

**EXPLORING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND
TRADITIONAL LEADERS REGARDING ULWALUKO.**

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at the involvement of traditional leaders in schools in the practice of the rite of passage called ulwaluko given that initiates who attend traditional male initiation are of school-going age male learners. The study looked at potential areas of collaboration between school governing bodies and local traditional authorities on the creation of an enabling environment for rolling out ulwaluko in schools in the Stutterheim District of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The study is grounded on the hybridity theory. The study found that lack of cooperation by schools and traditional authorities contribute towards the death of school-going initiates. The study also found that through alienation of African cultural practices by schools and traditional authorities, African cultural practices have been pushed to the periphery. The researcher recommends schools and traditional authorities to form joint fora where critical information about ulwaluko is shared and included in school-based policies.

Keywords: Traditional leaders, enlightenment, stakeholders, initiatives, school policies

1. Introduction

In the past ten years, between 2009 - 2019, there has been an increase in reported cases of the deaths of initiates (Dingeman & Rijken, 2019). This period surprisingly falls within the time of enlightenment and access to information and technology. The escalation of these deaths has even prompted the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, to add his voice on the subject and on what should be done. During his address at the opening of the House of Traditional Leaders in parliament in February 2020, when in his speech the president challenged the traditional Leaders to find ways of playing a meaningful role in circumventing the deaths of initiates (Business Live, 2020). He called upon the traditional leaders to consciously guard against the people who take advantage of the tradition of ulwaluko by making it a moneymaking scheme and as a result, most of the initiates who died were school learners. It was reported in the (Sunday Times, 2019) that the death toll had risen to eight, just halfway through the summer circumcision season, Ngam stated.

This call made by the president is informed by an observation made by (Kepe, 2010), that the traditional nurses (amakhankatha) are very young, lacking expertise, and having no inkling of the responsibility that comes with taking care of initiates. The president engaged the traditional leaders on their custodial role of keeping the tradition alive by making sure that the deaths of initiates were prevented. This, the president stated being conscious of the leadership role the traditional leaders played within their communities. The call came at a time when the deaths of initiates had catapulted to unacceptable levels such that scholars like (Myemana,2004) started calling for the discontinuation of the cultural ritual of ulwaluko sighting the escalation of the deaths of initiates. Amongst the causes of deaths are 'amakhankatha's abuse of power over the initiates by depriving them of water and food and also, through physically punishing them. Also, what came out was that the initiation schools act as breeding grounds for moral decay as criminal activities arise and initiate beatings seem to be the order of the day (Mcotheli,2006; Myemana,2004). However, the men who look after the initiates (amakhankatha) tend to abuse their status and physically abuse the initiates.

The initiates themselves (Vincent, 2008) also perpetuate incidences of criminality like rape, theft, and substance abuse.

The hidden message in what the president was saying was that traditional leaders should provide thought leadership in traditional issues, ulwaluko in particular. This, the traditional leaders can do by being vocal on how issues of ulwaluko could be and how the death of initiates could be curtailed. The main question of the study is “Is there meaningful collaboration between traditional leaders and schools management on issues pertaining to ulwaluko.

2. Objectives

To investigate the impact contribution of lack of collaboration between school governance and the traditional leaders on issues pertaining to ulwaluko of learners.

To propose ways in which traditional leaders can play a meaningful role in the prevention of deaths by school going initiates.

3. Significance

The study is of significance to scholars of school management as it explores the possibility of a tripartite collaboration between school management, traditional leaders and local communities to improve school governance. The study is of national significance in that it seeks to contribute to contemporary national dialogue on measures to curb the death of learners through traditional male circumcision. The study will also contribute to the body of knowledge on the dissemination of cultural values through African traditional education embedded in ulwaluko (Boateng, 1993: 321).

4. Research methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The choice of an interpretivist paradigm is informed by (Hammersley, 2013: 26) who opines that the paradigm is based on the fact that methods used to gain an understanding of knowledge related to humans and social sciences is based on how humans interpret their world and the actions based on such interpretations. Scholarly articles on ulwaluko were examined and included in the sources are books, newspaper articles, and theses that are on the subject of ulwaluko.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Concept of ulwaluko (Initiation).

The practice of ulwaluko is an age-old African cultural practice practiced by young males and young females from ethnic groups like AmaXhosa, AbaThembu, and Basotho. Young females like in the VaRemba tribe of Zimbabwe (Chikunda and Shoko, 2009) also practice ulwaluko. With the Xhosa tribe, this rite of passage from boyhood to manhood is called ulwaluko and is used to disseminate value-based messages preparing young males for adulthood (Ntombana, 2011; Duka-Ntshweni, 2013; Gogela, 2017; Ntozini, 2016). Ulwaluko brings with it a host of social implications. These social implications are the thread that connects male initiates to what it is to become a man (Aggleton, 2007). These social implications are the teachings that (Boateng, 1983; Gogela, 2017; Mfecane, 2018) identifies to be the lessons that are transmitted through the African

traditional education imparted to initiates at the traditional school. Through undergoing the rite of passage at the traditional school, the initiates are given the wisdom to carry their responsibilities of adulthood within the communities. This is done by “transmitting the traditional value system of ulwaluko within the society from one generation to another.

However, the traditional practice of ulwaluko appears to cause tensions and despondencies in the communities and schools respectively (Ntozini, 2014; City Press, 2018; Daily Dispatch, 2018, 2019, Business live, 2020). Far from it being a seamless and simple cultural ritual whose purpose is to transform young men to manhood, (Ntombana, 2011) the practice is fraught with complexities such as deaths of initiates, conflict between western and African tradition and abuse of initiates by amakhankatha. There is ample evidence to reflect death of initiates particularly during the initiation season of June and December respectively, where male learners of school-going age undergo the process of initiation.

5.2 Silence of school-based policies on ulwaluko.

Gudani (2011) posits that male traditional initiation schools form part of respected cultural practices in South Africa and therefore protected under the South African Constitution (Constitution, 1996). Section 30 of the South African Constitution states that, “Education shall aim to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty, and peace (Compschreur and Divendal,1989:244). The spirit of inclusivity and cultural diversity is also enshrined in the Freedom Charter, which was the guiding document that informed the drafting of the Constitution of the country. The Freedom Charter places the same value on equality of cultural practices in claiming that, “The Doors Of Learning Shall Be Opened”. This is also consistent with the old African adage that says, “The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth” (Mohale, 2020). The spirit of the Constitution of the democratic order promotes cultural expressions, appreciation, and respect of all cultures as equal. However, as much as the rights of individuals seem to be enshrined and accommodated in the Constitution, traditional leaders are not using this space to enhance the development of young people. There seemed to be silence on school policies relating to the issue of traditional cultural practices.

Traditional leaders have an obligation (derived from the Constitution) to make sure that school-going age learners that undergo the initiation process are protected by the policies of the schools that they are enrolled in. There seems to be silence on school policies relating to the issue of cultural practices in particular ulwaluko. Duku (2006) makes a case that the practice of the tradition is not included in the school policies such as the code of conduct and the mainstream curriculum and extramural policies that guide the schools and learners. The article contends that the traditional leaders and the schools where the learner initiates attend should demystify the practice of ulwaluko by opening up conversations on the inclusion of ulwaluko in school policies.

The silence of school-based policies is somehow affected by failure of African communities to champion the cause of what should be included in school policies regarding traditional practices such as ulwaluko. Mavuso & Duku (2014), argue that levels of education, Eurocentric approach to education, the condition of coloniality and lack of prominence of mother-tongue teaching are

amongst the many factors that contribute to lack of participation of parents in school governance matters.

Furthermore, (Deng, 1982) observes that the absence of impact on the part of African communities is affected by “intellectual poverty that has allowed inappropriate development of policies that are inconsistent with African thought and culture”. Deng further argues that, the intellectual bankruptcy (so identified) has resulted in disregard of African cultural wisdom in school-based policies in favour of Western knowledge systems.

The failure of traditional leaders and school governing bodies in including ulwaluko in school-based policies deprives school going initiates the benefit of being formally guided on ulwaluko linked practices. Thus, the deaths associated with ulwaluko could be prevented and the misconception about boys not being strong enough to withstand the hardship of the initiation school eradicated. Most school’s Codes of conduct are either silent on ulwaluko or they refer to ulwaluko briefly in an unmeaningful way.

Legislative and Policy Context.

The table below reflects the legislative and policy documents that contributed to the democratic dispensation that promotes free cultural expression and equity. These documents are the Freedom Charter, Harare Declaration, South African Schools Act, and the Constitution.

Guiding documents that were the “Foundations for South African Democracy”.

Freedom Charter	Harare Declaration	South African Schools Act	Constitution (Bill of Rights)	
The Doors of Learning and Culture shall be opened.	All shall enjoy universally recognized human rights, freedoms under an entrenched Bill of Rights.	Section 7 dealt with freedom of conscience and religion in schools subject to the Constitution and any applicable law, religious observance might be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances were conducted on an equitable basis and adherence to them by learners, members of staff were free and voluntary	Persons belonging to a cultural, religious, or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community- (a) To enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language	Education

All national groups shall have Equal Rights.	All its people shall enjoy common and equal nationality regardless of race, color, sex, culture, or creed	recognition is given to the diversity of language, culture, and economic background;	To form, join, and maintain cultural, religious, and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.	Equality
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(Source: Suttner & Cronin, 2006: 136-137; omalley.nelsonmandela.org, 1989; Act 108 of 1996 of the Constitution of South Africa; South African Schools Act ;1996)

Freedom Charter

The Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955 by the Congress of the People (Compschreur and Divendal,1989) to change and inform the policy landscape of South Africa. The Freedom Charter served as the foundation for South Africa's Constitution and the difficulties experienced then regarding policy are still relevant to this day. The relevance of the Freedom Charter to this article is the lack of transformation regarding the inclusion of African people's cultural practices.

Harare Declaration

"All shall enjoy universally recognized human rights, freedoms under an entrenched Bill of Rights". The Harare Declaration is an ANC penned document that was later adopted by the OAU as the blueprint document for a Constitutional dispensation in South Africa. The Harare Declaration promoted the idea of human rights-based Constitution with a Bill of Rights as the foundation. Schools in South Africa need to respect and promote African cultural practices with ulwaluko being one. The schools and traditional bodies fail to advocate for the recognition of ulwaluko as a practice to be promoted and protected by communities and by schools.

The clause above succinctly puts the point across and the same point made its way to the Bill of Rights that Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution also makes.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 106 of 1996).

The South African Constitution acts as a cornerstone for the prevention of human rights. Section 30 of the South African Constitution guarantees that "Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. By implication, this means that schools and school governing bodies must give an opportunity to communities to practice their cultural rites through inclusion in school policies.

South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996

The empowering legislation in the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 does not directly deal with cultural issues, but rather offers a framework within which school governing bodies can

address such. This, opportunity given by SASA to school governing bodies carry the hopes and aspirations of African communities who are practicing cultural practices such as ulwaluko to be included in school-based policies.

Therefore, having mentioned the guiding documents, there seem to be commonalities between the Freedom Charter, Harare Declaration, Bill of Rights, South African Schools Act. All the above guiding documents seem to promote free cultural practice.

Challenges faced by communities regarding the cultural practice of ulwaluko

The traditional male circumcision is seen by some as a clash between modernity and traditional practices or cultural practices versus Western health practices. This is evidenced by the number of initiates that die during the initiation season (Daily Dispatch, 2018; City Press, 2019; Business live, 2020). According to (Meel,2010) the commonalities in these deaths are that they are all mainly due to complications like septicaemia, dehydration, gangrene, pneumonia, assault, thromboembolism, and congested heart failure. Evidence from the sources above points to that the people entrusted with the initiates are not taking the responsibility seriously (Kepe, 2010).

No specific grooming of male learners.

Historically, initiation schools have the responsibility to educating male learners about human rights, family responsibility, and societal issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) and substance abuse like overindulgence in alcohol and drugs (Blacksash, 2014).

According to (Nwanze & Mash, 2012; World Health Organisation, 2008) the initiation schools play a social role in mediating intergroup relations, renewing unity, and integrating the socio-cultural system. Conferring this (Gqeba, 2019: 6) refers to the importance of the practice of ulwaluko and its relevance to humanity in general. Gqeba posits that amongst the many lessons initiates learn from the cultural practice of ulwaluko is to be one with nature through reliance on herbs for healing and curing any ailments. He also posits that initiates learn to appreciate the flora and fauna of their country through being forced to coexist with and depend on nature for a specified period. Initiates also learn about their culture in general and they develop reverence for the elderly as a source of wisdom and as carriers of societal memory.

Barriers to women addressing ulwaluko related issues at school

Culturally, ulwaluko's complex matters are categorized as secret. At the core of this secrecy, is the issue regarding the participation of women and those who did not undergo ulwaluko not to engage in debates that openly discuss ulwaluko. This fixation on secrecy and making ulwaluko a mystery was confirmed by the societal uproar that saw the cessation and suppression of the broadcast of 'Inxeba' the film showing details of ulwaluko (Daily Dispatch, 2018). Even though there is continued deaths of young men at initiation schools and reported cases of misbehaviour by the newly initiated young men in formal schools, there continues to be secrecy around traditional male circumcision (City Press, 2018; Daily Dispatch, 2018).

Failure of initiation schools to act in line with the legal requirements (Eastern Cape)

The schools are failing to act in line with the legal prescripts as set out in the Enforcement of the Application of Health Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act (Eastern Cape) (Act No.6 of 2001). These prescripts state that, “**Circumcisions** for cultural or social reasons may not be performed on boys younger than 16 even if the boy and his parents’ consent”. In addition, “provision for the protection of life, prevention of injuries and all forms of abuse experienced by initiates before, during and after customary practice of male initiation must be prevented and least but not, provision of guidance by traditional leaders as custodians responsible for the practice of male initiation within their jurisdiction”(ECAHSTCA, 2001). However, regardless of the above prescripts, there seemed to be an inevitable annual occurrence of loss of life and disfigurements of young men because of bungled traditional circumcision. Many see the loss of life as an infringement on the right to life, dignity, and quality in health care (Myemana, 2004) which is one of the important things the initiation schools are charged with while the initiates undergo this cultural practice.

The impact of Covid-19 on government/traditional leadership relations

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed weak relations between government and traditional leaders under *contralesa*. The two sent out contradictory messages to the citizenry particularly in the Eastern Cape. The government made a pronouncement putting a moratorium on traditional male circumcision. The pronouncement was informed by the growing infection rate and by lockdown Regulations imposed by government (Mndende 2020). *Contralesa* on the other hand argued that a moratorium on traditional male circumcision would only lead to a proliferation of illegal circumcision schools. The public disagreement between the two raised serious questions on governance issues. How was it possible for *Contralesa* to publicly defy a government pronouncement whilst they are part of government. *Contralesa* is represented in the House of Traditional leaders nationally and provincially. Does this mean that the pronouncement by Deputy Minister Bapela was never discussed with the relevant stakeholders before being made public (Feketha,2020). This is not only confusing to the citizenry but also makes a mockery of the notion of co-operative governance. This should and could have been resolved within government circles and with the directly affected stateholder like *Contralesa*. As stated in their Intergovernmental Relations Frameworks Act 13 of 2005. Where it is stated that, the constitution on cooperative governance, will guide in establishing:

A framework for the national government, provincial governments and local governments to promote and facilitate intergovernmental relations and provide mechanisms and procedures to facilitate the settlement of intergovernmental disputes (Intergovernmental Framework Act 13 of 2005).

Discussion

Literature reviewed shows that there is growing interest by the government, public, and media regarding the cultural practice of *ulwaluko* during the seasons of *ulwaluko* because of the reported challenges experienced. The challenges referred to include genital mutilation, death and criminal

activities and recently regulation of the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The intervention by the government has forced communities to open up dialogue regarding the practice of ulwaluko and thus forced traditional leaders to be actively involved by influencing the rules of engagement that will enable initiation practices to continue under safe conditions.

The above approach would enable communities to find a formal way of carving a meaningful role for traditional leaders to play in school governance by educating and guiding the school-going age learners before they embark on the journey to the initiation school. This would mean that traditional leaders together with SGBs deliberate on the guidelines with which the schools can empower the learners regarding ulwaluko and such could also be included in the school's code of conduct.

Furthermore, the issue relating to the participation of women in ulwaluko should be addressed, more so because nowadays several women are amongst formal structures of traditional leaders. In a country such as South Africa that advocates for the equal rights of women, the women traditional leaders should equally participate and influence discussions about ulwaluko more especially in school-based policies and any other matter such as behaviour (as traditional leaders and as mothers). Change needs to happen through open dialogue regarding ulwaluko and collaborative action for the school governing bodies and traditional leaders to play an active role in schools and include ulwaluko in school-based policies

Conclusion

The responsibility of both the traditional leaders and school governing bodies is that of being custodians of ulwaluko and of guiding young males in the process of ulwaluko. The traditional leaders are the custodians of the traditional practice of ulwaluko given their status as leaders of the communities. As a result, this places an onus upon traditional leaders to be actively involved in the schools to guide the learners through implementing provincial policies about ulwaluko. Thus, the failure of schools to equip young boys with the necessary skills to be safe during the initiation process falls on the shoulders of both the school governing body and traditional leaders. The schools should co-opt traditional leaders to partake in the governance of schools, particularly regarding ulwaluko.

Recommendations

Involvement of traditional leaders in school governance

The researcher recommends a mediated role that traditional leaders could play in school governance. This would help facilitate a framework within which to collaborate with school governing bodies on issues around school-based policies that will ensure learners cultural rights are protected. This would mean the reviewing of the existing policies such as the code of conduct of the schools to address the diverse cultural needs and conditions of the different learners.

Developing a core curricular program around cultural issues and ulwaluko in particular

The initiation ceremonies performed at initiation schools are done in the hope of preserving and sustaining the culture of ulwaluko as they are seen to be foundations of social unity and intergenerational communication in Africa (General Assembly resolutions, 1979). Therefore, if a

core curricular programme on ulwaluko were to be taught, then all the moneymaking schemes developed around ulwaluko would be minimised thus decreasing the greed that is associated with it either than indigenous knowledge.

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