Teaching for Cultural Relevance and Restoration in the Multi-lingual South African Setting: The Pedagogical Potential of Bi-lingual Setswana-English Stories

Karen Haire and
D.S. Matjila

Introduction

Plaatje includes in his 1916 bilingual collection, recently republished in 2004 and again in 2007, with illustrations, a story entitled *Katlholo ya Kgosi* (The King's Judgement). He states that:

> *Batswana ba na le polelo nngwe ke e. E tshwana le katlholo ya ga Solomone e e bolelwang mo Bebeleng, ntswa baruti ba pele ba re ba fitlhetse e itsege mo Batswaneng. Bebele e ise e kwalwe ka Setswana.*
>
> The following is a Batswana story. It is similar to the Bible story of the judgement of Solomon, but the pioneer missionaries say that they found it to be known among the Batswana before the Bible was ever written in the Setswana language (Jones & Plaatje 2007:15).

In this story two new mothers both claim one baby after one woman has accidently suffocated her baby in the night and steals the other woman's child. *Kgosi* (the chief or king) asks for a sword to cut the baby in half. One mother acquiesces while the other pleads with the chief to spare the child's

life and give it to the other mother. Her love for the baby is stronger than the pain of losing him to the other mother. The chief discerns that she who pleaded for the baby's life must be the real mother and settles the dispute in her favour. Whereas in the Bible story the emphasis is on the discernment and wisdom of the King, in the Batswana story the emphasis is on the mother. It is explicitly stated that:

> *Katlholo e, ke yona e e simolotseng seane sa Setswana se se reng: Mmangwana ke yo o tshwarang thipa ka bogale.*
>
> This judgement is the origin of the Setswana proverb: The mother of the child is the one who grasps the knife by the blade (Jones & Plaatje 2007:15).

The Setswana proverb and story extols the strength and courage of mother love, which will sacrifice, endure pain and brave danger for the sake of her child. Whereas Plaatje's story acknowledges the Bible and the missionaries and hence one view of the story focused on the king's wisdom, it simultaneously honours Setswana culture and proverbs, highlighting another view of the story, focused on the strength, tenacity and resilience of Batswana motherhood. There are always two ways at least of viewing a story depending on where one stands but there is also a place of convergence. Our shared human identity allows us to enter the space between cultures and languages and there learn about 'the wonderful diversity of our oneness'[1].

This space, we believe, offers the possibility of teaching and learning for cultural relevance and restoration, meaning, for example, if we wish to further highlight Setswana culture in the above story, we might explore the traditional judicial structure centred on the hereditary chief. The chief presided over *lekgotla* (the tribal court), as would undoubtedly have been the setting of this particular story. Usually there was a hierarchy of courts, the highest court being the one where the chief presided and which handled serious offences as well as appeals from lower courts presided over by headmen. The chief, the only person with the power to pass the death

[1] Pradervand states that 'One of the most precious dimensions of the human condition' is 'the wonderful diversity of our oneness' (1989: 201).

sentence, was held to be the embodiment of discernment and wisdom. The proverb *Kgosi, thipa e sega molootsi* (A chief is like a knife that would cut the sharpener) signifies that 'owing to the mere fact that the chief has a network of law-enforcers, advisors and tribal police' he has the 'ability to deal effectively with disrespectful, misbehaving and law-disregarding individuals within the tribe' (Sebate 2001:270).

The Multi-Lingual, Multi-Cultural South African Setting

This study is based upon the premise that learners in our multi-lingual and multi-cultural South African setting are not blank slates to be written upon, but bring to the classroom cultural resources that can and should be capitalized on to facilitate learning and teaching. In South Africa that cultural capital may include a vernacular, textured and complex, rich in proverbs, songs, stories and history. Ignoring that cultural capital, we may unwittingly undermine, disparage and negate certain types of intelligence. A tried and true educational principle is to build on the known and to move from the known to the unknown. Culturally-relevant texts and pedagogy validate learners' lived experiences, which in turn stimulate engagement and enhance self-confidence. Culturally restorative texts and pedagogy redress the effects of racism that has resulted in stereotypical misrepresentations of and negative affect attaching to African cultures and peoples.

The Cultural Capital of our African Learners

Our eurocentric education system assumes Western sensibilities, yet African learners bring a unique set of skills drawn from their natural, social and historical environments, such as skills of negotiation and problem-solving learned in families with many siblings (Ntuli 1999:196) or in the extended family. In settings such as the church, learning and teaching takes place through participation and performance, the antithesis of the passive classroom mode where opportunities to interact are typically highly structured and bounded (Ntuli 1999:197; Asante 1988:62f). For Africans, knowledge is not a collection of dead facts but 'has a spirit and dwells in specific places' and one learns through direct experience (Ntuli 1999:197; Asante 1988:80f), that is, through doing and through immersion in the

human situation. Moreover, knowledge is inseparable from ethics which informs its application (Asante 1990:11; Van der Walt 2006: 210), and wisdom entails the ability to integrate knowledge, ethics, direct experience, social intelligence etc.It is perhaps commonplace to say that Africans acknowledge the wealth of wisdom embodied in their proverbs and stories. Stories frequently encapsulate or explicate a proverb, as with Plaatje's 1916 collection discussed in the introduction. One of the ways in which we can be relevant to the sensibilities of our African learners is to use stories and proverbs, originating from an African culture, beginning at the primary level (Mashige 2002:60).

Culture as Ideology: A Tool of Control in the Past

Schools, in the colonial and apartheid context, became sites of control. By dismissing African cultural objects as unworthy of school study, education became complicit in 'a systematic assault on people's languages, literature, dances, names, history, skin colour, religions, indeed their every tool of self-definition' (Ngugi 1993:51). In education, as in the broader society, culture as ideology was a primary tool of oppression (Mashige 2002:52; Ntuli 1999:191). Under apartheid, there was a hierarchy of cultures in which 'whites arrogated themselves a central and pivotal role ... their monuments ... languages, philosophy and education were promoted by the state while others were left to fend for themselves' (ibid:193). 'They proscribed our initiation schools that taught the love and protection of nature' (ibid:192). African cultures were sometimes flagrantly suppressed, as with the forbidding of vernaculars in mission schools (ibid:191). Children too young to understand what was wrong with speaking their home language were routinely punished. Our African cultures were sometimes distorted in subtle ways, as with the West's elevation of reason, an implicit attack on emotion, arguably the primary faculty leading to understanding stories, certainly in the case of oral stories constructed and performed using structures of feeling (Scheub 2002). In the end 'we have been interpellated into the Western ideological machinery, hence the need for decolonising the mind' (Ntuli 1999:189). '[O]ne cannot build a truly African identity ... on the basis of borrowed and ill-understood cultural practices of the west' (Mashige 2002:59). We believe that the education we offer can make a difference

either for or against the decolonizing process, which entails cultural relevance and restoration. Specifically, as modelled here, it entails affective re-identification with our African languages, stories, proverb, histories, and cultural norms and values.

Thesis

In this study we draw on Plaatje's example. His vision gave rise to bridge-building efforts, such as the production of bi-lingual texts, including his collections of published Setswana proverbs and Folk Narratives. Furthermore, his vision prompted the collection and translation of oral *Setswana Stories* by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust between 2003 and 2008[2]. Selected stories are analyzed here for cultural relevance and restoration.

In light of the critical need to tear down the myth of Western cultural superiority in our educational institutions and to restore the equal status of African languages, literatures, cultures and histories, we argue for the inclusion of bi-lingual stories and proverbs from an African culture in our multilingual South African primary classroom. We believe that our shared human identity affords an entry point into the in-between space between cultures and languages where learning and teaching can take place.

Theoretical Constructs: Hybridity, Negotiation and Translation

Given that Africans for generations have been negotiating a middle course between imposed Western values, norms and sensibilities and home cultural norms, values and sensibilities, hybrid cultural identity or hybridity seems like a fitting theory to inform our study.

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on these moments of processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences (Bhabha 1994:1).

[2] We have permission from Sol Plaatje Educational Trust to use the Unpublished Collected Setswana Stories.

Bhabha, who popularized hybridity uses various terms including 'cultural difference' to denote the dynamic cultural identities of previously colonised peoples, as in India and Africa. He writes:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living (Bhabha 1994:7).

Bhabha's notion of hybridity, especially the renegotiation of cultural identities at the moment of articulation is appealing in that it restores rhetorical agency to formerly marginalized Batswana communities, allowing them to become subjects of their history, reformulating their distorted cultures and identities in the present.

> It is 'the in-between space' (of translation and negotiation), he writes, 'that carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (Bhabha 1994:38). The reason for this is that translation and negotiation are principles of difference; ways in which something other, something new can emerge (Viljoen & Van der Merwe 2007:9).

Bhabha's theory is further compelling in that it uses the analogy of translation and we are advocating here the use of bi-lingual stories and proverbs. Bhabha describes hybridity as 'the irresolution, or liminality of translation, the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation, 'that element in a translation which does not lend itself to translation' (1994:224).

In Plaatje's Setswana version of *The King's Judgement*, discussed in the introduction to this study, the word *Motsetse* (Plaatje 2007:15) appears once and refers to a woman in seclusion after giving birth. There is no real equivalent in the English culture, hence Plaatje translates it simply as 'Mother'. This bears out Bhabha's assertion that 'the content of a cultural

tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated in the act of translation' and that:

> The foreign element 'destroys the original's structures of reference and sense communication as well' not simply by negating it but by negotiating the disjunction in which successive cultural temporalities are preserved in the work of history and at the same time cancelled (1994:227f).

We suggest with Bhabha that 'culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other "times" of cultural meaning' in our case, retroactive (Bhabha 1994:178). *Botsetse*, for example, refers to the Setswana custom whereby a woman was secluded in the house for a time after giving birth (Malefo in Rantao 1993: 56). A small stick was placed in front of the door (ibid)/ cross poles in front of the hut (Schapera 1948:234) to let people know that only the midwife and those caring for the mother and baby were allowed to enter. In times past, an ox or a goat was sacrificed if the parents or parents-in-law were full of expectations for the child (ibid). The woman in seclusion drank a clear consommé made with the water in which the meat had been cooked (Malefo in Rantao 1993:56). After two or three weeks, when the baby's umbilical cord dried up and fell off, it was buried in the yard (ibid). This is done to establish a bond between a person and the land of his birth. Phankga, the protagonist in Mminele's novel signifies the importance of this bond culturally, by saying:

> *Mošomo wa go ba hlogo ya sekolo se ke wa ka, o ntshwanetše. Ke wa ka—Tau gare ga Ditau—Ngwana wa mobu wo, gare ga bana ba mobu wo.Ge ke be ke sale maleng a mme, mme o be a fela a monoka mobu wo go ntiisa ka wona. Ge ke belegwa, lentšu la ka la mathomo le kwelwe ke mobu wo, gomme ba nhlapiša ma meetse ao a lego mo mobung wo. Ke godišitšwe ke eng ge e se dijo tsa mobu wo? Ke hlalefišitšwe ke eng ge e se kgati ya mobu wo?—Bjale sekolo se se swanetse go hlahlwa ke mang ge e se ngwana wa mobu wo? Ke mang? Ke nna* (1966:19f).
>
> The position of principal in this school ought to be mine. It is

> mine—A Lion among Lions—Child of this soil, among children of this soil. When I was still in my mother's womb, my mother used to lick this soil to strengthen me with this soil. When I was born, my first word was heard by this soil, I bathe with water from this soil. How was I brought up if not by food nurtured by this soil? Where did I get my wisdom if not by … if not by the stick plucked from this soil? So who is supposed to lead this school if not the child of this soil? Who is the child of the soil? It is me.

In Batswana and other South African cultures it is believed that at the end of one's life one must return to where the umbilical cord has been laid, to die and become an ancestor. Hence a person is truly *ngwana wa mmu*, a 'child of the soil'.

Translation, says Bhabha, is partial re-presentation. He cites Benjamin's well-known passage that likens an original and its translation to 'the broken fragments of the greater language, just as fragments are the broken parts of a vessel' (Bhabha 1994:170). And that greater language, when it comes to cultures, suggests the shared human identity we posit as permitting the pedagogical possibilities of 'the in-between space'. To intervene in the present, 'to be part of a revisionary time', according to Bhabha, 'is to reinscribe our human, historic commonality' (ibid: 7).

Out of respect for our African material and our African learners, and in keeping with the afrocentric quest for methodological approaches that contribute to decolonisation, we have presented theoretical constructs, hybridity, negotiation and translation which intuitively, emotionally and creatively underpin, guide and inform our interpretation of Setswana stories and proverbs.

Teaching for Cultural Relevance and Restoration: The Care and Education of Children in Selected Setswana Stories

In this section of the study we model teaching for cultural relevance and restoration through language, story, proverb, history, cultural norms and values. Language, culture, history, proverbs, stories are intertwined and indivisible, bearing out the traditional African philosophy of holism, the

interconnectedness of all things. Language, culture, proverbs and stories derive from one source, life itself. Life, if you will, is the schoolroom.

The oral stories collected by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust number approximately 40. Of this collection, Batswana writer, B.M. Malefo (2008) tells us in the Introduction to the *Collected Stories* (*Ketapele va Ditlhamane tse di Kgobokantsweng*):

> *Dinaane tse ... di dira gore Batswana ba eletlhoko gore ke maungo a setso sa bone, bogolo jwa maitsholo, tsa botlhokwa, le maikaelelo a bone di tlhomamisiwa ke setso sa bone ...*
>
> *Batho ba ba tlotlang le go ithuta puo ya bone, gape baabe ba ithuta setso sa bone, gonne puo ke yone selotlele se se tshwaraganyang setso. Dinaane tse, ka jalo, ke tshone tshetlaganyo ya go fetisa ditumelo le tse di tlhwatlhwa mo setsong sa babui ba Setswana …*
>
> *Batswana, ka jalo, ba tshwanetse go ithuta gape mo dinaaneng tse gonne di rwele matso a botshelo jwa batswang dikai; tlotlo, tlhokomelo ya bana, seriti, lerato, boammaaruri, tse dingwe tse di tlhwatlhwa le thuto ka bophara*
>
> These stories make the Batswana aware that they are products of their culture, and that much of their behaviour, and many of their values and goals are culturally determined ….
>
> People who respect and learn their language are learning their culture as well, because language is a key component and carrier of culture. These stories are therefore a medium for transmitting beliefs and values present in the culture of Setswana speakers ….
>
> The Batswana can therefore learn from these stories, which … touch on all aspects of the Batswana way of life, such as respect, the care of children, dignity, love, honesty, other values, and education in the broadest sense (see footnote 2).

In terms of the care of children, we have already touched on the resilience,

tenacity and strength of the mother love and on the custom of *botsetse*, that is, the period and practice of secluding mother and child after the birth. Traditionally, seclusion was believed to be important in terms of protecting the infant from diseases and danger (Malefo in Rantao 1993:56) So-called natural dangers would have included viruses and contagious diseases to which a newborn is very susceptible, its immune system being relatively undeveloped. Other dangers would have included witchcraft, occasioned by jealousy, envy, revenge or some other intense negative feeling. Traditionally the Batswana believed in witchcraft, as articulated in the story entitled *Ngwana O Sa Leleng* (The Child who Does Not Cry.):

> *... rrangwana a re baloi, ditaba, magodu le baba botlhe ba ba re tsomang ba tla utlwa ngwana yo. Go ka nna botoka thata fa ngwana a sa lele, ka gonne fa re sa ntse re ilela ngwana ga re ka ke ra palama setlhare.*
>
> ... the father had a fear that witches, beasts of prey, thieves and all enemies pursuing them would hear the child. It would be much better, he said, if the child didn't cry because while they are still in that period of protecting the newborn, they shouldn't expose him to any kind of danger.

Tragically, in this story, things are arranged so that the baby does not cry, then he falls ill and dies in the cradle on his mother's back. Because he doesn't cry no one, not even his mother, is aware of his plight and he dies alone. The literal meaning of the proverb that the story illustrates, however, is less important than the analogous meaning it is understood to have by the Batswana. *Ngwana yo o sa leleng, o swela tharing* (The child who doesn't cry dies in the cradle) means that if you have a problem or are in some kind of trouble, speak up, talk to people, so that you can receive the help you need. Do not keep things inside, do not withdraw, do not bear your pain alone; ask for help, seek advice, accept comfort from others. It is a very practical life lesson, and fits with the communally reassuring social structures of traditional Africa and the value of inclusiveness. Too often we feel pain, shame or stigma associated with whatever we are facing. However, the problems we face are always human problems shared by others. By

opening up we find that others have faced similar situations and come through. By asking we are helped to constructive ways of handling our physical, emotional or spiritual pain. We find support in community, especially that community where one person's pain is the pain of all.

The story can teach not only about culture but about language. The word *thari* for example, translated 'cradle' refers to a sheep or calf skin traditionally tied around the mother to carry the baby on her back. Today, Batswana and African mothers who continue the practice typically use a cloth or a towel. *Thari* also has a number of related analogous uses for example, *thari e atile* means to have many children, while *go tlhoka thari* means to be barren, and *lethari* refers to a young girl of childbearing or marriageable age.

Among a Motswana child's first lessons is the importance of gratitude. Children have inculcated early in them the norm of giving thanks, which they do not with words but by clapping their cupped hands. The phrase *ke leboga ka a mabedi* meaning thank you, derives from this symbolic hand action. One of the modern stories in the collection, *Lorato* (Love Conquers All) illustrates the value of gratitude, as expressed in one's deeds. At first the two brothers in this story feel that the mother does not love them equally. As they mature they come to understand and feel the power of the impartial mother love. Leaving home, they find jobs and become independent adults, then:

> *E ne e re kgwedi e fedile ba bo ba ya gae ba isetsa mmaabona dijo le go ya go tlhola gore a o sa tshetse sentle. Basimane ba, ba ne ba le matlhagatlhaga mo e bileng ba bona tlhatloso kwa ba ne ba dira teng. Mme ka boitumelo ba ya gae ba fitlha ba direla Mmaabona moletlo o mo tona wa maleboga, ba laletsa batho ba le bantsi. Ga nna monate mme morago ga moletlo ba agela mmaabo ntlo e tona.*
>
> Every month end they would go home and take their mother food and make sure that she was doing well. These boys were so industrious that they soon got promotions at work. They went home full of joy and threw a big feast for their mother to say thank you. They invited a lot of people and it was a wonderful occasion. Shortly thereafter they built a very big house for their mother.

The story teaches one of the simplest yet most profound life lessons, namely, that it is in giving that we truly live and make the world a better place. In this story the value of mother love, the norm of giving thanks as well as the norm of showing respect for elders, comes to the fore. It is in acknowledging the role parents and other adults, teachers and mentors, have played in our achievements that the individual remains humble and grounded. As the Setswana proverb goes: *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* (I am a person through others), meaning that we coexist and are interdependent. 'My being and meaning in the world can only be fulfilled by the being of the other' (Matjila 1996). This group existence, a fundamental pillar of Batswana society, is a value shared by other black South African cultures.

A traditional story entitled *Letlapa le Basetsana* (The Stone and the Girls) brings out the value of treating others well and maintaining harmony in social interactions. The story goes:

> *Ga twe e rile e le basetsana ba bararo, ba ne ba ile kgonnyeng. Yo mongwe a kgopiwa ke letlapa fa ba le mo tseleng go ya kgonnyeng ke fa a roga letlapa. Fa ba sena go rwalela ba boela gae. Mme ba boa ka tsela e ba tlileng ka yona. Letlapa le ne la gogomoga, la nna legolo. Basetsana be tlhoka fa ba kgabaganyang teng.*
>
> Once upon a time there were three girls who went to fetch firewood. On their way one of them tripped on a stone and she swore at the stone. After collecting the firewood they went back home. They returned using the same road by which they had come. The stone swelled up, it became bigger and bigger until the girls had no way to pass.

The girls sing a song to plead with the stone which makes room for them to pass. However, the child who insulted the stone is still blocked. After the group of girls has returned home and told the father of the rude child about her predicament he goes to help her. Only after he threatens to leave her behind is she persuaded to admit what she has done and the stone lets them both pass. The story concludes that the girl went through a ritual cleansing. In Batswana culture, where a person is considered a spiritual being, it is believed that only a ritual, spiritual cleansing can heal a person after an

emotional experience. In this story what the girl had done was not in line with *botho* (humanity) and she needed to learn to live in harmony with others. Moreover, she needed to learn that 'honesty is the best policy'. Instilling an ethical value and appropriate behaviour in social intercourse, the ritual cleansing aimed to mould and chisel character. As one Westerner observed with regard to the remarkable social amenities of Africans:

> Those who have had the privilege of sharing life with African peoples can hardly fail to recognize the extraordinary level of social intelligence they display in their interactions (Fugelsang & Chandler, as cited in Pradervand 1989:208).

Repeatedly these Setswana stories foreground the benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience to parents and elders. Traditionally, the behaviour of children was regulated through the larger community. A child was expected to treat any adult his parents' age with the same obedience. An elder was expected to reprimand any child doing wrong. In African cultures generally every woman your mother's age must be treated as your mother and every man your father's age as your father. Any adult your parent's age can correct and punish you. If you complain at home, you risk a second punishment. As the saying goes 'It takes a village to raise a child'. A Setswana proverb says: *Ngwana lekuka o a sokelwa,* meaning a child is a milk-sack that must be watched vigilantly. Seboni (1962:157) explicates the proverb: *Ngwana wa Setswana sa maloba o ne a tlotlile mogolo mongwe le mongwe ka ntlha ya ngwao ya Setswana* (a Motswana child of yesteryear was respectful to all elderly people because of the Setswana lore that expects every child to be submissive and obedient to seniors).

Disrespect of elders brings punishment, as when Mosidi's sister is devoured by an ogre. In this story, entitled *Mosidi le Mosadimogolo* (Mosidi and the Old Woman), Mosidi sets out to find work and her mother is anxious because her destination is a place known to be inhabited by ogres. When Mosidi reaches the place, she meets an old woman who asks her to lick her festering sores, promising to reciprocate by protecting Mosidi from the ogres. Mosidi responds with humility and compassion. The empathy and feeling she exhibits as well as obedience to an elder who could be her

grandmother's age, is rewarded, not just in terms of safety but she receives many beautiful gifts from the old woman. By contrast, when Mosidi's sister, desirous of getting the same beautiful things, arrives, she treats the old woman with contempt:

> *... mme mosadimogolo a mo raya a re a mo gore dintho gore a kgone go mo sireletsa mo go bodimo. A mo leba ka go nyatsa go gora dintho. A mo raya a re ke go gore dintho. A mo raya a re ke go gore dintho di bodile mmele jaana.*
>
> ... the old woman...asked her to lick her sores so that she would protect her from the ogres. The sister scowled at her and refused. 'Must I wash your festering sores?' she said.

Feeling empathy and compassion, embodying humility and respect, are values that are key to a meaningful life fulfilled in living for others. Respect and obedience go hand in hand. Disrespect of elders leads down the wrong paths in life, as illustrated in a story entitled *Maitseo* (Behaviour), where it is related that:

> *Modise o ne a na le ditsala tse di tshwanang le ena ka mokgwa, ba tlhole ba biditse batho ba mo motseng. Modise e ne e le seganana le fa e bile mmaagwe a mo eletsa jang o ne a beile mo go reng ga a kgathale ka jalo ga a kitla a kgaogana le ditsala tsa gagwe.*
>
> Modise had friends who were ill-mannered and badly behaved like himself; they would fight with the people in the village. Modise was disobedient, and even when his mother tried to give him advice, he made it clear that he didn't care and didn't intend parting company with his friends.

In this particular story, Modise, who refuses to listen to his mother, goes to jail after committing a robbery. The mother resolves not to assist in freeing her son from jail:

> *O ne a dira se ka go mo ruta gore ngwana yo o sa reetseng molao*

wa batsadi o reetsa wa manong.

She did so in order to teach him that a child who does not heed his parents will live by the law of the jungle.

The story about Modise, just cited above is a modern Setswana story, in which police and jail feature, not *lekgotla*, though the story interestingly betrays hybridity in that an onlooker informs the elders who in turn catch the boys in the act of robbery, thus assisting the police. In the traditional stories in the collection it is *lekgotla* (the traditional court), the chief and the elders that pass sentences and deliver punishment. Sometimes a thrashing is given, sometimes a death sentence enacted. Obedience was a value traditionally inculcated and enforced in initiation schools. Their primary purpose, to assist in the passage from the status of *bašwa* (minor) to full *botho* (humanhood) prepared young people physically for the world of work and sexually for marriage. It also instilled in these new members of society their social responsibilities and duties.

Initiates would form *mephato* (age-regimens) that functioned as a group for life. After graduation the achievement of an individual was the achievement of the group, the failure of an individual, the failure of the group. If a member of the age-set became a shining beacon, all members shared the limelight. If one member became a disgrace, all were scorned. Thus peer pressure also regulated behaviour. In times past an entire *mophato* (age-regimen) would be called to *lekgotla* (the traditional court) to be whipped, for example, for one member showing disrespect to a senior, having warded off a blow when his father or his uncle wanted to punish him. The thrashing was often done with lashes which the youth themselves plucked from the trees. *Le ojwa le sa le metsi* literally (bend the twig whilst it is still green) meant spare the rod and spoil the child. While the means of enforcement, corporeal punishment, may be outmoded, the values of obedience and accountability for one's actions, especially responsibility to one's fellows, are as important today in preparing young people for life.

Initiation schools taught love and respect for nature; young people also learned how to compose and perform praise poetry. Today we tend to think of initiation schools only in terms of the controversial practice of circumcision. This is one of the distortions of African cultures in which

missionaries were complicit—consider the assessment of initiation rites among the Batswana as indoctrinating children 'in all that is filthy ... deceitful ... unrighteous ... blasphemous and soul-destroying' (Ludorf, J. 1853, as cited in Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:315). Clearly, there was some level of reading literally rituals which were intended to be understood in their social and spiritual functioning and aesthetic symbolism. Initiation, a preparation for the rigours of the adult life, now fed with strong meat youths, hitherto nourished with milk.

In terms of the selected Setswana Stories discussed in this study, one cannot always translate certain Setswana words and phrases literally into English without offending the English sensibilities. The reader from a white English culture for example, cannot stomach the idea of Mosidi licking the old woman's festering sores—we may accommodate those sensibilities by using the word 'wash' instead of 'lick' in the English translation. In Setswana, language and imagery is understood to be metaphoric, to be trope, and hence does not offend but appeals to the Batswana sensibilities. To take another example, it is related in a different story that Bohutsana was extremely poor: *O ne a ja maswe a balekane ba gagwe*, meaning he ate his friends' dirt/ faeces. To accommodate the English sensibilities, we use the idiom: 'He always had to beg from his friends for the leftovers he ate'. The problem of cultural difference in translation can go some way toward a possible explanation for misunderstandings and misrepresentations in the past, though they must also be explained by white Western culture asserting its hegemony and its sanitised 'civilised' values. Even Plaatje, staunch advocate for the preservation of his Setswana language, culture, history, and proverbs acquiesced with English prudery rather than defend the metaphoric use of graphic language in certain imagery:

> Much of the oral native philosophy is too plain and therefore too frank for civilised ears. This is particularly true in regard to some of the proverbs relating to the relation between men and women (1916:ix).

Rationalising his omission of such proverbs he adds: 'Old people never mentioned such sayings in the presence of youth or uncircumcised adults, whom they always classed with the children'

Socially *mophato* separates youths from the life of childhood and brings them to the threshold of adulthood. It conditions them emotionally to mores of the group and moulds them into unified age-sets. It strengthens the authority of government by imparting social values, a proper respect for elders, faithfulness in observing taboos and the rules of conduct in all relationships. At the same time it introduces them to the supreme right of adults—that of communicating direct with *badimo* who plays such an integral part in their lives. In contrast, a man who has not been initiated is a perpetual boy—Mosimane and the woman—Lethisa. In the past no such one could marry, nor partake in the councils of men and women. Uninitiated men were spurned by women as incomplete beings and uninitiated women were despised by men and other women (Setiloane 1976:38).

In Batswana custom, death, mourning, and widowhood call for ritual cleansings. Among the Batswana if a married man or woman dies, there are certain rituals to be followed by the surviving spouse. Immediately after a husband passes on, the wife is not bound to stay in the bedroom. A mattress is placed on the floor and people coming to comfort the bereaved sit down next to the mattress. The widow or those who give her support, usually grandmothers who are close relatives, explain to visitors the cause of death. At this stage, the widow is said to be ceremonially unclean owing to the death of her husband and is forbidden to travel or mix socially (in Setswana she is called *sefifi*). She will wear black dress until the end of the mourning, the following spring, or for twelve months. The first time a widow ventures out of her house into public places, even if it is just to go and fetch water, she carries a *shokgwe* an onion-like, bulbous root, the scales of which she unobtrusively drops as she goes on her way, but especially at the cross-roads. The significance of this practice serves to exorcise ill-luck. She avoids cattle kraals as her condition is believed to affect livestock disastrously. During the mourning period a widow is not allowed to visit friends and if she visits family members must return before sunset (*a seke a phirimalelwa ke letsatsi kwa ntle*). The observances and taboos surrounding a widow are especially stringent, even oppressive, and many modern Batswana women are attempting to throw them off, especially since they tend to reinforce a socially inferior status for women.

Neither a widow nor a widower is permitted to have sexual intercourse with anyone until they have undergone ritual cleansing (g*o*

tlhatswa sesila). If a person transgresses this taboo, it is said they will suffer from an illness that is caused by sleeping with a person who has *makgome* (filth of the deceased). This norm relates to morality and the respect of waiting a period before taking a new partner. It enacts respect for marriage as well as the surviving family of the deceased. The widow's mourning clothes (*thapo*) are ceremonially removed by the maternal uncle of the deceased husband, normally at the beginning of spring, when the whole family undergoes a cleansing ritual. According to Setswana culture death brings *sesila*, uncleanness to those closely connected with the deceased, increasing with closeness of relationship. The spouse, parents, siblings and children wear *thapo* (a strip of plaited grass) around the neck and, sometimes to indicate the bitterness of loss, dipped in the gall of the animal slaughtered for the burial. Worn continuously, it involves many taboos in personal relationships (Setiloane 1976:68f).

During the mourning period the family shave their hair, change their clothing, cease all agricultural work and abstain from customary activities and especially if they are widows and widowers, do not walk freely among other people. This practice in Setswana is called go *ikilela*, meaning to put oneself in quarantine. There is also a Setswana proverb that says *Tswhenyana e bowa bo ntlha e a ikilela*, meaning people should always respect traditional taboos and customs in order to be safe. They should always be guided by their conscience and uphold the moral values of society. One disadvantage of adhering to all cultural norms of society is that it did not allow people to think independently and challenge some of the practices. Creative minds were scorned as outcasts. The advantage of the practice was the harmony and unity among people living together.

In another of the selected Setswana stories, entitled *Bogosi* (The Chieftainship), the lure of modernity which tends to value and elevate youth over age and maturity, is seen for the folly and short-sightedness that it involves. Life is a delicate balance between extremes, good and evil, light and dark, young and old. The youth have new ideas, new abilities and possibilities, a freshness, an energy—but the need is for balance—and specifically the realisation that hard-earned, hard-learned lessons through many years of trial and error can temper the impetuosity of youth, provide young people with a long-term view of things and productively channel their energies. In this story, after the misled youth yield to the temptation—in the

form of a traveller, representative of the outside, the modern world—to kill all of the elders and enthrone a young chief, they immediately find themselves with an insurmountable problem that only the wisdom, knowledge and experience of an old man can solve. This particular story explains the Setswana proverb *letlhaku je lešwa le agelwa mo go le legologolo*, an image drawn from the traditional way of life, of maintaining the fence. Literally, it refers to the practice of replacing old or broken stakes with fresh new thorn branches placed alongside the existing branches. Thus the foundation of the fence remains intact and the new thorn branches gain strength from it. Figuratively, the proverb is understood by Setswana speakers to mean that young people should imbibe the wisdom, knowledge and experience of the elders whilst they are still alive. Wisdom in Batswana culture, as in other traditional cultures, is epitomised by an elder. Wisdom is learned primarily in the schoolroom of life.

Conclusions

We have here made only a brief foray into the Setswana stories and proverbs, collected by Sol Plaatje Educational Trust, illustrating the kind of cultural relevance and restoration they embody and might teach. The space in between languages and cultures is pedagogically fertile, opening up new times of cultural meaning. In our analysis of the care and education of children, cultural norms and values begin with the value of the mother-love which sacrifices and takes risks for the sake of her offspring and which traditionally protects the newborn from the harsh outside world for a time and carries her child *mo tharing* (in a cradle) on her back. The education of children continues with instilling values such as saying thank-you, treating others well and living in harmony with them, and being honest. As language, stories, history and proverbs repeatedly demonstrated in our study that group existence is a fundamental pillar of Batswana society. Hence community, certainly in the past, regulated a child's behaviour and community provided a social securing structure to which people could turn for help with problems but simultaneously community demanded respect for one's fellows, accountability, compassion and embracing social, emotional and spiritual responsibilities in relation to adulthood. Listening to and living in close community with elders was primarily how and where wisdom was to be

learned. 'Values such as empathy, sharing, respect for the other, humanness, gentleness, hospitality and mutual acceptance in human interaction', which Mashige (2002:54) finds in folklore generally and we found here, are in fact, humanistic values shared across cultures, and hence, as we claim, can teach across cultures. Initiation rites and norms surrounding mourning may differ across cultures and change within a culture over time, but their aim is to develop strong, mature men and women, moral salt of the earth human beings. Together with values, cultural norms mould and chisel the granite that is character, *botho*. Achieving *botho* is the work of a lifetime.

In our interpretation of selected Setswana stories we moved between cultural norms and values (summarized in the previous paragraph), language, proverbs, and history, in acknowledgment of their inseparability and the African philosophy of interconnectedness. The theoretical construct of hybridity, drawn from the principles of negotiation and translation, has intuitively, imaginatively and emotionally informed our attempted 're-negotiation of Batswana cultural identity,' in the present, our 'restoration of rhetorical agency' and 'reformulation of obscured, dismissed and distorted histories' in this study. Language, for example, can be a restorative teaching about the concept of *ngwana wa mmu* which explicates the affinity, affection and attachment to the land and *badimo* (the ancestors) which the Batswana feel. Proverbs with their figurative language teach indirectly and sometimes by analogy, so that *letlhaku je lešwa le agelwa mo go le legologolo*, for example, encourages young people to live in close community with and imbibe the wisdom of the elders.

As regards history, undoing and redressing some of the distortions about initiation schools, we alluded to the values of obedience, respect, accountability and responsibility they inculcated. In the past, mistranslation based on misunderstanding by outsiders from the hegemonic Western culture, contributed to egregious distortions, that resulted in extreme negative affect toward African cultures. While we believe that cultural norms can be oppressive and discriminatory, and impeded critical, creative faculties, we maintain that the metaphoric use of graphic language, like the symbolic signification of stringent cultural rules, laws and taboos embodied the strong meat that initiates needed to digest in order to become fully-fledged adults and ultimately, revered ancestors.

afterword

Our findings compel us to return to Plaatje, 'our first Motswana man of letters' (Shole 2004:ii) to pay homage. Pioneer writer, translator, linguist, collector of folktales and proverbs, and arguably the grandfather of modern Setswana literature, he worked tirelessly to preserve and develop Setswana language, stories, history, proverbs, and culture. Speaking some eight languages, he was genuinely passionate about his mother-tongue and never lost sight of the debt of gratitude a child owes its mother: 'The best Sechuana speakers known to me owe their knowledge to the teachings of a grandmother, or a mother, or both, just as I myself ... am indebted to the teachings of my mother and two aunts' (Plaatje 1916:7).

References

Primary Source

Collected Stories. Ditlhamane tse di Kgobokantsweng. Malefo, BM & K Haire (eds): With Introduction by BM Malefo. (Unpublished. Collected by Sol Plaatje Educational Trust, Kimberley.) [Used with permission.]

Secondary Sources

Asante, Molefi K 1988. *Afrocentricity*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

Bhabha, Homi 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Comaroff, J & J Comaroff 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Jones, D & ST Plaatje 2007. *A Setswana Reader (Folk Narratives) Padi Ya Dinaane Tsa Batswana*. Room To Read: South Africa. (Original published 1916).

Malefo, BM 1993. In Rantao, BJ. *Dinaane Tsa Ga Rona*. Pretoria: De Jager-Haum.

Matjila, DS 1996. Teaching African Languages: A Culture Based Approach. A Case for Setswana as a University Discipline. Presentation made at University of Maryland, Eastern Shore.

Mashige, Mashudu C. 2002. Cultural Identity and Folktales in the New

Millenium. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* Vol 12,1: 50-62.

Mminele, SPP 1966. *Ngwana wa mobu*. Better Books: King Williamstown.

Ngugi, wa Thiong'o 1993. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi: EAEP; Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.

Ntuli, Pitika P 1999. The Missing Link between Culture and Education: Are we still Chasing Gods that are not our Own? In Makgoba, WM (ed): *African Renaissance. The New Struggle*. South Africa: Mafube / Tafelberg.

Plaatje, Sol T 1916. *Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents. Diane Tsa Secoana le Maele a Sekgooa a a Dumalanang Naco*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

Plaatje, Sol T 2007. Padi ya Dinaane tsa Batswana. A Setswana Reader (Folk Narratives). Pretoria: Room To Read South Africa.

Pradervand, Pierre 1989. *Listening To Africa. Developing Africa from the Grassroots*. New York, Westport, London: Praeger.

Schapera, I 1948. Procreation and Childbirth. In *Married Life in an African Tribe*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.

Scheub, Harold 2002. *The Poem in the Story*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Sebate, PS 2001. The Wisdom we Lived and Live By: The Setswana Question. *South African Journal of African Languages* 2001, 3: 269-279.

Seboni, MOM 1962. *Diane le Maele a Setswana*. Love Press: Alice, South Africa.

Setiloane, GM 1976: *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana,* Rotterdam: AA Balkema.

Shole, JS 2004. Letlapele Ka ga Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje: 1976-1932, Foreword on Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje: 1876-1932. In *A Setswana Reader (FolkNarratives) Padi Ya Dinaane Tsa Batswana*. Kimberley: Sol Plaatje Educational Trust.

Van der Walt, B 2006. *When African and Western Cultures Meet. From Confrontation to Appreciation*. Potchefstroom: The Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa.

Viljoen, H & CN Van der Merwe 2007. A Poetics of Liminality and

Hybridity. In Viljoen, H & CN van der Merwe (ed): *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*. New York: Peter Lang.

Karen Haire
Extraordinary Senior Lecturer
Research Unit: Language and Literature in the
South African Context
North-West University
Potchefstroom
karen.haire@telkomsa.net

D.S. Matjila
African Languages
Director: Pan African Languages and Cultural Development
Department of African Languages
UNISA
matjids@unisa.ac.za