


# Thinking Africa through Soga's black spirituals: A theological reflection

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This article offers a critical reflection of *Lizal'isidinga laKho* (hymn 116) and *Wazidala iinto zonke* (hymn 16) written by Tiyo Soga and recorded in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) hymnal book. From the perspective of black theology of liberation (BTL), I historicise and contextualise hymn 116 and hymn 16 to debunk the argument that Tiyo Soga was alien to the lives, experiences of suffering and pain of his people. The article posits that hymn 116 and hymn 16 are black spirituals that articulate the contexts Soga found himself as a black person during the times of the frontier wars. Therefore, utilising blackness as a heuristic approach, I argue that the songs do not just historicise the experiences of black people in the times of the frontier wars, but they are prayers and/or laments from Soga that ask God to spare the lives, the culture, and value systems of black people in a world that seeks the destruction of their being, history, and culture. The songs emphasise the black struggle for justice and liberation encouraging black people never to succumb to the definitions given to them by those who seek the destruction of black personhood. The article locates Soga within the frontier wars to illustrate his own experiences as black person, then examines and presents *Lizal'isidinga laKho*, *Wazidala iinto zonke* as black spirituals born in a time of war to give hope to those who have been conquered and subjugated in the unjust wars of colonisation. Hymns 116 and 16 contribute to the decolonial turn discourse –unthinking of the west – because they emphasise the black struggle for liberation and justice.

**Contribution:** The contribution of this article is its focus on the way in which the intersection of religious studies, social sciences, and humanities generates an interdisciplinary contested discourse.

**Keywords:** *Lizal'isidinga; laKho*; black theology; liberation; black spirituals; black experience.

## Introduction

### Tiyo Soga's Experience of war and genocide

Tiyo Soga, the first black minister ordained in Scotland by the United Presbyterian church of Scotland in 1856, was a relative of Ntsikana kaGabha. He was born in the middle of the frontier wars between the British empire and amaXhosa kingdoms in the Eastern Cape.<sup>1</sup> Soga was born in 1829, almost 10 years after the death of Ntsikana kaGabha. During Soga's birth, chief Maqoma was expelled and evicted from Kat River territory by the British empire administrators. When Soga was at the age of six, there was a war that took place from 1835 to 1836 and he fled with his mother to the mountains. According to Janet Hodgson (1986:190), Soga, the elder, served in the leadership council and played a leading part in the frontier wars of 1834–1835, 1846, and 1850–1853. When the 1846 war of the axe broke out, Soga was at Lovedale studying; thus, Graham Duncan (2018:1) asserts that he was forcibly detached from his people early in his career. Duncan notes that Soga was a conflicted character because he lived in a time and context where the confluence of two cultures collided. Vuyani Vellem (2016:4–6) asserts that Tiyo Soga was born in the context of black conquest and genocide of black people, thus, making him a character in the black history in South Africa whose life was immersed in the frontier wars.

Like Dukwana, the son of Ntsikana kaGabha, Tiyo Soga believed that Africans can be both Christian and African. He, himself, attempted to embrace both the white world and the black world at the same time. Thus, Vellem suggests that the footprints of his life are at Lovedale, Scotland, and in the mission work among his own people – amaXhosa – until his death. Soga believed in African traditional values and tried to reconcile them with aspects of western civilisation. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that Soga was conflicted with himself and his life

1. Of course, the wars were not only concentrated in the Eastern Cape, but the coastal lands of South Africa, for example KwaZulu-Natal.

**Note:** Special Collection: Unthink the West, sub-edited by Fundiswa Kobo and Rothney Tshaka (University of South Africa).

as a black priest and a missionary. At the time he was gaining prospects within the white world and its Christian spirituality, his people were being destroyed in the frontier wars by the same white people he was following for their education and spirituality. He experienced first-hand what W.E.B Du Bois called 'double consciousness', the twoness that black people experience through colonisation and slavery:

[T]he sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (see Du Bois & Nathan 1986)

Here I do not want to get into details on what it means to live through conflicting cultures and spirituality. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2005) describes this very well when he argues that culture is not just culture, but it is history and politics of a people; culture is philosophy and spirituality of a people. Therefore, if Soga was conflicted between two cultures, it is same as saying Tiyo Soga was conflicted between two Gods, one was Xhosa, and one was western. Xolela Mangcu refers to Soga as a very consequential African who encouraged Africans to denounce African culture, and African ways of being and knowing the world.<sup>2</sup> Mangcu further notes that Soga is one of the Africans who believed that Europeans were superior to Africans. Evidently, all of us as theologians have been taught that the Christian God is superior to all other Gods. That is, the Christian God is a jealous God (see Ex 20:5) who would not want to share with any other Gods as he is the creator of all worlds. The Christian God is the one that pushed Soga into believing that the Xhosa people were inferior to Europeans and therefore, they needed to adapt into the ways of Europeans, which meant that the Xhosa culture and the Xhosa spirituality were inferior to western culture and spirituality. Thus, presenting the dilemma of the civilised beings versus the uncivilised beings. However, I am not certain which God between the inferior and the superior God appeased Soga by making him think that there is a way that Christianity can be adopted by Africans through integrating African spirituality to western spirituality. Furthermore, I am not sure which God showed him that western civilisation and western Christianity even in its own backyard came with the destruction of human life. Evidently, Williams writes that in Soga's travels to Europe, he witnessed the men and women who worked in fields and factories without hope of having a life of their own, and he protested upon the realisation that western civilisation came with human destruction (see Williams 1978).

In South Africa, Tiyo Soga's experience of genocide, particularly the *Ingqawule* (the cattle killing in 1856–1857) that left black people destitute and impoverished for a lifetime, made him realise the destruction that western civilisation came with as he had to preach to starved children, widows, men, and women who had experienced war that removed them forcibly from their ancestral homes in the Amatole to

2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-xB0rivSIU>.

the Kei (eNciba) (see Nxasana 2011). However, for him 'the pen represented Christianity and education, which he believed would ultimately lead to liberation from colonial rule' (Nxasana 2011:200). Therefore, in response to *Ingqawule* (known as the cattle killing) that plunged amaXhosa into poverty forcing them to seek jobs from the colonial administration, Soga started penning down hymns that articulate the existential crisis he finds himself in as an African. Today Tiyo Soga is much remembered for these hymns as he spread the gospel, but mostly he expressed the pain and suffering of the Xhosa people through his songs. The question for Soga in his songs is similar to James Cone's question: What has the gospel of Jesus Christ to do with black pain and suffering (Cone 2018)? He wanted God to be involved in the black struggle for liberation and justice. Therefore, it is from this background that I argue that *Lizal' isidinga laKho* is a song that is born from a conflicted character wrestling with himself, with God, and the world. The frontier wars gave birth to poverty and generational impoverishment and expropriation of lands without compensation within amaXhosa, and this is one of Soga's existential predicaments. How can he preach salvation when there was nothing salvific in the everyday lives of his people? There was no saving grace that the Christian God promises for his own people; therefore, Soga began to write his songs as lamentations. *Lizal' isidinga laKho* is a lament, a cry for God to save the African people and their culture and ethics. After all, if we are all God's children created in the image of God as the Bible argues, why Christians are not saving Africans from the destruction that comes with frontier wars?

## Wazidala iinto zonke [You created all things]

Hymn 16, *Wazidala iinto zonke*, carries the existential crisis and dysfunctionality that is usually expressed in Tiyo Soga's songs. Post-1994, *Wazidala iinto zonke* became a national anthem within gatherings of the youth. When I was still an active youth (Wesley Guild member) in the Methodist church, I used to spend time reflecting on this song. The song is very expressive of the struggles of the black youth in South Africa because it expresses suffering and pain that comes with landlessness and poverty. Without knowing who the author of the song was, I ascribed the song to Tiyo Soga because of the tone and the kind of social issues it raises.<sup>3</sup> I only found out later when I started doing research on Tiyo Soga's hymns that this song belongs to Tiyo Soga and it is recorded as hymn 3, page 2, in the hymn book used by the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA):<sup>4</sup>

1. *Wazidala iinto zonke*,  
Wena Thixo, wedwa;  
Akwancedwa nangubani,  
Ukuzenza kwakho.

3. Hymn 16, *Wazidala iinto zonke* in the MCSA hymnal book is not ascribed to Tiyo Soga, but G.S (General Secretary). It is in the Uniting Presbyterian Church of South Africa hymn book that ascribes the song to Tiyo Soga.

4. See the first edition and source of *Wazidala iinto Zonke* and *Lizal' isidinga laKho* in the first Xhosa hymnbook: *Incwadi yamaculo amaXhosa (Ehlaziyiweyo) Egunyaziswe Nagabandla aseRhabe*. 1929. Lovedale: Lovedale Press.

2. *Ezi ntaba ezimiyo,*  
*Zidaliwe nguWe;*  
*Zimi ziqinile zona,*  
*Ngokusekwa Nguwe.*
3. *Nala manzi aselwayo,*  
*Siwanikwe nguWe;*  
*Noku kutya sikutyayo,*  
*Sikuphiwe nguwe.*
4. *Wabadal'abantu Wena,*  
*Ngokufana naWe;*  
*Wabanika into zonke,*  
*Bafanelwa zizo.*
5. *Kwakufik'utshaba lwabo,*  
*Lwabahlutha zona;*  
*Bakudela wena Thixo,*  
*Beva izwi lalo.*
6. *Wath'ukuze basindiswe,*  
*Weenza ngezibele;*  
*Wabanik'uNyana wakho,*  
*Eze kubafela.*

Verse one speaks about how God created humans and gave them all that they needed to survive. The verse emphasises that everything that is here on earth belongs to God, not a single human being helped in creating the universe. As reflected above, the second verse speaks about nature and the environment; Soga speaks about how God created the mountains and the valleys. He then in the third verse speaks about the water and the food that we consume, and he argues that all have been given by God. In the fourth verse, the song then speaks about how all human beings have been created in the image of God. The fifth verse speaks about the enemy that came and took the lands, and everything given to the people by God. Then towards the end of verse five, the songs talk about how the people disrespected God by listening to the enemy. The latter sentence makes no sense, because it comes out of the blue; it makes me believe that this was included to have an evangelical meaning. The verse is out of context; which means the text does not align with the intended theme of the hymn. The theme being land conquest. The last verse then continues to speak about Jesus who saved the people through his death. The fifth and the sixth verse make no sense; they speak of a superior being who took the lands and everything that people needed to survive, but also speak about the son of God who came and died for them but says nothing about the lands, and the food that were taken from the people. The last verse is confusing, because in real life of amaXhosa and black people in South Africa, the lands were not taken by a supernatural being but by humans who saw themselves superior based on their skin colour. Black people's lands were expropriated without compensation by people who carried European flags, and their faith was Christianity.

It was in the name of the Christian God, the Catholic and Protestant churches expropriated the lands of the indigenous people throughout the world without compensation. Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the global south helped their home countries to acquire indigenous people's lands (see Mudimbe 1988:45). Though Protestantism in Europe fought against the Roman Catholic Church and its imperial interests in Europe but in the global south, the Protestant churches expanded the same interests as the Catholic church. The Protestant churches did not just force people violently, through the gun; they used the church as an important instrument in dividing and ruling the people by selling and portraying Christianity as the perfect and logic religion that would never fail the individual, and this was the case in which Tiyo Soga was raised, and practised Christianity in South Africa. Mudimbe (1988:45) writes that missionaries who came in the global south formed part of the political process that sought to create and extend the right of the European sovereignty to rule other worlds. The crux of missionary education was to overthrow paganism so that they could establish the Christian faith as a civilising and logical religion. In the newfound lands, kings and queens had the authority and autonomy to put the barbarous nations into perpetual slavery, and to dispose them of their property, lands and whatever it is that they might find. Mudimbe writes that the European kings and queens did all these things in God's name; thus, in South Africa expropriation of black people's land was carried out in the name of the Queen of England who was the head of the church of England (the church of England today in South Africa is known as the Anglican Church). All the lands were to be placed under the queen of England throne by 1913; black people had been so overcome by the British empire that they owned only 13% of the land. We can argue that Soga's children were the generation who, according to Sol Plaatjie, woke up 'on Friday morning, 20 June 1913, ... [and found themselves], not actually slaves, but pariahs in the land of [their] birth' (see Plaatjie 2007:18).<sup>5</sup>

In summary, hymn 16 is famous today because it wrestles with poverty, landlessness, that came with slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. Salvation is expressed in the song as the coming of God to give back what was stolen. Verse three and verse four speak about food that was in abundance, and the trees and mountains that stood strong before the coming of the enemy. Verse five expresses and emphasises that all human beings are created in the image of God which for then tries to show how the composer is struggling with issues of racism, poverty, landlessness, and the destruction of the environment. *Wazidala iinto zonke* is therefore an appeal for interventions from God. Tiyo Soga is preoccupied with the violence that has plunged humanity, nature, and the environment since the arrival of the coloniser in South Africa.

5. Sol Plaatjie was one of the major campaigners of the South Africa Native National Congress (SANNC) who was against the *Land Act of 1913*. Plaatjie went to Britain as the member of SANNC (SANNC was the predecessor of the African National Congress [ANC]); he was charged with appealing to the British government against the *Land Act of 1913*. The mission was futile; black people were relegated to owning 13% of the land in 1913. When the National Party came to power in 1948, black people lost more lands and owned mere 7% of the land. In the new democratic South Africa, black people own 3% of the land.

## ***Lizal'isidinga laKho* (Fulfil or Realise your promise)**

1. *Lizalis'idinga laKho,*  
*Thixo, Nkosi yenyanyiso!*  
*Zonk'iintlanga, zonki'ilwimi,*  
*Ma zizuze usindiso.*
2. *Amadolo kweli lizwe,*  
*Ma kogobe phambi kwaKho;*  
*Zide zithi zonk'ilwimi,*  
*Ziluxel'udumo lwaKho.*
3. *Law'la, law'la, nKosi, Yesu!*  
*Koza ngaWe ukonwaba;*  
*Ngeziphithi-phithi zethu,*  
*Yonakele imihlaba.*
4. *Bona izwe lakowethu,*  
*Uxolel'izono zalo;*  
*Ungathob'ingqumbo yakho,*  
*Luze luf'usapho lwalo.*
5. *Yaala, nKosi singadeli,*  
*Iimfundiso zezwi laKho;*  
*Uze usivuselele,*  
*Sive inyaniso yaKho.*

*Lizal'isidinga laKho* verse one speaks about the need for God to fulfil his promise to save all nations and race. In verse two, Soga asks his people to bow down to the Christian God and speak his words. Verse three asks God to lead his people because human beings with their greed and selfishness have destroyed worlds. Soga then in verse four, asks God to forgive his people, and pleads God not be harsh, thus destroy them from existence. In verse five, he asks his people that they do not undermine the word of God, so they may hear the truth about God.

Malusi Mpumlwana, the bishop of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church in 2015, once used *Lizal'isidinga laKho* and Psalm 137:4 to express the struggles of black people in South Africa since colonialism.<sup>6</sup> Thus, re-reading the *Kairos* document of 1985, Mpumlwana used *Lizal'isidinga laKho* and Psalm 137:4 to articulate the *Kairos* theology and the need for redistribution of land, restitution, and justice. The title of his address was: How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? (Ps 137:4): A reflective homily at *Kairos* 30 Celebration (see Mpumlwana 2015).<sup>7</sup> In his address, Mpumlwana pointed out that in his return from Scotland, Tiyo Soga was taunted by white settlers in Port Elizabeth. They jeered at his wearing of European clothes (which was a

6. Malusi Mpumlwana is one of the youths who was along Steve Biko in the Black Consciousness Movement during the struggle against apartheid. He is currently the South African Council of Churches (SACC) General Secretary.

7. His address was in celebration of 30 years of the produced during the church struggle against apartheid. 'The South Africa Kairos Document 1985', *Kairos Southern Africa* (blog), 08 May 2011, <https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/the-south-africa-kairos-document-1985/>.

novelty at the time) and walking with a Scottish woman for his wife. The settlers told Soga that African people would be totally overcome by Europeans and that his culture and all it stood for would be forgotten. In response to the taunting, he wrote *Lizalis'idinga laKho*, a spiritual of assured hope and confidence that the faithful God will make good on the pledge of the Jesus manifesto to set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (see Mpumlwana 2015:1). Mpumlwana (2015) asserted that the last verse of the original was changed in the mainline churches. The original lyrics read as follows:

O Lord, bless [*Nkosi khawusikelele*]  
 The teachings of our land; [*Iimfundiso zelizwe lethu*]  
 And thereby revive us [*Uze usivuselele*]  
 That we may restore goodness [*Siphuthume ukulunga*]

He asserts that the original verse was a resolve not to reconcile with the predictions of those who were taunting him, of the demise of the values he had cherished. Therefore:

[U]nlike the Babylonian exiles, Soga does not hang his harp in the willow tree, but he uses it to inspire hope, built on the foundations of the best of his people's values and teachings, that we may restore what is good, for the common good [*iimfundiso ze'zwe lethu, siphuthume ukulunga*]. (see Mpumlwana 2015:2)

Without the new generation knowing the original verse of this song, the song became famous during #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall Protest in 2015 that called for the decolonisation of the education system in South Africa. From the perspective of black theology, it is clear therefore that *Lizalis'idinga laKho* is meant to be a prayer for the rediscovery of black being and the cultures, histories and spiritualities of the African people. Soga wanted to put forward the teaching and ethics of his own ancestors like Desmond Tutu (1999) and Steve Biko (1978) who have also argued in their own works about the struggle against slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. *Lizalis'idinga laKho* proves Cone's argument that black spirituals are not evidence that black people reconciled themselves to human slavery, colonisation, and apartheid.

Cone argues that there is no theological interpretation of the black spirituals without paying attention to the environment that created them (see Cone 2022). These are black songs emphasising that black liberation is consistent with divine revelation. Cone asserts that 'church music' or the spirituals are a symbol of the emotions of black people regarding the state of their existence and being (Cone 2022:13). The songs are not composed through abstract notions of God, but they are relating to the segregation, lynching, and the political disfranchisement of black people. Cone (2022:17) argues that when black people came to America through slavery, they only had music to archive and historicise themselves so their songs are a historical striving for freedom and liberation from the yoke of oppression. Cone notes that song forms part of the oral history in Africa, so therefore it is not only black Americans who used songs to historicise and express themselves, their struggles for freedom and liberation. In the global south, oral history particularly song in Africa is a way

of speaking about being and existing in a world that seeks to destroy their personhood.

But we also need to admit that in the mainline churches, these songs were tampered with to make it true that black people reconciled themselves with slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. The spirituals written by black people in the mainline to serve the hopes and dreams of black people in the church were sanitised to fit the missionary gospel of conversion and civilisation. Based on the deliberations above, we must acknowledge that though the missionary churches have provided education to the very first so-called coconuts (the slang meaning of coconut means brown on the outside and white on the inside) like Tiyo Soga, the missionary churches remain a hazardous model of the church in Africa because they seek to conquer and colonise the African self. The adaptation of black spirituals' liberative paradigms in missionary churches in African communities is performed and enacted within the superiority and inferiority complex syndrome. The adaptation of the black spirituals' liberative heritage in the church is assimilated to western ways of evangelism and music. Thus, after sometimes the meaning of the liberative paradigms in the songs gets lost as the churches seek to fit them into western theology and Christianity. As illustrated above, as a black minister and a black theologian, Tiyo Soga wrote many songs that lamented and praised about the black situation, and the experience in the frontier wars. His songs in these mainline churches were written to serve the black spirituality; however, the mainline churches tempered the message of the songs to sanitise them to fit the missionary gospel of conversion and civilisation.

## Thinking Africa through Soga's black spirituals

When white people enslaved and colonised Africans, the intention was to render black people without history, culture, and ethics. James Cone (2022:17) notes the idea was to shut the doors to a future defined by African heritage and existence, thus making them unintelligible. So, *Wazidala iinto zonke* and *Lizal'isidinga laKho* are black spirituals that help us think about Africa by historicising black people's experiences in the time of the frontier wars. This is because the songs inform us of the rupture of lives, bondage and what the people can do to hold their culture, history, and their heritage. Through the two songs, I have come to understand the despair that is brought about by war as Soga was born in a time when the amaXhosa kingdom (the people he comes from) was engaged in the nine frontier wars with the British empire – bloody wars that took 114 years. Indeed, Soga's life reflects the contradictions and ambivalence that result from the unjust wars of colonialism and conquest.

Vuyani Vellem asserts that Soga's life is 'the personification of a body of knowledge pertinent to the development of foundational knowledge in examining the violence, disruptions and dislocations of black bodies, knowledge and spirit in modernity' (see Vellem 2016:1). Therefore, from the perspective of black theology of liberation (BTL), *Wazidala*

*iinto zonke* and *Lizal'isidinga laKho* form part of the black spirituals and black history emphasising black freedom and liberation. Thus, contributing to the decolonial discourses in cultural, and theological education in Africa. Though the missionaries distorted the songs to evangelise our people for conversion, in essence, the songs impart and archive history and make us remember who we are as Africans. After all, activists, and decolonial turn scholars like Panasha Chigumadzi have argued that people like Tiyo Soga in the South African history form part of the 'Coconut conundrum' (Chigumadzi 2015:6). The coconuts are those who were expected to join western civilisation and faith without question, but through the experience of racism and anti-blackness they find themselves longing for decolonisation to acquire the ways of their ancestors. The disregard for black lives in the world calls younger generations to join with their ancestors in the fight against colonisation, slavery, and apartheid. Therefore, 'the Coconut experience is not new, it can be traced back to Tiyo Soga who was a prominent anti-colonial figure who was the black graduate of the famed Lovedale Mission School' (Chigumadzi 2015:2), and among the first black priests educated in a western theological education system. But through torment of his people by missionaries and colonial administrators, Soga chose to become one of the anti-colonial figures of our time. Xolela Mangcu writes that when John Chalmers 'described black people as indolent and incapable of development' (Mangcu 2016:45–59), Soga responded by asserting that he finds:

[T]he Negro in the present struggle in America looking forward – though with still chains on his hands and chains on his feet – yet looking forward to the dawn of a better day for himself and all his sable brethren in Africa (Soga cited in Attwell 2006:39)

So in this sense, Soga never let Chalmers derail him from his mission; he continued to hope and dream of the liberation of Africans from colonialism through his songs.

In agreement, Leon De Kock (1994) writes that Tiyo Soga, as the first African to become an ordained minister and prototype of 'model kaffir', provides a site of textual convergence. He was 'inscribed within pronounced forms of missionary orthodoxy in a general sense, against the considerable force of his own Xhosa traditions, but he was also transformed into textual versions of the 'model kaffir' by missionaries in books ...' (De Kock 1994:35). Soga was supposed to personify transition from barbarism to redemption, which meant he had to shed off the isiXhosa culture. In his return from Scotland as an ordained minister, Soga was met by the great cattle killing [*Inqawule*] which made amaXhosa to become labours without autonomy as now all the lands belonged to the Queen of England. It is said that when Tiyo Soga saw what has become of his people, he expressed 'deadness and hardness of heart to the gospel, and his desire to be moved by the spirit of God' (De Kock 1994:47). De Kock asserts that his hardening was because of the experiences of his people amaXhosa, which as time went by, he started calling himself umXhosa not a missionary. He invoked isiXhosa lyrical expressions known by amaXhosa within the isiXhosa culture. Some of the things that Soga began to do was to talk about

oral traditions, Soga argued that there was a need to preserve the various oral forms of culture and history which were alien to missionaries' attitudes at the time. He began to have reverence for the isiXhosa culture and history, and thus he called for a recasting of Xhosa history and culture in literate modes. He argued that:

All is well today. Our veterans of the Xhosa and Embo people must disgorge all they know. Everything must be imparted to the nation as a whole. Fables must be retold; what was history or legend should be recounted ... Whatever was seen heard or done under the requirements of custom should be brought to light and placed on the national table to be sifted for preservation. Were there not several tribes before? What is the record of their history and customs good or bad? Had we no chiefs in days gone by? Where are the anecdotes of their periods? Were these things buried with them in their graves? Is there no one to unearth these things from the graves? Were there no national poets in the days of the yore? Whose praises did they sing? Is there no one to emulate this eloquence? In the olden days did not some people bewitch others? What were the names of the men of magic? Is it not rumoured that some were tortured severely and cruelly? Are there no people who have an idea of matters of this nature which happened under the cloak of custom? Are there no battles which were fought and who were the heroes? What feathers were won by the royal regiments... We should revive and bring to the light all the great wealth of information. Let us bring to life ancestors; Ngconde, Togu, Tshiwo, Phalo, Rharhabe, Mlwawu, Nqgika and Ndlambe. Let us resurrect our ancestral forebears who bequeathed to us a rich heritage. All anecdotes connected with the life of the nation should be brought to this big corn-pit our national newspaper Iindaba ... (see De Kock 1994:51–52)

Again, Walter Brueggemann (1986) believes that lamentations recorded in the Book of Psalms are not only directed at religious communities. Firstly, they are psychological dilemmas of the one orating or writing the lament; secondly, they carry sociological concerns of the religious community and society at large (Brueggemann 1986:64). Brueggemann states that the sociological dimension of lamentations asks social questions of justice; therefore, laments and/or complaints are not just a mere religious exercise, but articulations that carry political, economic, and social freight. Therefore, *Lizal'isidinga laKho* is also a lament, a cry for God to save the African people and their culture and ethics. After all, if we are all God's children created in the image of God as the Bible argues, why therefore Christians are not saving Africans from the destruction that comes with frontier wars? From the perspective of black theology, *Lizal'isidinga laKho* and *Wazidala iinto zonke* are black spirituals that depict the position black people find themselves in a white world. Moreover, these spirituals epitomise modern lamentations petitioning God to act against the systems of oppression that hold black people in misery and pain.

The black church was born in slavery and in the unjust wars of colonisation, and because of this its existence symbolises a people who have been completely stripped of their identity, culture and being by white Christians. Biko (1978) asserts that though the African has been stripped off his being and made a pariah in his own backyard, the white males have not completely succeeded in stripping the African of his heritage

and culture. Indeed, 'colonisation devours indigenous cultures and leaves behind a bastardised culture that may thrive at the pace and rate allowed it by the dominant culture' (Biko 1978:95). However, Biko asserts that the black church and black theologians must also realise that we have succeeded to a great extent to withstand the bastardisation that came with colonialisation and Christianisation because we can still demonstrate our humanity, and our ways of life through our oral history. Thus, Biko (1978:95) argues in his black consciousness philosophy we can rediscover the African value systems of being and existing in the world. The past is not completely lost; it needs us to search for it and bring it forward with us to articulate ourselves into being and existence now, and in the future. I argue, therefore, that like Biko, Tiyo Soga, through his songs and writings, illustrates to us that we should revive and bring to light all the great wealth of information left to us by our ancestors. Therefore, as the new generation of scholars, activists and artists, through our work and actions we should resurrect our ancestral forebears like Tiyo Soga and tell their stories as we encounter and understand them as Africans conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation.

In conclusion, hymn 16 and 116 recorded in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) hymnal book are lamentations, prayers that historicise a story of dysfunctionality, disruption, and dislocation of black bodies in the times of the frontier wars. I make this argument because these two songs are written by Tiyo Soga who is born in the time of frontier wars, who has experienced forcible removals of his people from their lands. One would think that our ancestors were spared by missionaries and the Christian administrators because they were also Christian. But many English churches and Afrikaner churches in South Africa expropriated our lands, and today those lands still rest in the hands of most of the mainline churches in South Africa.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that Tiyo Soga was born in an era of war and terror, genocide, and subjugation of his own people by the same people who taught him that God is love. He dealt with the existential crisis that his people found themselves in under the British empire and Christianity through composing songs directed to God, crying, and expressing the groans and the pain of black South Africans. I have shown that *Lizal'isidinga laKho* is said to be written in a context of Ingqawule (the great amaXhosa cattle killings), and again it is generally believed that he composed the song *Lizal'isidinga laKho* as a response to white settlers in Port Elizabeth known as Qgeberha today. At the beginning of this article, I noted that Vellem argues Tiyo Soga must be celebrated as he is the personification of a body of knowledge pertinent to the development of foundational knowledge in examining the violence, disruptions and dislocations of black bodies, knowledge, and spirit in modernity. In this article, I have celebrated Tiyo Soga and his work using two of his songs, namely *Lizal'isidinga laKho* and *Wazidala iinto zonke* to argue that black spirituals are not signs that black people agreed with colonisation of the African

people. However, their songs reflect their struggle with the Christian God that allowed the subjugation and oppression of their own people. Tiyo Soga, like many of us in black theology and decolonial studies, struggled with the question of God and the black people experience.

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S.L.K., is the sole author of this research article.

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