkomo kumsitho obizwa ngokuba ng*umtshato*. Le ntombi ihlala ubusuku phambi kokutya igxalaba lasekunene lenkomo kwangolu luthi.
- Olu luthi luyatshiswa ukuthi ubuntwana bakhe buphelile. Ngoku intombi le inxiba njengomtshakazi ngoba ilindele ukucelwa lisoka.

Umfanekiso: Sotewu 2016:23 onxibile njengentombi iza kubuya emva kwintonjane



# Intonjane yindlela yesiNtu yemfundo

- Ukufundisa ulwazi: yindlela yokufundisa iintombi ngezempilo nesondo ukulungiselwa umtshato efunda imisebenzi yendlu njengokusinda. (Sotewu 2016)
- Imfundo yesimo: Ubuze bakhe ngexesha lokuzifihla bufanele ukufundisa intlonipho nokuthobeka nokuthobela. (Rasing 1995:49) Intonjane ngumtshato phakati kwintombi nesiko layo. (Tyatyeka 2022)
- Ukuphumelela ngobunono entlalweni yemihla ngemihla: *umtshato* kwintonjane kukulinganisa umtshato nomyeni. Ukwenza *intonjane* kunyusa ilobola yaye amadoda amaninzi acela ukuyitshata intombi. (Mcimeli 1995:94)

# Imitshato yesiXhosa

AmaXhosakazi avumeleke ukutshata namadoda awolukileyo qha.

Le nto ithethwa nguNcedile Saule encwadini yakhe *Intaka Yobusi*. linkosana zasemzini nazo azikwazi ukutshata umXhosakazi phambi kokuya esuthwini nokuba zingamadoda enkubekweni yazo.

Simphiwe Nama, 2019.





Abakhwetha abasesuthwini.  
James Nachtwey, 2019.

# Ulwaluko lwamadoda

- Ulwaluko yindlela yamakhwenkwe amaXhosa yokuba ngamadoda
- Amaqela awo aluswa okanye ayekade esaluswa ebusika kwinkqubo emalunga nenyanga. Ngoku sezajika izinto, ayoluswa nasehlotyeni ngenxa yamaxesha esikolo.
  - Amaqela ahlala emabhomeni akhiwa ngengca kude neelali endle. Awatyelelwa ngabafazi.
  - Abakhwetha baluswa *yingcibi*, batye ukutya okukhethekileyo okunempilo.
  - Babizwa *abakhwetha* ngoba bayafundiswa kweli xesha ngootata babo.
  - Iinkcukacha ezichanekileyo zekharikulam ziyahluka, kodwa ngesiqhelo bafundiswa ukuthetha ulwimi oluthile lokuhlonipha, imbali, uncwadi (imibongo), intlalo kaNtu nezinyanya, imithetho, nobugcisa (Vincent 2008; Magodyo 2013:4)
  - Into ebalulekileyo kukwaziswa kwizinyanya/amawabo.



# Ukugoduka

- Emva kokuba sesuthwini, iifemeli zabo zenza *umgidi* ngomphumo.
- Oomama banceda kakhulu ukulungiselela umgidi njengokuba banceda kakhulu nangokuphekela abakhwetha abasesuthwini.

Umfanekiso: umgidi kaKuhle, 2011.







Amakrwala amaXhosa emva kolwaluko.  
Bongo Sibusiso, 2010.

# Ulwaluko yindlela yesiNtu yezemfundo

- Ukufundisa ulwazi: *abakhwetha* bayafunda ulwimi oluthile lokuhlonipha, imbali, uncwadi (imibongo), ezenkolo, umthetho, ezempilo, ubugcisa (Vincent 2008; Magodyo 2013:4)
- Imfundo yesimo: “The ideal *ulwaluko* man is expected to be responsible, selfless and respectful to family, elders, and the society at large.” (Magodyo 2013:46)
- Ukuphumelela ubunono entlalweni yemihla ngemihla: Umntu ongekai esuthwini akayondoda. (Gwata 2009) Inkwenkwe ayivunyelwa ukutshata kwaXhosa, nokuba nefemeli, nokukhokela kwimicimbi yamasiko, nokufumana ilifa. (Stinson 2011; Mavundla et al. 2009:402)

# Utshintsho phakathi kwexesha elidlulileyo nelizayo

- Iminyaka yabakhwetha itshintshile. Mandulo abanye abakhwetha babesiya esuthwini beneminyaka eli-13 ngakumbi emaMpondweni (Feni 2015). Umthetho wale mihla uyalela ukuba babe neminyaka eli-18.
- Ixesha abalihlala esuthwini lihlima kakhulu. Kwizizukulwana ezithathu ezidlulayo abakhwetha babehlala inyanga ezintandathu entabeni. Kwizizukulwana ezibini babehlala ezintathu. Namhlanje bahlala inyanga enye. (Bullock 2015)
- Ukuhlaliswa bucala kuyatshintsha. Kudala, amakrwala ayesiya entabeni ahlale emabhomeni ayetshiswa ekupheleni. Kule mihla kukho izakhiwo ezizizindlu eziqhelekileyo ezisetyenziselwa ulwaluko ingakumbi ezidolophini.
- Intonjane ayisenziwa kwimizi emininzi (Sotewu 2016:55)

# ZAJIK'IZINTO

Inoveli yesiXhosa

Siphokazi Vanessa  
Mpofu





# **ZAJIK' IZINTO**

Inoveli yesiXhosa

**Siphokazi Vanessa  
Mpofu**



## Ngubani oyayo esuthwini?

- Umfundi ongumLungu unomhlobo ongumXhosa oya esuthwini
- Lo mfundi wazi inkcubeko yesiXhosa yaye usithetha kakuhle
- Lo mfundi ufuna ukutshata umXhosakazi athandana naye.
- Emva kokuncokola (nokuphikisana) neefemili zombini, uyamkelwa asiwe esuthwini.

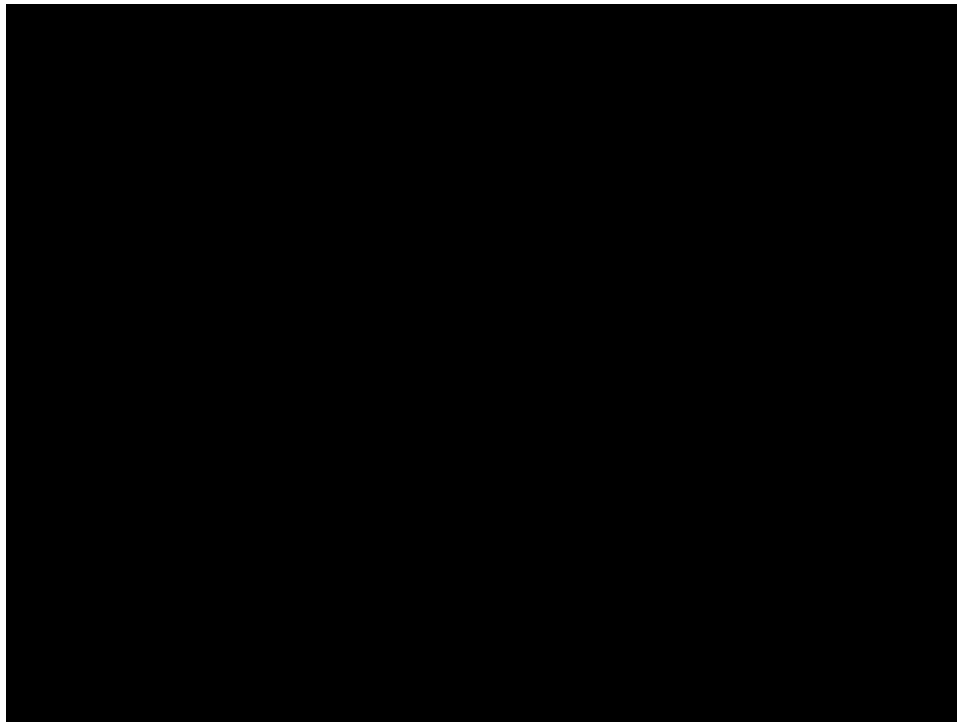
## Yinto eyinyaniso, ngo-2016



- Uthetha isiXhosa
- Wa-adophthwa yifemeli yamaXhosa
- Kukho namakhwenkwe amaNdiya aya esuthwini namhlanje.



Ikrwala liphuma ngokweCawe





Zandile Zaula

Today, 11:14



Yho ndiphosiwe 😊



REPLY



Add this audio to the syllabus??? draft. Ibaluleke kakhulu nakwintetho yethu yakwaALTA



Mr Mlawu Tyatyeka, a retired veteran of  
PANSLAB

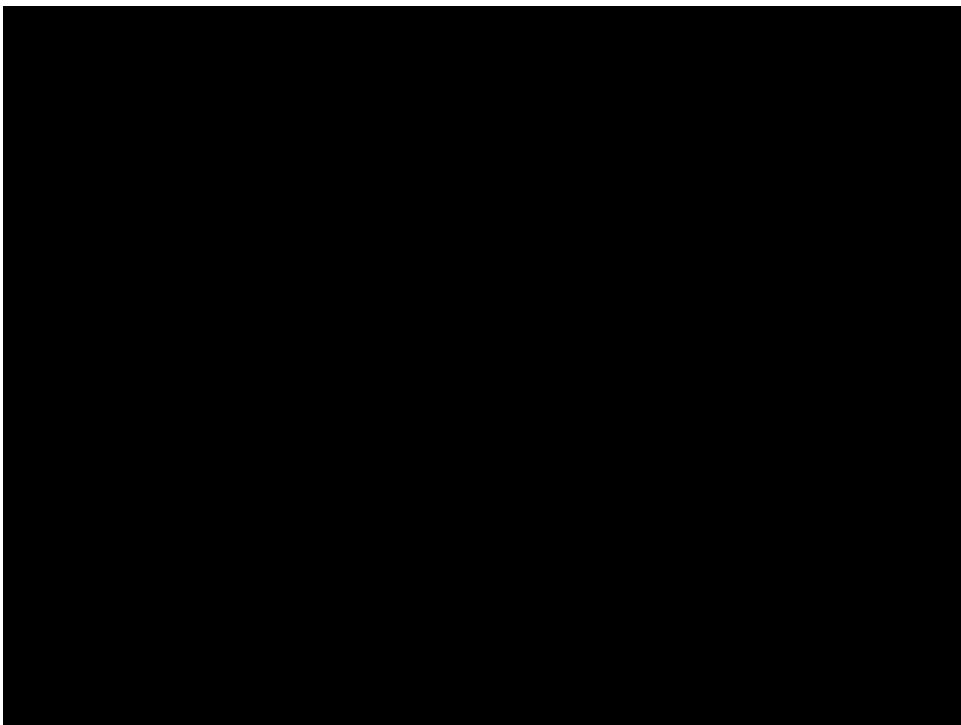
Intonjane itshata nesiko. Umakoti utshata  
nomyeni. Bobabini bangena kwisigaba esitsha  
sobomi yiyo le nto bagungxa ngokufanayo.  
Kufuneka ubomi babufunde ngokutsha. You  
shorten the horizon first. Kunjalo nakumkhwetha  
wegqirha.

???? Title in Nande video???

Ezi vidiyo zombini za:







Kubuya amakrwala esuthwini! Ngumphumo ke lo! Kuqala umgidi ke ngoku! Yiva amakhwelo! Imnandi le nto!



# isiXhosa: journey further

Highlighting further

Talk about intlonipho yemfihlo

Videos of intonjane/ulwaluko

Situations have changed such that we have to recognize that

Things that happen make them open: accidental deaths cause doctors/nurses enter space

Democracy has propelled way ahead; children interact with others and friends from other cultures start to be involved

Helicopter umkhwetha, as opposed to by foot; (amabhongo) also used in wedding ceremonies

We can't run away from what exists already

Innovation: rejection of seclusion; now performed in initiation school buildings in Transkei – interview woman whose sons

Traditionally, a married woman close to abakhwetha is seen as witch; is this still the case? – abekhwetha in hospitals

(female nurses); begging at traffic lights and don't run if it's a woman driver – situations that bring oomama in the picture

# Uluhlu lokusetyenzisiweyo

Imifanekiso – <https://africageographic.com/stories/xhosa-circumcision-ritual-south-africa-its-hard-to-be-a-man/>

Umlungu – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfLxz2W7N1U>

umIndia – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbdJSBCOPZE>

uCwenga Titi –

<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/culture/lgbtqia/transwoman-isixhosa-initiation-rite-13-november-2022/>

SABC Intonjane <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7G2V4htK30>

People can be past schooling age

Whole family can be prescribed intonjane by igqirha

Time conflict between contemporary education and ulwaluko (especially)

Gbv for ulwaluko education – source?

Cross-gender respect – Magodyo 2013:4

Government involvement – must be 18yo; must go to doctor and given vax + vitamin b to strengthen body

Interview clip?

Nice iboma – background?