Technauriture as an Educational Tool in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to situate the importance of orality in southern African communities within the paradigm of Technauriture, that being the intersection of technology, auriture and literature and how it relates to imparting educational messages within South Africa in particular. The process of orality as allowed for through, for example oral histories, music, poetry and story-telling, and how it interacts with the recording process facilitated through modern technology, as well as the return of the oral material via technology in educational and archival circles is further explored in this article. The question which this article seeks to understand is how technology can contribute in the educational milieu. Furthermore, orality still proliferates in South Africa and it is used for both documentation and dissemination of information in an educational and archival manner. This process is explored further in relation to contemporary forms of isiXhosa oral literature or Technauriture.

Keywords: Technauriture, orality, oral literature, technology, isiXhosa, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research undertaken in this article emanates primarily from the Eastern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. This is a province in which nearly 80% of the inhabitants speak isiXhosa, the language which underpins the traditions associated with orality in this area. These traditions include contemporary story-telling, oral poetry, wisdom-lore such as idioms and proverbs, as well as riddles and other forms of orality which are associated with social and digital media in the contemporary milieu (Dlutu 2013). An example of how contemporary youth interact with orality and how it can manifest in their lives is the young presenter of the South African Idols show, Tebogo Thekisho who has changed his television or presenter name to ProVerb, thereby clearing associating himself with the wisdom emanating from the literary proverb.

The aim of the article is firstly to further define the concept of Technauriture in relation to local and global trends. Secondly, to identify contemporary contexts in which orality operates specifically within the amaXhosa community in modern-day South Africa. Thirdly, the article assesses ways in which technology can be used as an archival and educational tool against the backdrop of the proliferation of new technologies in the context of an emerging economy such as that operating in southern Africa. The article is then concerned with the

documentation and dissemination of information taken from the community and then returned to the community via Technauriture and other means. In a similar vein, Starr (1984: 5) asserts that: 'The oral history movement may be perceived as a conscious effort to utilize technology – not only the tape recorder, but … microforms, the computer and other tools of the age…' Arguably, today these new tools would include cellular telephones, tablets, fablets, video-recording equipment, computers and the internet. Such an approach has for example been validated by the technologised work of the *Verba Africana Series* (2009) at the University of Leiden referred to later in this article. The main objective of this article is then to identify areas in which technology can be used as an educational and archival tool particularly within southern Africa, and in relation to oral poetry and story-telling. Although there are eleven official languages in South Africa that underpin this art of orality (including English and Afrikaans as adjunct African languages), this article, as mentioned earlier, concentrates on oral literature produced in isiXhosa. As can be seen from the table below (Table 1), based on the most recent 2011 census data, isiXhosa is the second largest language spoken in the country (16% of the population). IsiXhosa is also mutually intelligible with isiZulu, SiSwati and isiNdebele. If one adds all of these languages together then one is speaking of close to half the South African population who belong to the isiNguni speaking language group. In essence it is these languages that account for the existence of Technauriture in its multifaceted forms, from DVDs, social network sites to individual websites which have been created by performers. This will be discussed later in this article.
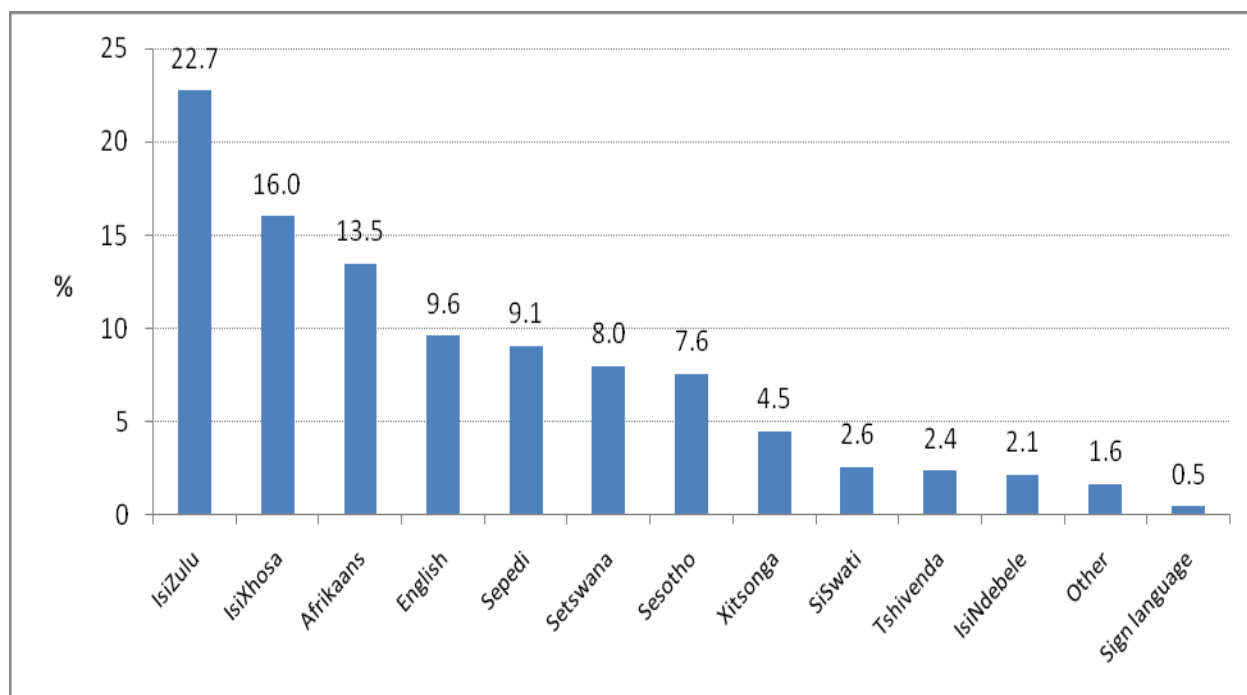

Table 1. South African Language Census – 2011.

The importance of the constitutionally entrenched and enabling legislative environment in South Africa is arguably playing an important role in allowing for the flourishing of Technauriture as an educational tool in the country. Section 6 of the Constitution which allows for the official recognition of the above-mentioned languages is partly what drives the transforming and mushrooming back into contention of the orality associated with these languages via contemporary technology and Technauriture. The importance of multilingualism in a multicultural society such as South Africa where language is suggested as a strong factor in the fostering of social cohesion and transformation cannot be overemphasised. Technauriture can assist in the form of status language planning to create visibility for our languages as well as to protect and disseminate our cultural heritage. Technauriture is integral not only to the preservation of our languages but also to their increased visibility. This is extremely important if one considers the point made by Crystal (2000: ix) that '[t]he plight of the world's endangered languages should be at the top of any environmental agenda...' and that approximately fifty percent of the world's languages will die out in the next one hundred years. According to Crystal (ibid), this means that a language will die every two weeks. Technauriture is therefore a very important contemporary tool which can be used to create a national educational platform for languages which are presently lacking in status planning.

Figure 1. A map depicting the 9 South African provinces together with their capital cities

2. FURTHER THOUGHTS ON TECHNAURITURE

The term Technauriture essentially provides a theoretical paradigm for the interface between oral performances, the capturing of performance as well as the dissemination of oral performance through the medium of new technologies including the world-wide-web. This article suggests that more than ever before what is required is a cross-disciplinary, holistic approach to the understanding and teaching of orality in the world today (Kaschula in Gohrisch & Grunkemeier 2012b). It is further suggested that Technauriture offers such an analytical framework for this methodological approach to take route and manifest in creative ways that facilitate not only our understanding of orality, but how that contemporary orality interacts with modern technology in the educational context pertaining to a given society.

There is no doubt that all forms of literature, including oral literature have, and are being dramatically transformed by the digital media. This is serving to widen the scope of orality into what is termed Technauriture which encompasses the fluid movement of orality from what David Coplan (1994) refers to as 'auriture' to the digital media. This has arguably created a fecund on-line environment for the mobilisation of orality within the digital world. There is a need therefore to recognise the inter-disciplinary and cross-fertilised nature of this technological environment. If one for example considers the teaching of a contemporary oral poem, such a poem should be taught holistically in terms of unearthing not only the context of the performance, the modalities associated with the capturing and dissemination of the poem, the life and history of the poet, but also the literary worthiness and critical content associated with the poem. It is all these facets rolled into one that should make up a contemporary poetic analysis. In essence this is what underpins the concept of Technauriture.

There is vibrant debate around orality and oral literature in South Africa (indeed throughout the world). 'If one portrays orality and literacy as incompatible and different, rather than forming part of the same continuum, then one is left with images of literacy versus illiteracy, civilisation versus non-civilisation, structure versus non-structure and so on' (Kaschula 2002: 66). This debate is well captured in the conflicting views suggested by Finnegan (1988) and Ong (1982) where Finnegan suggests the two forms interact whereas Ong sees them as totally separate with literacy replacing orality. Arguably the latter view has now been proven to be short-sighted and incorrect as literacy and orality clearly intersect. Today this is largely fuelled by modern technology where the oral and written is ever-present, co-existing side by side.

Oral literature in South Africa finds itself at the centre of the question of what literature is, and how it is to be taught. The orality-literacy debate and the relevance of the oral word alongside the written word are the focus of much discussion world-wide. Coplan (1994: 8) talks of extending terms such as orature and oral literature to 'auriture' which, according to him, encapsulates not only the oral and the written, but the aural as well. In a similar way, Gunner

(1989: 49) talks of the mixing of genres, the orality-literacy debate and so on. In an extensive article in which she reviews the state of oral literature in Africa since the publication of her famous book *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), Finnegan states the following in regard to the term 'oral literature':

> My own inclination would definitely be to keep it … To me the advantages mostly outweigh the costs… It highlights the creative, aesthetic qualities and the significance of heightened and formalised linguistic activities in a cultural (sic) recognised setting … the term also draws the study of Africa into the terminology and scholarship of international comparatives study … (Finnegan 1992: 42).

In terms of contemporary oral forms, it would seem that there are three areas of prominence is South Africa. These are contemporary stories (including media such as the internet, radio and television), entrepreneurial oral art, as well as oral poetry. The underlying link in the three areas is that they have commercial value as explored later in this article in relation to specific performers. It would seem that forms such as riddles, idioms and proverbs play a less prominent role and are often incorporated into other genres, for example, stories. Ruth Finnegan (1977) and Walter Ong (1982) have long debated the nature of orality and its relationship with technology, such as writing systems. To a degree they represent two sides of the same coin. Both accept the innate value of oral cultures and oral tradition. Ong (1982: 9) states that "(h)uman beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and posses and practice great wisdom, but they do not 'study'". Finnegan is however emphatic in her recognition of the role of oral poetry and by extension orality and its innate value to human society: '(i)t is difficult to argue that they (*oral poets*) should be ignored as aberrant or unusual in human society, or in principle outside the normal field of established scholarly research. In practice there is everything to be gained by bringing the study of oral poetry into the mainstream of work on literature and sociology' (Finnegan 1977: 2). Perhaps Finnegan's statement could now be adapted to include not only work on literature and sociology, but also to modern-day technologies.

It is against this backdrop of the interplay of orality and the influence of technology that the term Technauriture has been coined (Kaschula 2004; Kaschula & Mostert 2011). In terms of the etymological roots, the 'techn' represents technology, the 'auri' is derived from the word auriture, whilst the 'ture' represents literature in the more conventional sense. Auriture, used by Coplan (1994: 9) implies the use of a range of senses in one's appreciation of the oral word: hearing, speaking and the more abstract aesthetic analysis of the word. Auriture has been suggested in place of orature, orality or oraural, the latter an unsuitable term used by Kishani (2001: 27).

Technauriture attempts to embrace the implicit dichotomies that Ong and Finnegan acknowledge, and to place the nature of the debate regarding orality and oral traditions firmly in a coherent 21st century discourse; one that will offer

a coherent nomenclature that can seamlessly transverse the respective disciplines and firmly locate orality into the interdisciplinary paradigm that will promote the capture, nurture and harnessing of orality, oral histories and oral traditions (Mostert 2010). The overriding advantage is that it encompasses orality and so much more. This allows for other less customary disciplines to address issues of orality and oral tradition within an eclectic paradigm that allows for the focus of new approaches not to be overly concerned with the nature, definition and applicability of orally based knowledge and knowledge systems in relation to their specific academic discourse.

Kaschula (2004, 2009) as well as Kaschula & Mostert (2011) define Technauriture then as an attempt to capture the modalities associated with the 'three-way dialectic between primary orality, literacy and technology', thus moving the debate into a more sophisticated realm that expands what has essentially been a dichotomous tension between orality, writing and the use of technology in re-inventing the oral word. This debate now includes the implications of technology as a general and alternative category. Here the term technology is used widely to include all technologies that can be brought to bear on the issues of orality, oral history, and oral traditions more generally, and the implications of the application of technology to contexts that need to be characterised by a sympathetic perspective towards orally based cultures. This should be seen as an attempt to recognise that the dynamic nature of the contemporary realties is such that human culture has evolved to be more aware of the implications of technological advances.

3. CONTEMPORARY SITES OF TECHNAURITURE

The emergence of Technauriture is not limited to southern Africa and it is indeed an international phenomenon. One need only consider the University Of Leiden's *Verba Africana Series* (2009) available on DVD and dealing with story-telling in Zanzibar and Ghana as well as the ELLAf oral documentation initiative based in France. The latter project provides an on-line encyclopaedia devoted to the dissemination of African oral literature. There was also an initiative undertaken by Dr Mark Turin as part of the *World Oral Literature Project* at the University of Cambridge as well the work done through Technauriture on the preservation of statues from the University of East London in the United Kingdom and Rhodes University in South Africa. This project's aim is to develop a European Union (EU) based model around the Technauriture concept which promotes the capture, nurture and dissemination of cultural artefacts. In this case selected EU statues, which reflect a historical and cultural tradition, form the focus for development of lesson plans and teaching materials for the classroom. This will be facilitated by a dedicated web platform; http://www.technauriture.com/ There is also the Sitole project which is an example of a contemporary southern African initiative to preserve and

disseminate the late Bongani Sitole's poetry via http://www.technauriture.com This work will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Another recent example of Technauriture in action is the work being done by the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa. This library houses traditional African music that has been collected throughout Africa by the Tracey family since the 1950s. There is now a pilot project to repatriate and restudy the Tracey field recordings in the Dodoma district in Western Tanzania as well as the Rift Valley in Kenya. This music is being digitised using special equipment (digital heritage manager) and it is being preserved and disseminated through modern technology. Recordings were returned to three artists still alive who are on the original recordings, descendants of artists, local schools, community centres, universities, the Dhow Countries Music Academy in Zanzibar and the Department of Culture offices in Bomet and Nairobi, Kenya (Thram, 2014). This is arguably at the cutting edge of archival practice, allowing for this orality and music to be returned to the community via Technauriture.

Furthermore, the post-democracy era in South Africa has introduced a renewed pride in what it is to be African – hence there has been a revival in the status and role of oral literature. This form of literature is fast taking its rightful place alongside written literature and is now studied in schools and universities. The 2014 new draft guidelines for the study and development of literature in South Africa (Grades 10-12) which were recently issued by the Department of Basic Education for example call for authors to provide books related to folklore anthologies for African home languages (Grades 10-12): 'The Department of Basic Education has developed a Grade 12 Home language National Catalogue for Folklore Anthologies for each of the nine (9) African languages in 2014 for implementation in 2015.' Furthermore, the draft guidelines make the following call to publishers: 'Publishers must develop material for the Grade 10 - 11 Folklore Catalogue for each of the nine (9) African languages at Home language level to complement the one already developed. In order to broaden learner's knowledge of Folklore…' Although this initiative must be welcomed, arguably the place of technology and Technauriture within this educational milieu could be further considered.

In the educational milieu oral literature or Technauriture is also being used in an innovative way (through the use of DVDs) to teach people about HIV-AIDS, agriculture, family planning and so on. The didactic or educational nature of this literature is perhaps ensuring its recognition in educational structures and elsewhere in South Africa. An example would be the use of folktales to impart knowledge to young pregnant teenage mothers by the Eastern Cape Health Department. This is discussed in more detail in a later section of this article. If oral literature or Technauriture is to serve any long-term useful purpose, then it must be taught and recognised as a dynamic, living tradition, constantly interacting with new technologies and having much to offer.

Although research on language and technology is beginning to take root, there are relatively few experimental projects as mentioned above where new

technological documentation and research methodologies are being explored in relation to the capturing, archiving and dissemination of orally-based material (Furniss 2006; Merolla 2006 onwards). The work of Merolla (2006 onwards) speaks largely to the well-established *Verba Africana Series* while there is also the comparative study at Humboldt University on creativity and the adaptation of new media in southern and East Africa (Veit-Wild 2009). All the above studies are concerned with the artistic, cinematic, musical, literary and cultural practices in the digital age (Kaschula in Gehrmann & Veit-Wild 2012a).

Two examples of South African oral poetry performers of Technauriture as well as the educational value of their poetry are considered below.

3.1   ZOLANI MKIVA

In terms of Technauriture and oral poetry (*izibongo*), the work of two performers is highlighted: Zolani Mkiva and the late Bongani Sitole. The former is a well-known social commentator and performer, having initially gained global recognition through his performance in honour of Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as the first democratically elected President of South Africa in 1994 (Kaschula 2002: 92-98). This inauguration poem has been included in many of South Africa's school poetry textbooks. Mkiva has however performed throughout his life and he was first recognised as a formidable performer while he was a student at the University of the Western Cape in the 1990s (Neethling 2001), again in the context of an educational institution and with an educational message. In later years he produced CDs and performed internationally, winning many awards. More recently he has come to encapsulate the notion of Technauriture through his engagement with the digital media. This is clearly illustrated through his website http://www.poetofafrica.com

This website contains a picture gallery of Mkiva wearing his signature head-dress of porcupine quills which he initially wore at Mandela's inauguration. This head-dress links the past to the present and perhaps replaces the traditional knobkerrie or stick and the spear that were traditional accoutrements used by the *imbongi* or oral poet (Opland 1983). The website furthermore contains useful information regarding recent album releases, lithographs, poetry and videos as well as how to contact the agent of the performer. There is information pertaining to over a dozen music albums and international singles; as well as poetry performed at cultural ceremonies, poetry festivals and for royalty, and poetry contained in printed texts. The website also lists video performances including performances at the 2010 Soccer World-Cup hosted in South Africa, poetry in honour of Cuban leader Fidel Castro as well as an innovative First National Bank advert which uses Mkiva's performance abilities. This again speaks to the multidisciplinary nature of the contemporary performer today and how Technauriture is being used as an empowering economic tool. He is further referred to on the website as *Imbongi yesizwe* 'poet of the nation', thereby

suggesting that he is following in the footsteps of the late SEK Mqhayi who is today recognised as one of the greatest literary talents that has been produced by South Africa. Mqhayi was referred to as *imbongi yesizwe jikelele* 'the poet of the entire nation' (Opland 1983: 94). Even the website title of 'poet of Africa' speaks to a perceived wider continental recognition. The website furthermore acts as an educational portal where to some extent the work of the poet is returned to the community as an educational resource.

Today Mkiva is a prolific performer. He has managed to effectively adapt the tradition of oral poetry to the contemporary South African environment. He performs in honour of global icons while at the same time using modern technology to boost his creative profile through the internet and other forms of mixed-genre approaches such as adapting his poetic performances to music and CD for modern consumption. This adds economic and educational value to the tradition. In the same way that the traditional *imbongi* or oral poet received a bag of maize or a cow from the Chief as payment for his services, today the contemporary performer receives royalties largely based on performances related to, and encapsulated by Technauriture.

3.2   BONGANI SITOLE

In a similar vain to Mkiva, the late Bongani Sitole's work dates back to performances in honour of the late Nelson Mandela after his release from prison in 1991. In fact, Sitole was the first oral poet to perform in honour of Mandela after his release when he returned to Transkei for the first time in 27 years in April 1991. All of Sitole's work was orally produced in isiXhosa and contained a form of political and social education. It was then recorded, transcribed, and translated into English with the assistance of the poet himself, later culminating in the publication of *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking: Xhosa oral poetry in Context* (2002)*;* as well as the book *Qhiwu-u-u-la! Return to the Fold* (2006), with Mandlakayise Matyumza. Both books contain numerous examples of his isiXhosa poems as well as the English translations which have been made widely available for educational purposes within the schooling system.

Since then much information has been uploaded via websites, thereby further intellectualising the Sitole archive via books into the schooling system and returning this orality to the community via Technauriture. The Technauriture.com website mentioned above presently houses this poetry in translation, together with lesson plans in both isiXhosa and English for teachers to download free of charge. The website represents a portal or site which encapsulates a specific era of South Africa history just prior to democracy (1990-1994) through the eyes of a particular oral performer.

The work of Sitole therefore represents a further example of how performances that would otherwise have been lost, now live on through Technauriture, captured for all eternity as a socio-political commentary and

educational resource on an extremely important segment of South African history, namely, the lead-up to the first democratic elections in 1994.

4. CONTEMPORARY PERFORMERS OF TECHNAURITURE: STORY-TELLING

4.1 GCINA MHLOPHE

In terms of contemporary story-telling in South Africa, the performer who immediately comes to mind is Gcina Mhlophe. So prolific have been her performances internationally that she has been awarded Honorary doctorates from various universities, including Rhodes University in South Africa in April 2014. Mhlophe's home-page can be found at www.gcinamhlophe.co.za

This home-page contains personal information about Gcina Mhlophe as well as her Arts and Heritage Trust which is a fundraising endeavour to assist disadvantaged children who wish to further their education. There is also a "Contact us/Bookings" section. This again speaks to the commercialisation or entrepreneurial aspect of contemporary oral art – through Technauriture it has in fact become a valid path for economic success.

The website contains the following information about Gcina Mhlophe: "Nokugcina Elsie Mhlophe (born 1958) is a well-known South African freedom fighter, activist, actor, storyteller, poet, playwright, director and author. Storytelling is a deeply traditional activity in Africa and Mhlophe is one of the few woman storytellers in a country dominated by males. She does her most important work through charismatic performances, working to preserve storytelling as a means of keeping history alive and encouraging South African children to read. She tells her stories in four of South Africa's languages: English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa."

Again this shows how versatile Mhlophe is as a contemporary performer, utilising Technauriture in order to reach a wider audience and also through various languages in a multicultural society, thereby showing multilingual sensitivity.

4.2 NOMPUCUKO ZAKAZA

Zakaza has recently become a renowned story-teller in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Though not as established as Mhlophe, she presents herself as a multifaceted isiXhosa story-teller but is also a 'life-long skills development trainer'. In 2013 she initiated a Language, Arts, Culture, Heritage and Tourism NPO (Lisahluma Skills Development Services 121-446) and this NPO promotes reading, writing, and story-telling through establishing youth and

children's reading clubs while also engaging retired isiXhosa educators. In 2014 she was engaged in the Advanced Cultural Management course offered by the Swallows Foundation and Isiseko Senkonjane at Emthonjeni Arts Centre in Hamburg, Peddie in the Eastern Cape. As a result of this initiative she has been selected to travel to the United Kingdom to attend a training course with the Swallows Foundation. According to the *Daily Dispatch Newspaper* (30 October 2014) 'Zakaza was selected to attend the event by the Swallows Foundation UK for her "outstanding contribution" to her community through her skill and passion.' Like most performers she takes a multidisciplinary approach to her career. She points out though that her passion for her work is 'spiritually motivated' and that it is 'difficult to be self-employed through something which our local communities look down upon'. This latter point speaks to people's negative attitudes to using African languages in a country where English retains hegemonic status (Kaschula in Altmayer & Wolff 2013). She however expresses her happiness at being a story-teller and wishes to use the tradition to 'create employment opportunities for the unemployed youth through my NPO.' Again, this speaks to the economic value or opportunity creation that is becoming associated with Technauriture and oral literature more generally. Zakaza recently completed a Masters degree in the art of story-telling entitled 'IsiXhosa storytelling (iintsomi) as an alternative medium for Maternal Health Education in Primary Healthcare in the Eastern Cape.' In this thesis Zakaza (2014: 17) states that: 'While strongly advocating for storytelling as a culturally appropriate way of dealing with maternal health problems, the researcher is also mindful of the fact that learning cannot be defined through a single method, hence this study presents integration of folktales into the existing maternal health lessons and not as an isolated strategy but as a way to encourage selected maternal health educators to facilitate a positive response to maternal health messages by pregnant women.'

This is ground-breaking and innovative work which links directly to the pedagogic function of Technauriture. Her facebook page www.facebook.com/lisahluma provides a portal for the work that she is doing with teenage pregnant mothers in the Eastern Cape. Although there may be no direct benefit to her from the Technauriture aspects of her work, there is direct support received from the Department of Health as well as the Eastern Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC). This collaboration between a story-teller and government agencies should be welcomed and allows for the educational and archival value of this performance mode to be fully utilised within a contemporary educational milieu. With the assistance of DSRAC she has also produced 2 volumes of performances recorded on CD entitled '*Unobalisa Storytelling Series.*'

Story-telling and poetry are therefore very rich areas of Technauriture. This is not limited to southern Africa but is true of the world at large. From American rap and spoken word artists through to African performers, technology is at the forefront of orality as an educational tool. A further example from southern

Africa would be Bontekanye Botumile, a story-teller from Botswana who has produced a collection of folktales under the title *Patterns in the sky: A story of Botswana legends and basket patters.* This material is accessible at www.botswanastories.com This website again shows the multifaceted nature of the contemporary story-teller with stories, press releases, information about books published, art and theatre all populating the site. Again, like Zakaza and Mhlophe, Botumile shows how Technauriture can contribute to developing the lives of unemployed youth in Botswana through developing their talent in visual and performing arts.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has outlined and defined the notion of Technauriture and how it can apply to southern African communities, particularly in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Reference has been made to specific performers and how they relate to Technauriture as a tool for the preservation and support of pedagogic strategies within educational settings. This in turn depicts the emerging relationship between orality, literacy and technology. In fact most performers are now inter-linked with each other globally through contemporary technologies in this digital age which permeates our contemporary existence.

The analysis in this article suggests that involving locally-based performers as researchers from the community in communicative events, for the purposes of translating and interpreting and involving them in design decisions can lead to technologies that return the oral word to rural communities and that his serves to further enrich the potential for Technauriture. One need only consider the examples given above in this work. The article also points to the commercial value of Technauriture as a contemporary economic vehicle with which performers can make a living, while at the same time contributing to the educational and didactic environment not only locally, but globally.

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