

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POTENTIAL ROLE THAT FOLKLORE CAN
PLAY IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF *MPHOKO*.**

ZIPHORA MMABATHO RAMAILA

A minithesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of,
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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

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Ziphora Mmabatho Ramaila

MA mini-thesis, Department of English, University of the Western Cape

In this mini-thesis I investigate the potential role that folklore can play in contemporary environmental problems. My research in this area was prompted by people living around the Mantrombi nature reserve in the Nebo region of Limpopo province who showed an interest in reviving folklore as an education model to combat their existing environmental problems. As a response to this urge I decided to collect, translated, transcribe and analyse SePedi folklore to reveal its didactic nature.

The focus of my analysis is the narrative of a rain ritual called *Mphoko* provided to me by Mohube Ramatsetse, an elderly woman, from Maphotla village. I firstly read the ritual as text to show how it utilises literary elements such as metaphor, cultural codes and cultural symbols in creating local interpretations and understanding of environmental issues. I then compare and contrast the ritual performance with theatre-for-development as outlined by Zakes Mda (1993) examining ways in which local media might function as an effective environmental education tool better than exotic media.

I argue that although there are estimations of growing literacy among black people in South Africa, in the rural areas where there is still marked illiteracy, there is a need to reconsider a holistic or comprehensive approach in environmental education. This holistic approach should combine indigenous and western media in communicating environmental issues. My analysis of both the video footage and the transcribed oral narrative of this ritual shows how its linkage of its activities to the idea of sacredness encourages environmental protection, and conservation and preservation of natural resources and human moral fabric.

November 2005

DECLARATION

I declare that An Investigation of the Potential Role that Folklore can play in Environmental Education: A case study of *Mphoko* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Ziphora Mmabatho Ramaila



November 2005

Signed.....

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the problem

In modern South Africa there have been a number of environmental predicaments reported. It is reported that,

already 3435 (15%) of South Africa's plant species, 102 (14%) of bird, 72 (24%) of amphibian, 90 (37%) of mammal and 142 (22%) of butterfly species are listed as threatened in the South African Red data Books, which indicate the conservation status of threatened species and ecosystems. In addition, many important ecosystems have been degraded and ecological processes impaired. Trends indicate that this situation is not improving and that growing human populations and sustainable rates of resource consumption will result in increasing negative impacts on biodiversity. Unless we act fast and effectively, much biodiversity including the life-support systems which we rely on will soon be lost (White Paper on Biological Diversity, 1995).

In the Limpopo province, which is the focus of this study, some of these problems have recently attracted media and public attention. This province has 89% of its population living in rural areas, with a large number of people still living on farms (<http://www.nkuzi.org.za/areas-operation.htm>). According to Viljoen (1992) cited by Terblanche et al (1994: 54), "more than 60% of South Africa's total population (approximately 24 million people living in 3, 7 million dwellings) use coal (and often wood as well) as a source of household energy". This is a true reflection of the lifestyle in many areas in the rural parts of Limpopo province, Nebo region in particular, where there is still no electricity. Where it is available it has just recently been installed. My experience as a nurse in St Rita's hospital, which is the only hospital serving more than thirty villages in Nebo region is that there are many cases of home accidents that range from burns to respiratory tract infections to death by carbon monoxide asphyxiation that are common during the cold winter season. In addition to coal and wood as sources of household energy and heating is a practice that is more detrimental to the natural environment, namely deforestation. These conditions are exacerbated by the existence of 46% unemployment (<http://www.nkuzi.org.za/areas-operation.htm>) and illiteracy at 36%,

(ISPA, online) which automatically imply that people depend largely on natural resources for life sustenance.

In such conditions there is an urgent need to raise environmental awareness amongst all environmental stakeholders, the general public included. Such environmental education or awareness in rural areas should take the unemployment and the illiteracy elements into serious consideration. Existing strategies in alleviating environmental problems in Nebo region have regrettably concentrated on solutions provided by formal education channels only. This approach has often produced inadequate results. I suggest that environmental awareness programmes should take a holistic approach that combines formal learning and indigenous channels in order to engage local people in finding solutions to their immediate environmental problems.

Indigenous communication channels include amongst others, folklore, folk drumming, praise poetry, proverbs, idioms, totemism, and rituals, to mention but a few (Warren et al, 1995). I believe that revisiting indigenous communication channels is of utmost importance on two accounts. On one hand, coupled with the costly print and electronic media, illiteracy becomes the greatest handicap to reading and writing as effective communication strategies. On the other hand the unavailability of local equivalents of scientific terms tends to create misunderstandings which lead to local people ridiculing environmental education strategies that rely solely on education that utilizes exotic languages.

1.2. Significance of the study and methodology

I was inspired to undertake this study by the people neighbouring Mantrombi Nature Reserve in Nebo region of Limpopo province after discovering that they wanted to revive the usage of folklore especially in combating environmental problems peculiar to them. As a response, I decided to find out how indigenous knowledge can be used to respond to contemporary environmental matters. I started off with in-depth interviews in which elderly people became my information sources. In the course of this research I have collected folklore pieces of different kinds but I came to develop a particular interest in the rain ritual, *Mphoko*, and decided to analyse it for this thesis. Being a SePedi speaker, I felt privileged and encouraged to collect, transcribe and translate this ritual.

With the analysis of this ritual I am doing two things. Firstly I read the ritual as text to show how it adopts literary elements. Seemingly, this ritual has shown success in its emphasis on environmental protection and good conduct. Secondly I compare and contrast the ritual performance with the idea of theatre-for-development described in Zakes Mda's *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre*. In order to do this I start by looking at theatre for development in general to identify its successes and failures with regard to rural environmental awareness.

I was also inspired by a similar project which was established by The Orion Society which was established in 1982 in North America. From their website I read that this society considered folklore as a resource for sustainable development. This society is regarded as the pioneer of what is called a place-based model of thinking and acting. Place-based education is described in this context as the education of a community which seeks as its goal nature literacy. This they do by inspiring individuals to be humane custodians of their environment where local knowledge forms the basis of informed decision-making. The Orion society believes that the future health of communities depends on nature-literate people working on their home ground to effect change. Toward these ends, they work with educators of all levels from across their country to develop groundbreaking models for place-based, interdisciplinary environmental education, plan national conferences on a variety of topics, publish educational monographs, and sponsor teacher-training institutes with the goal of nature literacy always at the core.

Founders of the Orion society argue that this approach provides rich information to the learner because it

is interdisciplinary at its core, exploring the fertile ground where science, history, literature and art coalesce in the web of stories that define a particular community. Through this immersion in the local landscape and its cultural history, a bioregional sensitivity is fostered, and a sense of environmental and ethical responsibility arises naturally among students. The goals of this program are to acquaint students with their local natural and cultural communities through extensive study in the field; to form connective tissue between strictly divided academic disciplines; to re-enliven the education process by actively involving students in documenting the cultural and natural history of their regions; and to

nurture ethical attitudes toward local environments and neighbouring communities (www.orionsociety.org).

1.3. Brief description of *Mphoko* proceedings

The major aims of this study were twofold and both were fulfilled. A cross-sectional study and interviews were conducted mostly around Mantrombi nature reserve, in the Nebo region of the Limpopo Province in June of 2002. I then made an analysis of the video footage and a transcription of the oral narrative of the rain ritual, *Mphoko*, as presented by Mohube Ramatsetse. I subsequently used this analysis to investigate the potential role that folklore can play in environmental education, examining ways in which the performance of the ritual might function as an effective environmental education tool. The original SePedi text of *Mphoko* and my own English translation appear in an Appendix at the end of the thesis.

According to the informant Mohube Ramatsetse, whose age was estimated at over a hundred years by her grand-, great-grand, and great-great-grand children during the time of the fieldtrip, *Mphoko* was an old Pedi custom that was performed to ask for rain from the ancestors. This ritual seems to have been practised long ago and started to die out in the late 1980s. Ramatsetse explained to me that there were numerous activities to be engaged in prior to the rain ritual performance, during the performance and after the performance. She further explained that the ritual was always preceded by a divination at a high-chief's kraal either by a senior indigenous healer or a village elder who had received socially acclaimed credentials in rain ritual matters. In response to the divination, all members of Maphotla village where Ramatsetse grew up, would participate in the initial procedure of *go ntšha dibeela*, that is, the collection of litter from the entire surrounding area. There, roles of various participants in the *Mphoko* ritual would be allocated and rehearsals would commence. The leading performers, virgin boys and girls, called *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* respectively, would be guided by the older men and women who had expertise in ritual matters. The families of *mošoboro* and *mathumaša* would have laid the ground through emphasis on proper behaviour and good moral fabric.

The *mošoboro* and *mathumaša* would perform the sacred environmental cleansing with the medicine that the chief, together with his healer and selected elders, would have

prepared. Before the actual ritual could take place, men with great knowledge of flora and fauna would go on a hunt for a sacrificial animal. The same men would do a proper inspection of the sites which were to be meeting points at different stages of the actual performance of *Mphoko*. These sites included among others a specified lagoon and a designated acacia tree. When the virgins had carried some of the medicine in small calabashes and clay pots, then older women would at a later stage, take whatever remained of the medicine to meet the virgins at the lagoon which marked the end of the cleansing process. The women together with the virgins would pour the medicine into the lagoon simultaneously shouting *pula* which means, rain.

The procession comprising the virgins and elderly women would move to the acacia tree where designated men and women would have prepared food for the feast. Eating, dancing and singing marked the end of this event. Thereafter all participants would journey back to the chief's kraal which was their rendezvous prior to the cleansing expedition and a parting point at the end of the whole process. Ramatsetse explains that heavy rain would immediately start to fall even before the participants reached their homes. This is in summary how *Mphoko* was performed. As old as it seems, its revival has been sought in recent years by people living around the Mantrombi nature reserve in the Nebo region of the Limpopo Province.

The significance of this revival will be clear in the chapters that detail the discussions. My analysis of *Mphoko* gave particular attention to its textuality and its theatricality. The analysis of its textuality extracted literary elements such as signs, symbols and metaphors from the narrative and interpreted as well as analyzed them in the context of the performed ritual. As mentioned above, equally important was a comparative study between *Mphoko* and theatre-for-development as outlined by Zakes Mda's *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre* (1993) to show its theatricality. For that, elements such as scenes, scenery, the plot, characterization, props, and spectacle were considered.

1.4. Definition of key concepts

Education. It is defined here as the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another by means of direct instruction. Although education processes exist in all societies, it is only in the modern period that mass education takes the form of schooling, that is, instruction in specialized educational environments, in which individuals spend several years of their lives (Giddens, 1989: 726).

Environment. The term includes the land, water and air, all plants, animals and microscopic forms of life on Earth, the built environment and our social, economic, political and cultural activities that form part of everyday life, (The Green Paper for Environmental Policy in South Africa November, 1997). For these reasons an effective environmental policy must cover a wide range of issues. In its broadest sense, the environment embraces the conditions and / or influences under which any individual or thing exists, lives or develops.

Folklore. The idea of folklore as “the lore of the folk,” was coined in Great Britain synonymous to “popular customs” in 1846 by William John Thoms. Thoms correlated folklore with a pastoral, anti-industrial setting. The folklore of today represents the survival of animistic ways of thinking, (Dorson, 1978: 13-14).

Another contention is that folklore “may describe either one of the two concepts. The first is a field of learning devoted to the scientific study of the cultural acts of a people, while the second concentrates on the subject matter of the field” (Makgamatha, 1991:2). A more recent definition by UNESCO is

folklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totaling of traditional-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group of individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as the reflect its cultural and social identity, its standards and values transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms include, among others, language, literature, music dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts (Finnegan, 1992: 12).

Indigenous knowledge. The literature on Indigenous Knowledge does not provide one single definition of the concept. Nevertheless, several traits distinguish Indigenous Knowledge broadly from other knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge is knowledge that is

unique to a particular culture and society. It is the basis for local decision-making in agriculture, health, natural resource management and other activities. It is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals. It is essentially tacit knowledge that is not easily codifiable (November 4, 1998 Knowledge and Learning Center. Africa Region World Bank).

Literacy. This has been defined as “the ability of people to read and write” (Giddens, 1989: 743) Michaels and O'Connor (1990) however, give a different and a more encompassing description of literacy as: “Literacy... is an inherently plural notion. We each have, and indeed fail to have, different literacies. Each of these literacies is an integration of ways of thinking, talking, interacting, and valuing, in addition to reading and writing...Literacy then is less about reading and writing per se, and is rather about ways of being in the world and ways of making meaning with and around text.”

Sepedi/Northern Sotho. The language Sepedi, also known as Northern Sotho is mostly spoken in the Northern Province of South Africa. It is also a member of the Sotho language group. Different dialect clusters are found in the Northern Sotho speaking area. The most important dialects in the South-Central dialects are Kopa and Ndebele-Sotho. The dialects of the central districts are: Pedi, Tau and Kone. Northern Sotho as a written language was based originally on this cluster. The main dialects of the northwestern parts are: Tlokwa, Hananwa, Matlala, Moletsi and Mamabolo; in the northeastern parts they are: Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Khaga, Dzwabo; Eastern: Pai and the East Central: Pulana and Kutswe. As with most other African languages it is also a tonal language. Around 9, 8 % of the South African population uses it as their home language. (<http://www.cyberserv.co.za/users/~jako/lang/sep.htm>)

1.5. Organisation of the thesis

Following this introduction, the second chapter is a literature review which examines anthropological and literary contentions in folklore studies. The reviewed literature partly serves to justify my choice of engaging a multidisciplinary study and partly serves to show how a literary and anthropological combination is inescapable in folklore research and analysis. In this chapter I also consider material pertaining to the evolution of folklore as a genre and as a concept and the intellectual treatment of

indigenous communication channels across time and space. I relate some of these debates to the analysis of *Mphoko*, especially with reference to environmental education.

The third chapter outlines my methodology, providing a description of the empirical research ideals such as research methods, sample, sample design, ethics and tools that I employed during the data collection process and reflecting on the fieldtrip. I then relate these ideals to the actual research environment, specifically looking at the ways in which the folklore or oral narrative research process violated ideals such as principles of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, as well as special considerations regarding power, reciprocity and contextual relevance. I further look at issues regarding the right of the informants to the research outcomes, the utilization of research findings, the unavoidable omission of important distinctive non-verbal cues and interjections due to lack of semantic or phonological representation of them.

In the fourth chapter I discuss the textuality of the ritual. I am inspired to read the rain ritual, *Mphoko*, primarily as a text by Herbert Blau who argues that a ritual performance has its textual element because, “a performance seems written even if there is no text, for the writing seems imbedded in the conservatism of the instincts and the linguistic operations of the unconscious” (Schechner & Appel, 1990: 258). Through analysis of the transcribed and translated text of a video recording of my interview with Ramatsetse, I show in this chapter how the ritual adopts literary elements such as the metaphor, proverbs, cultural codes and cultural symbols. I suggest that the effect of their use in this ritual related to the promotion of conservation and preservation of human values of the environment and natural resources through the evocation of their sacredness.

Like any theatre, the ritual seems to combine text and performance. Hence in the fifth chapter I look at whether the rain ritual is an aberrant phenomenon or whether it can be described as theatre-for-development proper. This chapter focuses on the ritual as a performance. Theorizing popular theatre or theatre-for-development, Mda (1993: 45) argues that “although the literary composition may constitute the basic element of a theatrical performance, theatre is not primarily a literary art but uses elements of other arts such as song, dance, and mime, in addition to dialogue and spectacle.” In this chapter I adapt this argument to the analysis of the footage of the ritual narrative in order to show

that it similarly employs these elements of art. I consider, amongst others, the use of characterization, plot, scenes, scenery, spectacle and props, within the context of a performance or drama to show how they emphasise environmental protection.

The final chapter provides my conclusion and recommendations. In this chapter I summarize my contentions about the effective role of folklore in environmental education: its contemporary uses, the suggested intervention for the future and how this intervention should be implemented and by whom. Here the analysis of *Mphoko*, the rain ritual, will be summarized to support my view that folklore has a potential role in addressing environmental problems specifically with regard to its performed, theatrical evocation of sacredness. In this section I make recommendations which could aid in alleviating environmental problems in rural areas or elsewhere for either the improvement of the existing approaches in environmental education in Nebo region, or to add to a body of knowledge that promotes the recognition of indigenous knowledge.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter begins by considering the importance of establishing an understanding and the relevance of an environmental education programme that combines these two systems. This section is followed by a presentation of literature that deals with literary and anthropological contentions in folklore studies. This serves to highlight anthropological treatment of folklore, indigenous culture in general. The third section of the chapter looks at recorded success stories of the use of folklore in environmental education. These materials provide a basis for the understanding of why formal strategies seem to be unsuccessful in elevating environmental awareness in such places as Nebo region.

2.1. Indigenous Education versus Formal Education, with particular reference to Nebo region.

There is some evidence that global contemporary intellectual, research and professional debates on development are continuously seeking solutions from indigenous lifestyles and customs. In matters of the environment, for example, at the Rio Summit of 1992, UNESCO made a public appeal for widespread re-visitation of indigenous methods of environmental protection. For a world-acclaimed organisation such as UNESCO to make such an appeal shows that there is a lot to salvage from the traditional world. A comparative analysis between formal education and indigenous or traditional education systems is therefore relevant. My aim is to weigh the pros and cons of both systems in order to identify their possible meeting points especially in environmental education. My research has suggested that a combination of both formal and indigenous education can help people address contemporary environmental problems.

Ohuche & Otaala (1981: 22) argue that, “traditional African education was practical, informal, and primarily non-verbal. However, there existed opportunities for formal education in the secret societies, and verbal education in the folklore.” It is however important to note that the element of formality or formalness in indigenous education differs from how it is used in non-indigenous exotic education. Arguably the

formalness of exotic education tends to be a euphemism for systematic power and control. Ohuche & Otaala (1981: 22) see formal education as follows:

Starting with Bible study, it expanded to include reading, writing, arithmetic, and (later) English or French literature, geography, history and nature study. Originally, little or no attempt was made to encourage the development of technical skills in pupils; and the immediate environment was either ignored or condemned as uneducative, because it was thought to be anti-Christian.

Regarding indigenous education however, they would argue that children received long term wisdom through dramatized, narrated and sung folklore from early stages of their development. Methods of teaching included amongst others, modelling, rituals and storytelling. The subject matter incorporated the occupational, the religious and the environmental factors. Thus indigenous education may be seen as non-depreciating or durable, partly because of combining the sacred and secular factors. Formal education on the other hand, as Ohuche & Otaala (1981) argue, can be described as ephemeral due to utilising a reductionistic approach that employs foreign secular information. Consequently indigenous education offers a possibility of optimum practical cultural and ecological sustainability by integrating critical thinking and cultural values that are tested in practical life decision-making situations. Comparatively the nature of knowledge acquired through formal means demands only short-term recall just to enable the learner to pass an artificially tested examination. It is also argued by Ohuche & Otaala (1981) that the introduction of formal education into indigenous societies was to create economically productive forces of labour. Hence the subject matter of formal education seems divorced from the day to day life of the target group and thus, unlike the practical indigenous education, depends on logic and is abstract (Ohuche & Otaala, 1981). Because education was embedded in the daily living of children in the traditional context, it was seen as long lasting.

Proponents of indigenous or traditional education perceive the routine of formal education as emphasising polarities between those who can afford life-sustaining amenities and those for whom putting the next meal on the table is close to impossible.

Children of the latter group are bound not to take formal education if feeding an

empty stomach is a priority. Those who do have the means feel out of place among the have-nots. Consequently there is an ever-growing movement of educated people from under-sourced areas to urban areas to seek better working and social environments. This results in an imbalance where only undereducated and uneducated people are left to fend for themselves in the rural areas. Coupled with financial problems this situation gives rise to lifestyles that are completely strange to a rural atmosphere (James, 1992). In other words, formal education falls short in fulfilling its mandate as it caters for those who are financially well off.

The state of affairs for formal education in the rural areas of Limpopo makes it an unreliable means for conveying environmental awareness and education. O'Leary et al (1998) argue that poor quality education facilities are the chief contributory factor to poor education in Limpopo province. They have discovered that "pupils attend classes under trees or are housed in shacks that are not conducive for learning" (O'Leary et al, 1998: 43). Congestion arises from a situation where a total of up to 95 pupils with different learning speeds, are cramped in one classroom and this, they show, gives rise to lowered education as the teacher is compelled to pass a certain percentage of the class. Hence those pupils who move to the next level are not yet competent enough. These are the pupils who tend to be ridiculed, harassed and stigmatized by teachers and resort to dropping-out rather than subject themselves to this never-ending embarrassment. At the time finishing schools were established in cases where pupils failed matriculation in various attempts, but at present this service is no longer available. During my fieldtrip to Nebo region I met a number of idling young people who were reported to have failed matriculation at least twice and had no hope in the future. Conditions under which education is administered to pupils in rural Limpopo are in themselves serious environmental problems, consequently making the question of environmental education seemingly unfathomable.

Although early learning is generally recognised to be a crucial experience, in the Nebo region there are 68 Educare centres which care for only 6 548 of 68 100 children of ages between 0 and 5 years (O'Leary et al, 1998: 60). The subject matter in these centres put accent on childhood development which integrates care, education and social development with health, housing welfare, schooling and economic development,

(Atmore 1996:8 cited by O’Leary et al, 1998: 54). With regard to the situation in Nebo region, however, statistics indicate that at the time of the study a total of approximately 61 552 children under 6 years were not receiving such Educare services, or by implication, any formal early education on issues of the environment.

Among adults in Nebo region who care for young children (and would potentially motivate them and pursue formal education, the level of illiteracy is high. Due to the influx of economically active people to the urban areas, there is a substantial number of children who are cared for by their uneducated grandparents. Out of a total population of 324 909 in Nebo region, 13 347 people are of ages between 65 and 99 (O’Leary et al, 1998: 83). Most of these elderly people are without education. It has been discovered that Nebo region alone has a total number of 152 302 people of ages between 15 and 65. Only 80 825 of these have secondary education while only 4116 have tertiary education (O’Leary et al, 1998: 49). This means that approximately 67 361 adult people in Nebo region are illiterate. There are various angles from which the roots of this malady can be traced. Even though the stringent apartheid policies and its resultant disparities have played a role in creating these situations, perpetuation of some cultural practices was also a factor. Inevitably, illiteracy of adults resulting from both cultural practices and pressures of economic change, perpetuate a pattern of a less educated youth.

From the above it may be assumed that formal education cannot by itself succeed in certain environments. By comparison indigenous education traditionally took place in the warmth and comfort of the home neighbourhood. The teacher was a familiar person. The subject matter was locally relevant and socially sanctioned. Learning was hands-on and not abstract. Testing was on the spot and not delayed for examination at a latter stage. Although indigenous culture may have been deliberately excluded in the designing of learning and teaching programs, James D. Wolfensohn in Serageldin & Martin-Brown (1999: 5) contends that “you simply cannot have development without recognition of culture and history.” Furthermore, the evidence of anthropological research indicates that indigenous education has potential success through utilising locally specific subject matter and methods of dissemination that could fast-track environmental education.

2.2. Folklore and Anthropology.

Some anthropological descriptions of folklore in the early nineteenth century used arguably pejorative terms such as “bygones”, “popular antiquities,” “survivals” “superstitious,” “illiterate,” “backward,” “primitive” “simple”, “unspoiled,” “pastoral,” and “close to nature” (Dorson, 1978: 11). However recent anthropological studies tend to pursue the complex nature of folklore. As Makgamatha (1991:2) puts it, “folklore may describe one of two concepts. The first is a field of learning devoted to the scientific study of the cultural acts of a people, while the second concentrates on the subject matter of that field” in order to discover its scientific engagements.

A number of suggestions have been made as to how anthropological research may unpack the subject matter of folklore. As early as 1972 Dorson (1972: 11) asserted, “the student of African oral forms should be a literary critic, concerned with stylistics, characterization, symbolism; the creative imagination”. This sentiment is equally shared by Ruth Finnegan cited in Dorson (1972) that folklore deserves the same value and treatment as written material. Recent anthropological studies of African oral literature, folklore included, took a step further towards in-depth critical analysis and contextualisation of these materials (Okpewho, 1992). Okpewho (1992: 113) explains that for indigenous people, folklore in particular was the means “to explain the mysteries of nature and also the universe in a way that makes them and reflects their peculiar nature.” In matters of the environment this in-depth critical analysis and contextualisation of material becomes relevant because, as Okpewho (1992) puts it, the content of oral literature shows a great deal of the intense relationship between people and their environment and to an extent, their ecological symbiosis. For a modern anthropologist, the intense scrutinization of folkloric material is an ideal means of recognising the valued treatment that folklore deserves.

Through anthropological research it has been discovered that folklore traditionally served a number of useful purposes. It has been shown that folklore served as a source of “amusement, didactic function, discipline of young children and maintaining conformity” (Makgamatha, 1991: 8-11). Arguably, folktales in particular served as an intergenerational instrument for the transmission of customs, but also in satisfying complex social and spiritual needs (Makgamatha, 1991). For Warren et al (1995),

indigenous modes of communication such as puppet shows, folk drama, storytelling, interpersonal communication and even local meeting places had an effect in cultural and information dissemination because they were locally significant and engineered. It is thus that indigenous communication channels are commended for being “ever-present, having high continuance, important media of change, development programs can utilize them, offer opportunities for participation, and if ignored can result in inappropriate development efforts” (Warren et al, 1995: 113). Through recent systematic research and analysis of folklore, contextual significance is highlighted.

Systematic research and analysis of indigenous knowledge is crucial especially in recent times for a number of reasons. It has been shown that indigenous modes or channels of communication experienced progressive erosion as exogenous education and media were being introduced in indigenous societies, which subsequently compromised the survival of indigenous knowledge. Hence Warren et al (1995) argue that the first step to cultural emancipation is for indigenous people to take control over indigenous knowledge and its communication channels because it is more significant and comprehensible to them than technologically generated knowledge and channels.

2.3. Folklore in Literature.

Metaphors, as Makgamathe (1991) argues, are embedded in SePedi language and are mostly utilised in riddles and folktales. This shows that an understanding of messages presented through both oral and written folkloric material relies on the contextual understanding of the literary element, metaphor. As early as 1948 Archer Taylor argues in an article titled “Folklore and the Student of Literature” that literature contains elements borrowed from folklore (Dundes, 1965). This is borne out in a number of texts. For example, Olive Schreiner’s short story “The Hunter” is in the form of a folktale where non-tangible human elements are animated as characters (Turner, c1991: 9-14). In a short introductory autobiography of Benjamin Letholoa Leshoai, *Masilo’s Adventures and Other Stories* (1968) is described as an anthology of

free adaptations or variations of traditional tales. There have, of course always been such changes to the stories orally passed down through the generations. Leshoai believes that preserving these tales is particularly

important now that traditional storytelling is almost a thing of the past (Turner, c1991: 336).

As this comment suggests, the line between orally presented and written material is very slim. The short story “Masilo’s Adventures” from this anthology is an allegory that utilizes metaphors in dealing with various life issues (Turner, c1991: 335-341).

The folkloric approach in writing seems to work well in simplifying life complexities. Ellen Kuzwayo’s short story compilation, *Sit Down and Listen (1990)*, describes her involvement in recreational camping with the youth from some parts of Soweto in the 1950s. During this period she adopted the folklore storytelling technique as part of camping proceedings. She found it to be an effective communication channel through which most of these young people found it easier to vent their horrible encounters with the apartheid system. Orally and in written form, Kuzwayo was able to utilise folklore to break down political, societal, behavioural, and ideological complexities among the youth of Soweto.

The relevance of reviving folklore as an education medium was also more recently realised by Gcina Mhlope, a writer, actress, mime artist, singer and storyteller. In 1982 Mhlope established the Zanendaba Storytelling Institute based in Johannesburg as an extension and revival of the tradition of storytelling. In this context Mhlope recognised the combination of art and education in African storytelling and set out to restore and develop it in an attempt to reform authoritarian teaching methods. Thus Zanendaba Storytellers acknowledge the possibility of applying the storytelling model to teach history, language and communication skills, capitalising on one of the dictums of storytelling, namely, that of fully engaging the creative thinking of both students and teachers in learning spheres (www.ashoka.org).

In her novel *To My Children’s Children*, Sindiwe Magona represents, in a folkloric manner, an integration of real life experiences of black people living under the system of apartheid. She presents her personal experiences for future usage by those who have no first hand experience with apartheid, in particular her own grandchildren. Magona’s piece can be seen as a written alternative to an oral intergenerational dialogue. Magona succeeds in this endeavour because she uses simple language to present complex issues, which is one of the ideals of folklore. Magona’s novel shows the flexibility of

indigenous communication channels and how literature could be of help in bridging the intergenerational communication gap. This folkloric approach that Magona and other writers use could be adopted in any environmental education or any development strategy in rural settings to simplify complex scientific terms to local contexts.

Some research has already established the application of certain linguistic or literary elements in Pedi folklore. For instance Pretorius (1989: 28) shows that the rhetorical question is a technique used in Pedi traditional poetry “to create a dramatic effect” depending on the mood of the poet. Further Pedi folklore invokes sensual and verbalized imagery and in Pedi praise poetry “metaphoric language is extensively used,” and involves a totally implicit comparison between two objects with one carrying a figurative meaning of the other (Pretorius, 1989, 32). For example in SePedi a figurative giving of human qualities to birds and animals is crucial to praise poetry “as a means of poetic utterance” (1989: 42). The most important point of all, which I believe applies to the very existence of indigenous life in general, is that “the symbolic meaning of a poetic word is determined by its poetic context” (Pretorius, 1989: 45). This confirms my view that it is crucial to ascertain the significance of certain linguistic elements in Pedi folklore and the meanings of symbols in their contextual application.

Another influential work regarding Pedi literature is by C.M Doke, appearing in Kaschula’s *Foundations in Southern African Oral Literature*. Doke looks, for example, at how proverbs function in what he calls Bantu-lore. He argues that “the term ‘proverb’ is too restrictive for ...Bantu-lore”. In its place he adopts the usage of the term “aphorisms.” He theorizes that this term is the most applicable in Bantu wisdom-lore and defines it as “a short, pithy sentence expressing some general truth or sentiment”. Pretorius (1989: 47) seems to concur with Doke in arguing that the proverb is one of the traditional oral heritages in Northern Sotho poetry (Pretorius, 1989: 47).

2.4. Folklore and Environmental education.

Influential to this thesis are theories of schooling and folklore. Ivan Illich, who is considered to be one of the most influential theorists of radical education, situates what seems like the catastrophic nature of formal education towards indigenous lifestyles within the domain of modern economic development. Illich argues that modern economic

development is “a process whereby previously self-sufficient peoples are dispossessed of their traditional skills, and are made to rely on doctors for their health, teachers for their schooling, television for their entertainment and employers for their subsistence” (Giddens, 89:428). In other words, instead of relying on their local survival mechanisms, indigenous people are subjected to exotic modes of living. Hence, informally acquired information is looked down upon while emphasis is put on formal means of information dissemination. Consequently media such as television and radio are given more credence than indigenous methods. However, Vladimir Jákovleviý Propp (1984:6) posits, “folklore is the product of a special form of verbal art.” By implication, educationists should acknowledge the complexities that are in play in the production of folklore. It is reassuring to know that folklore is art as Propp (1984) has realised. There is compelling evidence and numerous projects in some parts of rural South Africa accounting for the feasibility of successful environmental education through folklore.

My first source is a monograph by Rob O’ Donoghue and Eureka Janse van Rensburg (1999) called *Regional Environmental Education Programme (REEP) in the Southern African Development Community*. Articles from this collection deal with how indigenous myth, story and knowledge have effectively contributed in environmental education processes. The combined effect is to present a critical engagement with environmental education issues through multiple and varying voices. Contributors are educators concerned with environmental issues in parts of South Africa like Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape as well as in other countries in Southern Africa (mainly Zimbabwe) and even outside the region. I have selected a few examples from this source to show the necessity of using indigenous communication channels in contemporary South African environmental education strategies.

Mabongi Mtshali, an environmental educator with the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg describes her work with school children which focused on birds in African proverbs. Mtshali’s project was aimed at the promotion and revival of the love of birds among members of the Sabalala Nolwazi Environmental Youth Club in Pietermaritzburg. This exploration of the representation of birds was the major focus because, as Mtshali puts it,

proverbs embody knowledge, values and attitudes which when studied with understanding, can assist in re-awakening a sense of value for nature. They can also re-establish links between the urban youth and the environment. Proverbs have words of wisdom, beauty and also underline the relationship between animals and man. They show how observant people are and how much they understand birds' behaviour (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999: 3).

Even more relevant to one of my aims of exploring the possibility of a synergy between formal and informal education, is an article by Kim le Roux. At the time of publishing her article, Kim le Roux was a Masters student in Education at Rhodes University and worked with teachers and other resource material developers from within the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa. Le Roux's paper discusses the potential of indigenous knowledge in environmental education including its place in South Africa's new national curriculum framework. Le Roux acknowledges the important step that post-modernity took by putting emphasis "on voices, on allowing them to be heard, listening to many voices." She goes on to say, "in this process we need the vigorous storytelling that can become part of indigenous knowledge processes" (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999: 18).

In another study, Mduduzi Mchunu, the Deputy Director of Environmental Education in the Department of Environment and Traditional Affairs in Kwa-Zulu Natal, sampled Zulu idioms to comment on the relationship between the environment and language (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999).

The research of Mandisa Ngwane, a Geography teacher helps to relocate folklore studies in mainstream education. She examines knowledge of plants and linked possession of this knowledge with age, education and gender. Ngwane argues that the growing detachment of people from their environment affects the culture of oral transmission of knowledge about the importance of trees to people. She is equally concerned about the untapped environmental information that she avows is possessed by the elderly rural people and is of potential value to the younger generations, (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999).

Finally, the project by Peter Raine, a PhD student in the School of Global Studies at Massey University in New Zealand, aims to contextualize local environmental issues

in the global context. Raine looks at what he calls mythos, logos and symbols. He argues that “we cannot exist as human beings without mythical horizons, and yet surprisingly, these horizons are not universal to all people. Each cultural group has discovered different means of expressing the mysterious qualities of reality,” (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999: 64). Raine goes on to say, “it is the symbol which is important to dialogue between worldviews. Symbolic discourse is a search for symbols, which can stand in the place between worldview boundaries beyond argumentation and dialect” (EEASA & SADC REEP, 1999: 3). These observations have relevance to the symbolic practice performed, for example, in the rain ritual, *Mphoko*.

Another important precedent to my research is a compilation of articles edited by Zulaiga Rossouw (1999) titled *Schools within the Community: Learning to frame Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge Systems with Contemporary Knowledge*. Contributions in this collection focus on indigenous interventions in contemporary environmental problems. This anthology amasses a variety of indigenous knowledge texts including stories on traditional honey production, tales of the indigenous trees of Zimbabwe and totems in traditional biodiversity conservation.

In another valuable study, Ismail Serageldin and Joan Martin-Brown (1998) edited a compilation of papers presented by various scholars during a Conference on Culture in Sustainable Development held at the World Bank in Washington, D.C on September 28-29, 1998 titled *Conference on Culture in Sustainable Development: Investing in Cultural and Natural Endowments*. Here, culture is the focus of attention and the deliberations were geared to its incorporation into the development paradigm in relation to issues in economics, gender and sustainable development, as well as heritage and national sustainable development. Unsurprising perhaps, these issues are however relegated to second position with AIDS at the top of the agenda.

In KwaZulu Natal, which is one of the provinces hit hard by the AIDS epidemic, a particular ritual was revived—that of Nomkhubulwana. Other than regeneration of cultural pride, the reviver of this ritual, Andile Gumede, is said to emphasise its pursuit because she believes that “we blacks have a problem. We have children, but we don’t have families. We don’t keep our virginity. We sleep around with anyone,” (Hamilton, 1998: 64). Arguably Gumede perceives herself as the mediator between the disappointed,

annoyed ancestors and a generation who have lost touch with their custom. Despite attempts by government, through the approval of the Children's Bill in July 2005 that could impose an absolute prohibition on the Nomkhubulwana practice, there are some intellectuals who see it as one of the possible solutions for the AIDS education in KwaZulu Natal and elsewhere where it has been instituted. In support of this practice Brian Williams, the Director of the Epidemiology Research Unit argues,

the flaws in the mainstream educational and health programmes derive from the fact that they are often didactic and prescriptive and have very little to do with empowering those people who could influence behaviour in communities where AIDS is rife (Hamilton, 1998: 65).

In contrast to mainstream education and health programs Nomkhubulwana emphasises good behaviour throughout a young person's development by utilising virginity and sacredness as metaphors of preservation and conservation. These instances are evidence of the potential success of folklore in environmental education especially in rural areas.

Literature shows that there is much to salvage from the indigenous world in the development of environmental education. It also shows that although earlier anthropological work may have vilified indigenous cultures and folklore suffered as a reliable resource of valuable information, modern anthropological research provides reassurance for the elevation of folklore to the same level as written texts. Folklore has already been utilised in environmental projects and seems to be providing good results. It is thus not impossible that the reintroduction of folklore could play a valuable role in environmental education and awareness in such places as Nebo region.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND REFLECTING ON THE FIELD TRIP

In the first section of this chapter, procedures implemented before, during and after the collection of the data are presented and discussed. The second section provides a reflection on the fieldtrip with special focus on the challenges I encountered. This is important because in recent intellectual and scientific research debates there is evidence of the need for a paradigm shift especially pertaining to doing research on indigenous cultures and lifestyles. These debates seem to suggest individuation of contexts which automatically problematizes the implied universal application of mainstream research theories and methods.

3.1. Methodology.

I have elected to use a multidisciplinary approach that combines literary, narrative, and anthropological research approaches for this study. This move was inspired by several standpoints, for instance, even in his era William Bascom in Dundes (1965) acknowledges that the dual affiliation of folklore with the humanities on one hand and with social sciences on the other is well recognized. Archer Taylor also argues that folklore is, in many cultures, indistinguishable from literature. He further argues that literature contains elements borrowed from folklore simply because writers have imitated folklore (Dundes 1965).

Regarding anthropological research approach, I have resorted to a combination of hermeneutics and phenomenological inquiries. Though a traditionally biblical study method, hermeneutics has according to Bernard (1988: 22) become commonly used in anthropology in studying what is called “free-flowing native texts, free-flowing acts of people and construing those acts as if they were texts whose internal meaning can be discovered by proper exegesis.” Application of hermeneutics to the study of *Mphoko*, through employing an array of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and case studies, has enabled me to unravel the internal meanings of various processes and characters in order to understand its relevance to its proper context. Phenomenology according to Bernard (1988) makes phenomena its focal point and uses words that reflect

consciousness and perception instead of numbers to describe their experiences rather than explanations and causes. In that fashion one studies things in their natural settings attempting to make meaning of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. For this thesis I was able to conduct interviews with elderly Pedi people to discover indigenous ways in which the environment was preserved and conserved. It was through these dialogues that I was able to identify different interpretations and perceptions of various users of the environment of the persisting environmental problems in Nebo region that I might not have achieved if I were to use quantitative methods. I was able through the hermeneutic/phenomenology combination to get verbal responses from the young and old about their understanding of the existing environmental problems and how young people perceive old methods to be still applicable in combating modern environmental problems.

Anthropological research are chiefly elevated for enabling the researcher to study a collection of a variety of empirical material ranging from case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, observations, and historical, interactional to visual texts. This characteristic made it possible to focus on the recount by Mohube Ramatsetse as the unit of analysis. Anthropological approaches are therefore crucial for the understanding of people's attitudes and perceptions about the issue of environmental and ecological management and utilization. I however exercised caution in the choice of this approach well aware of the element of ideological influence underneath the designing of research approaches and methods. Although anthropological research provided a plethora of theoretical research methods there was a need for a research method that would take into cognizance the voices of all the participants, me included, in order to identify the meanings that various issues held for them. The inclusion of narrative research approach thus seemed inevitable as White (1995) (cited in Rapmund & Moore, 2002: 23) argues,

human beings are interpreting beings and they make sense of their experiences through narrative or stories, which are socially constructed through language...The good news is that because narratives or stories are constructed in language, they can be revised or transformed. Retelling stories that facilitate growth and change, is the main focus of researchers following the narrative approach.

As I have mentioned in the first chapter, many of my informants were elderly people who have not gone through formal education. For them, retelling was tantamount to rewriting their life experiences. In a society that is undergoing myriad forms of transformation, to listen to every narrative that will provide hope for change in this instance combating environmental problems, is crucial. This is important as Rappaport 1993: 240) (cited in Rapmund & Moore 2002:23) argues, “narratives or stories function to order experience, give coherence and meaning to events and provide a sense of history and the future.” This notion became obvious to me through listening to various voices during the field work as to the potential and relevance of folklore in modern contexts. Narratives became major information resources for this thesis as informants, both young and old, recollected their past experiences, emotions and perceptions about past, present and future environmental problems. In that regard a dialogue was created between myself and the informants and the informants themselves. However, as White (1995) argues that narratives are constructed in language, it is therefore imperative to be conversant with the language of the informants. This allows for accurate translation and interpretation of the recount/s because as Kelly (1999: 398) (cited in Rapmund & Moore 2002: 24) argues “experience can only be understood within the social, linguistic and historical features which give it shape.” For the full understanding of the relevance of *Mphoko* for instance, it was important to situate the experiences of the informants within its relevant social, linguistic and historical contexts. For that I chose participants from various walks of life from single cases to group discussions because qualitative inquiry allows for smaller samples even single cases, which are selected purposefully. It is because, as Patton (1990: 169) puts it,

the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling.

Passersby were approached to participate in the study. I also moved from one homestead to the other soliciting informants. Due to unfamiliarity with some of the research sites I had to ask the passersby in which homesteads I could find key informants. The single cases served me right for ground-breaking and to identify topics or issues that were

pondered in group discussions. For instance, one of my first elderly informants blamed the degradation of morality in her locale to what she considered to be casual sex talk in the media. Based on this sentiment I invited a group of young people to take on this discussion. In this way the responses of informants dictated the flow of the dialogue, the manner in which informants sampled and how themes were to be streamed-lined.

Even though the sample was an unorthodox randomly selected one, there was a method I used to amass informants. This is called snowballing or chain sampling. This type of sampling is deemed one of the effective approaches for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases. That is to say “who knows a lot about...? Or “who should I talk to?” Hence by asking a number of people who one can talk to, the snow-ball piles up and the sample or new information-rich cases are added on (Patton 1990). I was however not pressured into the technicalities of sampling as Barbard (1988: 80) explains, “there is no need for scientific sampling in phenomenological research, in which the object is to understand the meaning of expressive behavior, or simply to understand how things work.” For this thesis one of the aims was to understand the rationale behind the interest shown by people living around the Mantrombi nature reserve to reestablish old methods of environmental awareness strategies in modern times

Nevertheless the interviewees’ consent was gained and the aim of the study explained to avoid future complications and misunderstandings. Interviews were conducted in the environment which was suitable for the participants, that is, participants were not removed, unless necessary, from their vicinities during the interview. Interviews were conducted in the language spoken by the interviewees, that is, Sepedi. Hence I translated and transcribed the original material into English.

As mentioned above, the worry of having or not having a representative random sample was lessened by an appointment of information rich cases. Hence I elected Mohube Ramatsetse as the key informant and her recount as a case study for this thesis. Case studies are useful where particular attention has to be given to particular phenomena deeming special attention or of a unique form and in-depth probing about them is needed. Patton (1990: 54) reassuringly argues,

Case studies are particularly valuable when the evaluation aims to capture individual difference or unique variations from one program setting to another, or from one program experience to another. A case can be a person, an event, a program, an organization, a time period, a critical incident, or a community. Regardless of the unit of analysis, a qualitative case study seeks to describe that unit in depth and detail, in context and holistically.

As far as the reliability of small or single cases or samples as opposed to a representative sample is concerned Barnard (1988: 170) argues, “an important question for ethnography then is: Are a few informants really capable of providing adequate information about a culture? The answer is yes, but it depends on two things: choosing good informants and asking them things they know about.” I chose to focus on Ramatsetse’s recount for various reasons. Firstly, her age got my attention. Secondly, to have someone of her age recollect accounts with such precision and coherence was striking. Thirdly, given her age, she was better positioned to make comparisons of present and past environmental changes and lifestyles. Fourthly, her compound was our meeting place when I participated in a research activity for The Center for the Book and in that way I built rapport with her. Lastly, due to the ample time I spent with her I in a way took advantage of the availability of the author and that gave me the opportunity to do a follow up and to verify the accuracy of some of my interpretations and translations.

To supplement the interpretations and translations that Ramatsetse provided I used *Marema-Ka-Dika Tsa Sesotho Sa Lebowa* by J.R.D Rakoma, an anthology of SePedi proverbs and idioms, and *The New English-Northern Sotho Dictionary* compiled by T.J Kriel English-Northern Sotho Dictionary. The reason for using these sources is because of the dilemma existing between original or standard SePedi language and dialects. I opted for the established terminology in Kriel for formality and uniformity sake and also to avoid what is called transliteration (Mphahlele 2004: 341). Besides, there seems to be an emphasis in the academic world on verification especially where definitions and descriptions of phenomena are concerned.

Data were recorded via video, tape recordings and field notes. This was done with caution as it is sometimes seen as invasion of privacy to tape or video record people. Their consent was obtained in this regard. The methods and approaches employed in this

study were however not without challenges. The section below outlines some of those challenges.

3.2. Reflecting on the field trip

A research process is always preceded by a painstaking task of putting together a research proposal which becomes a blueprint for the research process. One is always urged to be precise regarding suitable research methodology, data collection tools, study and theoretical framework. However, these research ideals seem to be influenced by western ideology. It is thus imperative to provide their contextual implications. For this thesis it is important to consider the implications of these ideals in relation to narrative research in a rural setting where elderly people are the main research informants. This move was inspired by Malinowski's contention that for a student of oral literature or orature it is imperative to talk about the narrator and what influenced the narration before presenting and analysing research findings (Finnegan 1992).

Prior to the actual fieldtrip, I was confident that I was in a proper position to conduct the research. I was at the same time aware that my possession of research skills would not provide me with immunity to fundamental realities and irregularities peculiar to field research. Some of these realities were shaped by discourse systems such as language, age, culture, gender, economic status, power, and intellectual involvement. These discourse systems have proven to have constantly ridiculed research ideals such as among others ethics, preconceived assumptions or theories, predetermined methodologies, researcher supremacy, data transcription and interpretation. In addition to these discourse systems are a few binaries such as literate/illiterate, modern/traditional, young/old, civilized/uncivilized, informed/uninformed and formal/informal which were at play during the fieldtrip. These are some of the things that one easily brushes off in a research process because they seem not to have any interference with getting the results. In my view they are worth mentioning so that things such as ethics, theories and scientific assumptions could be reviewed or at least validated in relation to folklore studies in particular. Let us look at how the abovementioned realities impacted on my research.

It was a cold winter morning. Although the sun was out, there was a stinging draught that forced people out of their houses to bask in the sun. At this time of any week

day the streets of any village are buzzing with people scurrying to different directions. The attention-catching women characters heavily covered with thick colourful blankets and bundles of God-knows-what on their heads in Maphotla village for instance, created quite a spectacle. In the midst are children suspended on an adult's arms being shepherded to a pre-school or a crèche. An echoing rowdy atmosphere of ululating voices is resonating from another end of the village. I came to know later from Mohube Ramatsetse that *ba a rokwa lehono* (they are getting sewed today). She was referring to a session during female circumcision. After further inquiry I came to know that sewing here had a figurative connotation rather than the mere usage of thread and needle. I found myself at a threshold of one of the houses.

I shouted *kokoo!* This is a Pedi way of knocking. A hoarse voice from within responded *ka gare* (come inside). She burrowed her back in a corner in the *lapa* (a low wall which is erected around a traditional compound to form an enclosure which usually has one main entrance), in a position that allowed her to get a view of the road and other sides of the yard. She sat in a slight stoop with her eyes glued to the ground with a distanced gaze. As I was moving nearer to where she was seated, she straightened her back in a slow tilt like petals of an opening rose. She shielded her eyes from the sunrays with her left hand and looked at my feet as I trod towards her. It was as if she could read my intentions with every step I made, leaving me with a pang of guilt. She ripped through my soul with her piercing look that I felt so transparent and for a moment I wanted to run back. I felt like a predator that forages around targeting the weaker animals for an easy meal.

I stretched out my right arm for a handshake. In a chameleon-like stagger she stretched hers out and I used my left hand to redirect it as it was going out of line. Her hand was extremely cold and coarse. She tried to wriggle it off my grip maybe embarrassed due to the stale stench of urine hanging on her tattered clothes at the same time passing an apologetic remark about the coarseness of her palms. At this point I was gently rubbing the outside of her palm. This is a skill I learned during my nursing years of using minimal physical contact as a non-verbal icebreaker. This technique proved effective in allaying anxiety and for building rapport. I realized its effectiveness in closing the physical and mental gap between my informants and me. For the elderly,

because of being marginalized and shunned, I employed it as a physiologically rendered symbol of appreciation and acknowledgement. In no time Mohube Ramatsetse was comfortable enough that she even pulled the sleeves of her sweater up to show me her desquamating lower arms.

After releasing her hand from my grip she steadily fidgeted for something on her lap and got hold of a blue handkerchief. She gently flung it on the walking stick she held in her left hand all this while. I got to understand the relevance of this action in the process of the conversation. During her jubilant laughter that became a prelude for her explanations, she had a thunder-like productive cough. Like a cannon, a thick ball of sputum blasted out uncontrollably. She removed the hanky from the walking stick and with great precision caught and wrapped it up in time before it sprawled on the ground. As we continued our conversation she ceremoniously kneaded it so that a misty map-like imprint was formed in the middle of the hanky after which she hung it back on the walking stick.

I made myself comfortable, on the same *modutudu* (a lower wall build in the lapa for sitting) next to her, so that we both faced eastwards. After introducing myself and explaining the significance of my visit, she made a sudden turn to a position in which she could establish a good eye contact with me. The routine cultural interrogation commenced while she played the judge and the jury. *O bowa kae*, she asked with great interest. In Pedi culture *o tšwa kae* (where do you come from) and *o boa or bowa kae* (where are you hailing from) have different interpretations or rather demand different explanations or responses. To *bowa* literally means to come back or return and to *tšwa* literally means to come out of, go out or leave. The *o tšwa kae* automatically asks where one is residing and *o bowa kae* asks where one is originating from. In the latter, one is expected to give a brief history of their clan or family. The clan praise poem serves this purpose. When Ramatsetse threw this question to me I was flabbergasted. I started to shuffle through my bag in disarray. As I was about to pull out my writing material I remembered one of the teachings of Dr Els Van Dongen, a visiting lecturer in the Anthropology department of the University of the Western Cape, that a researcher that start by brandishing pen and paper in the research field alienates his or her informants. I jerked back letting my bag to drop on my feet. I suddenly turned to face her, and, her go-

on-I-am-listening stare made it difficult for me to recollect in a flow a few lines that roamed haphazardly in my mind. At this point I regretted having not taken my grandfather's advice of writing down, as he was saying the praise poem so that we the grand children could have written copies of it. Unfortunately my grandfather is no more. He passed away.

Ramatsetse seemed to be reading an expression of perplexity on my face with every movement of my lips straining to trace my origin. Upon discovering that I was struggling to say what she was expecting to hear, she gave a sarcastic though sympathetic chuckle and exclaimed, *ruri bana ba rena! Gomme ke ge le rutegile ge lere yalo?* (Poor children! And you say you are educated like that?)

Her exclamation helped me to jump into a counteracting question, which was to become crucial for the ensued interview. I asked, *Kganthe Koko ya lena thuto e phala bjang ye ya rena?* (in which way is your generation's form of education better than ours, grandmother?) She laughed again and a thick ball of sputum curtailed the laughter forcing her to cough instead. She cleared her throat and removed the hanky that was hanging on her walking stick and with a gentle movement wrapping the phlegm. When she was rubbing in the phlegm on the hanky she explained:

Mohol'a rena ebe e noba gona go hlagola le go aga lapa le motse. E be ele mohola wa rena. Le go diša. (Our main purpose in life was just to hand-hoe and also to build a home and a society. That was our main purpose. As well as herding domestic animals). *Bjale thuto lebe le ehwetša bjang ka gore le nale tsebo ye ntšhi?* (How did you accumulate so much knowledge without structured education?) I asked her. *Ba bagolo babe ba re ruta. Ba be ba re anegela tša kgale le gona go dira meletlwana ya setšo motho obe o ithuta. A kere lena le lebelela thelebišhene lere le bala dipuku tšeo tša lena? Rena re be re sa tsene sekolo,* explained Ramatsetse. (The elders used to educate us. They used to impart old chronicles and also through participating in traditional ceremonies one could learn. Isn't it you young people rely on television as well as read those your books? We never took formal schooling). *Naa o nale mengwaga e me kae, koko?* (By the way how many years do you have, grandmother?) I asked. With a jubilant laughter Ramatsetse explained; *Rena ke rena bale ba tlala ya mohlopi le tšie.* (I belong to the generation of the *mohlopi* famine and locusts). In this instance one of her grand children who all this time was

eavesdropping from the kitchen, shouted, *re kgolwa gore Koko a ka be a fetile lekgolo la mengwaga*, (we believe that granny could be over a hundred years old). The *mohlopi* famine and locusts which Mohube mentioned are examples of the most common historical events which everyone who is well informed about the agricultural history of Pedi people is expected to have knowledge about. They are also used by the older generation to estimate their own ages. But also, if they could be properly analyzed, patterns of climatological and environmental changes could be traced.

Naa Koko o fela a botša ditlogolo dinonwane?, (Do you sometimes narrate folklore to your grandchildren, grandma?) I asked. Before she could reply one of the grandchildren screamed from inside the house and said *mmotše a go anegele yela ya mosadi wa go hupa tlhako ya kgomo* (tell her to narrate the one about a woman who held the hoof of a cow in her mouth). She started laughing and after some time she positioned herself to start with the narration. For this thesis, however, I shall not dwell much on the folktale as the focus of analysis is on the rain ritual. Worth mentioning however, is an apologetic statement she made before the narration of the folktale which marks yet another crucial point for the development of this study. She said, “*gona bjale ba a tla bana bare ba a dinyaka di a pala*” (Recently children have been ordered to ask us to provide these narratives and it is a difficult task). This statement highlighted what Warren et al (1998) regard as the challenge to preservation of indigenous knowledge in general. They argue that the underutilization and untapped knowledge is never accessible if the holder is not accessible. Hence as the elders die, the authenticity of tradition diminishes. Some of it has not been passed on and so it becomes completely lost. Warren et al (1998) further lament that there is a danger that the knowledge will die with the elderly because young people are not inquisitive and eager to learn from the old traditional world. From the above series of questions and answers one can see that the interview is slowly taking shape. Sometimes it is not even necessary to have a structured questionnaire. This however is a skill that depends much on one’s awareness of the cultural ideals and knowledge of various traditional age-specific literacies. This is evident in the way rural people do greetings.

In Pedi culture greetings are long because the host goes into a lengthy inquiry about the guest’s health, then follows with weather and the environment, then people,

politics and history before they start worrying about the main reason of the visit. Likewise, Ramatsetse began her inquisition with general issues pertaining to my village, its landscapes, my people and eventually me. A globally held climatological inkling about Limpopo province is that it has a dry and arid winter season. But according to Ramatsetse in the olden days there used to be winter rains but, as she puts it, because Pedi people are losing touch with their tradition, which was governed by ritualistic ancestral reverencing, the heavens are turning a blind eye on them. This shows that rituals were a spiritual integral part of typical indigenous ways of living but not solely transformative or demonstrative as Schwimmer (1980) in Schechner & Appels (1990) wants us to believe.

In other instances during the fieldtrip, there were incidents which continuously called for more than just research skills, which I found difficult to ignore. The incidents described below may be amusing to the reader but I should confess that they created ethical cul-de-sacs throughout the entire fieldtrip. Hence I ask whether or not it being possible for a researcher to neglect, suspend or do away with his or her past orientations or skills acquired in other fields to exercise selective involvement. In one of the homes I entered to solicit an interview, there was a child with severe diarrhoea who was under the care of its grandmother. If it is a crime, then I am guilty as charged because on several occasions I was faced with overlapping roles being torn between a mere anthropological-literary researcher and a health advisor. In some situations it was very tempting to contravene research ethics in order to acknowledge and accommodate intellectual, social and cultural differences. Such incidents weighed much on the research process because they demanded readjustments in terms of convenient research sites, allocation of time for each activity and choice of informants.

While I was conducting research interviews in one of the villages neighbouring Mantrombi Nature Reserve, I came across a group of local lads who after passing them, started whistling at me. I ignored the action and passed by but one of them detached from the group and followed me summoning my attention. When I finally stopped, in frenzy he asked me who I was and what I was doing in his village to which I explained. I expected the worst from this incident but on the contrary nothing bad happened. I came to know that I was mistaken for a journalist. This young man explained to me that he saw me

recording an elderly woman in one of the homes in the street where he lived and thought I was working for SABC. He apparently went and called his friends to try and find me so that I could take their certificates with me to SABC offices in Aucklandpark and put a good word for them so that they could also become journalists. I came to know from the discussion I had with the whole group that they have passed their Matriculation some few years ago and could not continue with tertiary education due to financial constraints. In other areas people looked upon me with eyes of hope. They thought I was working for the government and that I was involved in some employment placement project or something of that sort. After I fully explained my motives they then started to understand but still asked for advice. To this I ask if it was unethical of me to have provided such information.

Worth noting also are the conventional unwritten nonnegotiable house rules governing coexistence among Pedi people. These are some of the unwritten rules I was brought up with and which are still been inculcated in many homes especially in the rural areas. It was going to be absurd and impossible for me to pretend not to know them. Anyway, it is a common practice among Pedi people to regard anybody that knocks at one's door as a guest. There is no such thing as an uninvited guest in a traditional Pedi context. And it is a matter of fact that the host entertains the guest and not the other way round. It is a held perception that because a person would have travelled from point A to the host's home he or she is always hungry and thirsty on arrival. There is even a proverb that says "moeng tla ka gešo reje ka wena." Loosely translated this proverb means that "guest come to my home so we can eat through you." Everybody yearns for a guest because always when there is a guest the daily menu gets improved. This is the time when children get to eat better food than what they normally eat. This eventful moment sometimes if not always, takes place without consultation with the guest. In no time a tray filled with rare foods, irrespective of the financial conditions of the host, is presented in front of you. Worth noting as well is that it is regarded as very impolite by Pedi people to turn down any offer, especially an offer of food. It is even worse when they hear that one is from faraway places. The indigenous explanation I got for this gesture was partly that of putting the guest at ease and primarily to get to hear more tidings from the guest's side when the meal was still being prepared. In my view it is important to mention or

warn that this is an inevitable situation that awaits any researcher who intends to do research with Pedi people. Should one adopt this new idea of buying refreshments for informants and risk cooperation or aspire to the well quoted phrase, if you are in Rome you do as the Romans do? Whose ethics are more important, the informant's or those pre-designed from outside the research field?

At the initial stages of the interview processes with elderly men, they viewed the presence of a video camera and a tape recorder with great suspicion. I came to know as the interviews progressed that they thought I was some *lefokisi* (a commonly used local term for a private investigator). They mistaken me for a criminal private investigator for which they did not want to be a part as that would put them in a situation where they would appear in a court of law. This chronic paranoia or hysteria about the law could possibly be attributed to the subjection of men to unfounded dehumanisation in the past which was legally harnessed especially in the cities. As a result there seems to be an urge among rural men to protect themselves from the law and public chastisement. To show how deeply ingrained this hysteria is, one of the old men asked, *a le sa nyaka makomonisi?* (Are you people still looking for communists?). Generally, the interviews with elderly men were closed, stifling and hence I found myself getting edgy at times. But there were also interesting characters that provided another angle.

Unlike the elderly men, elderly women were more relaxed and curious without any taint of negative suspicions. It was during the interviews with elderly women that, not just power and gender discourses were invited, but mostly the age factor. With them I felt more like a village child. Although it was winter the sun was sometimes unbearable and a move into a shade was sometimes necessary. In one of the interview sessions, I found one of my to-be informants sitting in the shade of a tree that grew next to the threshold in her yard. I joined her there and after some time during our conversation she, in a very cunning way, ordered me to go and get her water to drink from her house. It is worth noting that in the Pedi customs, children never evade errands or else they will be severely reprimanded or even punished. In that case I had to go and fetch water for the elderly woman because I was viewed like any other child.

Another interesting point worth mentioning relates to the video recording. All the informants who accepted to be recorded did that because they wanted to appear on

national television. The reader may wonder whether I introduced and explained the research aims and objectives to my informants. In the rural areas it was and still is a rare case to own a video camera. And it is only perceived to be the job of a journalist to use a video camera, let alone a female person. There is a need to exercise patience with people in general, rural people in particular. One has to continuously explain things and not just assume that because they did it at the beginning of the interview process they do not need to repeat.

With regard to young people there were no qualms over being tape or video recorded. Participation was voluntary and most of the time very heated and informative discussions came out. For instance I gave a poem called *Lebake*, dagga, to a group of high scholars to read and engaged a discussion thereof. They gave various interpretations to the poem thus hinting at the versatility of oral literature. Regarding the content, if it is true that dagga tampers with a person's sanity, these pupils learned during this discussion that it was possible. Among this group were three boys who were pinpointed by their counterparts as dagga smokers to which they admitted. At the end of the discussion they showed concern for their health and considered discontinuation of dagga smoking. Two of these boys wanted me to come back in order to verify if they are going to live to their promise. What is the use of inducing change but not be able to follow it up?

In general however, the fieldtrip enabled me to capture rich information for the development of my thesis. I discovered that a considerable number of my informants still had strong inclinations to traditional culture. From the older informants I discovered a high degree of orality. The published findings of the research that was conducted by O'Leary et al (1998) and James (1995) were thus founded. All the elderly informants said their clans' praise poems and almost all my elderly informants have no formal education. But due to political and intellectual down-playing of orature as a standard mode of information sharing, elderly people are given less privilege if at all, to share their knowledge. When they do realize a slight chance, they make full use of it. As a result I had a problem ending interviews with them and also in deciding what to capture on tape and what to leave out.

Informants in this category got excited, maybe because of the amount of attention and acknowledgement I gave to their knowledge, and just wanted to talk for hours on

end. They were the appropriate informants for my thesis and this realisation in a way made them feel special and valued. Mohube Ramatsetse for instance recollected all her childhood memories and presented them with utmost eloquence and vibrancy. I got introduced to a dramatic and performative side of this elderly person who looked very passive in the beginning of the conversation. But the major challenge with elderly people is that they despise to be interrupted while talking and hence one had to acquire good and effective listening skills. Ramatsetse wished that I could spend more time with her, worried that if I set up another visit for the future I might come back to find she had passed away.

There was a feeling of discontent expressed by all male and female elderly informants about the future of the present generation, their moral fabric, their reliance on exotic means of survival and most crucial, their lack of interest in traditional and cultural matters. Elderly informants seem to attribute rebellion of the young people to the so-called modernity propagated through media, especially television and school. One elderly woman lamented the way in which sex is made a casual talk where there are even songs, radio and television advertisements about what she called *khondolo*, a mispronunciation of condom. She explained to me that it was unthinkable during her youth days that young people could become sexually active before they go through a rite of passage or get married. At this stage girls are not expected to have any practical knowledge of sex and are exposed to it during the circumcision period. What she found hard to comprehend was the use and effectiveness of formal education if the so-called educated youth are engaged in teenage pregnancy, rape, divorce, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, murder, and crime of varying degrees. This elderly woman wanted me to talk to her grand daughter who she alleged to be going out with a married man. Should I or should I not have involved myself in this matter?

Young people also expressed mixed attitudes towards the expectations of elderly people from them. Some of them perceived elderly people as a hindrance to fun time. Those felt that elderly people are imposing and transferring their outdated lifestyles on them. A young female informant expressed contempt towards a situation in which she was barred from entering into a cemetery yard during a burial service of her relative unless she changed a mini skirt she was wearing to a longer skirt. She retorted, *ba*

kgalabje ba ba diphiri ba reja ka nako, (these old men appointed as funeral-overseers are wasting our time). There was however another contingent who viewed dressing as a portrayal of a person's personality. For them wearing a short skirt to a funeral service is lack of scruples. One such comment was made by a young girl and said, *gonale bannyana ba bangwe ke bo magosha kua ditoropong mo ma gaeng. Ge ba fihla mo gae ba titira gore ba hlalefile go re feta. Ga ba na thlomphe*, (there are some girls here in the village who are prostitutes in the cities. When they are back at home they tend to perceive themselves as cleverer than all of us. They do not have respect). I came to know that this girl was talking about her close cousin and wished that I could come back and try and convince her to at least go back to school.

Young male informants also acknowledged the existence of distasteful behaviour amongst the youth, especially the embarrassment they get from noticing rural girls starting to imitate city lifestyles. They expected girls in the rural areas to be models of good behaviour for city girls because in the cities there is no much social reprimand against moral decadence and there is no call for respect. One young man said that rural young people are lucky because they are not in close association with hardships that arise from drug usage and crime the same way as young people living in the cities. He said that rural young people should consider themselves lucky because they can still live with their families even when they have children and can still get full support.

To a large extent young informants are aware of the importance of a healthy environment for future survival. They are fully conscious of the apathy with regard to schooling amongst themselves, their lack of determination or sense of purpose in life, their careless lifestyles, lack of respect for nature, lack of respect for life and their lack of curiosity about self-improvement. These respondents agree that they lack determination but also that there is no one to turn to when they need help. Even though I was in these villages for a short period, this did not stop the young informants asking me to organise workshops in which I could provide guidance in various avenues. The big question again is where do I draw a line?

The interviews I had with various informants brought up a lot of interesting themes. I also got informed through observation of other by-the-way-side activities. My main informant Mohube Ramatsetse for instance, provided me with another holistic

approach to folklore as opposed to how pre-school educators I observed during the research project for Centre for the Book present it. Where pre-school educators are still using the drill and drive method, Ramatsetse incorporates humour and athleticism in her folklore teachings to her grand children. Interesting to observe was the way of greeting she uses with her great-granddaughters of ages three and five years. While shaking hands with them, the grandchildren were to hop three times, at the same time reciting something that she taught them. She gave each one a name that she calls them by during the greeting. Ramatsetse named the three year old *khukhwanyana* and the five year old *mmadiepetsana*. *Khukhwanyana* is a Pedi term for beetle in. The exchange of greetings between the great-grandmother and the beetle great-granddaughter for instance, is for the beetle to explain its intentions and it went thus;

Mohube: *Khukhunyana o iša kae boloko bjo?* (Beetle where are you taking this cow-dung?)

Khukhwanyana: *gae gae gae.*(home, home, home)

Mohube: *Kganthe o hlalefile?* (Are you this clever?)

Khukhwanyana: *kudu kudu kudu.* (Much much much)

There are two ways in which this form of greeting could be seen as educational. It could heighten curiosity in children to want to see the insect or animal they are being likened to. In that way children get to learn different species of animals and insects. Even more interesting was the explanation that Ramatsetse gave for making the grandchildren to hop during the greeting. She explained that every child, no matter what state of tiredness he or she is in, can jump at least three times or else they are physically unsound. In addition to it being a didactic tool and source of humour, this form of greeting became some kind of a diagnostic instrument. This shows that a researcher of folklore has to be alert about things that happen aside the questionnaire or structured interview questions because rich information might be left unnoticed.

In addition to the challenges on the field, are those pertaining to converting an oral narrative into a lexical equivalent. For instance, certain interjections and onomatopoeias are not globally used, hence it becomes a challenge to represent them in writing. In my view interjections do not only indicate emotional states but they are theatrical and serve as abbreviations, non-uttered sarcasms, emphatic fillers, and have

social and discursive functions. Hence any attempt to translate interjections should look beyond lexical equivalence in order to conceptualise an accurate version in terms of textual recasting. Failure to do so may result in interpretation confusion, which I should confess to having experienced in the rain ritual analysis. Other non-verbal and body movements that informants used to supplement their verbal explanations defy the rules of phonology, phonetics and phonemics. Recreation of indecent language was also a challenge because more as one wants to provide a multilingual rendition of the original text one is at the same time striving to be sensible. I feel that the English rendition of the rain ritual could not provide the similar proverbial or metaphoric density as the Pedi version. Consequently, the language through which the narration was presented is compromised. In my case, where I lacked an English equivalent of a term or an expression, an inevitable situation was to sometimes provide a neutral version of the original material or what could be for others an undertranslation. In a way there is an impingement of the hegemonic culture and language over those of the subaltern. The question, can the subaltern speak becomes appropriate in this instance. This question leads to yet another challenge which a student of narrative research has to face, the notion of authorship or authority. In the context of the ritual study, should I refer to myself as the author, translator, scribe or recorder? Are narrators' information rights protected or do they lose ownership of their information once it gets verbalized? Is there any such thing as individual authorship given the dependence of reality and knowledge on communal experiences? Is my being a Pedi speaker automatically making me the mouthpiece of the informants?

In my view I was in some contexts an insider and in others an outsider. My insiderness stemmed from an adoption and acceptance of the Pedi identity. As a university-based researcher however, I embodied profound inequalities and a covert form of intellectual dominance. This put me in a relatively privileged position outside the typical Pedi culture. Again in the context of the interview processes my being socially classified under the culturally inexperienced young put me "outside" the privileged position of the knowledgeable elderly.

Thus I conclude by saying that oral narratives deserve to be closely studied, not only because they structure the meaning through which a culture lives but also

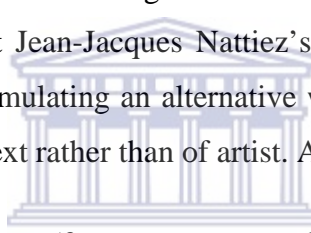
acknowledging the inherent complexities pertaining to the relation between language and meaning, between words, signs and symbols and what they refer to in a particular context.



CHAPTER 4 ANALYSING THE TEXTUALITY OF *MPHOKO*

In modern society there are various ways in which information can be stored. Information can be written down and stored in books and journals and recorded in audio and video digital media. This is potentially a privilege for the large body of undocumented though valuable indigenous knowledge which can help to ensure its circulation and accessibility. In the case of *Mphoko* my recordings and transcription have enabled the textual interpretation that follows.

Textuality here will take into cognisance the notion expressed by Sheridan (2005: 27) that "...texts are more than just words on a page, but are formed in the interactions among reader, author, and language." Another perspective from which to engage textuality is in terms of cultural exchange, as Stern (2004: 176) put it, "the text, as we know, is not only a conveyor of knowledge but also a medium of cultural exchange." Alant (2002: 63) observed that Jean-Jacques Nattiez's (1990) model of the "symbolic phenomenon" is relevant in formulating an alternative way of describing the prestige of oral creativity as being that of text rather than of artist. Alant (2004: 63) explains,


The symbolic phenomenon (for our purposes, the text) is conceptualized as having three "dimensions", namely the *poietic* (relating to a process of creation that may be described or reconstituted), the *esthesis* (relating to the construction of meaning on the part of a receiver) and finally the *trace* or "neutral level" (relating to the physical and material embodiment of the symbolic form).

This means, Alant (2004) explains, that oral text combines the creative process and the object of creation into a distinct component together with the appreciation of the oral performance by the audience. The discussion of the textuality of *mphoko*, therefore, is geared at merging these three "dimensions".

For an oral text to be regarded as literature depends largely on the response of its reader or the audience on the basis of their expectation of the text (Alant, 2002). Subsequently, in this chapter it is shown how *Mphoko* succeeds as a communication medium in two ways. Firstly, it does that by looking at what prompted feedback from Maphotla people either as audiences or participants in *Mphoko* procedures. Secondly, *Mphoko* succeeds as a communication channel by looking at how one can interact with it

as text. In that regard, elements such as figures of speech, cultural codes and cultural symbols will be considered. Subsequently, I discuss the etymology of particular terms in order to contextualise their meaning within the ritual performance. The third aspect of my approach is more sociolinguistic in focus. In this part I extract concepts and situations in the narrative that indicate interlanguage or intercultural discourse. I look at borrowed terms and cultures to show the influence that foreign culture, language in particular, may have on indigenous ones. My discussion will in addition to the analysis of the *Mphoko* narrative, consider the interview with Ramatsetse in general. Here I do two things, acknowledge *Mphoko* (the text) as an “artefact or material object on the one hand and as an interpreted aesthetic object on the other” (Du Plooy, 2002 269). Firstly I look at the deduction of meaning as residing within specific words or phrases and secondly acknowledge the social and historical relevance of the text.

It may be argued that rituals are performances and thus contain a textual element. Herbert Blau in Schechner & Appels (1995: 258) writes, “a performance seems written even if there is no text, for the writing seems imbedded in the conservatism of the instincts and the linguistic operations of the unconscious.” This implies that a performance is generated in the mind and therefore does not always rely on a written script to be presented. In that regard I argue that by virtue of being a ritual, *Mphoko* has an intangible textual element to it. Although he is concerned in this instance with talking about the interpretation of the Bible, Du Plooy’s (2002: 275) contention that “texts which are concerned with the mysteries behind the surfaces of reality, need to be read with a keen eye for specifically the gap between signifier and signified, because this is where, according to Eric Gould (1981), the numinous resides,” is relevant for the analysis of *Mphoko*. In this regard let us look at how proverbial and metaphoric language or expressions are utilised in Ramatsetse’s encounter, what Du Plooy (2002: 269) describes as “the subtle interactions between the semantic, syntactic, phonic and rhythmic patterns and metaphoric allusions.”

Ramatsetse’s account is loaded with metaphors. For example, when describing what people’s roles were in their community at the time when the ritual was practiced, she mentioned that their main important task was *go aga motse*. *Motse* has a variety of meanings. It is used to refer to a home and also to refer to the entire society or

neighbourhood. To *aga* is to build or construct. Loosely translated *go aga motse* is to construct or to build a home or neighbourhood. But this expression has a proverbial connotation. According to Rakoma (1975: 5) *go aga motse ka batho* (to build a neighbourhood with people) for instance means *go dula ga mmogo ka kwano* (to live together in harmony). This expression conveys the suggestion that social harmony was of prime importance during Ramatsetse's youth. The notion of *go aga motse* however, has a gender element to it. Where the metaphor pertains to the emphasis on law and order, building or constructing a nation or society becomes a masculine activity. But where it is pertaining to grooming behaviour it becomes a feminine activity. The mother is by virtue of being a child bearer a primary caregiver and commended when children are well behaved and criticised when they are not. In the context of the ritual and the society of Maphotla in general, the key participants, *mašoboro* and *mathumaša*, had to be on their best behaviour, not only for the sake of the performance but also to portray the calibre of mothering they receive in their abodes. The perpetuation of social harmony in this particular context, therefore, indicates shared responsibility for both men and women. Nowadays, the attainment of social harmony seems to take precedence in dealing with environmental issues. Its opposite, social conflict, becomes a fundamental ingredient of major environmental problems. Within the narrative there are a number of activities that indicate the inculcation of social harmony or integration.

As explained, *Mphoko* was an old Pedi custom that was performed to ask for rain from the ancestors, which started to die out in the late 1980s. The leading performers, virgin boys and girls locally called *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* respectively, would be guided by the older men and women who have expertise in performing the cleansing ceremony which would have proceeded by a hunt for filth and a hunt for a sacrificial animal respectively. At the end of the entire hunt process the filth would be ceremoniously burned. In line 1 of the Sepedi version of the rain ritual narrative, Ramatsetse explains that *Mphoko* is also referred to as *lesolo la pula* (the rain hunt). There are, however, other hunts implicated that were integral to *lesolo la pula*. For instance she mentions the hunt for refuse or litter and that for the sacrificial animals. In SePedi this activity is called *go tšwa lesolo*. According to Kriel (1985) *tšwa* literary means to go out, to appear from hiding or to come to the open. *Lesolo* literary means a

hunt. Loosely translated, *go tšwa lesolo* is to go out on a hunt. The proverbial meaning of *go tšwa lesolo* however, is according to Rakoma (1975: 98) *go dira modiro ka go o dika le le batho ba bantšhi* (to gang together towards performing a task as a large group of people). This expression suits its context since Ramatsetse explained that during the hunt for refuse the entire village had to participate. The hunt for a sacrificial animal too involved a contingent of men. *Go tšwa lesolo* in this context therefore emphasises social harmony on one hand and public participation on the other. The notion of ganging up or working together superficially means to have many hands in order to get the task done quickly. On a deeper level it implies shared needs, sentiments, responsibility and cooperation towards a successful execution of a task at hand. In the context of the society of Maphotla, the possibility of drought, which is counteracted by the ritual for rain, becomes a shared concern. This way drought and its resultant elements receive public concern and *lesolo la pula* becomes a local means and mode of communicating and solving them. This element is often lacking in contemporary environmental projects that aspire to western methods. Here individuals run workshops. That is, an individualistic approach is taken. In the context of *Mphoko*, however, it is unthinkable for an individual to conduct the hunting process. Instead, the ritual takes a communal and holistic approach in its proceedings.

Another element that seems to encourage social harmony through *Mphoko* appears in line 50. Ramatsetse explains that absenteeism without a good reason from the ritual proceedings was tantamount to treason, *go oba molato*. Those who failed to attend were hence regarded as offenders or law-breakers and were reported to the chief. From Kriel (1985) we learn that *go oba* literally means to pull closer, to bend or to commit and that *molato* means a crime. A loose translation of *go oba molato* is thus to commit a crime. Figuratively *go oba molato* is according to Rakoma (1975: 63), *go dira phošo gomme wa ba wa otlwa ka baka la yona*, to commit a crime and subsequently receive punishment for it. It could be deduced that public participation and agency in this ritual was a serious matter, and adherence to its guiding rules was highly enforced. By making this ritual and participation in it compulsory, there was assurance that every member of the community was a watchdog for any interference with the immediate environment.

Another element worth considering is the subtle “metaphoric allusion” of particular items in relation to *Mphoko*. Ramatsetse lists a number of items which would have been gathered during *lesolo la dibeela*, the filth or refuse hunt. In line 56 she mentions *thari e hunnwe lehuto*, a knotted baby carrier. *Hunnwe* is the past tense for *huna* which, according to Kriel (1985), means to tie or to knot. It is mostly used in relation to a *lehuto*, a knot. Hence *go huna lehuto* literally means to knot a knot. Symbolically and figuratively, *go huna lehotu* means *go thatafatša selo ka boomo gore batho ba se se kgone*, to deliberately complicate a matter or thing so that it becomes difficult for other people to deal with (Rakoma, 1975: 37). According to Ramatsetse, because it was widely believed that held *dibeela* were strewn around by ancestors, they were seen as symbolic communications or warning signs and hence ominous of major catastrophes. The filth therefore is suggestive of what Eric Gould (1981) cited by Du Plooy (2002) calls the “numinous.” Thus, Ramatsetse explained that this knotted baby carrier symbolised the probability of infant mortality. The response that the community gave to this premonition rested on their expectation of the possible occurrences embedded in the symbolisms of this item. Hence according to Ramatsetse there was a general consensus that giving birth in that particular year when such a premonition was made was generally seen as risky, as there was a probability that newborn babies would immediately die. On a more positive light this supposition could serve to tone down population growth or as a contraceptive or birth control measure if you like. At the same time as the immediate environment was rid of physical pollution, there were also attempts at minimising environmental pressures, overpopulation in particular, which would entail an increased demand for natural resources.

The second aspect of looking at the textuality of the rain ritual is inspired by a citation of Geertz by Turner in Schechner & Appels (1995: 15-16),

textual analysis attends to how the inscription of the action is brought about, what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events; history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behaviour, implies for the sociological interpretation. To see social institutions, social customs, social changes as in some sense readable is to alter our whole sense of what such interpretation is towards modes of thought rather more familiar to the translator,

the exegete, or the iconographer than to the test giver, the factor analyst, or the pollster.

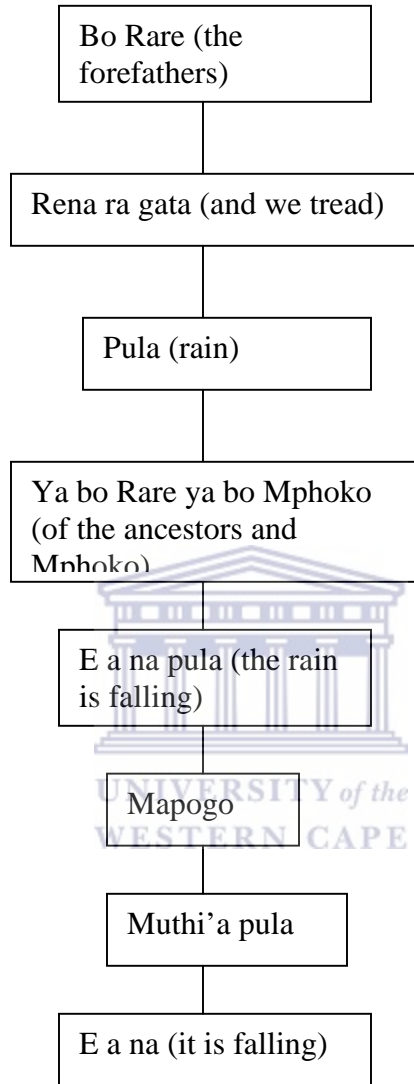
My understanding of the above quotation is that there is text even for an unwritten performance such as *Mphoko*. The quotation urges that thought processes behind the unfamiliar social customs deserve to be treated like readable material as understood in their proper social contexts. That said, I would like to consider some of the themes mentioned in the above quotation in relation to the rain ritual, especially bringing about of the inscription of the action and formation of the flow of events by fixation of meaning.

4.1. How the inscription of the action is brought about

Alant (2002: 65) states that, “it has moreover become increasingly common (under the influence, perhaps, of contemporary theories of intertextuality) to see the oral tradition as, rather than a long chain of interlocking conversations between members of the group something inherently multifaceted, multidirectional rather than simply linear.” It is therefore worth noting that not only was Ramatsetse’s account a narrative but also a multimodal presentation or performance that combines telling and song. Ramatsetse presented what she called *koša ya pula*, the rain song. Within this song is a succinct inscription of the manner in which the action is brought about and it goes thus:

<i>Pul’a bo rare e ka na</i>	The rain of our forefathers will fall
<i>Ra tsoga re gata monola</i>	And we wake up to trample the moisture
<i>E a na iye! Pula wee!</i>	It is falling truly! The rain yes!
<i>Ya bo rare ya bo Mphoko</i>	The one of our forefathers the one of <i>Mphoko</i>
<i>Aye! Pula wee!</i>	Aye! Rain yes!
<i>Ya boMapogo’a dithaga</i>	The one of <i>Mapogo</i> of the weaverbirds
<i>Kgoši se buša ka muthi’a pula</i>	The king that rules with the rain medicine
<i>E a na iye!</i>	It is falling truly!

This song provides a view of the historiography of the rain ritual as a performance and as text. Below I have designed a diagrammatical representation of the ritual as it is outlined in the lyrics.



Let us first look at how the lyrics provide the sequence of the actions or events. The sequence of the lines of the song in a sense provides the order of episodes of the ritual according to local importance of its main objectives. When looking at the above diagram, the forefathers and the falling rain are placed at distal points of the continuum. The forefathers are at the top implying that they are seen as having powers over rainfall, which comes at the bottom of the diagram. In between is who else is involved and what is to happen in order to make sure that the two distal phenomena are properly served.

A bottom-up interpretation of the diagram could be that *pula e a na*, the rain is falling, because *muthi* 'a *pula*, the rain medicine, from Mapogo has been invoked. Ramatsetse explains that Mapogo was the main chief of the Matebele people who assimilated the people of Maphotla after they were forcefully removed from their original abode. As the chief he is an overseer of his community. In addition to that attribute, as Ramatsetse puts it, the Matebele chieftaincy was ritualistically idealised in those days. Worth noting is that in the song chief Mapogo is described as Mapogo of the weaverbirds. This is a totemic description. That means he belongs to the group that adopted the weaverbird as their totem. The weaverbird symbolises among others wit, grandeur and immaculacy. According to Ramatsetse it is because of these attributes that the Mapogo clan adopted the weaverbird as their totem. By virtue of the attributes of the totem, chief Mapogo as the epitome of society had to mimic the weaverbird in character and in execution of the proceedings in order to make the ritualistic idealisation of his kraal not out of place. His inclusion in the rain song acknowledges his role in the supernatural order of things.

The next aspect of the song lyrics, is the repetition of 'the rain is falling.' This becomes an emphasis and reassurance of what is reflected in the following lines. The indication is that the rain is falling because *Mphoko* of the forefathers has been performed. Here the invitation of the forefathers has a number of connotations. It could serve to locate *Mphoko* in time and space to show that it is a long-practised custom or that the anger of the forefathers that is manifested in drought can only be appeased through the performance of *Mphoko*. In the next line the song sings that people are trampling on the morning moisture because our forefathers are appeased, and have given us rainfall. According to Ramatsetse, this was the rain song, meaning that whenever one was asked to sing the rain song it would be this one that was sung. It could therefore be said that the lyrics of the rain song were fixed, and hence reproducible. In that regard these lyrics provide in order of importance, the procedures to be followed to ensure a successful rain ritual. *Muthi* is a Nguni term for traditional medicine, and not a Pedi term. The inclusion of this term has textual, social as well as historical implications. Textually, there is communication between two languages, indicating fluidity of culture or cultural infusion. During the interview with Ramatsetse she explained that in the past the

Maphotla refugees were Pedi people but later on Mapogo urged the Ndebele people to relocate on their side in order to tone down the tribal divides. Historically or politically, the order of the living arrangements designed by the apartheid government was that of cultural seclusion. The harmonisation of this term into the song could indicate the convergence of two previously separated cultures that are starting to share the same space.

From the lyrics and the supplementary information one can deduce an emphasis on cooperation, power and control. Chief Mapogo becomes a figure of authority. His invitation into the song elevates him to a position above the law but below the ancestors. This invitation could be seen as a reminder of punishment if the ritual is flawed or if there is no adherence to the traditional laws. This factor of potential punishment by the chief appears on various occasions in Ramatsetse's account especially in relation to young people. In the context of the Maphotla people the inherent fixed identity of a chief both unconsciously and consciously enforced laws, which were instrumental in ensuring pursuance of *Mphoko*, which subsequently entailed proper care of the immediate environment and any living organism living in it. However, the in-depth analysis of the rain song unravels themes such as continuity, adherence, the underlying expectations, the sequence of activities for the actual performance/and desired outcomes. Because it adheres to one sequence of the lyrics, meaning one cannot decide to reorder the lyrics, this song seems to foster meticulousness, consistency with regard to particular procedures and durability of the ritual. This shows that there is more to the textuality than the application of the oral-formulaic theory. Hence the next section looks at how through fixed meanings the flow of events is indicated.

4.2. The formation of flow of events through fixed meaning

The focus of events in the ritual is aided by the symbolic factor, which seems to be instrumental in the building up of the actual activity. I suggest that in order to derive local relevance and sociological interpretation of the flow of events in folklore, the knowledge and ability to interpret symbols as they are used in a particular context is necessary. This means that the better the understanding of cultural symbolism expressed in a folkloric piece the better the interpretation. As Du Plooy (2002: 275) warns, "if you

explain or change a metaphor, you actually reduce its original scope. You are most probably taking only... one of the many associations and meanings that the metaphor conjures up and canonise that one as the only or as the ultimate meaning.” In *Mphoko* the use of symbolism involves a fixed ranking of things. This ranking should be clearly reflected in order to provide an appropriate understanding of how events unfold in folklore, and in this rain ritual in particular.

De Saussure theorizes that the linguistic *sign* (a key word) the union of a concept and a sound image. He therefore concludes that meanings can (and do) vary widely, but only those meanings that are agreed upon and sanctioned within a particular language will appear to name reality. This section of the study of the rain ritual narrative looks not only at the textuality, or how it is structured by narrative conventions as a story-telling, but also considers the interconnectedness of intertextual signifying networks. It is therefore imperative to establish the cultural significance and importance of particular metaphoric signs and symbols as they apply to the rain ritual, especially in relation to sacredness as a metaphor for conservation and preservation.

The idea of sacredness, in the context of *Mphoko* at least, serves as a metaphor of conservation and preservation. In the context of the rain ritual terms such as *Mphoko*, *Mašoboro*, *Mathumaša*, *mogopo*, *dibeela*, *thari*, *mollo*, *lesolo*, Bible, and *pula* seem to have fixed symbolic connotations. Descriptions of these concepts will help to illustrate this interpretation.

Mphoko is derived from the verb *foka*. According to *The New English-Northern Sotho Dictionary*, to *foka* is to sprinkle medicine in order to drive away disease, or as a preventative against disease (as a medicine man). *Mphoko* as a rain ritual hence involves the process of making the medicine by local professionals and the process of spraying or sprinkling the medicine, which is always undertaken by *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* under the watchful eye of the well-informed elders. The fixed supernatural meaning of *foka* is aided in the choice of participants of the ritual procedure of *Mphoko*. Equally influential in the choice of who is to *foka* were the fixed images and characteristics of who qualified as *mathumaša* and *mašoboro*, in other words, the physical embodiment of the symbolic form.

Mašoboro is a plural form for *lešoboro*. This term is used to refer to a male offspring that has not been taken through the process of circumcision. According to Ramatsetse this is a person who has been closely observed and his behaviour intensely monitored for flaws by the village elders. According to socially set standards he is considered not yet ready for taking serious responsibilities. Those responsibilities included amongst others, getting married and starting or maintaining a family. Ramatsetse explained that under traditional professionals' meticulous tutelage during the process of circumcision, this person develops skills that will empower him to be able to fend for his family. The minimum age at which one would go through the circumcision process back then was eighteen years but became extended in an instance where siblings of the same sex were born immediately after another. For instance, in the case where an eighteen year old is succeeded by a sixteen year old, no matter how well built the sixteen year old was, he would not go before or at the same time as the elder sibling. And because circumcision was done after a period of five years the sixteen years old would then be circumcised when he was twenty-one years old. Hence Ramatsetse added that in previous years, by the time of coming of age a *lešoboro* was to go and work in the farms to be able to afford a blanket to wear when he returns from circumcision. This applied to both male and female siblings. She explained that in the olden days circumcisions for males and females used to be a two years process. For males the first year was called *bodika* and the second year was called *bogwera*. In both accounts male initiates were educated in different avenues other than the widely held stereotype of equating circumcision with mere severing of the participants' foreskins. The same applied to *mathumaša*.

Mathumaša is a plural term for *lethumaša*. This is a female child who has not yet undergone circumcision. A conventional traditional physical attribute that Ramatsetse said was employed to determine who qualified as a *lethumaša* was breasts, their shapes and sizes. She explained that *mathumaša* had breasts that could fill a hand and not small buds. Shapes and sizes of breasts seem to have been a local tool to measure development of female children. This physical attribute was by social definition an indication of whether or not a female person had reached a stage in which she could handle responsibilities and pressures defining a family. Breasts seem in this instance to be a

metaphor of maturity. Seemingly virginity was a key factor towards maintaining physical and social attributes that characterized *mathumaša* and *mašoboro*. For *mathumaša* breast posture was a determinant of whether one had lost or was still maintaining their virginity. Hence, as Ramatsetse put it, in the old Pedi tradition, it was not necessary for *mathumaša* to cover their breasts so that they automatically made their virginity markers available for public scrutiny. Subsequently the size of one's breasts was a natural method of age grade classification.

The possession by *mathumaša* of hand-filling erect breasts instead was according to Ramatsetse an indication of sexual inactivity that presupposed them to be naïve and irresponsible. This naiveté is determined by having not come of age according to Pedi standards. Typically *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* are socially associated with irresponsibility, and a state of being uninformed, childish, artless, and uncorrupted. They could thus symbolize amongst others moral rectitude, innocence, purity, simplicity, ingenuousness and youth. Seemingly, *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* thus became the cultural codes to signify untainted morals and behaviour. As a result they were perceived as sacred and hence important in this ritual. Making *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* the leaders of the ritual could be seen as a symbolic reward for moral fabric, good behaviour, mutual respect and communal responsibility. These elements in my view are essential if social catastrophes such as teenage pregnancies and spread of formidable sexually transmitted diseases are to be combated in Nebo region in particular.

As I have discussed above, *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* were supposed to refrain from any laxity including sexual activity until they had undergone circumcision. The rules of the ritual further emphasized this and acknowledged their adherence by making *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* chief performers in the ritual. This move could be seen as a symbolic reward for preservation of their virginity, amongst the other virtues that are core determinants of good behaviour. In this way, among others teenage pregnancies and their resultant complications, as well as general moral decadence among young people, were prevented at different levels of a person's development. I argue that the practice of *Mphoko* was a lifelong learning process that incorporated the family, the community and involved religious factors in perpetuating environmental education and mutual responsibility towards the immediate environment.

Some contemporary critics are now connecting interference with this traditional promotion of moral substance to a myriad of ills. Those that are still attached to some traditional conventions oftentimes wag a finger at the church and formal education. For example, Debora James (1992: 21) discovered that amongst the Pedi people of GaNchabeleng,

For some people school and literacy appear as jointly responsible for widening the generation gap between themselves and their children, and brings with them a range of related ills. According to such a view, it is because girls no longer mix with other girls but rather form friendships with boys in class that girls began to fall pregnant at a younger age. This has caused the age at which children are initiated to decrease (from mid adolescence to the age of six and eight years).

This perception provides as a justification for the argument made in this thesis that environmental education in the rural areas is an activity that demands a holistic approach that takes the historical, social, cultural, and intellectual as well as material differences of the target communities into serious account. The following section looks specifically at the cultural materials that embody symbolic form.

Mogopo is one cultural material of symbolical importance in the context of *Mphoko*. According to Kriel (1985) *mogopo* is a SePedi equivalent term for a wooden salver. During the fieldtrip I discovered that the wood types from which salvers were carved and the sizes of salvers, determined both their culinary and symbolic functions. According to Ramatsetse some were used generally in the home for serving purposes. Some were used only during special events such as rituals, circumcisions and wedding ceremonies. The size or diameter determined what was to be dished into a *mogopo*. This is evidence of a fixed ranking of utensils through fixed values being given to foodstuffs. For example, Ramatsetse explained that there was a specific *mogopo* for meat and it would always be smaller than the one for the porridge. However, during partaking of meals, food was portioned from the bigger *mogopo* into ones small enough for one serving. In that regard, *mogopo* symbolizes abundance, sharing, order, material wealth, and coherence due to the fact of being reasonably big. And to fill it up with supplies, it was implied that there was enough of that particular foodstuff to be shared by a number of people. *Mogopo* therefore symbolises order in that it is one utensil that seems to be

always in a calculated transit. In line 28 we are told that *banna ba sola `pitša tša bona tša dinama*, men would dish-out their meat from pots, and women dish-out porridge inside *megopo*, wooden salvers, and take them to the men. Men take *megopo* specially made for portioning meat to women and children. There seems to be a perpetual standardised manner for the putting in and taking out of things from a mogopo as it gets passed through various hands. This emphasises cohesion from the mere fact of having just one big mogopo for porridge from which a number of people would share. Service of meals in this context does not leave room for exclusion or lateness. During the *Mphoko*, people who might have been seeing each other from a distance would at this instance partake of the same meal.

The idea of fixed values being bestowed on foodstuffs is evident in the ritual proceedings. For instance in lines 17 Ramatsetse accounts that *Bakgalabje ba. Ba botoga ba bolaile diphoofole*. These men. They bring over kills of game. Also in lines 24 to 25 we are told that *banna ba bolaile dikgaka, dikgwale, diphuti, se seng le se seng sa lešoka, ba apeile*, men would have hunted and killed guinea fowls, partridges, duikers, anything that lives in the wild. In line 26 we are told that *rena re tla le maušwa ka megopo*, we would bring porridge in wooden salvers and in line 27 we learn that *go tloga fao re išetša bakgalabje*, thereafter we would take porridge to the men. 'We' here refers to the women. This is also evidence of division of roles, which are in turn determined by fixed social perceptions about what women and men are each capable of. The fixed linking of toughness and bravery with men automatically makes them the proper candidate for hunting. Women are by social interpretations seen as timid and sentimental and hence are given the easier task of preparing and providing porridge. Women as givers of life provide for the energy-giving foodstuff to the famished lot and men provide for the prestigious condiment, meat. Even the serving process of these foodstuffs follows the same format. Women take portions of porridge for both the men and themselves to the place where men would have been preparing the meat. The men would then portion the meat for the women and themselves. Going back to the issue of size, the produce of women, porridge, goes into the bigger salver. And the men's produce, meat, is put into a smaller salver and is to be served in an orderly manner in small amounts due to its rarity to supplement the porridge. However, the array of meat types implies that there were

enough wild animals that such a variety could be available for hunting. The fixed meaning of hunting in relation to *Mphoko* however, could be seen to a large extent to have served as a means to prevent wanton killing of wild animals. This was possible through both the stringent general rules of governance set by the chief, and the linkage of hunting to the sacred procedures central to the rain hunt. Knowledge of wild animals was also necessary so that people did not kill what is not for human consumption. And because this ritual was done quite rarely, killing of animals associated with this ritual was a once-off activity and an example of a fairly sustainable relation to the wild.

During the interview Ramatsetse lamented that wild animals used to be so many that antelopes used to graze closer to their compounds. According to her account there were guinea fowls, duikers, kudus, to mention only a few. Unlike modern children who only see pictures of wild animals either in books or on television, she says that children back then had firsthand knowledge of different types of wild animals and their behaviours. On another level, as *mašoboro* are groomed to be responsible future husbands and fathers, their inclusion in the preparations of the ritual that included hunting was ecologically informative and educative for them. As I have discussed above, a *lesolo la dibeela*, the filth hunt, was a ritualistic environmental cleansing process. Both hunting activities, the hunt for animals and that for filth, were treated with utmost symbolism undergirded by sacredness to get maximum attention and participation of members of the society.

The final performance of the ritual took place under a *mosehla* tree. Line 2 says *ba kgethile mosehla*, they have chosen an acacia tree. The significance of this tree becomes evident as we look at its physical characteristics and its symbolism. According to De Vries (1974) the branches of an acacia tree are arranged in such a way that it does not dry out under sunny conditions. This tree is also described as a light wood but waterproofed. It is biblically associated with the manna and also the making of flood-surviving arks. A characteristic that is even of relevance to the adoption of this tree in the rain ritual is that, as De Vries (1974:2) puts it, “it is remarkable for its reproductive powers and divine powers to repel evil.” Ramatsetse on the other hand explained that *mosehla* is medicinally used to, for example, *go hlatswa madi*, to clean the blood, and in fertility matters. The symbolism of *mosehla* automatically makes it a perfect choice

especially when linking it to the symbolism of rain, fertility and purification. Ramatsetse explained that the almost fetish-like value that was given to this tree resulted in certain myths and taboos being set around its destruction or cutting. The general response arising from the expectation of the potent nature of *mosehla* served to preserve and conserve this species in time and space.

The New English-Northern Sotho Dictionary defines *bodiba* as an abyss or a pool of water or deep hole in a river. According to De Vries (1974: 2), an abyss symbolizes

the land of the dead, the underworld, connected with the Great Mother or earth-god, the dark world, hell in the bowels of the earth, abode of the departed spirits, anything immeasurable, mystery, inferiority, sorrow, chaos in which the universe was formed,” or/and “the abode of the devouring beast.

In lines 19 and 20 Ramatsetse explains that *le rwala ka dikgamelo, magapana lena mathumasa a le mašoboro*; the *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* would carry calabashes and pails containing *Mphoko*. After the sprinkling process they would, as outlined in line 9 *kopana dibeng jwa gore ge re fihla moo re tšholla Mphoko re re pula*; meet at a designated abyss where the remaining *Mphoko* would be poured into it with an accompanying shout of rain. She described this *bodiba* as being very big and fearsome such that nobody could go anywhere near it alone. Seemingly the symbolic association of *bodiba* with the spirits, the devouring beast and the earth-god connotations, protected it from things such as pollution and harvestation of its contents. As with *mosehla*, certain taboos were set around *bodiba*. The same way as the fields were purified, so was the *bodiba*. The inclusion of this resource in the ritual seemed to have served to monitor its use and to keep it untainted.

Sacredness of *Mphoko* could be better understood by engaging the institution of totemism and how it becomes a complementary element to realise the desired outcomes. It is said that followers of this culture believe that the totem possesses half of their souls (Ollivier, 1994). A totem is defined as “a class of material objects which native Africans regarded with a superstitious respect” (Ollivier, 1994: 122). The adherence to totemic practice still prevails even in the contemporary traditional societies, and its perpetuation is evident in the still acknowledged clan totem animals. From the rain song we have

already established that chief *Mapogo* identifies with weaverbird. Those identifying themselves with a particular animal as their totem develop sentimental connections with the animal and refer to each other as that animal. In some sense people symbolically get transformed into that particular animal or bird or thing. For instance those who identify with a crocodile will refer to each other as such. The close relationship that indigenous people in the Nebo region have with their environments is evident in giving their children names of animals, natural occurrences or environmental behaviours. Identification with a totem could therefore partly be seen as a symbolic method of unification and partly but most importantly as a method of nature conservation and preservation. Although this is contestable Ollivier (1994: 122) argues, “totems were distinguished from fetishes in that a fetish was an isolated, individual thing, while a totem was never an individual thing, but always a whole class of things.” Other than viewing it as worshipping of plants and animals, totemism should be seen as a traditionally defined and locally applicable effective method of social coherence and friendship relations because people who were classified under one clan saw themselves as being “related like animals of the same species” (Ollivier, 1994: 123). Totemism in this regard could be seen as a metaphor for preservation and conservation of animal and plant species and also as a vehicle for social harmony.

If rituals such as the rain ritual are spiritual and sacred performances (Shechner & Appels, 1990), items selected in relation to their execution could therefore be seen likewise. For instance, Ramatsetse explained that the appropriate animal to be hunted would be revealed in clairvoyance prior to the actual hunt by the head consultant in issues of *Mphoko* who could either be a traditional healer or a socially acclaimed professional rainmaker. She further explained that in addition to this clairvoyance, wild animals were given symbolical seniority by the society as compared to domesticated ones. As a matter of fact Ollivier (1994: 81) asserts, “the killing of certain animals was strictly forbidden due to taboos which entered their mythical history somewhere along the way.” As to the relationship between man and animal, Ollivier (1994) confirms that there is, for instance, a mutual benefit of the connection between a person and his totem. Therefore, “if his totem were an animal, he would not kill it; if it were a plant or a tree, he would not cut it down or gather any of its fruit” (Ollivier, 1994: 122). The religious processes, as Turner

contends, “emphasize ethical problems, hidden malice operating through witchcraft, or ancestral wrath against breaches or taboo or the impiety of the living towards the dead,” (Schechner & Appels, 1995: 8). This way the supposed potent powers of the sacrificed animals were seen as a protection to the man and his immediate environment. In the case of *Mphoko* according to Ramatsetse, in line 18 and 20, *mala a tšona a nokelwa ka moeteng... ke ona le ileng go foka ka ona naga ye*; the internal organs of the animal killed during the hunt were mixed together with other ingredients and put in a clay pot to make the medicine that was used to sprinkle the fields.

Another theme that is embedded in the textuality of *Mphoko* is the interplay between the family, the occupational and the religious factors. These factors seem operationally inseparable and hence *Mphoko* was valuable as a lifelong environmental learning process. We have seen how the family weaves moral virtue into the potential chief performers, *mašoboro* and *mathumaša*. We have also seen how older participants engage their different social roles thus incorporating their professional expertise in the ritual proceedings. Hence during the preparations of the ritual the young participants receive intensive tutelage from the older participants. The religious factor in indigenous education is evident on one hand where sacredness becomes a lynchpin in *Mphoko* through the unravelling of the physical and material embodiment of the symbolic form. On the other hand, in line 5-6 Ramatsetse explains that *Mokibelo re a tloga re ya lesolong, Sontaga bannyana ba ya mphokong* (on Saturday is set for the hunt, on Sunday girls carry out *Mphoko*). Sunday is by the guiding rules and laws of Christianity dedicated to worshipping. It is the day for going to church and observing the teachings of the Christianity dogma. Could it be by coincidence that the main cleansing process also takes place on a Sunday? The reason that I am drawing parallels with Christianity is simply because Ramatsetse criticised the inclusion of Bibles in contemporary attempts at revisiting *Mphoko*. She asserts in line 82 that *diPebele di nee mmereko wa tšona. E sego wa mo puleng*, Bibles have their own function. They are not relevant in issues of the rain. Hence I posit that the Bible is a symbol of Christianity, a metaphor of exotic culture, which by implication automatically deprives the rain ritual of its contextual sanctity.

The predication of the ritual on sacredness or the religious factor thus serves to reduce impertinence towards it. I believe that the attachment of sacredness to the ritual

also builds good ground for long-term individual and inter-group civility, moral integrity, a sense of community and communal environmental diplomacy. *Mathumaša* and *mašoboro* are, by virtue of being virgins, sacred persons through whom a symbolic mystical dialogue between the ancestors and the living is carried out.

From Ramatsetse's dismissal of the inclusion of Bibles in ritual matters, we can deduce that in the community such as hers calling for indigenous practices in combating contemporary environmental problems is always met with disappointments if this involves the imposition of exotic models. Further, this narration aids in identifying certain elements that could be seen as yardsticks to determine the extent to which exotic cultures produced catastrophic results to indigenous lifestyle in time and space.

Ramatsetse mentioned that participation in the rain ritual was compulsory. In line 47 she explains that *ba bang ge ba sa ile meberekon*, those who had gone to their places of working, were exempted. It could hence be argued that industrialisation aided in the extinction of the performance of *Mphoko*. Not only was it disruptive to normal running of the ritual performance, but it also tainted the medium through which this culture was conveyed, namely the language. The very concept *mmerekong* she uses in line 47 is derived from *bereka* which is a SePedi adaptation of the Afrikaans word for work, 'werk' or *om te werk*. In line 21 Ramatsetse says *nnete ge le sepela mo šokeng*. 'Nnete' is yet another SePedi adaptation of the Afrikaans term for just: 'net'. In line 64 Ramatsetse explains that *go be go nale matopan'a beng a le mo mara e se bakgalabjekgalabje*; there were a handful of them here but they were not that elderly. 'Mara' is a SePedi adaptation of the Afrikaans term for but, 'maar'. In line 26 Ramatsetse says *Mmamotseko e be ele foromane ya rena*, Mmamotseko was our foreman. 'Foromane' is a SePedi adaptation of either the English term foreman or the Afrikaans *voorman*.

The above discussion has discussed the textuality of *Mphoko*. We have seen how sacredness becomes a metaphor for nature conservation, preservation and environmental protection. In reading the ritual as text one deduces that there are multiple authors of this narrative. As Ong (1982: 45) argues,

for oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known.... Writing

separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for ‘objectivity’, in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing.

In this regard I strongly challenge that the aim of folklore collection and analysis should be geared to unravel the forces, which are at play in producing communal authorship. This is crucial because as Alant (2002: 60) realised, “oral texts are generally only differentiated within a *functionalist* perspective, with comparatively little attention given to questions of status or prestige.” He explains that “it is precisely because researchers have been unable to conceive of the text *beyond* “its” tradition,” that “we need to remain sensitive to the fact that the notion of tradition is in any event an “organising principle” of a field of knowledge,” Alant (2002: 65). This contention is taken further in the next chapter, which analyses the theatricality of the rain ritual. Here we look at how this ritual succeeds as a performance in raising the level of rural or local-based environmental sustainability.



CHAPTER 5

ANALYSING THE THEATRICALITY OF *MPHOKO*

In the previous chapter we have seen how *Mphoko* can be read as text in order to unravel the pedagogic nature of an expression of folklore. In this chapter I look at *Mphoko* as a performance. I wish to compare and contrast *Mphoko* as a performance and the idea of theatre-for-development as outlined in Mda's *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre*. This move is validated by what was been described as "the need for an interpretation of the oral text beyond the confines of its textuality" (Barber & De Moraes Farias, 1989: 3), in turn giving "impetus to the so-called performance-centred approach in oral tradition," (Alant, 2002: 55-56). The aim here is to consider this aspect in terms of contextual relevance, significance, cost-effectiveness, local authorship, and community-centeredness. In order to do this, I commence this chapter with a background to theatre-for development.

5.1. A general overview of theatre-for -development

The link between ritual and theatre has already been established. Victor Turner in Schechner and Appel (1995: 8) acknowledges a progressive "characteristic developmental relationship from ritual to theatre" and subsequently reveals its relationship to social drama. One could then say that theatre is inbuilt in the everyday lives of indigenous people. I would therefore, like to challenge any effort to import foreign institutionalized themes and approaches without the consideration of this ever-present dramatic factor in indigenous contexts. In this regard I shall look at popular theatre or theatre-for-development as discussed in Mda's book, *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre*. By comparison, I will discuss how the ritual adopts elements that might be perceived as characteristic of an elite or mainstream theatre performance, although what follows will show how *Mphoko* deserves the status of a proper example of theatre-for-development.

According to Mloma (2002) theatre-for-development or popular theatre gained attention in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time in many parts of Africa theatre practitioners saw potential in theatre-for-development because it put grassroots

participation at the centre for effective development. This meant that the community would identify problems and come up with possible solutions to them. Subsequently the community in question was to be engaged in research and discussions relating to the perceived root causes of the identified problem/s and possible solutions thereof. Mlama (2002: 46) further explains that theatre-for-development was also heralded “as an effective community medium for development.” Even more encouraging was that it was supposed to provide the possibility of the facilitation of developmental issues in local languages. The excitement which this possibility raised was however, short-lived as Mlama (2002: 48) reveals:

by the end of the 1980s various studies had also identified shortcomings and constraints in popular theatre. Some of the popular theatre workshops of the 1970s were criticised as being “developmentalist”. Although they sought the view of the communities, the final theatre productions were loaded with development messages whose formulations were not much different from the conventional top-bottom messages of the extension worker.

This form of theatre-for-development cannot be regarded as being people-centred or locally sensitive. A pertinent question to ask is whether or not there are changes in adaptation and approach from those of the end of the 1980s. Mlama (2002: 48) provides an answer to this question by saying:

at the present time, some Popular Theatre practitioners still impose alien theatre forms on communities despite the call to let communities use indigenous or forms familiar to them. Elite theatre practitioners engaged in popular theatre often find it easier to operate with the European-based play into whose skills they have been trained. Divorced from their traditional theatre forms, they lack the courage to let the community use forms which will challenge their artistic superiority. Rather than expose their clumsiness at performing the traditional dance, recitation, or mime, they choose to work with European drama forcing the community into alien forms for which they have fewer skills than their own indigenous forms.

In *Theatre for Development: an Overview* Nogueira (2002: 103) similarly links the establishment of theatre-for-development to the “so-called era of development started after the Second World War, gaining a critical view of the associated development

policies arising from this period.” Seemingly during this period, theatre became one of the sought after media used to “disseminate development packages on topics such as health, agriculture and birth control, in the underdeveloped nations” (Nogueira, 2002: 105). In Ghana and Uganda in the 1950s theatre-for-development involved tours in rural areas where, among others, demonstrations of new agricultural machinery and techniques, and distributions of insecticides sprays were central teachings (Nogueira, 2002). Also according to Kidd (1984) cited by Nogueira (2002: 104) “theatre-for-development was used as propaganda for colonial government development policies. Theatre was made by development workers to disseminate ideas such as immunisation, sanitation and cash crop production.”

In the 1960s, Nogueira (2002) further contends, theatre was taken to the rural villages and urban squatter areas in the form of travelling theatre by groups of university students. In this way theatre was supposedly made accessible to the general populace. This approach was however, done away with in the 1970s because instead of presenting ready-made performances, research about villages preceded the production of the drama. As a result, subsequent discussions at the end of performances, which were influenced largely by the research findings, were organised as a form of community education and mobilisation. That was termed theatre-for-development whose influence stretched into the early 1980s.

When discussing popular theatre or theatre-for-development, Mda (1993: 46) adopts a definition of “popular” by Leis (1979):

it means that a work is comprehensible both for the people as a whole and for the individual; it enriches and expands the people’s own forms of expressions; it adopts and strengthens the point of the most progressive section of the people; and it roots itself in traditional and develops this in a positive manner.

Mda (1993) provides a distinction between drama and theatre. He explains that drama is the literary composition while theatre is the actual performance that may or may not emanate from the literary composition. However, Schechner & Appel (1995: 5) argue, “performance consists of mostly oral traditions. Even where there is written drama, the arts of performing (as distinct from the drama performed) are passed down through direct

oral transmission.” Schechner & Appel (1995) further contend that the transmission of the art of performance in an African context is done in a more informal manner through imitation in the early period of every developing child.

If we assert that folklore deserves the same treatment as the written text, it is indisputable that Ramatsetse provided the actual literary composition of the *Mphoko* performance. In other words she provided the literary presentation of the actual performance or a significant theatrical presentation of the ritual process or procedure. Mda (1993: 45) explains, “although the literary composition may constitute the basic element of a theatrical performance, theatre is not primarily a literary art but uses elements of other arts such as song, dance, and mime, in addition to dialogue and spectacle.” But as the analysis of the textuality of the rain ritual showed, in confirmation of Blau’s argument (Schechner & Appel, 1995: 258) that, “a performance seems written even if there is no text, for the writing seems imbedded in the conservatism of the instincts and the linguistic operations of the unconscious.” From Ramatsetse’s account, the rain ritual too seems to have incorporated all of these elements of theatre, that is, song, dance, mime, dialogue and spectacle. Before going on to discussing the ritual as an example of theatre-for-development in the better sense, I will consider how the ritual adopts elements that tend to be perceived as characteristic of an elite or a mainstream theatre performance.

5.2. Comparison between *Mphoko* and elite theatre

From Ramatsetse’s narration, the elements of elite or mainstream theatre such as props, characters, dressing, the spectacle, song and dance, scenes and stages, and the plot are identifiable. Let us look at each element.

Props. These include such things as Magobe (porridge rations) Pitša (three-legged pot), moeta (big clay pot), mogopo (wooden salver), magapana (small calabashes), dikgamelwana (small pails), dibeela, mala a diphoofole (wild animals’ intestines), dikgwale (partridges), dikgaka (guinea fowls), diphuthi (duikers).

Characters. Seemingly *mathumaša*, *mašoboro*, *bakgekolo* and *bakgalabje* are the main characters in the rain ritual performance. But caution has to be exercised not to compare idealized-theatre performers with rain ritual performers. Said differently,

characters in these two occasions should be given credence according to the standards of these two unique though informative and didactic practices.

James L. Peacock in Schechner & Appel (1994) holds that because of belonging to the working class, and, perhaps due to political and sexual reasons, mainstream actors are rarely given respect off-stage. Peacock further argues that ritual performers on the other hand are by virtue of having their leadership and occupational responsibilities interwoven into administrative and ceremonial commitments, raised to prestigious positions even after a ritual performance. Seemingly as ritual performances are undergirded by spirituality, their performers automatically draw from their spiritual resources when it is time to preach, sing or otherwise perform. Arguably ritual performers are experiencing a spirit-filled life that transforms their daily behavior subsequently enabling them to exercise superior performance during particular occasions (Schechner & Appel, 1994).

Dressing. According to Ramatsetse *mathumaša* covered their bottom parts with *ntepa*, a garment made from a piece of cowhide to cover the buttocks, and *lebole* (a garment made of strips of leather threaded with beads or copper rings used to cover the front part, usually above the knee in length). They were not expected to cover their breasts but had strings of beads criss-crossing their upper bodies. *Mašoboro* would only have their *lekgeswa*, a g-string-like undergarment made from an animal's skin worn by boys and men, on. Older women would wear *ntepa* as well but instead of *lebole* they wore a *thetho*, a garment made from an animal's skin long enough to cover the front of a woman to the ankles.

Spectacle. During the sprinkling of the mixture *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* get divided into two groups and head to different directions after which they meet at a designated *bodiba*. According to Ramatsetse during this time there is complete silence. Not even whispering is allowed between performers.

Song and Dance. Singing and dancing seem to be indivisible in an indigenous context. Ramatsetse explained that to end the actual performance of the rain ritual, a feast was held where all the performers would converge under a *mosehla* tree in a celebration, which would start with eating and end with song and dance. The lyrics of the song are included above.

Scene/Stage. The staging of the ritual performance takes place at different settings. There is a specific action that takes place at a chief's compound or kraal. The action then moves to the fields and then to the *bodiba*. The final performance takes place underneath the designated acacia tree after which the performers would re-converge at the royal kraal as it was the rule to disperse at the point where they assembled before the ritual pilgrimage.

The plot: Seemingly one of the ideals of a mainstream or non-indigenous performance or drama is a linear plot or a story line called a Frytag's pyramid. Ong (1982) however, warns against the application of the so-called Frytag's pyramid to oral performances. It is explained that due to the adoption of a climatic linear plot the Frytag's pyramid presupposes a progressive rise in tension, reach a climatic point, which is followed by the denouement. Ong (1982: 143) however, perceives the persuasion of an analysis of oral performance that follows this line as committing "the same chirographic bias evident in the term oral literature." He further argues that this climatic linear plot is not applicable to oral performances because oral culture is more about real life, hence "you do not find climatic linear plots ready-formed in people's lives, although real lives may provide material out of which such a plot may be constructed by ruthless elimination of all but a few carefully highlighted incidents." Irrespective of the inapplicability of the mainstream plot to an indigenous performance or drama, there are other methods, which I feel could be adapted to indigenous performances, *Mphoko* in particular. For this study I would like to look at the agitprop, participatory theatre and theatre-for-development. Let us first look at the general description of these methods.

Mda (1993) imported Lambert's three methods used in popular theatre or theatre-for-development namely the agitprop, participatory theatre and theatre-for-conscientisation. He explains that instead of putting more emphasis on analyzing communities and how they engage in decision-making, agitprop is preferred in theatre-for-development for its inclusion of plays that have a political persuasion, as well as explicitly communicative, message-oriented and exhortatory plays. According to Nogueira (2002), Marxist ideology is fundamental in the designing of the agitprop. Arguably, there was a new understanding of the role of the working class developing in

the time of its inception, and the introduction of agitprop as such served to make a revolutionary class out of the usually downtrodden.

A participatory theatre is described as a two-way communication channel rather than a one-way top-down one. Theatre-for-conscientisation, on the other hand, is heralded for its capability as a dialectical tool for attaining a critical analysis of reality through what is called a Freirian process of conscientisation. But for Mlama (2002) the fact that certain elite theatre practitioners continue to impose foreign forms of theatre on indigenous settings is in a way downplaying theatre as a conscientisation process. Mlama (2002) holds that the element of conscientisation in theatre demands more than theatre skills from the side of the director. Arguably the leader of such an encounter should have more knowledge than the community in question so that he or she can provide relevant guidance. Mlama (2002: 48) further emphasises that

the leader of the Popular Theatre process is not simply a director as in the mainstream theatre, but also an animateur. As animateur one requires a level of consciousness higher than the community one is leading so as to properly guide the analytical processes of identifying, understanding and solving development problems.

Looking at *Mphoko*, I feel that it encompasses some, if not all, the initially intended characteristics of these three methods, namely the agitprop, participatory theatre and theatre for conscientisation. As far as Mda (1993) is concerned, an agitprop play is produced by professional groups and oriented towards the people. Warren (1995) however, argues that possessors of indigenous knowledge deserve to be treated as professionals in their own right. I therefore acknowledge opinion leaders such as traditional healers, elderly people who are by local standards acclaimed specialists in different areas, and traditional leaders as being professionals in their own right. Because they anticipate the time and method of this ritual, I regard them as producers, scriptwriters, costumers and stage engineers of the *Mphoko* performance. Particular groups that are implicated as being of importance to the success of this ritual responded to a matter of local urgency, that is, the rain ritual ceremony. This ritual therefore, like an agitprop play or theatre, explicitly and implicitly raises consciousness internal and external to the performing group. Similarly, according to Ramatsetse, the Moletlane chief

kraal in the era of *Mphoko* was considered as highly placed in matters pertaining to rain rituals. As a result it was only this particular chief who would decide and publicly announce the date and time for the rain ritual. The public proclamation, as the narrator stated, always came after a consultation with the rainmaker or socially acclaimed well-informed elderly person or a designated traditional healer. This then parallels the characteristic of an agitprop theatre to raise consciousness from outside.

Turner argues, “life-crisis rituals (and seasonal rituals, too, for that matter) may be called “prophylactic”, while rituals of affliction are “therapeutic,” (Schechner & Appel, 1995: 11). In the case of *Mphoko*, the rain ritual could therefore be seen as the foundation for a poverty remediation strategy by instilling an urge to till the land in every member of a community in question. According to Ramatsetse a prediction of heavy rainfall was a presupposition for a year of good harvest. Turner in Schechner & Appel (1995: 8) argues, “redressive action is often ritualized, and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion”. Hence on an implicit level there was an enforcement of among others social cohesion, poverty alleviation, self-sufficiency, communal responsibility and advocacy for long-term environmental protection and self-determination from inside and outside the performing group.

It appears that every participating member was called forth in advance to be informed about his or her roles in the ritual. As Ramatsetse explained, *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* received meticulous tutelage from well-informed elders in preparation for the ritual. Performers received direct and indirect support from other community members and the family in particular as the unit and system for socialisation played a major role in enforcing the socially-binding but unwritten rules. As it has been argued that folklore involves a lifelong learning process, *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* as main performers in this ritual, had been progressively mentally, physically, aesthetically and otherwise prepared from childhood. Automatic adherence to the socially set rules that defined good behaviour was primarily encouraged in the home. According to Ramatsetse the leading traditional healer would also undergo proper spiritual and physical cleansing before, during and after the ritual. And as in the case of agitprop the whole ritual process took place in a “non-formal” way. Let us now look at how the rain ritual compares to a participatory theatre.

When looking at the discussion by Mda (1993) there are several factors that a participatory theatre has that differentiate it from the agitprop and theatre-for-conscientisation. One of them is that the production of the play and spectacle is done “by and for the people with spectators” (Mda, 1993: 50). Similarly, as the rain ritual narrative reflects, before the actual ritual performance the whole community participated in the *lesolo la dibeela*; the hunt for refuse or filth. Here the land is rid of all items that are considered foreign to it and seen as polluting the environment. Worth noting is that there is fluidity in the role played by other members of the community, with alternation between full participation to spectatorship. As spectators they closely judge the ritual proceedings for flaws and successes and make suggestions after the performance for future improvements. Nevertheless, with the high degree of consultation and education during the preparation and planning for the rain ritual, there seem to have been no probability of flaws. The less-informed consulted the well-informed primarily to learn and also as a personal safeguard from a situation of becoming a scapegoat if anything would go wrong. Let us now look at the similarities the rain ritual has to theatre-for-conscientisation.

As with the theatre-for-conscientisation, during the actual performance of the ritual, the play and spectacle were produced without the spectators. The meeting places, what to bring along, the times for starting and ending the ritual activities, the choice of participants, allocation of roles and responsibilities were decided upon without the broader community’s involvement. Similar to theatre-for-conscientisation, depending on the phase of the ritual performance, there seemed to be a continuous meeting and disintegration of actors. For instance, Ramatsetse explains that the *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* would detach as one group from the older participants and all move to the chief’s kraal where they collect the cleansing medicine. They then move as a solid group to the starting point of environmental cleansing. From this point they then break into two groups each pouring the cleansing medicine to the opposite direction. They meet again at the *bodiba*, (abyss), where they were joined by a group of elderly women. After the activity at the *bodiba*, *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* joined by the contingent of elderly women would move as a group towards the designated *mosehla*; acacia tree, where they would join the rest of the older men and women. This is where the *dibeela* (filth or litter)

were to be ceremoniously burned after which would be an ending feast. Each leader of the performing group had a responsibility to see to it that each young member was compliant and cooperative. As Ramatsetse accounts, in the instance where *lešoboro* or *lethumaša* broke a rule, his or her parents would pay a cow in penalty. Seemingly, in those days a cow was considered a heavy price. This was partially because cattle ownership had a sentimental element to it but also, ownership of cattle or cows was a determinant of success and affluence that gave pride to a man and hence it was not easy to part with any. The main duty for older performers was thus to raise awareness about the importance of ownership, and respect of property. Where these factors are at play, people's heritage is safeguarded. In modern times however, there is evidence of a progressive compromise of communal ownership and respect of property resulting in serious environmental degradation.

Mda (1993) accounts that through an intervention of theatre-for-development, a breakthrough was made in Roma Valley, Lesotho. He explains that it was a joint initiative between the English Department and the Institute of Extra Mural Studies of the National University of Lesotho. There was an inclusion of teachers from rural schools, civil servants, adult educators who worked for agencies other than the university, and members of community-based groups such as village health workers and women's organizations, as well as a contingent of university students (Mda, 1993). By contrast, Mlama (2002: 48-49) argues, "some theatre practitioners, most of whom are university-based, take the Popular Theatre process as just another movement, indeed another experiment." In this context, occupying a particular position in an institution external to the community under scrutiny readily relegates an individual to the outsider category. Those who are employed are classified as the privileged members of a particular group. Such perceptions consequently give rise to intergroup, class, intellectual, linguistic, materialistic and even ideological polarities, while the privileged group subsequently assumes the role of being self-pronounced representatives of the less privileged. Mlama (2002: 49) states that university-based theatre practitioners "have at times allowed the process to be appropriated by state bureaucracies or donor-driven projects to achieve the goals set outside the community." It appears that the Roma valley Theatre-For-Development Project received funding from the Ford Foundation (Mda, 1993). It would

be interesting to know in this regard who approached the donors or rather who presented the proposal for funding? What was proposed and by whom? What criteria were used to grant the funding? Was the funding directed to the community or the English Department and the Institute of Extra Mural Studies of the National University of Lesotho?

But to return to the question of rituals, Turner in Schechner & Appel (1995: 8) notes that, “nonindustrial societies tend to stress immediate context-sensitive ritual; industrial pre-electronic societies tend to stress theatre, which assigns meaning to macro-processes-economic, political or generalized familial problems- but remains insensitive to localized, particularized contexts.”

In the case of *Mphoko*, the immediacy of the ritual seems to draw from a number of angles which revolved around the Maphotla people’s adopted lifestyle, namely subsistence farming. The ritual tended to emphasise self-sufficiency hence identification, understanding and solutions of immediate problems were sought from within. The linkage of sacredness to all of the ritual’s undertakings, made full participation inescapable and farming compulsory. In an instance where there was no rainfall, the blame was put on the uncooperative community members and the angry ancestors. In that way the ritual was context-sensitive and stressed immediate and local intervention to local problems or their prevention.

In my view the only intervention that professionals should provide should be to encourage local people to utilize their local traditional surviving mechanisms in any development strategy. With rural people one just needs to speak the language that they would understand, the language of *Mphoko* for instance. Recently the ex-Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, made a public appeal for moral regeneration. In this context he singled out mainstream churches and religions as possible mediators. I however believe that involving indigenous communication channels and indigenous professionals in this call would produce even better results. In Kwazulu-Natal for instance the annual Nomkhubulwane ritual seems to be growing in scope and magnitude. But instead of being encouraged, this ritual received a lot of criticism from some members of the public and national media, which provided varying, but vilifying interpretations of it. In my view it has to be better understood in its own context. Because of their historical and contextual significance and interpretations, rituals such as among others Nomkhubulwane

and *Mphoko* have a potential in producing desired results. Because they are prompted by local urgency there is no need for external rewards as it was the case with the Roma Valley project whose operations seemed depended on funding from the Ford Foundation. Traditional professionals have the script, they have the story line, they have the props, they know how to shape the actual characters, but they lack the encouragement and acknowledgement.

Even in the case of Roma valley, whether it being simultaneous dramaturgy or forum theatre, my impression is that the time and space for the performance were preconceived by the members of Marotholi Traveling Theater. Such theatre might be seen as necessary to impart certain information, but it might not be particularly relevant to the target group in time and space. While the indigenous person might not call it theatre-for-development, or popular theatre, or theatre-for-conscientisation they have particular customs such as *Mphoko* that pursue the same objectives. Although this is contestable, Ong (1982: 42) argued, “oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life world, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings.” As for *Mphoko*, it closely reflects and refers to the life world of the Maphotla people and shows the element of intertextuality that implied a convergence of two cultures. It was performed during the time when it was relevant, that is, the ploughing season but the approach and method could be adapted to other contexts.

The rules governing the rain ritual performance were instilled more in the home than during the actual performance. This shows that the perpetuation of *Mphoko* required much of the responsibility for behavioural modification and character moulding to be done in the family. The family as a unit of socialization took centre stage. In the long run not only were the fruits to be reaped after the anticipated rainfall but into the future when the community was populated by well-behaved members, there was a low incidence of crime, there was communal sharing, maximum mutual respect, a well kempt environment, sustainable usage of natural resources, absence of unwanted teenage pregnancy, a continuous intergenerational dialogue, self-reliance, self-determination and so forth.

The theatricality or performance of a rain ritual was not only meant to respond to or act out economic, political or cultural crises as might be assumed. It mainly served as a preventative, rehabilitative and curative measure for unwarranted behaviours such as among others moral laxity, decadence, and dependency. Most importantly it encouraged consistent maintenance of a clean environment. Through sacredness and totemism embedded in ritual proceedings, *Mphoko* succeeded in safeguarding human beings, animals and vegetation. These two institutions animated fauna and flora to the same level as human beings, thereby combating the wanton killing of wild animals and over-harvesting natural flora. Human beings and environmental elements such as trees and water resources alike became performing characters in the *Mphoko* performance.

This chapter has shown how *Mphoko* adopts and adapts elements that may be perceived as characteristic of an elite or mainstream theatre performance, and then through comparing and contrasting *Mphoko* as a performance with theatre for development, shown its local relevance, significance, people-centeredness, cost effectiveness and most of all, its rightful place in the realm of performance.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

As a result of my work on *Mphoko*, I contend that management and education for the environment should be a two-way street where the indigenous and western driven professionals and intellectuals learn and teach one another. Although conservation of natural resources for instance has become a major focus of a number of international organizations, indigenous knowledge has become an underutilized resource in the development fraternity. A particular challenge is that foreign methods tend to be universally applied, irrespective of the fact that some of the world's richest areas in terms of biodiversity lie in the so-called developing countries. In this regard, my analysis of the rain ritual has shown that through their particular education channels indigenous people disseminated information which was crucial to the ongoing sustainable livelihood of the community and that of its immediate environment.

The explanations of the origins of contemporary environmental problems often tend to be more global and scientific in focus making it harder to translate to indigenous people. Nevertheless, awareness is necessary and depends fully on proper information communication and dissemination and information communication depends on people's level of understanding of the extent of the problems. Inevitably understanding of environmental problems depends on the means of communication. In the Limpopo Province, for instance, the realities are such that education methods that employ exotic languages become a failure. This could be partly attributable to the existence of a substantial level of illiteracy that could also be explained in a variety of ways that are influenced by the above-mentioned factors.

According to Pringle (1982) the genealogy of environmental degradation in South Africa traces back to the times of Jan Van Riebeeck. The analysis of the rain ritual serves to harness the argument that where indigenous people were killing for survival the colonizer practised brutally well calculated wanton mass killing of wild animals and unreasonable overharvesting of natural vegetation. As Pringle (1982) has shown, the institution of apartheid in South Africa resulted in alienation of black people from

involvement in environmental issues. As we have learned from Otaala and Ohuche (1981), Ivan Illich, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (Giddens, 1989), indigenous people's education models have tended to be undermined by the introduction of formal education that has since dismally failed to fulfil the civilizing objective it was meant for, but instead exacerbated already existing clashing of thought and lifestyle in societies. Formal education therefore comes to seem ambiguous:

a basic human right and the responsibility of government to provide, yet formal education - when available - often fails to meet people's needs. Indigenous peoples in particular often find that mainstream education systems are alienating and do not value their own culture or language (Kent et al, 1999).

In the Nebo region, usage of formal education as a platform to effect environmental awareness becomes yet another failure given the presence of a large group of non schooling young people. All the same, education about environmental problems is of prime importance. The question which I then asked is if formal methods have failed, and are continuing to fail, what could then be the best option?

In response, my thesis has utilized folklore in the form of a rain ritual, and associated totemism, to put forward an argument that indigenous communication channels have a potential role to play in effective environmental education in two ways. Firstly, it unpacked the content to bring to the surface the interrelationship between human beings, fauna and flora embedded in folklore. Secondly, the analysis of the rain ritual has shown the flexibility and adjustability of indigenous communication methods to any education sphere. There is still of course a great deal of folklore that needs to be rekindled to full capacity. The rain ritual narrative case study from the elderly Mohube Ramatsetse indicated that there is ample untapped information that needs to be acknowledged and be drawn into rural development programs. Because elderly people in this particular society still live in an extended family setting, they still have close contact with their children and their grand children. This serves to promote intergenerational communication. Although this now takes place in a reduced fashion due to a myriad of unprecedented circumstances, there is still enough to rekindle and transfer indigenously held ideals of good behaviour.

Analysis of *Mphoko* has helped to show how indigenous media could complement mainstream mass media in raising public awareness of the implications of existing environment problems. This is necessary given statistical evidence about the existence of substantial illiteracy in many rural communities in South Africa that justify the necessity for a holistic approach to environmental education. Hence I have shown in this study that broader incorporation of folklore could assist in bringing all environmental stakeholders to the fore. Proponents of folklore praise its lifelong learning characteristic because its subject matter is the basic day-to-day life of people. For instance, folkloric pieces such as riddles require one to acquire knowledge about the behaviours of plants, animals and people of different types. This means that the participant in a riddle session should know her or his surrounding environment very well. Hence, education through riddling become participatory and could prompt attitude change about the treatment of the environment. The analysis of the rain ritual is a small contribution in re-orientating the existing teaching methods in a similar way from rote learning to attitude change and learning through participation and educative training.

The existence of substantial unwritten information demands the establishment of a dialogue between those who possess it and those who seek for it. In this way pupils and students will get to consult the informal teachers, that is, the elderly people in their communities, in order to add to the information they have acquired from the formal teacher. This will happen only when a platform is created for students and pupils to take seriously the locally-based knowledge sources. In this regard the analysis of the rain ritual seeks to invite academic recognition and realization of a possible synergy between formal and informal communication channels. Acknowledgement of folklore in formal education would help to reform the grotesque indigenous figure created from without and rejuvenate the vilified indigenous cultures. The focus will be able to shift from a voyeuristic stare at aberrant paganism to detailed analysis of unique localized durable information dissemination strategies. Analysis of the ritual made it possible to foreground the theatricality and textuality of folklore. It has proven that through utilization of sacredness as a metaphor for preservation and conservation indigenous peoples put environmental education at the centre of their daily lives. This could not be realized without the proper understanding of the language through which the narrative was

presented. Hence the two main functions of language as a means of communication and a mode through which culture is transferred have proven to be indubitably inseparable.

The availability of different contentions about the success of formal learning in traditional societies tends to elevate indigenous communication channels. It is then just to promote the utilization of folklore in order that rural individuals and even groups could acquire competence and skills that are necessary for the identification and anticipation of environmental problems and work with others to solve, minimize and prevent them. But it was reassuring as well to learn that “African writers have been in the forefront of the continuing efforts to collect and translate texts from their own people’s oral traditions, and they have done this as a way of advertising the greatness of their indigenous cultures” (Okpewho, 1992: 17). Of the existing material I have reviewed, there is not much extensively engaged content analysis or interpretation of folklore, Sepedi folklore in particular. What is mostly tackled is the history of folklore as a genre of literature and the introduction of folklore as a concept, as an ideological tool and as an information source.

The collection and translation of folklore with the aim to store for future usage will earn the indigenous peoples a number of points. Amongst others it will help to capture the compromised yet valuable information source, to conjure cultural emancipation, and to effect intellectual self-determination and self-realization. Eventually the obscure assumptions accompanied by misrepresentation, rarefied interpretation, bogus translation and underestimated local understanding of folklore will be obliterated. Consequently folklore as a local mode of creation of meaning will provide short- and long-term overall understanding of the impact and effects of human behaviours and lifestyles on both themselves and their immediate environment, and a sense of how local environmental problems are contextualized within the global arena.

The reviewed literature equally created an understanding of the fading adherence to folklore in indigenous societies. Implicitly the relayed message is of the availability of a market competition that sells morally lax non-indigenous cultures at the expense of moral-bountiful indigenous cultures. As a result Otaala and Ohuche (1988) charged the advent of western technology with bombarding the youth with non-indigenous lifestyles,

and in a way sidelining the capacity and limiting the capabilities of the elderly in transmitting traditional knowledge to the young.

6.2. Recommendations.

There are various publicly displayed disappointments regarding the introduction and the reliability of formal schooling as an agent of socialization and civilization. I hence recommend that indigenous cultural studies should be a norm just as it is with western cultural studies at tertiary level. This would help to amend the already displayed problems in the colonially imposed formal schooling that tended to undermine indigenous knowledge. This, we are told, resulted in the failure by the formal school engineers to put forward indigenous knowledge as a worthwhile subject matter for the learning process. Formal schooling could be seen as a handicap in indigenous societies for it tends to limit the exposure of children to the local knowledge of their communities.

Encouragement and formalization of indigenous cultural studies in the formal academic milieu would therefore help to reverse the attitudes in children that militate against the acquisition of local knowledge. Students would collect, interpret, and translate with the aim to publish and store their locally held and relevant information. This move will further work towards creating South African and even African relevant and applicable theories and methodologies in social science research. The literary engagement with indigenous material would provide new views that would realize, although not according to traditional formal standards, folklore as one of the unique indigenous communication channels whose study demands sophistication and complex cognitive understanding. Hence I recommend that folklore studies should be treated with the same seriousness as that is given to other literary genres. This would serve to emancipate indigenous literature from the stronghold of exogenous literature. Subsequently students will learn what is closer to home and immediately relevant to their own lives. It would be easier to look inside the home for sources in the form of elderly people than to spend years trying to contextualize a literary piece that has been influenced by forces that are strange and applicable in a far away environment. Besides it has been argued that formal education entails cultural hegemony. Hence downplaying South

African indigenous cultures at tertiary level cultural studies in favour of European cultural studies should be regarded as a violation of basic human rights.

For such change to take place, amendment of education policies should be engaged from institutional to national levels. I therefore recommend that it be compulsory for academic papers to be made available to government officials. This would help to develop a direct dialogue between government officials and academics along a similar line of professional orientation. Both institutions would be honouring the United Nations' stipulated call for acknowledgement of the rights of indigenous peoples, their cultures and their languages in formal education, namely that:

indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the state. All indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning (UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 23 August 1993).

Adherence to this commitment will then reassure concerned people such as those living around and neighbouring the Mantrombi nature reserve. In the past the clashing of interests identified between government officials and the common populace has oftentimes led to backfiring environmental development programs. A recommendation for change in existing policies would pin down government officials to consult with the masses before embarking on so-called development strategies. The societies' ideas, needs and aspirations would be respected and acknowledged. Hence environmental education would be a holistic endeavour that combines formal and informal methods and approaches to the benefit of all.

The analysis of the rain ritual has proven that there is didactic material embedded in folklore that could be unpacked and reutilized in environmental education. This serves to justify the legitimacy of the plea by the Mantrombi people for the establishment of a locally fostered environmental education project. Public support for such interest is what I recommend so that rural people could become fully involved and realize their place in relation to promoting the sustainable livelihood of their community and the environment.

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APPENDIX I

THE RITUAL NARRATIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MOHUBE RAMATSETSE

SePedi Original Text

1. **Mohube:** *Ge re eya mphokong, Ee! A kere ke lona lesolo la pula. Ka lesolo la pula 2. a kere ba kgethile mosehla. A kere o a otseba mosehla? Gobe go iwa moo mosehleng.*
3. *Ge go iwa moo mosehleng re kgobokana; ba bagolo ba eme ka maoto bare lenyaga le*
4. *bare le lemeng. Bare mathumaša le mašoboro ba ye lesolong pula še. ke moka wa*
5. *bona! 'tšatši la gore; Mokibelo re a tloga re ya lesolong, Sontaga masorobo le*
6. *mathumaša ba ya mphokong. Ge re fihla kua mphokong re a pharologana ba*
7. *bangwe ba ya ka. thoko ye ba bangwe ba ya ka thoko ye (use hands gestures) ya*
8. *mašemo re yo kopana 'dibeng jwa gore. Gobe gole diba bjo bogolo ka thoko ye*
9. *(points to the opposite direction). Re yo kopana dibeng jwa gore ge re fihla moo re*
10. *tšholla mphoko re re pula! Re tšholla mphoko.*
11. **Pheladi:** *Mphoko ke eng?*
12. **Mohube:** *Mphoko ke 'hlare se re bego re foka ka sona.*
13. **Pheladi:** *Ba se dira ka eng?*
14. **Mohube:** *Yee?*
15. **Pheladi:** *Mphoko ba o dire ka eng?*
16. **Mohube:** *Go tseba bona bakgalabje. Ba kगतlile ba kगतlile se a nkg se re hong!*
17. *A kere baile baya lesolo maloba, Bakgalabje ba? Ba botoga ba bolaile diphoofolo tša*
18. *naga jwale mala a tšona a nokelwa ka moeteng o mo ka (shows with hands) ba tšhela*
19. *meetse gomme mola gobedile go nkg gomme le tlo rwala ka dikgamelo, magapana*
20. *lena bannyana ba le mašoboro a ke ona le ileng go foka ka ona naga ye. Ga le foke*
21. *go fihla kua gaNkgudi. Nnete go tloga mo go dikologa motse wo wa gabo rena re*
22. *yobe re kopane moo bodibeng bjoo, le mašoboro a. le opela pula le eya leyo hwetša*
23. *banna le basadi ba kgobokane moo mosehleng woo gomme le apeile maušwa, le tšwa*
24. *nao gae. Ge le fihla moo lo hwetša ba bolaile dikgaka, dikgwale, dipnuti, se seng le*
25. *se seng sa lešoka, ba apeile. Ba tšere pitš'a Mmamotseko. Mmamotseko ebe ele*

26. *foromane ya rena. Ba apeya rena retla ka maušwa ka megopo. Mogopo o a o tseba a*
27. *kere? Go soletšwe ka fao go tloga fao re išetša bakgalabje ba ba bego ba tlile puleng.*
28. *Aowa! ge re fihla mole re a ba neela gomme ba sola `pitša tša bona tša dinamama ba re*
29. *šebetša. Aowa! re itietše ga rena re khoše. Mola go felago ge go šino fela go lewa, ba*
30. *thoma bjale ba opela koš'a pula, bona bakgalabje ba le basadi ba. Ba e opela gona*
31. *mo mohlareng mo.*
32. **Pheladi:** *Ba reng ge ba opela? Nkopelele aowi koko.*
33. (She laughs) **Mohube:** *O tla e reng? O ka e kgona?* (After a short pause she starts to sing the rain song);
34. **Mohube:** *Ba re*
35. *Pul'a bo rare e ka na*
36. *Ra tsoga re gata monola*
37. *E a na iye! Pula wee!*
38. *Ya bo rare ya bo mphoko*
39. *Aye! Pula wee!*
40. *Ya boMapogo'a dithaga*
41. *Kgoši se buša ka muthi'a pula*
42. *E a na iye!*
43. *Re opela, ke moka go a fela jwale bare agaa! Go fedile bjale bakgekolo le masogana*
44. *le bakgalabje. Mmamogwaša, Mmamogwaša ke yona kgoši ya Matebele a Moletlane,*
45. *e re le lemeng, go ja še fao Pula e tlile go na ge le etšwa*
46. *gaMapogo le tšo kgopela go foka lešoka la lena moo le boang ntshe. Pula šeo. Wa*
47. *bona! Re fetša beke tše pedi goba tše tharo. Jwalo ba bang ge ba sa ile meberekong*
48. *ke gore ba baileng mmerekong ga ba ne mathata. Go gana ge o ka no dula ka mo*
49. *gae, o dutše ka mo lapeng o se wa ya, bagwera ba gago ba go bone o mo gae. E tlo*
50. *ba molato ba go tšea ba go iša mošate batswadi ba gagwe batlil'o inama se batshele.*
51. *Ba tlilo ntšha kgomo.*
52. **Pheladi:** *Dibeela tše o rego di hweditšwe ke eng?*
56. **Mohube:** *Dibeela. Thari e hunnwe mahutu, ya kua Moletlane. Bjale thari yeo e*
57. *hunnwego mahuto, ke gore gago na bana. Le ge o ka belega mogongwe o tlo tloga.*
58. **Pheladi:** *Di beilwe ke mang?*

- 59. Mohube:** Aowa! Ke bagologolo ba kgale. Bagologolo ba gabo bona ba ba
- 60** robetšeng A kere ba bang le ba bang ba nale bakgalabje ba bona ba batala? Aгаа!
- 61.** Ka se bona moo ba beng bale ntshe, ba bereka mmereko wa gore.
- 62.** Jwale wo wa Moletlane kgale e be ele
- 63.** mošate wo mogolo wa go neša pula. E be e le ba
- 64.** go neša pula. Go be go nale matopan'a beng a le mo mara e se age
- 65.** bakgalabjekgalabje. Ge re eya puleng re be ro feta moo go
- 66.** yena pele. Ke yena a yang go re fa gore e yang le yo nyaka dibeela
- 67. Pheladi:** Ba dirang ka tšona?
- 68. Mohube:** Ge ba di hweditše di ya mollong. Gape ba dibeela ga ba bee selo se se tee.
- 69.** O hwetša ntepana, o hwetša lebušana, o hwetša kobo, o hwetša pheta. Nnete ge le
- 70.** sepela mo šokeng, ke moka le a di tšea, ke tšona di yang go tšhumiwa 'tšatši leo ge le
- 71.** bowa mphokong. Re tšhuba dibeela.
- 72.** Pheladi: Di ntšhiwa ke mang?
- 73. Mohube:** Yena motset'a rena. A kere babe ba dikgobela go yena? Gomme tšatši leo
- 74.** di a ntšhiwa moo mohlareng wa mosehla di yo tšhubiwa fao.
- 75. Pheladi:** Ka baka la eng ebe ele mašoboro le mathumasa ba ba bego ba eya
- 76.** mphokong?
- 77. Mohube:** E! ga retse. Ke se kgale. Gape kgale mašoboro le mathumaša a be a
- 78.** nale molao. A be a nale molao setereke. Ge ba seleka wa ba iša
- 79.** mošate batswadi ba bona ba tlo khonyalala. O
- 80.** ka se tšea kae lehono? Le re kare kare bathong a ga leke la tšwa la wo phapharega la
- 81.** nyaka dibeela? Ge baile ba beya gore beke ya gore ka letšatši lagore baya ba kopane
- 82.** 'seke ba be ba tla ba swere diPebele. Hee! DiPebele di nee mmereko wa tšona.
- 83.** E sego wa mo puleng. Ge motho a re ke a bolela yena ye a swerego Pebele,
- 84.** Hehehehehe. Gape o tla ba wa hwetša o šokišega. Gape rena ka gore re
- 85.** bana ba magošing a mphoko o hwetša re kgotsa jwang?

APPENDIX II

THE RITUAL NARRATIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MOHUBE RAMATSETSE

English translation of *Mphoko*

Mohube: Whenever we embarked on *Mphoko*, yes of course it is the hunt for rain. During the rain hunt they would have elected an acacia tree. I suppose you know an acacia tree? We used to assemble at that acacia tree. When we assemble at the acacia tree, the elders would have passed the word around urging every member to plough their fields in that year. They would order that *mathumaša* and *mašoboro* should carry out the rain cleansing ceremony honouring a premonition of heavy rainfall. You see! On a certain day, normally a Saturday, we would go on the filth hunt and then the next day on a Sunday *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* would carry out *Mphoko*. During the performance of *Mphoko* the group would separate into two groups each heading to the opposite direction to surround the fields and to later remerge at a designated abyss. There was a big abyss this side [points with a spread palm]. We were to meet at this particular abyss into which we would splash out some of the *Mphoko* and shout rain! We poured out *Mphoko*.

Pheladi: What is *Mphoko*?

Mohube: *Mphoko* is the medicine that was used to sprinkle with.

Pheladi: How was it made?

Mohube: Excuse me?

Pheladi: What was *Mphoko* made of?

Mohube: Only the elder men knew. They would have pounded things together some of which were unbearably stinking. Remember that they would have gone hunting for the sacrificial animal a few days before the *Mphoko* day. These same old men! They would have disembowelled whatever they killed, and added water to the guts that they put in a big clay pot. That frothy and stinking mixture was what the *mašoboro* and the

mathumaša were to scoop with small pails and calabashes to sprinkle the entire surrounding environment. We did not spray up to our neighbouring village, gaNkgudi. Just from here and right around our village [*she makes a sweeping gesture with her stretched arm to estimate the breadth and width of her village*] until we [*mathumaša*] meet at a designated abyss together with the *mašoboro* singing the rain song in order to join men and women who would be assembling under the designated acacia tree having with us our rations of porridge from our homes. These men and women would have prepared different kinds of meat, partridges, guinea fowls, and duikers in big pots that they would have gotten from Mmakotse, our foreman. We [*mathumaša* and *mašoboro*] would then put portions of porridge in *megopo* (traditional wooden salvers). “Have you seen a *mogopo* before?” Food would be dished out inside them and taken to the elders who would have also participated in the rain ritual. What happened was we [*mašoboro* and *mathumaša*] would supply our portions of porridge and only then would we sample from the pots of meat for the elders and ourselves. After the meal the elders would start to sing the rain song; these elderly men and women. They would sing right there under the acacia tree.

Pheladi: What was the song? Would you please sing for me, grandmother?

Mohube: Will you understand it? Will you follow it? It went thus:

The rain of our forefathers will fall
And we wake up to trample the moisture
It is falling truly! The rain yes!
The one of our forefathers the one of *Mphoko*
Aye! Rain yes!
The one of *Mapogo* of the weaverbirds
The king that rules with the rain medicine
It is falling truly!

That was the rain song, and when the singing was finished they [elderly men] would announce, urging every participant, young and old, that Mmamogwaša; Mmamogwaša was the king of Ndebele people of Moletlane. The elders would tell us that Mmamogašwa says we should plough for there was a prediction of crop abundance. Heavy rainfall would be expected after we had approached Mapogo [the local chief] to

ask for permission to cleanse our environment until where it ends. There comes rain. You see! The full preparations took us one or two or three weeks. Now when others are still gone to work, that is those who went to work do not have problems. Unacceptable is when you can just sit here, at home, sitting here in your compound and did not go, friends of yours having seen you here at home. It is going to be a case. The guilty party would be report and be called to the chief's kraal. His or her parents would suffer serious consequences. They would be charged a cow in penalty.

Pheladi: These *dibeela* that you say were collected, what were they?

Mohube: There used to be a number of things scattered around. A *thari* (skin for carrying infants) for instance. In the case where the straps of the *thari* had knots when it was found, that would be a sign of a low birth rate in that year. Or even high child mortality rate.

Pheladi: Who would have scattered them around?

Mohube: The ancestors. Our people who passed away long time ago. You should bear in mind that in each social group there are elderly men with great wits. They provide services in their areas of specialization. Now the Moletlane kraal was highly positioned in rain rituals. They were responsible for instigating rainfall. Not long ago there used to be a handful of such knowledgeable men around here even though they were not very old. They acted as our advisers in any matter pertaining to the rain ritual performances. They would decide on the date for *dibeela* hunt for instance.

Pheladi: What did they do with them after collecting them?

Mohube: Whatever found would be burned. As I have explained it was rare to find just one item during *dibeela* hunt. We would find *nepana* (a small skin for covering backsides of women and girls) here, *lebujana* (a small apron of beads worn by little girls) there, *lepayana* (a small cotton blanket) over there, and a *pheta* (a string of beads) around there just as we were walking in the wilderness. We would take these things to be ceremoniously burned after the actual environmental cleansing procedure, *Mphoko*.

Pheladi: Who carries them to the burning place?

Mohube: The village conciliator. His compound would have been the storage place for these *dibeela*. Thus on the day of *Mphoko* he would be the one to present them in the acacia tree where they will be burned.

Pheladi: Why were *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* key players in *Mphoko* undertakings?

Mohube: How will I know? It was part of the old order. You should know that in the olden days *mašoboro* and *mathumaša* were highly disciplined. They used to be extremely obedient. In an instance where they did any mischief they would be charged at the chief's kraal, and their parents would pay a heavy price in return. Where do you see that today? Once, not very long ago, an order was made that people should embark on a *dibeela*. I mean it could be arranged for a particular week on a particular day for people to assemble but not to bring Bibles. You see, Bibles are relevant somewhere but not in issues of the rain ritual. But it is often those who abide by the teachings of Bible who will always criticize this idea. This is really saddening. It is extremely shocking for us who grew up under chiefs who put value to *Mphoko*.

