Zambia HEIS and Building Community Connectedness: Orature surrounding Mulungushi Rock of Authority and Broken Hill Mine

Mwaka Siluonde
Literature and Languages, School of Education
Mulungushi University
Kabwe, Zambia
mwakasils@gmail.com

***Abstract*—**In this paper, I use the contemporary orature surrounding *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* and *Broken Hill Mine in Kabwe, Zambia* to argue that there is often a missing link between the public, formal and theoretical discourse taught in Zambian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and private or communal narratives. Specifically, as observed in communities where the subject matter originates from. This is despite the fact that when taught in the classroom, it is assumed that what is presented about a particular community reflects that community including its peoples' perspectives on the same. I theorise that despite the existence of many public political, historical narratives of *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* and *Broken Hill Mine* to feed the University classroom, the perspective of the community as espoused in its current orature is scanty. This is arrived at through a comparison of data compiled from document analysis of programmes offered at a selected University and actual oral literary material from the communities involved. Such a situation broadens the gap and alienates local people in concerned communities from knowledge that relates to them. My thesis is that the missing link, the gap or connection between the local and indigenous communities where the *Rock* and *Mine* are located and HEIs can be built by bridging classroom knowledge with contemporary orature about the two. Identifying the oral narratives and other oral artforms such as legends, myths surrounding the historical sites under discussion would provide valuable information regarding how communities interpret and connect to these artifacts today. Only then will we be able to bridge the gap between the subjects taught in the classroom and the actual subjects in the community.

Keywords – HEIs, Decolonisation, Orature, Mulungushi Rock of Authority, Community Connectedness

I. INTRODUCTION

Preliminary findings of my overarching research project on contemporary orature surrounding *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* and *Broken Hill Mine* guide my suggestion that contemporary oral literature particularly community narratives provide essential material for connecting the 21st century classroom to the community. Mulungushi Rock of Authority is a natural rock located in Kabwe near Mulungushi University. The heritage site is a venue for meetings and decisions of great political and historical significance to Zambia. In fact, some have argued that it is the birth place of Zambian independence because its very first meeting was a Zambia African National Congress (ZANC) (a pro black party) rally in 1958. Started in 1906, *Broken Hill mine* is the oldest mine in Zambia and it later became the place where the broken hill skull which sits in a London Museum was discovered. The city of Kabwe, where the mine is located, is considered one of the most polluted in the world, owing to large amounts of lead poisoning during its operational years (1906-1994).

Contemporary orature can here be understood as oral literature emerging from the everyday activities of present-day society. I observe, from sampled content taught at a selected Zambian university, that there is often a missing link between the public, formal and theoretical discourse taught in Zambian HEIS and the private and/or present-day communal narratives, as observed in communities where the subject matter originates. Yet, when taught in the classroom, it is assumed that what is presented about a particular community reflects that community including its peoples' perspectives on the same. An assertion that is especially relevant today when contextualizing and localising education (and its content) is at the centre of current decolonisation discourse. It must be noted that in order to achieve eclectic decolonisation, while sustaining a link between what is taught in HEIS and the community, calls for an inward self-reflexive

approach to education that is local while at the same time more nuanced in favour of the community in which the content originates.

It is for this reason that my investigation of the contemporary oral literature surrounding *Mulungushi Rock or Authority* leads to the conclusion that content will only connect to the community if it appeals to a community's present narratives and interpretation of its environment. That is with cognizance that myths and other oral literary art forms have always been cardinal to how society understands, interprets and demystifies the world around it [1]. Identifying the oral narratives and other oral artforms such as legends, myths, proverbs surrounding the historical sites under discussion could provide valuable information regarding how contemporary communities interpret and connect to their environment today. It is for this reason that I theorise that despite the existence of many public, political and historical narratives of *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* and *Broken Hill Mine* to feed the University classroom for instance, the perspective of the community as espoused in its contemporary orature is scanty. Such a situation broadens the gap and alienates local and/or indigenous people in concerned communities from knowledge that relates to them. My thesis is that the missing link, the gap or connection between the local and indigenous communities where the *Rock* and *Mine* are located and the HEIS can be built by bridging classroom knowledge with contemporary orature about the two. I therefore use preliminary findings on *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* to illustrate my point here.

II. Background

The current project on oral literature, its presence and role in contemporary society is inspired by my earlier work on oral mnemonic devices and the framing of the Zambian novel in English [2]. In the study I sought to establish whether oral narratives/literature are a linear descendant and absolute tangible entity to which the African/Zambian novel in English solely refers. My aim was partly to deconstruct decolonisation discourse characterised by "the hierarchised and polarised idea that considers oral narratives (orality) and images in the novel (writing) as [are] binaries in which oral narratives are privileged as the absolute logocentric location of meaning from which images in the novel originate [1:1]." My findings demonstrate a contrary situation where images in contemporary novels although sometimes influenced by oral narratives are multicultural, heteroglossic [3], chronotopical [4]), differànce clad [5] entities, born in a dynamic and non-static 'third space' [6] where other (others) [7] entities are always emerging.

This raises pertinent questions about the existence, nature and status of contemporary orature. Questions, which are partly addressed in findings from my current research on contemporary oral art forms such as kitchen party songs which in similar ways to the images in the Zambian novel in English are born out of a technologised and multicultural cosmopolitan modern society. This leads to my thesis that if oral narrative mnemonic devices or images are not slavishly inherited by the Zambian novel in English, then it follows that those oral narratives themselves and by extension oral literature is a fluid and dynamic entity. That is, one that does not simply disappear as it is replaced or swallowed by the novel (and literacy).

Yet, as long as orature is considered a manque [8], unworthy of study and considered primitive by evolutionists [9] or belonging to a frozen distant past, the role that its contemporary counterpart has in bridging the gap between HEIS and the community is overshadowed. This is especially so when any semblance of oral narratives or oral literature observed in today's society is taken as remnants of the past with no relevance to today's classroom. In other cases, if present in the curriculum, the oral literary art forms are taken as frozen historical artifacts belonging to oral tradition, oral literature and indigenous studies. Rarely, is the possibility of oral literature's presence in contemporary society imagined. Stemming from the foregoing discussion is my contention that as people and societies evolve, they continue to create narratives about the world around them – narratives that should be in cooperated into the classroom where such communities are the subject. Without this, important communal narratives which can bridge the gap between the community and HEIS may be lost. Hence, the need to reorient 21st century HEIS to include perspectives such as the ones suggested concerning contemporary orature and the two historical sites referred to here for example.

III. Decolonisation and Localisation of HEIS Content

This conversation is particularly relevant in the light of decolonisation discourse and its preoccupation with contextualising the education system through teaching of local content. An intervention which is viewed as one of the major ways that decolonisation can be achieved. This is elaborate in incessant calls to indigenise the Education System by using local languages in the Zambian School System. A move which can easily be related to Wa'thiongo's [10]

'decolonisation of the mind' centred on the proposal to get rid of English on the premise that language carries culture. The core argument being that the empire, through language – culture continues to colonise former colonies long after the coloniser has physically left. A related approach to the Decolonisation agenda is noted in the gravitation towards local content observed in the Zambian Education system. Hence, while the inclusion of local content has been with the view of decolonisation through contextualisation and localisation of content, this has inadvertently created a situation where the content is local but not eclectic or connected to current related communities.

As a case in point, I note the increasing presence of local content in many programmes at a selected Zambian University in Kabwe. Actually, aspects of oral literature are noted in some programmes at the University but in the form of frozen narratives which are not always familiar to the community. My contention is that, although relevant to the objectives of the concerned programmes, they must not be misconstrued to embody what I suggest concerning contemporary oral literature. Local Heritage sites such as *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* are for instance present in History studies as they are in Civic Education. My findings illustrate that a history course outline as is expected examines local sites such as the *Rock* in the light of heritage sites as potential sources of history. Similarly, a Civic Education course outline on Heritage studies, discusses the site simply as 'a heritage site' in relation to the political history attached to it. In addition, a unit that discusses 'indigenous systems as heritage sites' presents oral literature as a part of fossilised oral art related to Heritage. Hence, while one would argue that oral literature is present in today's classroom, in both the History and Civic education course outlines, contemporary oral literature which embodies the perspectives of today's society is not the main focus.

I use the above cases simply to illustrate that even in programmes that are normally assumed to embody oral literature, the bridge between the classroom and the communal narratives enshrined in contemporary oral literature is missing. This is because the place of oral literature has been taken for granted, assigned and /or restricted to the History, Civic Education and literature class. This has been done without consideration that oral literature exists in a contemporary form. In addition, a form that if harnessed can connect the classroom to the community in all fields of study. This comes with the realisation that because society is ever evolving, the 21st century classroom must be forever relevant to the contemporary society it is working with.

The danger in ignoring current communal perspectives enshrined in orature is that it creates a gap between the official narratives and communal narratives. This is because where ever there is official knowledge, there is a related parallel knowledge system enshrined in communal orature. Yet, as long as this is not taken into consideration, the more privileged knowledge system will always dominate, while the less privileged one remains overshadowed and excluded. This is akin to Scott's [11] idea of public and private transcripts that characterised the colonial system and colonial resistance. According to the idea, the colonial period was characterised by public narratives based on the subservient public image of the colonial subject when before the colonial master on one hand and the private image of the colonial subject away from the colonial master. Yet, because the public narrative became the official colonial narrative due to power dynamics, the private transcripts or narrative and perspective of the colonial subject remained overshadowed. If this is applied to our situation, one notes how the formal content or theory taught in the classroom takes official narrative status related to historical sites such as the *Mulungushi Rock of Authority*, while local communal narratives remain in the periphery and end up disconnected from the HEIS in which teaching is done. It is therefore my contention that there is always a parallel knowledge system aside the official one enshrined in the myths, and other narratives surrounding historical sites that must be harnessed.

III. Formal Classroom Discourse vs Orature surrounding Mulungushi Rock of Authority

What must be taken into account while bridging the gap between what is taught and the community is that as society evolves, despite the sites and sometimes content remaining the same, people around them change and so do the community narratives around them. Current orature provides synchronic perspectives on how the sites such as *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* influences the narratives of people around it on one hand and how the changing people around it influences the narratives about the site at different times. These narratives would be missing if we stick to oral narratives of yester year.

The actual research used various qualitative methods such as document analysis of the curriculum and programmes at a selected University in Kabwe and other secondary data. This was coupled with open

ended interviews of randomly and in some cases purposively selected members of the communities around Mulungushi Rock of Authority. Being a preliminary research ten respondents of different age groups: a family of six (indigenous), 3 male farm workers, one retired civil servant were interviewed. Their responses were recorded, later analysed by picking out salient themes or material related to various literary genre such as songs, poetry, myths and so on. Ethical aspects were accounted for by assuring the respondents that their identity would remain anonymous and that the collected data was solely for academic purposes.

In order to illustrate the relevance of contemporary oral literature in connecting official narratives to the community I use information on the Rock as it appears in a recent newspaper article (about the site as a political meeting place in the Kenneth Kaunda era):

> Since the late 1950s to date, major national policy addresses and political decisions that have shaped Zambia have been held at this rock. The Zambian African National Congress (ZANC), under the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda held "one of its early meetings on October 26, 1958 at the Mulungushi Rock of Authority. When UNIP broke away from ZANC, the new political party held its first meeting at the rocky secluded area near Mulungushi River in 1960. The delegates mapped a political strategy that helped Zambia gain her freedom from Britain in 1964. More than 2,000 nationalists attended. Former UNIP secretary-general Grey Zulu, one of Dr Kaunda's peers and freedom fighters, is among people credited for having sighted the place later to be called Mulungushi Rock of Ages or Mulungushi Rock of Authority. The Mulungushi Declaration or Mulungushi Reforms held in 1968 is one of the outstanding meetings held at Mulungushi Rock of Authority.[12]

At the same time, I draw on material from oral literary material collected from a community around the Rock to deconstruct the official narrative. In so doing the communal perspectives (enshrined in the oral literature) sips through the cracks exposing gaps in the official narrative. The type of gaps that I suggest would have to be addressed in order to attain classroom-community connectedness.

Firstly, one of the old men (old enough to have lived in the area when some of the meetings were held) interviewed, explained that according to narratives he heard whilst growing up, the meetings or gatherings at the *Rock* were sites at which politicians such as Kenneth Kaunda sacrificed others in order to stay in power. So, while the official summary of meetings sampled above, sticks to the official narrative from participants of the meetings at the rock, the interpretation of a local observing from the distance is different and excluded. In fact, whilst the official narrative as to why Kenneth Kaunda stayed in power for 27 years is based on political experts and participants, for the locals, the more meetings he held at the historical site, the more people were sacrificed/killed and the more years of power he bought for himself.

At the same time, while the significance and interpretation related to the old man's narrative represents the narratives of his time, the *Rock* and such stories might not appeal to today's community in the same way. There is need to interrogate the fact that some people living around the area today were not born then or have changed over time. This means the significance, interpretations of the *Rock* and other narratives emerging may not be the same as those in the past. In fact, among younger people interviewed: some did not know about the *Rock* despite living in the area; others spoke of a second and third rock aside the one located within Mulungushi University. In fact, information about the third rock was more forthcoming from younger informants than the *Rock* of interest. One of the respondents spoke of the third rock which had an underground cave, located north of the second rock mentioned (which is on private land) at a place called *Mambilima*. This third rock carries more significance to the local people than *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* because it is believed to have become haunted after some white people died there. It is said that sometimes water flows from the underground cave and if anyone tries to swim in this water, it begins to swirl swallowing (the dead white people are responsible for this) the swimmers.

The difference in attitude and oral narratives or myths coming from the older generation and the younger generation here is significant because it shows how the *Rock* makes more sense to the older man because he is closer to the action, having lived at a time when many meetings were held there. This is different from the youths of today that experience it in different light. It is for this reason that today's communal narratives must be heard. Without such perspectives from local people today one would simply assume that the official narratives about the *Mulungushi Rock of authority* are the arche narratives and yet they may be disconnected from local narratives.

Sometimes, the differences in official narrative and interpretation leading to disconnection between what is taught and the community may manifest itself in subtle ways. Subtle and yet significant to the desired connectedness between HEIS and the community.

One notes how some locals living in the area around *Mulungushi Rock of Authority* calls the Rock 'ici loko' (a combination of the Bemba demonstrative adjective 'ici' meaning this and 'loko', the linguistic equivalent to the English 'rock'). Such differences and absence in the classroom if not mediated may have detrimental consequences to class and community harmony. One is reminded of how the issue of names and naming remains a pertinent point of reference in the naming of the Victoria Falls for instance by David Livingstone:

> Once upon a time, a goodly Scottish doctor caught a notion to find the source of the Nile. He found instead a gash in the ground full of massed, tumbling water. His bearers called it Mosi-oa-Tunya, which means The Smoke That Thunders, but he gave it the name of his queen. [14:iv]

It is observed that had the explorer taken time to understand local narratives surrounding the falls, he would have been alive to the fact that the locals were already aware of it and knew it by the name Mosi-oa-Tunya (The Smoke that Thunders). I argue that failure to look to current local narratives of content, such as the *Rock*, related to the communities may be have undesirable consequences. Particularly, detrimental to bridging gaps between what is taught in the classroom and the community if local orature is completely ignored.

IV. Conclusion

The insights above call for reorientation concerning how relationships between HEIS and the community can be fostered, harnessed, nurtured and sustained. This is because it expands decolonisation discourse from localising content to a more self-reflexive attention to what this means in relation to the type of content that bridges the gap not only with the community but contemporary society. As Mwangi [13:1) suggests, it is time to "depart from the tradition of "writing back" to the European colonial centre by focusing their [our] gaze on local forms of expression that are seen to parallel classical colonialism." This calls for a more self-reflexive attention to whether the HEIS classroom takes into account community narratives of content taught as espoused in contemporary literary oral art forms. This is because this is more likely to connect HEIS to society.

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