Revisiting the Debate on Christian Missionary Imperialism in South Africa: Its Role in Oppressing the IsiXhosa Language and Culture

Mlamli Diko
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8516-3586
University of South Africa
dikom@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

In this article, I critically probe the role of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa and its destructive contribution to the oppression of the isiXhosa language and culture, untangling the roots and shadows of a system that sought to distort indigenous identity under the guise of Christian salvation. Qualitative meta-synthesis and cultural imperialism as a theory are applied to anchor the argument. This article uncovers three notable findings. First, the use of language as a strategic and political weapon of imperialism obligated Christian missionaries and the church to abolish isiXhosa linguistic and amaXhosa cultural structures, and replace them with Western philosophies, elevating English and Afrikaans as the dominant mechanism of education and religious discourse. Second, the Christian church's condemnation and oppression of ancestral amaXhosa practices led to their gradual erosion under the crushing weight of Christian dogma. Third, through its pervasive influence, missionary imperialism imposed Western cultural values that disconnected the threads of intergenerational transmission of amaXhosa knowledge systems, leaving far behind a fractured cultural mosaic that continues to obstruct the recovery of amaXhosa heritage in a post-colonial scenery. In the end, by interweaving historical accounts, ethnographic critiques, and cultural discourses, I unmask the indelible scars of Christian missionary and church interventions and advocate for the revitalisation and advancement of the isiXhosa language and amaXhosa culture.

Keywords: Christian missionary imperialism; cultural imperialism; local knowledge systems; isiXhosa language; post-colonial heritage

UNISA university of south africa PRESS
Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
Volume 51 | Number 1 | 2025 | #18484 | 23 pages
https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/18484
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)

Historical Background and Introduction

Numerous scholarly debates, historical investigations, and contemporary discourses have explored Christian missionary and church activities in South Africa, positing an inherent and unavoidable connection between missionaries and cultural imperialism (see Burnett 2023; Erlank 1999; Kaschula 2008; Mills 1995; Saule 2017). The central premise of these arguments is unambiguous, suggesting that Christian missionaries and the church served as the vanguard of Western expansion. In this regard, by establishing their footholds, missionaries derided indigenous belief systems, questioned indigenous practices, undermined concerted self-assurance, dismissed respect for local authorities, and ultimately provoked political or social upheaval. In this weakened state, indigenous communities, with special reference to amaXhosa, succumbed to the global forces of Western expansion, internal disintegration, and relentless cultural transformation paved the way for direct imperial supremacy. Alongside this, missionary frameworks of thought and belief were imposed, propagating their supremacy in education and religious institutions.

Consequently, missionaries emerged as key agents of invasive cultural imperialism. The primary aim of the Christian missionary incursion and the church was to serve as a strategic and political precursor to Western colonial multiplication by systemically distorting indigenous belief systems, cultural practices, and traditional governance structures. This deliberate dismantling of local societal cohesion rendered communities such as amaXhosa vulnerable to imperial subjugation, while simultaneously institutionalising Western epistemologies, cosmologies, philosophies, and ontologies through missionary-led education and religious frameworks, thus cementing the mechanisms of cultural and ideological authority. It is my view, therefore, that the Christian missionary introduction in South Africa was not pure, as it functioned beyond mere religious conversion to actively dismantle indigenous socio-cultural structures in favour of Western ideological hegemony.

I must further underline that it is regrettable to generally observe that the Christian missionary invasion posed uninvited challenges to the isiXhosa language, and culture, as it systemically devalued and delegitimised indigenous epistemologies while advancing Western cultural hegemony (Porter 1997, 367). Western missionaries, driven by Christian desires, continually perceiving isiXhosa as unqualified for conveying Christian doctrine or Western ideals, sought to influence this language through translation projects and the introduction of written orthographies (Sakupapa 2023, 202). These missionary projects include, but are not limited to, translating the entire Bible into isiXhosa to facilitate the spread of Christianity within amaXhosa and beyond. This translation, spearheaded by the Lovedale Press, a former oppressive publishing house, significantly altered isiXhosa grammar and vocabulary, introducing new religious terms and concepts that were extrinsic to the indigenous philosophy of amaXhosa (Masondo 2018, 209). In the same vein, early missionary materials included the translation of catechisms and hymnals into isiXhosa to impart Christian ideologies (Mathebula 2013).

These translations prioritised Christian theological philosophies, sidelining indigenous linguistic expressions and oral narratological techniques that are central to amaXhosa.

As I argue elsewhere, missionaries continued to introduce a standardised written form of isiXhosa that was more aligned with Western linguistic structures, which overlooked the flexibility and fluidity of this language (Diko 2023). An example of this is the missionaries' orthographic standardisation of isiXhosa, where they introduced a fixed alphabet and syllabic rules modelled after Western languages, marginalising isiXhosa phonological features such as tonal distinctions (Wilkes 1985, 148). Against this reality, I contend that this imposition of rigid Western linguistic structures on isiXhosa severely undermined its natural dynamism, restricting its phonological and grammatical evolution by enforcing artificial constraints that did not reflect the language's intrinsic tonal and morphological complexity. Consequently, this standardisation not only distorted "authentic" isiXhosa expression but also contributed to the long-term oppression of indigenous linguistic knowledge, intensifying Western linguistic hegemony at the expense of organic linguistic development. Of note, this act was not accidental but part of a larger imperial strategy that aimed to demystify indigenous cultural independence, glorifying the dominance of Western mentalities under the dress of religious and educational advancement. Accordingly, the lasting consequences of this imposed linguistic rigidity—where isiXhosa's organic evolution was stifled—should directly be traced to the missionary project, making it a central agent in the colonisation of African languages.

To the same extent, this process constrained the language's expressive variability, which is central to its oral and performative traditions. In clarifying this assertion, Maseko and Vale (2016) submit that missionaries intended to oversimplify isiXhosa for educational purposes, resulting in the loss of complex grammatical forms and metaphorical expressions. As a direct consequence of these oppressive practices, Mathebula (2013, 41) indicates that many indigenous philosophies of amaXhosa such as *Ubuntu* (humanity or interconnectedness) were challenging to translate directly into Christian contexts. Due to this factor, missionaries resorted to translations that fit their understanding of these terms, which frequently led to a misrepresentation or oversimplification of indigenous philosophies of amaXhosa. It is not surprising, therefore, for Moffat (1988, 3) to proffer that:

> I am deeply grieved to see the people of this land, so rich in their own traditions, reduced to mere shadows of themselves, their languages twisted and their customs obliterated in the name of salvation.

Bearing this pronouncement in mind, I contend that it is a regrettable reality that in the process of attempting to "save" indigenous African peoples, their culture and language were transformed into mere instruments serving external agendas, stripping them of the ability to express their realities. By the same token, in a zeal to spread the Gospel, some amaXhosa people have unintentionally silenced the voices of their own people,

depriving them of their rich histories and the language that mirrors their cultural essence, ancestry, and spirituality. This view is based on the reality that certain members of amaXhosa have strategically and politically utilised Christian missionary systems as a means to ostracise or suppress the voices of their fellow amaXhosa, commonly through the structures and doctrines of the Christian church. An example of this is how some amaXhosa converts, leveraging their alignment with missionary systems, use church doctrines to silence and dismiss traditional oral histories and ancestral practices as heathen, effectively marginalising those who celebrate ancestral, spiritual, and cultural values. This is nothing else but betrayal—an insidious distortion masked as salvation.

In other words, by aligning themselves with these imposed oppressive mentalities, they have inadvertently intensified the silencing of indigenous philosophies and cultural expressions within their society. In the process, I cannot help but feel that the Christian mission's agenda in this land has resulted in an intolerable distortion of the isiXhosa language and cultural dimensions of this ethnic group. It is my view that what was intended to elevate amaXhosa has instead, tragically, rendered them voiceless in their own land. Therefore, while Christian missionary efforts inadvertently preserved certain languages, specifically English and Afrikaans, they were primarily guided by an agenda to oversimplify isiXhosa for religious instruction, stripping it of its cultural affluence and reducing it to a mechanism for proselytisation.[1]

Above all, the use of English and Afrikaans as the preferred mediums of education in missionary schools dismissed isiXhosa, relegating it to the domain of domestic and informal communication, and thus cementing miscalculated notions of its servitude in intellectual and socio-economic contexts. Once more, I put forward that in the effort to spread the Gospel, there was a failure to recognise the mysterious destructive impact that the mechanisms used for evangelism—language and biblical scriptures—had on indigenous communities of amaXhosa. In this process, the very language and cultural identity of the people who desired to be educated were unintentionally eroded, and they were divorced from their language and culture. This realisation brings great regret, as the means intended to uplift have rather caused lasting detriment to the essence of their cultural and linguistic legacy. In acknowledging the destructive impact of Christian missionaries in Africa, Slessor (1905, 134) pens down as follows:

> In our attempts to introduce Christianity to these tribes [amaXhosa], we inadvertently imposed our own language, values and ways of thinking, rendering their own language and practices "primitive" and diminishing their deep-rooted spiritual connections with the land and ancestors.

Beyond the linguistic and cultural implications, the missionary assault on the isiXhosa language and culture was equally damaging. This implies that by disqualifying

1 For the purposes and scope of this article, proselytisation refers to the act of attempting to convert individuals or groups to a particular religion, belief system or ideology. It involves persuasive efforts aimed at gaining followers and spreading the doctrines of a specific faith or worldview.

traditional belief systems, rituals, and governance structures as paganistic or primitive, missionaries undermined the cultural identity of amaXhosa. Within this context, indigenous ceremonies such as *ulwaluko* (traditional male initiation), *ukunqula iminyanya* (ancestral veneration), and local practices established in ancestral recognition were condemned and rejected by the Christian church, continually citing Deuteronomy 18:10–12, Exodus 20:3–5, 1 Corinthians 10:20–21, and Isaiah 8:19 among many other biblical scriptures, leading to their gradual decline or transformation under the Christian missionary imperial influence. This cultural alienation was intensified by the imposition of Western ethos, which framed indigenous practices of amaXhosa and customs as obstacles to Christian progress (Shingange 2024, 7). The resulting dislocation weakened collective cohesion and consciousness and disrupted the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, leaving amaXhosa with a fragmented sense of identity and subdued agency within a rapidly Westernising colonial context. In sharing the same sentiments in a broader African context, Brownlee (1955, 37) argues that missionaries were instrumental in undermining the social cohesion, consciousness, and cultural practices of indigenous peoples, including their governance structures. Adding to this scholarly dialogue, Mzondi (2023) is of the view that by characterising indigenous practices of Africans as paganistic and incompatible with Christian progress, they disassembled centuries of cultural wisdom and enacted Western ideologies, which disjointed African identities and weakened their independence.

Nonetheless, it must be outlined that the subject of Christian missionaries' role in the oppression of isiXhosa and the culture of amaXhosa remains a critical area of contemporary scholarship due to its enduring impact, which is destructive by the way, on both the linguistic scenery and cultural independence of amaXhosa. Missionary interventions, while purportedly aimed at the spiritual and moral upliftment of amaXhosa, among other racial groups, resulted in the systemic reduction of indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, cosmologies, and practices. At the same time, the alarming imposition of a Western theological framework not only redefined the social ethos of amaXhosa but also reshaped the linguistic structures of isiXhosa as a language, relegating it to the margins of informal and non-intellectual discourse (Diko 2023, 603). This cultural and linguistic repression, fuelled by the missionary agenda, continues to resonate in post-apartheid South Africa, where the aftereffects of imperial legacies are still evident in the ongoing hegemony of English and Afrikaans in higher education, mainstream media, and the public setting. The historical intricacies of language, identity, and power dynamic forces warrant continued scholarly revisitation, especially as South Africa seeks to recover and revitalise its indigenous languages and cultures in the face of globalised, Westernised forces.

By the same token, the scholarly debate concerning Christian missionary activity in the context of isiXhosa is vital in probing the universal implications of cultural imperialism (Burnett 2023; Grohmann 2024). As previously pointed out, missionary work was not only an instrument for spreading Christianity but also an instrument for advancing Western cultural hegemony, which significantly altered the trajectory of African socio-

political structures and cultural practices. This imposition undermined the rich oral traditions and customs, ancestral practices, and communal frameworks that were central to the identity of amaXhosa. Because of this reality, by deconstructing these historical experiences, contemporary scholarly dialogues may critically address how religious and cultural imperialism intersected to subjugate African philosophies, and how this oppressive legacy continues to influence contemporary notions of cultural legitimacy and self-determination. In view of ongoing decolonisation efforts, revisiting the role of Christian missionaries in adversely influencing the isiXhosa language and culture is fundamental to discerning the contemporary struggles faced by isiXhosa in asserting its rightful position within the South African cultural and linguistic landscape.

I need to also express that writing this scholarly discourse was profoundly painful because it required me to wade through the scars and echoes of a colonial past that sought to obliterate the essence of amaXhosa identity, including their language. The process of revisiting these vastly entrenched injustices is not merely an academic exercise but an emotional reckoning with the enduring wounds inflicted by cultural imperialism—a legacy that continues to cast long shadows over efforts to recover linguistic and cultural dignity.

With this historical background in mind, this article has two aims to address. The first is to critically unmask the role of Christian missionary activity in the systemic distortion of the isiXhosa language and culture, exploring how missionary-driven practices solidified the imposition of Western epistemological frameworks that undermined indigenous African knowledge systems (IAKS). This aim seeks to uncover the historical and ongoing consequences of missionary efforts in influencing the socio-cultural and political dynamic subtleties of amaXhosa, with a particular focus on language as both a cultural and intellectual tool. The second is to revisit the broader implications of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa, with emphasis on its contribution to the cultural oppression of amaXhosa, particularly concerning their language and culture. In this context, by unmasking how missionary teachings and colonial mentalities intersected, this article explores the enduring legacy of cultural control and its damaging impact on contemporary efforts to recover and revitalise isiXhosa within the post-apartheid South African context. To address these two aims, I use qualitative meta-synthesis as a research technique, while I apply cultural imperialism as a theory to drive the arguments of this article. Qualitative meta-synthesis and cultural imperialism are explained in the next section.

Qualitative Meta-Synthesis and Cultural Imperialism

First and foremost, meta-synthesis is a qualitative research technique, subsumed in qualitative research methodology, which involves the systemic integration and *interpretation of findings* from multiple qualitative discourses to generate greater and original philosophies, uncover underlying themes, and provide a holistic discernment of a specific phenomenon such as the detrimental influence of Christian missionary imperialism on isiXhosa language and culture. Unlike quantitative meta-synthesis,

which desperately relies on statistical aggregation, qualitative meta-synthesis underscores the *synthesis* of concepts, narratives, ideals, ideologies, and interpretations across various scholarly discourses to build an interlaced, theoretical comprehension of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Richardson and Waters 2023; Walsh and Downe 2005).

This research technique—qualitative meta-synthesis—is particularly suited to exploring complex social and cultural challenges, as it draws on a wide range of philosophies and experiences, thus creating a richer and more comprehensive scholarly debate. In other words, it weaves together threads of thought into a cohesive tapestry, constructing a mosaic of intellectual discourses that captures the intricate dance of ideas and perspectives influencing human understanding of such challenges. This research technique serves as a bridge, connecting fragmented philosophies into a harmonious symphony of meaning. Interestingly, Beck's (2002, 214) definition of qualitative meta-synthesis ignites a spark of intellectual alignment with the purpose of this article, as it eloquently captures the essence of interpretive integration. Unequivocally, the recognition that qualitative meta-synthesis represents a higher level of abstraction and conceptualisation serves as a lighthouse guiding this article's analytical framework, perfectly resonating with the profundity and synthesis I aim to attain. No wonder, therefore, Levitt (2018) concludes that qualitative meta-synthesis is a qualitative research technique of blending findings by bringing together and breaking down findings, critiquing them, discovering essential features, and transforming them into a new conceptualisation. Differently put, this qualitative research technique is like putting together a big puzzle made of different stories and ideas to understand something really tricky, like why people think and act in certain ways. It takes little pieces from many places and connects them to make one big, clear picture that helps humans learn new things.

In revisiting the debate on Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa and its role in oppressing the isiXhosa language and culture, qualitative meta-synthesis serves as an effective tool to collate and critique existing qualitative research on this subject. This means that by synthesising findings from historical accounts, ethnographic reports, and cultural critiques, I locate recurring patterns and contradictions in the existing body of knowledge, such as the missionaries' rejection of indigenous belief systems and their role in eroding indigenous practices and ancestral veneration. Having said this, I must indicate that qualitative meta-synthesis in this scholarly discourse emerges as a critical procedure through which the layered mentality of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa is revisited, contested, and dissected. Similar to interlacing strands into a unified fabric, this qualitative research technique collates and critiques the fragmented yet interconnected pieces of knowledge.

In other words, by judiciously blending these diverse perspectives, it allows for the identification of recurring patterns—such as the systemic disposition of isiXhosa and its cultural realities—and refines the contradictions that underpin the missionary

project's role in distorting practices such as ancestral recognition (Levitt 2018). In addition to this explanation, I submit that qualitative meta-synthesis does not merely aggregate knowledge; it breathes new life into the collective discourse, unearthing the overlooked fractures and silences in the existing scholarship as it pertains to isiXhosa and amaXhosa culture. This research technique thus serves as both a magnifying glass and a mirror—enlarging overt nuances while reflecting the cultural and linguistic devastation wrought by Christian missionary interventions. In this view, this technique is indispensable for exposing the insidious mechanisms of imperialism and reclaiming the nobility of the isiXhosa language and culture from the shadows of historical erasure, manipulation, distortion, and invisibility. In this regard, this qualitative research technique uncovers the overarching implications of Christian missionary interventions, including the destruction of amaXhosa identity and the disruption of intergenerational cultural transmission. It is clear, therefore, that this research technique not only provides a coherent and critical revisitation of Christian missionary imperialism but also underscores its enduring legacy in influencing contemporary discourses on linguistic and cultural overthrow.

Having outlined the selected research technique employed in this scholarly discourse, the subsequent discussion delineates and explicates the theory selected to underpin and advance the arguments presented herein. At its best, cultural imperialism, as a theory, refers to the intrusion of one dominant culture on subordinate cultures through the mechanisms of mainstream media, education, and religion, thus cementing power structures and eroding indigenous identities (Roach 1997, 47). This theory operates as a form of symbolic colonisation, where the cultural practices, values, and belief systems of the authoritative group are presented as universal, while indigenous traditions are overlooked, distorted, or obliterated. Within this theoretical paradigm, I posit that the Christian missionary enterprise in South Africa operates as a conduit for the erosion of the isiXhosa language and culture, with missionaries serving as cultural architects who seek to build an imperial edifice upon the rubble of amaXhosa customs, traditions, and rituals. In simpler terms, this idea is similar to when someone comes to your house and says their toys, games, and rules are the only ones that matter, and they throw away the things you adore the most. In the same way, missionaries in South Africa brought their own ways of talking and living, pushing aside the isiXhosa language and culture, making it seem like only their way was right.

In the context of this scholarly discourse, cultural imperialism operates as a silent but powerful current that sweeps away the roots of the amaXhosa legacy, replacing them with Western ideals, and thus disrupting the very fabric of their communal identity. In capturing the core of this theory, Bush (2024, 358) aptly describes cultural imperialism as the unyielding dominance of a single cultural agenda over pluralistic identities, facilitated through institutional mechanisms that silence and suppress the other. Accordingly, I proffer that cultural imperialism constructs a global hierarchy in which the cultural frameworks of the powerful are inscribed as normative, while the indigenous practices of subjugated communities are discredited and rendered invisible.

Given these factors, I have no other choice but to argue that this unjust practice reflects a profound betrayal of cultural plurality, reducing the rich tapestry of indigenous identity to mere fragments in the shadow of an imposed monolith. Such symbolic violence uproots the foundational pillars of the amaXhosa legacy, leaving a barren landscape where the vibrancy of linguistic and cultural diversity once flourished.

In essence, in the case of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa, cultural imperialism as a theory works not only through the explicit rejection of indigenous practices but also through the subtle infiltration of Western religious doctrines, which are positioned as the pinnacle of civilisation. Missionaries, as cultural emissaries of the imperial project, desired to replace native practices and the concept of ancestralism with Christian rituals, presenting the former as barbaric, demonic, paganistic, and primitive. This ideological invasion, yet so destructive, akin to the planting of a foreign seed in alien soil, muddles the natural development of indigenous cultural expressions and knowledge systems, leading to their fragmentation and decline. In this way, cultural imperialism does not simply impose external values—it systemically reconfigures the very landscape of indigenous identity, leaving behind a disconnected, hybridised version of culture that struggles to reconnect with its historical roots. Having detailed qualitative meta-synthesis and cultural imperialism as a theory, the next section critiques how language, as employed by Christian missionaries, functioned as a strategic and political agent of imperialism.

Language as a Tool of Imperialism

Language, as a centrepiece of identity and cultural communication, has long been wielded as a potent instrument of imperialism, facilitating the corrosion of indigenous cultures and the imposition of foreign rule. Speaking of cultural imperialism, language operates not plainly as a means of communication but as a receptacle of ideological domination (Radebe 2022, 77). This means that by establishing the language of the coloniser as the high-ranking and official machinery, imperial forces systemically disqualify and discredit indigenous language practices, including those of amaXhosa. In the context of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa, the isiXhosa language was not only undermined but actively displaced by English and Afrikaans, both of which operated as linguistic scaffolds for the broader imperial mentality. This imposition, in the case of Christian missionaries, transformed language into a double-edged sword: a channel for proselytisation and a tool for casting aspersions on indigenous philosophies. In support of these assertions, Kambon and Songsore (2022, 14) find that the Christian missionary adoption of the coloniser's language is fundamental for the circulation of Christian messages, as native tongues lack the capacity to convey the sacred intricacies of divine revelation. However, I need to indicate that the intrusion of the coloniser's language for the circulation of Christian systems does not render this practice justifiable. Such a practice drives a linguistic hierarchy that casts isiXhosa and other indigenous South African languages as dim echoes, incapable of illuminating the wisdom of ancestral and spiritual revelation, thus

extinguishing their expressive profundity and spiritual resonance. This linguistic genocide operates as a cultural scalpel for removing the ranks of isiXhosa from their ancestral genealogy and relegating them to the margins of distortion, a planned act of vandalism hidden in the guise of spiritual necessity and salvation.

I further argue that this sentiment reveals the ideological underpinnings that elevated English and Afrikaans while demeriting isiXhosa. At the same time, even if one were to contend that Bible translations from English to isiXhosa constructively contributed to the development of this language, this perspective warrants critical response and reflection. In view of this indication, I argue that such translations, while ostensibly adding some considerable amount of value, were vastly interwoven in a notion of cultural imperialism that intended to domesticate isiXhosa within the imprisonments of Western theological paradigms. Rather than intensifying grounded and convincing linguistic advancement, these translations deformed isiXhosa's inherent philosophies and traditions, subordinating them to foreign ideologies. Differently put, the continued glorification and introduction of English as a colonial and missionary language into native communities of amaXhosa not only regulates religious instruction but also anchors the moral and civilising mission of the imperial enterprise.

Having said this, it seems undeniable to me that this egregious and pre-planned oppression of isiXhosa is not merely a historical misstep but a purposive act of cultural sabotage, drenched in the audacity of imperial dominion, and it enrages me to witness how this linguistic colonisation soldiers on, eroding the soul of a people and reducing their language to an instrument of oppression. Such an atrocity smells of the shameless hypocrisy of political and missionary fraudsters who, while posturing as agents of equality and spirituality, accelerate systems that trample upon the very essence of amaXhosa identity, exposing their rhetoric as hollow and their governance as nothing more than an insidious betrayal of isiXhosa. Accordingly, it is not surprising for Saule (1998) to believe that there is no other way of exposing this linguistic and cultural prejudice for *what* it is, a big hoax and a blatant lie veiled in hypocrisy, whose principal aim is to oppress isiXhosa and the culture of amaXhosa.

Building on these scholarly arguments, the Christian missionary agenda in South Africa exemplifies the cultural imperialist strategy of language power. This implies that by framing isiXhosa as an impediment to civilisation and progress, missionaries employed language as a battering ram to fragment the cultural origins of amaXhosa. Through biblical translation and education, English became both the instrument and the message of Christianity and the church, relegating isiXhosa to a subordinate rank. As Kaschula (2008) reports, schools established by missionaries prohibited the use of isiXhosa in academic or religious contexts, cultivating an environment where the coloniser's language was associated with intellectual and spiritual sovereignty. This linguistic prejudice, therefore, was a calculated act of cultural alienation, severing amaXhosa from the oral traditions, customs, and local knowledge systems that had sustained their identity for generations. Considering these assertions, I put forward that this Christian

missionary agenda within amaXhosa, as a manifestation of cultural imperialism, represents a pre-planned and systemic assault on the linguistic and cultural integrity of amaXhosa. Viewing isiXhosa as an impediment to civilisation and progress was not merely a misjudgement but an act of ideological violence designed to delegitimise the entire philosophy of amaXhosa. I further argue that by elevating English as both the mechanism and the message of Christianity, missionaries entrenched a hierarchy that positioned colonial languages as the sole conduits of intellectual and spiritual authority, effectively silencing indigenous epistemologies. This linguistic imperialism, cloaked in the guise of missionary education and spiritual advancement, solidifies a form of cultural alienation whose reverberations are still to be felt if not resolutely and decisively addressed.

Language, under the administration of Christian missionaries, served as a Trojan horse, solidifying Western ideologies within the socio-cultural fabric of amaXhosa (Ndebele 1987, 5). This being the case, the introduction of Christian doctrines subtly yet effectively recast indigenous belief systems of amaXhosa as antithetical to ancestral reality. Terms central to the isiXhosa worldview, such as concepts of ancestral reverence and communal spirituality, were reinterpreted and erased in biblical translations, distorting their cultural significance. For example, in isiXhosa, *ukukhonza* (worship) traditionally entails a broad spectrum of meanings related to serving or showing reverence, particularly towards ancestors as custodians of spiritual guidance and familial welfare. However, in biblical translations that were introduced by Christian missionaries, this term was narrowly redefined to align exclusively with the Christian notion of worship directed towards God and the church. By so doing, ancestral reverence—a cornerstone of amaXhosa—was branded as idolatry, stripping it of its cultural and spiritual validity within Christian doctrine. Against this reality, I submit that this systematic distortion of isiXhosa is both unfair and profoundly defeating, as it deliberately restructured amaXhosa ancestral and cultural identity to conform to Western religious paradigms. It is significantly saddening that an entire philosophy of identity, established in communal spirituality and ancestral recognition, is reframed as illegitimate, compelling amaXhosa to navigate their own beliefs through the window of an imposed and exclusionary worldview.

Another example pertains to *ubugqirha* (amaXhosa traditional healing), referring to the traditional practice of divination and spiritual healing, which was either omitted or recast destructively in biblical texts and their interpretations, equated with witchcraft or sorcery. This particular interpretation negated the role of *amagqirha* or traditional healers in society, nullifying their practices to superstitions incompatible with Christian teachings. Consequently, the concerted and spiritual functions served by *ubugqirha* or traditional healing were undermined, eroding its significance as an integral part of the amaXhosa philosophy. As a direct result of these oppressive systems, I contend that this systemic reinterpretation and distortion of foundational amaXhosa concepts within biblical translations is a greatly disconcerting component of cultural imperialism. Here, by imposing Western theological constructs onto indigenous philosophies, these

translations not only obscure the depth of amaXhosa spiritual and ancestral practices but also weaken their intrinsic value and meaning. This distortion, while hidden in the guise of religious salvation, effectively overlooks and diminishes the richness of the indigenous cultural framework, cementing a legacy of intellectual and spiritual oppression. For these reasons, I submit that the current post-imperial government should hang its head in shame, for it continues, in large part, to drive the distortion of amaXhosa indigenous practices, a living tapestry of wisdom and identity woven through centuries, by allowing them to languish under the shadow of imposed modernity. Such neglect not only dishonours the legacy of a people but also betrays the promises of a decolonial renaissance and democracy, leaving an abyss where cultural restoration should thrive.

Above all, the introduction of Christian missionary translations into the isiXhosa language stands as a clear example of Christian missionary imperialism, using language as an instrument to interweave Western ideologies within the cultural and ancestral foundations of amaXhosa. This suggests that by reconsidering and distorting key concepts such as ancestral veneration and traditional healing or *ubugqirha*, Christian missionaries not only ejected indigenous belief systems but also branded them as incompatible with Christian teachings, thereby compromising their cultural significance and imposing a foreign religious philosophy (see Cele 2001; Greenfield 2010; Mativo 1982). In view of these pronouncements, I submit that the continued reverberations of Christian missionary imperialism within contemporary contexts demand indignation, for it is not simply a historical relic but an ongoing form of cultural oppression. As previously pointed out, the imposition of Western theological ideologies on indigenous belief systems through the distortion of key amaXhosa concepts such as *ukukhonza* (worship) and *ubugqirha* (traditional healing) continues to cast a long shadow, obstructing the full expression and discernment of spiritual identity. This historical manipulation, by constricting the scope of these terms to fit Christian dogma, effectively deformed indigenous practices and reconfigured them as inferior or sinful, creating a spiritual wound that endures in the collective psyche of amaXhosa (Sakupapa 2023, 203).

Considering these assertions, the imperial government's role in driving this distortion demands scrutiny, for the systemic denigration of indigenous philosophies not only devalues the rich cultural legacy of amaXhosa but also maintains a framework of intellectual and spiritual domination that continues to downplay traditional knowledge systems, reducing their revitalisation in the present day. This enduring legacy requires urgent confrontation, as it is a vestige of colonial practices that continue to silence native voices and distort their cultural experience. Given these scholarly indications, I submit that the colonial government as well as its oppressive agents, in its arrogance and ignorance, imposed a foreign theological framework that sought to suffocate amaXhosa, distorting centuries of wisdom in a misguided attempt to civilise what it could not understand. In contemporary contexts, the lingering effects of colonial governance persist in the continued repression of isiXhosa and amaXhosa culture, as the very systems designed to oppress still cast a pall over efforts to recover and restore the dignity

and richness of ancestral knowledge, leaving a society fractured by the remnants of an empire that never comprehended the value of what it sought to overshadow. Due to these reasons, I further contend that the act of translation was thus not a neutral exercise but a weaponised process that reconfigured the amaXhosa philosophy to align with Western epistemologies. Language, in this sense, became the invisible ink with which the Christian missionaries rewrote the script of amaXhosa cultural and spiritual life.

By the same token, this symbolic violence of linguistic imperialism, with special reference to isiXhosa, extended to the public sphere, where English and Afrikaans were *institutionalised* as the languages of governance, law, diplomatic communication, and commerce (Motsaathebe 2018, 170; Munyai and Phooko 2021, 299). Therefore, by solidifying the use of these languages in official domains, colonial powers guaranteed that the isiXhosa language and culture were suffocated and relegated to the private and informal spheres. This then created a linguistic hierarchy that mirrored and fortified the racial and cultural hierarchies of the colonial regime (Mekoa 2020, 55). As a result of this oppressive incident, mastery of the coloniser's language became a prerequisite for access to social mobility and political independence, compelling amaXhosa to adopt a language identity that was alien to their heritage.

The imposition of this dual linguistic burden further fragmented their cultural identity, leaving them as strangers in their own land. This means that the forced use of both their native language and the language of the missionaries created confusion and disconnect, making it harder for amaXhosa to celebrate their culture comprehensively. As a result of this observation, some amaXhosa people still struggle to express their "authentic" identity, feeling caught between two worlds—one that is familiar but devalued, and another that is foreign but enforced. This then leaves them feeling like outsiders in their own communities, unsure of where they truly belong. Through the theory of cultural imperialism, I posit that the use of language by Christian missionaries in South Africa, particularly within amaXhosa, could be likened to a corrosive river, gradually eroding the bedrock of amaXhosa cultural identity. Differently put, the systemic displacement of isiXhosa by colonial languages not only sidelined this language but also disrupted the intergenerational wisdom, values, customs, and traditions.

As Greenfield (2010, 518) explains, this process of cultural disruption was compounded by the missionaries' portrayal of isiXhosa as secondary and unworthy of preservation. The result of this linguistic prejudice was a cultural amnesia that left certain amaXhosa struggling to recover their historical and linguistic legacy, like many other linguistic and ethnic groups in South Africa and elsewhere in the global village. In a nutshell, the role of language in Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa exemplifies the destructive force of cultural imperialism. Within this framework, by employing language as both a weapon and a vehicle for ideological supremacy, missionaries facilitated the systemic oppression of the isiXhosa language and culture. Having discussed the use of language as an imperialist tool by Christian missionaries in South

Africa, it is now important to argue how the culture of amaXhosa was oppressed through these systems of power, hence the next section.

The Oppression of AmaXhosa Culture by Christian Missionary Imperialism

The oppression of amaXhosa culture through Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa should be conceptualised within the context of cultural imperialism, which theorises the hegemony of one culture over another, in large part, through coercive and powerful systems. Christian missionaries, as agents of Western colonial expansion, did not purely bring religious doctrines to amaXhosa but carried with them an insidious cultural agenda. In this context, the imposition of Christianity was not a kind of process of spiritual education but a calculated political strategy of cultural eradication (Saule 1998). Missionaries, equipped with the tools of Western civilisation, purported to replace the rich traditions, customs, and belief systems of amaXhosa with Western ideals, presenting their cultural norms as the epitome of progress and relevance.

Such activity reflects a myopic cultural imperialism that mutes the intricate wisdom of amaXhosa traditions as relics of mediocrity, unsettling their inherent value and nuanced wisdom. Therefore, in contemporary contexts, amaXhosa cannot be expected to transcend the profound cultural dislocation and epistemic violence wrought by missionary intervention, as such a stance would trivialise the depth of their already destroyed heritage. Rather, a critical interaction with this legacy is imperative to restore their cultural sovereignty, reinvigorate local knowledge systems, and resist the enduring hegemony of Western-centric paradigms. On account of these submissions, I contend that if amaXhosa traditions were truly relics of mediocrity, why then did Christian missionaries find it necessary to dismantle and overwrite them rather than simply coexist with them? And how can one expect a people to seamlessly recover their cultural sovereignty when the very foundation of their knowledge systems was deliberately broken under the crushing weight of “civilisation”?

Importantly, the cultural exchange between Christian missionaries and amaXhosa was not equal but marked by the displacement of local knowledge systems, rituals, and languages, akin to a foreign plant being forcibly introduced into the native soil, uprooting indigenous roots and suffocating their growth. For example, Saule (1998) finds that missionary schools in South Africa systemically displaced amaXhosa knowledge systems by engineering Western-centric curricula that celebrated European histories, philosophies, and religious doctrines while disregarding or denigrating indigenous content. Saule (1998, 11) continues to suggest that subjects such as history and English literature were prioritised over the oral traditions and local histories that formed the backbone of amaXhosa cultural education. This exclusionary practice served to alienate amaXhosa learners from their cultural heritage, cultivating an ideology that their local knowledge systems were secondary and irrelevant within the modern world. The schools thus became tools not of liberation but of cultural estrangement, uprooting

amaXhosa traditions under the pretence of intellectual advancement. Accordingly, through interweaving Western religious doctrines and curricula into missionary schools in the context of amaXhosa, these institutions acted as cultural forges, melting down the ancestral and intellectual legacy of amaXhosa into conformity with colonial ethos, leaving a legacy of alienation that reverberates painfully in contemporary contexts.

This cultural dislocation, akin to severing a tree from its roots, has stunted the elevation of amaXhosa knowledge systems, demanding urgent recovery and recognition of their intrinsic value. I must also caution though that this erasure of amaXhosa culture through Christian missionary imperialism is indefensible as it represents not just an imposition of religious belief systems, but a calculated political strategy aimed at consolidating colonial hegemony by demystifying the cultural autonomy of the oppressed. These actions underscore the exploitative nexus between religion and empire, where the pretence of spiritual salvation was weaponised to weaken amaXhosa identity, discrediting centuries of accumulated wisdom to entrench Western hegemony, the church, and Christianity.

Building on these scholarly views, it is important to accept that in the process of imposing imperialist philosophies upon amaXhosa, Christian missionaries waged an ideological assault on their rituals such as *ukubuyisa* (reconciling with the deceased)—a godly indigenous ceremony integral to maintaining ancestral connections—branding these complex ancestral practices as paganistic aberrations unworthy of coexistence with Christian dogma. This deliberate dismantling of amaXhosa communal spirituality was not ordinary discouragement but an outright eradication, as Christian rites were aggressively imposed to obliterate indigenous traditions and customs. The intrusion of these foreign practices acted as a cultural scorched-earth policy, uprooting the significant spiritual roots of amaXhosa and suffocating their communal identity under the crushing weight of an alien and oppressive theological order (Dlali 2023, 7; Mekoa 2020, 55). Central to the mission of cultural imperialism was the Christian missionaries' use of language as both a tool of conversion and a means of cultural repression (Gilmour 2007, 763). As previously outlined, language is not just a vehicle for communication but a powerful vessel that carries the values, philosophies, and histories of a people.

Having said this, by imposing English or Afrikaans as the mechanism of instruction and worship, missionaries not only accelerated the spread of Christianity but also strategically and politically undermined the linguistic establishments of amaXhosa. In this context, language became a double-edged sword: on one hand, it allowed for the dissemination of religious ideas, but on the other, it served to downplay the cultural uniqueness of amaXhosa. Given this reality, the missionaries' linguistic imposition worked like a smothering fog, slowly clouding the visibility of isiXhosa and, in turn, their accompanying cultural expressions. In sharing the same sentiments, Keto (1977, 602) opines that the suppression of indigenous practices, such as *intonjane* (the female initiation ritual), underscores how missionaries politicised spirituality to serve colonial interests. This implies that by branding these rituals as paganistic and incompatible with

Christian ideals, missionaries hijacked religion to undermine the social cohesion and governance systems of amaXhosa. This was not a mere theological disagreement but a calculated act of cultural oppression, where the disqualification of indigenous practices served as a political strategy to entrench colonial authority and disrupt defiance, guaranteeing the hegemony of imperial power over both the spiritual and political spheres of amaXhosa life.

With these deliberations in mind, I argue that Christian missionaries in South Africa bear significant accountability for this cultural erosion, as they strategically positioned themselves as arbiters of moral and spiritual authority, wielding religion as both a shield and a spear for colonial domination. In other words, by denouncing amaXhosa cultural activities as barbaric and imposing Christian ideals, they served as agents of cultural disinheritance, systemically divorcing amaXhosa communities from their ancestral establishments and indigenous governance structures. This coordinated reconfiguration of cultural landscapes was not only an inadvertent consequence of evangelism but a coordinated political manoeuvre that silenced the identity and resilience of the amaXhosa people. Over and above this indication, the missionary schools, while ostensibly established to provide education, functioned as institutions of cultural assimilation, where amaXhosa children were taught to internalise Western values and reject their ancestral belief systems, thereby becoming strangers in their own land. This educational system worked like a sieve, filtering out indigenous philosophies and replacing them with those of the colonisers. As a direct result of this reality, Keto (1977) uncovers that the younger generation of amaXhosa matures distanced from their cultural legacy, unable to fully appreciate the nuances of their language, traditions, customs, and history (also see Mativo 1982).

Informed by the already presented scholarly discourses, I contend that the impact of Christian missionary imperialism on the cultural landscape of amaXhosa extended far beyond purely ritualistic changes or educational reforms. Rather, as I argue elsewhere, it created a profound sense of cultural alienation, leaving amaXhosa caught between two worlds—one cemented in their indigenous traditions and the other in foreign Western values (Diko 2023). On account of this observation, this dislocation, just like a tree torn between two different climates, meant that amaXhosa were never able to fully thrive in either cultural sphere. They were neither able to retain the fullness of their indigenous identity nor fully integrate into the Westernised, Christianised world that missionaries intended to create.

The vast fissures within amaXhosa society, generated by Christian missionary interventions, resulted in a fragmented sense of cultural selfhood, where the younger generation began to question the relevance and validity of their own traditions and customs in the face of the dominant Western narrative (Weber 2021, 133). For these reasons, the legacy of missionary cultural imperialism in South Africa cannot be understated. This is because the systemic suppression of isiXhosa, amaXhosa rituals and philosophy left lasting scars that continue to detrimentally affect the community's

relationship with its legacy. The missionaries' attempts to plant a foreign cultural tree in the soil of amaXhosa society, while claiming to nurture it, instead led to the displacing of indigenous values and a profound cultural interruption. The imperialistic nature of this cultural offence was not only physical but symbolic, as the missionaries pursued distorting the very heartbeat of amaXhosa identity and replacing it with a foreign construct. In so doing, they contributed to a cultural memory loss that stripped the amaXhosa people of their agency, leaving them adrift in a world that denied them the tools to recover their cultural sovereignty. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1998) is unequivocal about this, suggesting that the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance of the exploited is the cultural bomb. Having said this, I contend that the effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves. It, therefore, stands to reason to acknowledge that imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale, but its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow amaXhosa to believe that only a single story of identity and culture existed. The colonial and missionary enterprise in Africa functioned as an eraser, systemically scrubbing away indigenous cultural expressions and substituting them with alien ones, thus leaving Africans stranded in a hybrid cultural limbo. Given that the role of Christian missionary imperialism in the oppression of amaXhosa culture has now been debated, it is central to focus on the role of education and the schooling system in intensifying these oppressive structures. This is presented in the next section.

The Role of Education and the Schooling System

The role of education and the schooling system in the context of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa is the central dimension of comprehending the long-lasting effects on indigenous cultures and languages, particularly that of isiXhosa (Bunyi 1999; Kaschula 2008; Roche 2022). Education, in the hands of Christian missionaries, was a powerful method for cultural domination. As missionaries introduced Western-style education to South Africa, they did not simply teach knowledge in a neutral sense; rather, they circulated a philosophy that presented Western civilisation as superior and indigenous cultures as backward. For example, missionary schools prioritised Western history, literature, and religious doctrines while sidelining or belittling local knowledge systems of amaXhosa, thus cementing a damaging perception that indigenous cultures were mediocre.

By the same token, the over-reliance on the English language in missionary education effectively downplayed isiXhosa, solidifying the destructive notion that native languages are unworthy of intellectual and cultural honour, further entrenching colonial dominance (Mbaya 2023, 6). In this sense, education became a method of cultural imperialism, with schools serving as governmental sites where the values, belief systems, and practices of colonial powers were etched into the minds of amaXhosa children. In this ideological battleground, the isiXhosa language and cultural practices

were not solely disregarded but were actively undermined, as the Western ethos imposed in schools became the standard by which all else was measured. Saule (2017) is in alignment with these claims, arguing that Christian missionaries, in their role as both educators and cultural imperialists, utilised the schooling system as a mechanism for moral and cultural reengineering. In this regard, Mbaya (2023) continues to denote that the curriculum they implemented, centred on Christian doctrine, Western philosophy, and European history, was designed to reshape the minds of indigenous children and align them with the imperial project. On the grounds of this assertion, the education system, thus, operated like a sculptor's chisel, chipping away at the foundational cultural and linguistic identities of amaXhosa.

Above all, the consequences of this educational colonial project were far-reaching, with the schooling system becoming a key institution in the transmission of cultural imperialism (Diko 2023). This means that by sidelining indigenous knowledge and glorifying Western ideals, Christian missionary education not only dismounted amaXhosa communities but also facilitated their alienation from their cultural ancestry. In the classroom, learners were taught to view their ancestral belief systems and practices through a viewpoint of disdain, and their language was regarded as a barrier to progress (Brownlee 1955). This systemic distortion created a rift between generations, as children were indoctrinated into a philosophy that deemed their cultural ancestry irrelevant. As a result of this reality, the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge—the lifeblood of any community—was severely disrupted. The schooling system, rather than serving as a bridge to the future, became a barrier that divorced amaXhosa from their past and fragmented their cultural continuity.

With these views in mind, I argue that by teaching learners to reject these cultural rites in favour of Christian rituals, missionaries reprogrammed entire generations to see their own customs and traditions as obstacles to "civilised" progress. The education system, therefore, was not purely an instrument of intellectual transmission, but a crucible in which the very identity of amaXhosa was redefined in opposition to their indigenous practices. In a nutshell, the role of education within the context of Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa cannot be overstated. It was the primary site where cultural imperialism took root, shaping the language, values, and belief systems of successive generations. Through a methodically constructed educational system, missionaries aimed to mould indigenous children into subjects that aligned with colonial goals, eroding the isiXhosa language and cultural practices in the process. For this reason, I argue that like a shadow creeping across the land, the influence of this educational system has lingered long after the official end of colonial rule, leaving a profound imprint on the cultural and linguistic identity of amaXhosa. In view of these scholarly debates, it is important for this article to now turn to the concluding remarks in a bid to underline the main point of the argument. This is presented in the next, final section.

Concluding Remarks

In revisiting the debate on Christian missionary imperialism in South Africa, this article has critically probed the profound and lasting impact of missionary activities on the isiXhosa language and culture. It has argued that Christian missionaries, as agents of a universal imperial project, did not purely seek to convert individuals to Christianity; they aimed to reshape entire social structures, erasing and replacing indigenous belief systems with Western religious discourses. This mission was not confined to religious doctrine but extended far beyond the very fabric of cultural expression, rendering indigenous practices as symbols of barbarism. In the process, the missionaries' efforts to civilise amaXhosa, continually framed as benevolent, were in fact vastly insidious, eroding the indigenous identity and sidelining the richness of their cultural heritage. On the other hand, the theory of cultural imperialism serves as a critical viewpoint for discerning how missionaries, unknowingly or knowingly, served as cultural colonisers, imposing a foreign value system upon amaXhosa. Through the manipulation of language, missionaries not only sought to convert individuals but also to influence the philosophy of entire communities. The language they used became both a mechanism and a weapon of imperialism—codifying Western ideas of civilisation while simultaneously marginalising and weakening indigenous languages, traditions, and customs. This linguistic imposition was a means of control, symbolising the broader socio-political dynamic forces that intended to suppress indigenous autonomy. The imposition of a foreign tongue undercut the very means by which amaXhosa communicated their values, histories, customs, and traditions, resulting in a systemic dismantling of their cultural integrity.

To the same extent, this article has illuminated the subtle yet powerful ways in which missionary work contributed to the fragmentation of amaXhosa identity. This suggests that cultural practices that were once fundamental to communal life and ancestral expression were displaced by Christian rituals, leaving amaXhosa with a fractured sense of selfhood. The gradual oppression of these traditional rites led to a dislocation of cultural knowledge, interrupting the intergenerational transmission of wisdom and practices that had been central to the community's cohesion and consciousness. This cultural alienation, akin to a tree whose roots have been severed from the soil, left amaXhosa in a state of existential limbo, caught between the old and the new, unable to fully embrace either without the risk of losing their identity. In closing, the role of Christian missionary imperialism in oppressing the isiXhosa language and culture cannot be underestimated. As I argued earlier, through the weaponisation of language, missionaries facilitated a potential cultural genocide that sought not only to convert amaXhosa but to replace their way of life entirely. The long-lasting effects of this cultural displacement are still felt today, as amaXhosa, like many other indigenous African communities, continue to navigate the complexities of post-colonial identity formation.

Therefore, this article underscores the necessity of acknowledging the enduring legacy of missionary imperialism and calls for a more intricate understanding of the intersections between language, culture, and power. Only through this critical viewpoint one could begin to restore the cultural sovereignty of amaXhosa and address the continuing effects of colonial oppression in the present and beyond. Finally, this article is dedicated to the enduring spirit of the amaXhosa people, whose linguistic and cultural heritage stands as a testament to defiance in the face of historical tides of erasure and subjugation. May this scholarly discourse serve as a beacon that rekindles the flame of local knowledge systems, illuminating the path towards retrieving identities obscured by the shadow of Christian missionary imperialism.

References

Beck, C. T. 2002. “A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Research.” *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 27 (4): 214–221. https://doi.org/10.1097/00005721-200207000-00004.

Brownlee, C. 1955. “A Fragment on Xhosa Religious Beliefs.” *African Studies* 14 (1): 37–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020185508706948.

Bunyi, G. 1999. “Rethinking the Place of African Indigenous Languages in African Education.” *International Journal of Educational Development* 19 (4): 337–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(99)00034-6.

Burnett, P. 2023. “Resonating across an Anglican-Xhosa Mission Soundscape: A Case Study of Instruments, Bells, and Processions.” *Postcolonial Studies* 26 (3): 406–432. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2023.2243073.

Bush, R. 2024. “Imperialism and Africa.” *Review of African Political Economy* 51 (181): 357–375. https://doi.org/10.62191/ROAPE-2024-0029.

Cele, N. 2001. “Oppressing the Oppressed through Language Liberation: Repositioning English for Meaningful Education: Conversations about Research.” *Perspectives in Education* 19 (1): 181–194.

Diko, M. 2023. “The Racial Hierarchisation of the isiXhosa Language in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Discourse.” *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 12 (2): 598–607. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i2.2318.

Dlali, M. 2023. “Proverbs as an Agent of Cultural Wisdom and Identity among the Xhosa Speaking People.” *Lexicographica* 39 (1): 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1515/lex-2023-0002.

Erlank, N. 1999. “Re-Examining Initial Encounters between Christian Missionaries and the Xhosa, 1820–1850: The Scottish Case.” *African Historical Review* 31 (1): 6–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/00232089985310021.

Gilmour, R. 2007. “Missionaries, Colonialism and Language in Nineteenth-Century South Africa.” *History Compass* 5 (6): 761–777. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00472.x.

Greenfield, D. 2010. “‘When I Hear Afrikaans in the Classroom and Never My Language, I Get Rebellious’: Linguistic Apartheid in South African Higher Education.” *Language and Education* 24 (6): 517–534. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2010.502969.

Grohmann, M. 2024. “Decolonising Intercultural Theology and Research: What Role for Cultural Outsiders?” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45 (1): a3149. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3149.

Kambon, O. B., and L. Songsore. 2022. “Combating Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Misorientation to Preserve Afrikan Intangible Cultural Heritage.” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 33 (1): 114–137. https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v33i1.5.

Kaschula, R. H. 2008. “The Oppression of isiXhosa Literature and the Irony of Transformation.” *English in Africa* 35 (1): 117–132. https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v35i1.41394.

Keto, C. T. 1977. “Race Relations, Land and the Changing Missionary Role in South Africa: A Case Study of the American Zulu Mission, 1850–1910.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10 (4): 600–627. https://doi.org/10.2307/216931.

Levitt, H. M. 2018. “How to Conduct a Qualitative Meta-Analysis: Tailoring Methods to Enhance Methodological Integrity.” *Psychotherapy Research* 28 (3): 367–378. https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2018.1447708.

Maseko, P., and P. Vale. 2016. “The Struggles over African Languages.” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15 (1): 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215613605.

Masondo, S. 2018. “Ironies of Christian Presence in Southern Africa.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31 (2): 209–231. https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2018/v31n2a10.

Mathebula, S. 2013. “Missionary Publishing in South Africa.” *Logos* 24 (1): 41–46. https://doi.org/10.1163/1878-4712-11112011.

Mativo, K. 1982. “South Africa: History of Oppression and Struggle.” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 11 (3): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.5070/F7113017208.

Mbaya, H. 2023. “Contested Religious and Cultural Issues: An Encounter between Western Missions and African Cultures and Religions in South Africa in the Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 54 (1): 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340259.

Mekoa, I. 2020. “The Politics and Nuances of Language in South Africa: A Critical Appraisal.” *Journal of African Languages and Literary Studies* 1 (1): 55–69. https://doi.org/10.31920/2633-2116/2020/1n1a3.

Mills, W. G. 1995. “Missionaries, Xhosa Clergy and the Suppression of Traditional Customs.” In *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, edited by C. Bredenkamp and R. J. Ross, 153–171. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Moffat, R. J. 1988. “Describing the Uncertainties in Experimental Results.” *Experimental Thermal and Fluid Science* 1 (1): 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/0894-1777(88)90043-X.

Motsaathebe, G. 2018. “When the Subaltern Speaks: Re-Examining Indigenous-Language Media as Alternative Public Sphere during Colonial South Africa.” *Journal of African Media Studies* 10 (2): 169–183. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.10.2.169_1.

Munyai, A., and M. R. Phooko. 2021. “Is English Becoming a Threat to the Existence of Indigenous Languages in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa?” *De Jure Law Journal* 54 (1): 298–327. https://doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2021/v54a18.

Mzondi, A. M. M. 2023. “Looking Back: Theological Reflections on the Intersection between Pentecostalism and Ubuntu within the African Section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa.” *Religions* 14 (10): 1274. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101274.

Ndebele, N. S. 1987. “The English Language and Social Change in South Africa.” *English Academy Review* 4 (1): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10131758785310021.

Porter, A. 1997. “‘Cultural Imperialism’ and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780–1914.” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25 (3): 367–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086539708583005.

Radebe, M. 2022. “New Features of Media Imperialism: The South African Online Media and the Coverage of the Ukrainian War.” *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 41 (2): 75–89. https://doi.org/10.36615/jcsa.v41i2.1407.

Richardson, M., and S. F. Waters. 2023. “Indigenous Voices against Suicide: A Meta-Synthesis Advancing Prevention Strategies.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 (22): 7064. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20227064.

Roach, C. 1997. “Cultural Imperialism and Resistance in Media Theory and Literary Theory.” *Media, Culture and Society* 19 (1): 47–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/016344397019001004.

Roche, G. 2022. “The Necropolitics of Language Oppression.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51 (1): 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-041420-102158.

Sakupapa, T. C. 2023. “Tracking the Decolonial in African Christian Theology: A Southern African Perspective on Mission from the Margins as a Decolonial Mode of Mission.” *International Review of Mission* 112 (2): 202–217. https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12476.

Saule, N. 1998. “Images of Ubuntu in the Essays of S.E.K. Mqhayi in *Umteteli Wabantu* (1912–1939).” *South African Journal of African Languages* 18 (1): 10–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.1998.10587181.

Saule, N. 2017. *Libambe Lingatshoni*. Pretoria: Bard Publishers.

Shingange, T. 2024. “The 19th-Century Missionary Encounters with the Batswana People in South Africa: An Intersectional-Decolonial Approach.” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45 (1): a3160. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3160.

Slessor, M. 1905. *Missionary Reflections and Personal Experiences in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.

Walsh, D., and S. Downe. 2005. “Meta-Synthesis Method for Qualitative Research: A Literature Review.” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 50 (2): 204–211. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2005.03380.x.

Wa Thiong’o, N. 1998. “Decolonising the Mind.” *Diogenes* 46 (184): 101–104. https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219804618409.

Weber, S. 2021. “Faith, Culture and Youth Ministry in South Africa: The Impact of Traditional Cultural Practices on the Faith Formation of Youth.” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 49 (1): 133–151. https://doi.org/10.7832/49-0-198.

Wilkes, A. 1985. “Words and Word Division: A Study of Some Orthographical Problems in the Writing Systems of the Nguni and Sotho Languages.” *South African Journal of African Languages* 5 (4): 148–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.1985.10586606.