

Mmino wa bana (Children's Songs) as a Determinant of Reading Recorded Knowledge among Rural Teenagers in Ga Molepo, South Africa

Mahlaga Johannes Molepo

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1248-2348>

University of the Free State, South Africa

MolepoMJ@ufs.ac.za

Abstract

This article takes a phenomenological approach that combines interpretivist and critical forms of research paradigms to explain *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) as a determinant of reading recorded knowledge among teenagers in Ga Molepo, South Africa. Data was collected from focus groups in a purposive sample of rural teenagers engaged in learning through song and repetition. The multiple case study method was employed to draw data from multiple sources including the rural teenagers' childhood experiences and literature in library and information science, the behavioral sciences (i.e., anthropology, sociology, and psychology), musicology, and folklore. Photovoice was used to visualise rural teenagers in their natural habitat. This research argues that recorded knowledge in the form of books and other printed material is what drives reading within the school system and the purview of mass reading. The findings reveal that best practice in reading programmes should consider ways of knowing from traditional and modern communities. The driving of reading programmes in South Africa and the continent at large requires a critical interpretivist approach that acknowledges the nature of being of traditional communities and their local epistemologies. The article concludes that *mmino wa bana* should be catalogued and made accessible in new formats that integrate technology. Policymakers in arts, culture, and heritage (i.e. library and information services) should consider the importance music plays in the early development of rural teenagers.

Keywords: *mmino wa bana*; reading; recorded knowledge; rural teenagers; interpretivism; critical theory

Introduction

While educational and literacy research is replete with findings about the literacy crisis facing South Africa's education system (see, for example, Millin 2015; Spaul 2013), cultural influences on the orientation of rural teenagers towards recorded knowledge have received very little scholarly attention. Discourse on the reading crisis has for the most part blamed the Department of Education and its failing teacher education programmes. As Willenberg (2018) puts it:

the ultimate responsibility for educating South Africa's children lies in the school system. The PIRLS results and recent investigations have provided incontrovertible evidence that initial teacher education programs are not producing graduates sufficiently equipped to teach reading.

The ability to read and write determines one's level of literacy, and this is directly linked to participation in the modern school system. A study by Rule (2017) identifies the "oratorical approach to teaching reading" as a challenge among learners in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Rule (2017) further suggests teaching reading pedagogies as one of the solutions to this challenge. These studies focus on reading using governance and teacher perspectives. This article emphasises the need to also study the communicative language (i.e. *mmino wa bana*) of rural teenagers in their reading and literacy development.

According to Statistics South Africa (2019), there have been some improvements in social challenges such as literacy. It is reported that between the years 2007 and 2017, school attendance among learners aged 16–18 rose from 91.3% to 96.0%. This is attributed to the no-fees policy. What is omitted from these statistics is rural teenagers between the ages of five and 15, who are the focus of this article. Nell (1988) asserts that literacy estimates are a mass phenomenon. The author warns that although literacy estimates offer a quick guide to the extent of reading in a country, they should be treated with great caution. The reason is that there are other broader societal factors that drive reading and therefore literacy rates. For instance, in England, charity schools, such as those established by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, were widely available and held that teaching the poor put them in a better position. This contributed to the interest in reading by the poor. The availability of cheap popular literature was also a factor that influenced the country's reading culture.

This research argues that recorded knowledge in the form of books and other printed material is what drives reading within the school system and the purview of mass reading. *Mmino wa bana* (children's songs) in traditional communities are taught to rural teenagers as a means of negotiating social, cultural, political, and economic space for expression, hence the need to explain their ideological underpinnings. The ideological underpinnings that inform *mmino wa bana* determine rural teenagers' acceptance or rejection of the technological inventions (i.e., recorded prints) from other cultures. An improved understanding of the important role music plays in traditional African community life can assist in creating successful reading programmes for rural

teenagers in various social environments (i.e., classrooms, reading programmes, libraries, etc.).

The research starts by addressing the problem. This is followed by a discussion on recorded knowledge and the universe of knowledge, the methodology as well as the researcher's childhood experiences. To find out what authors in other disciplines have researched on children's learning and reading (the researcher's emphasis), the article also reviews literature in education and the behavioural sciences. A discussion of the "call and response" pattern in African folklore follows, with practical examples (with photos) of rural teenagers engaged in learning through song at a village playground. The role of librarians in community libraries is briefly addressed. Finally, a discussion of the findings is presented and followed by recommendations and a conclusion.

Addressing the Problem

What influence does culture have on rural teenagers' reading practices? A sizeable number of rural teenagers in South Africa struggle with reading. Most studies on reading focus on the government's role in promoting reading (see Willenberg 2018) and the teaching of reading methods (see Rule 2017). Recent studies on strengthening the reading eco-system in South Africa focus on the sustainability of book clubs, reading in rehabilitation centres, partnerships, reading habits, Web 2.0 as well as storytelling and reading initiatives (Ngoepe 2020). However, there is also a need to look at the socialisation of rural teenagers, especially their natural habitat. Their culture and traditional ways of knowing (i.e., oral folklore) determine their interface with reading recorded knowledge. In library and information sciences, recorded knowledge such as books are part of what is referred to as the universe of knowledge. According to Wilson (1968), the universe of knowledge is made up of authors, texts, physical objects, librarians, and readers. The environment in which rural teenagers are raised from childhood is dominated by an oral culture whose unwritten words and utterances are seldom clearly described and appraised in the universe of knowledge. Apart from other broader societal factors that determine the consumption of recorded knowledge (see Nell 1998), the oral culture rural teenagers grow up with is not sufficiently notated and documented for description and appraisal in the universe of knowledge. For instance, a study by Mokgetle (2018) shows that *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) form one of the neglected areas in studies of childhood development in rural children. One of the reasons highlighted by Mokgetle for this neglect is the scarcity of documented and notated records of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs). It is important to investigate this problem in library and information sciences because the reading struggles of rural teenagers are linked to recorded knowledge. Recorded knowledge in the form of books is what drives reading within the school system and the purview of mass reading. *Mmino wa bana* (children's songs) in traditional communities are taught to rural teenagers as a means of negotiating social, cultural, political and economic space for expression, hence the need to explain their ideological underpinnings. This determines rural teenagers' reading of recorded knowledge. The purpose of this article is to interpret *mmino wa*

bana (children's songs) as a determinant in the reading of recorded knowledge by rural teenagers.

The research's objectives are as follows:

- To explain *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) as a determinant of reading recorded knowledge among rural teenagers;
- To describe *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) as a neglected area in the reading development of rural teenagers;
- To make recommendations for best practices in reading programmes aimed at rural teenagers.

Recorded Knowledge

It is important to be clear from the outset. In this article, the concept of recorded knowledge is used interchangeably with writings, written text, books, library resources and printed material. The invention of writing and printing presents some of the earlier technologies that many people in the postmodern age often take for granted. Postmodern critics are renowned for articulating the present using historical contexts. As Felluga (2015, xi) asserts:

postmodern critics often look backwards to the changes implemented by earlier technologies that we now take for granted—especially the written word, a tool that has become so naturalized that we tend not to think about it as a technology that affects our thought process.

The normalisation of the reading of written texts follows the norms of a literate culture. While most rural teenagers attend school in the modern sense of the word, they were socialised in a preliterate culture that is fundamentally different from a literate one. One of the examples that show the difference between preliterate and literate cultures is the answer to the question, "What is a tree?" According to Felluga (2015, xii), the answer to the question in a literate culture is unanimously linked to "our communal literate source—the dictionary, which structures our experience of the world through the conventions of science and taxonomy." The use of words such as "photosynthesis" and "oxygenation" as aspects of a tree illustrates this definition. However, in a preliterate culture, the author insists, the answer would unanimously be different because there is no written text to refer to. Ong (1982, 49) (cited in Felluga 2015, xii) writes that "oral culture tends to use concepts in situational, operational frames of references that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld." Similarly, exposure to the orality of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) among rural teenagers can determine the reading of recorded knowledge. Their definition and understanding of reading might be fundamentally different from what holds in a postmodern South African literate culture.

We live in an era often referred to as the information age. The world we live in is an interesting one, full of writings. According to Wilson (1968, 1), “most of the writings are of passing interest to anyone, despite their being records or traces of human activity.” In library and information sciences, these writing can be characterised as recorded knowledge. Librarians can relate to the assertion by Wilson (1968). For instance, how many items of library resources in the form of books and other printed material get transferred to a library storage years after they are written? Daily, society creates and disseminates various types of writings through individual and organisational effort. Books are almost everywhere. They can be found in most academic, public, school and community libraries. Written texts are also ubiquitous in the school system, mass media in the form of television programmes and newspaper headlines daily. Information flows through these traditional media platforms and their digital alternatives. Individuals and organisations have a lot of information to consume, by choice or chance. This phenomenon is referred to as the universe of knowledge. It is a universe made of authors of texts, material/physical objects, information professionals, readers as well as factors that determine consumption patterns (see also Nell 1998). Rural teenagers in Ga Molepo become participants in this universe of knowledge through the school system and mass reading. The question is whether *mmino wa bana* as communal oral folklore feature in this type of universe of knowledge? In librarianship, such a universe is organised and controlled by way of description and appraisal.

Bibliographic Control

Bibliographic control consists of all the measures put in place to assist information workers to identify, organise and record texts to make them accessible to users in libraries. One means of organising and controlling the world of writings is through bibliographic control. Wilson (1968, 1) states that the “discovery of the valuable in the mass of the mostly worthless or uninteresting is a major ingredient in the problem of bibliographical control.” In the case of rural teenagers we may ask, who determines which reading material is identified and described for reading in book clubs, community libraries, schools, homes, churches, and other social spaces? The simplest of answers could be teachers, parents, and librarians/cataloguers. There is of course the difficulty of linking the simplest of answers to other players (for example, cataloguers). These players can also become spheres of influence. As Wilson observes, “[t]o have bibliographic control over a collection of things is to have a certain sort of power over those things” (Wilson 1968, 6). The reading struggles of rural teenagers can be contrasted with the struggle *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) face in getting a clear description in the contemporary universe of writings.

Methodology

This research adopts a phenomenological approach that combines interpretivist and critical research paradigms to explain *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) as a determinant of reading recorded knowledge among teenagers in Ga Molepo, South Africa. Interpretivism focuses on understanding the respondent’s experiences and the

meaning of those experiences from their own perspective (Sarantakos 2005). The multiple case study method was employed to draw data from multiple sources, which include rural teenagers' experiences, literature in library and information sciences, the behavioural sciences (i.e., anthropology, sociology, psychology), musicology, and folklore. The multiple case study allows data to be collected from different sources (Yin 2009). Critical theory (in the historical sense) "is supposed to contribute to the necessary subjective dimension of emancipation by clarifying immanent (historically based) emancipatory ends and demystifying reifications that prevent 'free action'" (Antonio 1983, 331–32). Data was collected from focus groups in a purposive sample of 10 respondents engaged in learning through song, role play, and repetition. Five of the respondents were girls and the other five were boys from the village of Maripathekong in Ga Molepo. The purposive sampling helped the researcher understand the activities rural boys and girls engage in outside the modern school system. Two focus groups were created by dividing respondents into the categories of boys and girls. Interviews in the focus groups were carried out using an interview schedule administered by the researcher. Data was analysed thematically.

Photovoice was used to visualise the rural teenagers in their natural habitat. According to Wang, Burris and Ping (1996) and Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice is a participatory action-research methodology based on the understanding that people are experts on their own lives. It was first introduced to rural women in Yunnan province in China by Caroline C. Wang and her associates. This method allows rural teenagers to use photos to raise epistemological questions regarding their struggles with reading recorded knowledge. This will encourage South African policymakers to consider *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) as a determinant of reading recorded knowledge among rural teenagers. Respondents' experiences assist with an interpretation of the ideological underpinnings of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs). This article also draws on insights from the behavioural sciences.

Insight from the Behavioral Sciences

The researcher is cognisant of literature that depicts the repercussions of the Western behavioural science tradition for Black children's learning and reading challenges, the researcher's emphasis, in the modern school system. The misunderstanding of Black children's behaviour in education and literacy literature can be located within Western behavioural sciences literature. According to Hale (1982), Western behavioural sciences have been used for colonial expansion and political control in parts of the world. While the reading struggles of rural teenagers are a small detail in the bigger scheme of the struggles of the marginalised peoples of the world, they resonate very well with the ideas of Frantz Fanon. For example, in Fanon's book *A Dying Colonialism* (1965), we learn that the victory against colonialism in Algeria had little to do with the possession of heavy artillery against the French war machine. It had more to do with the strength and power of mass participation, unity, and resistance at every level of society. Similarly, the neglect of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) in South Africa's post-1994

era represents a broader struggle of rural communities. Reading and literacy development often mirrors mainstream Euro-American ethnocentrism. It is therefore relevant that the overt marginality of traditional forms of knowing in the contemporary schooling system of South Africa is highlighted in this article.

As Nsamenang (2006, 293) puts it:

Views on development and intelligence mirror mainstream Euro-American ethnocentrism and are presented as being applicable to all human diversity. In contrast, an African worldview visualizes a phase of human cyclical ontogenesis of systematic socialization of responsible intelligence in participatory curricula that assigns stage-appropriate developmental tasks.

The quotation above is relevant when one considers the role *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) play in rural teenagers' reading development and intelligence. In contrast to the reading style adopted when reading a novel, for example, rural teenagers are used to systematic socialisation in their natural habitat. This calls for new ways to research the reading of recorded writings (i.e., books), which have roots in Euro-American cultural environments.

The Need for New Ways to Conduct Research

Rapid technological advances are connecting people across the world regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, and geographical borders. Rapid changes in technology and access to the internet now allow people from diverse socio-economic and political backgrounds to come together in dialogue. These changes necessitate new approaches to research on the reading and literacy crisis in South Africa. Ball and Freedman (2004, 4) corroborate the idea of looking for alternatives as follows:

We argue for this new focus because more different kinds of people *are* coming together—in classrooms, in workplaces, over the Internet, in cities all around the globe. ... Diverse people will struggle to understand one another. We therefore will need to understand the nature of that struggle. We will have before us opportunities to watch what goes wrong just as we have done, but we also will have opportunities to watch and learn from effective communication as it occurs.

At a micro level, the acknowledgement of the nature and ways of knowing of rural teenagers should provide a starting point for improved understanding. This can be done by drawing insight from Mikhail Bakhtin's theories and perspectives.

Mikhail Bakhtin's Theories and Perspectives

The theories and perspectives of Mikhail Bakhtin are useful in explaining *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) as a determinant of reading and literacy development in rural teenagers. The idea of *freedom* as a relative term in African children's education (see

Adeyemi and Adeyinka 2003) links very well with the notion of activating the holistic cultural wholeness of rural teenagers to understand their reading struggles.

In a publication titled *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language, Literacy and Learning*, Ball and Freedman (2004) employ Bakhtin's idea of "ideological becoming" to understand how a person's individual ideas and world view influence how they interact with the social environment. According to Ball and Freedman (2004, 5), Bakhtin's ideological becoming "refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas, what Bakhtin calls an ideological self."

Discussing the "ideological self" of students, the authors assert that:

The choices learners make about what types of languages to acquire and use are political just as the decisions teachers make about what types of languages to provide and accept in the classroom are political. (Ball and Freedman 2004, 5)

A closer look at the quotation reveals that the individuality of learners in the mainstream schooling system cannot be separated from the cultural and political aspects that shape and influence the world view of the rural teenager. In other words, learners from traditional communities go to school as holistic beings. Ideologically, they are influenced by the culture of the society they belong to. The same also holds for their attitude towards reading associated with the modern schooling system. Apart from the support learners receive from the school and teachers in a learning environment, it remains the decision of the learner to accept or reject what is being offered. Drawing on the Bakhtinian point of view, a similar point is made by Ball and Freedman (2004, 5) about students:

Students make conscious and unconscious decisions about how much to identify with and acquire school language and school ways; they come to school with ways of talking or singing [the researcher's emphasis in this article] that mark them as members of a particular socio-economic class, and they decide what to read and write and whether they care most about pleasing the teacher or their peers or both or neither.

The reading struggles of rural teenagers are more complex than what has been recently documented in the available literature (see Willenberg 2018). A question may be asked: Can reader apathy amongst rural teenagers be attributed to the *ideological self* as well as the influence culture has on the reader?

Current research on reading in South Africa does not consider the important role music (i.e., folk) plays in the lives of rural teenagers. This neglect can partly be attributed to the fact that African folklore is mostly oral with limited notation and documentation. As Mokgetle (2018) cautions, this type of folklore is at risk of extinction because it has rapidly been replaced by television. The purpose of this article is to highlight *mmimo wa bana* (children's songs) as a neglected area in reading programmes aimed at rural teenagers.

Interestingly, this neglect of the role music plays in human beings is also pervasive in the social psychology of music. As Rentfrow (2012, 402) aptly puts it:

Mainstream social psychology has little to say about music. In the rare cases when music has been used in social psychology research, it was usually as a mood manipulation rather than the focus of the investigation.

It is therefore not surprising that the role music plays in the lives of rural teenagers and adolescents has received little attention in South African reading and literacy studies. In this article, this neglect is remedied by pinning the “call and response” pattern in music to the ontological and epistemological orientation of rural teenagers. This is necessary for an understanding of the ideological self (see Bakhtin in Ball and Freedman 2004) of rural teenagers in reading programmes. To do this, we need to trace the origins of the “call and response” pattern in Black folklore.

In the book *Black Children, Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*, Hale (1982, 97) highlights the need to consider the role music plays in the lives of Black children. The author asks the following questions: How prevalent is music in the Black environment? What songs are sung? These questions are relevant in this article. The author further reiterates that is important to look into the verbal skills of Black children, a shift from studies that focus on language from a linguistic perspective. *Mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) are prevalent among rural teenagers in Ga Molepo. Folk songs with a similar pattern to “call and response” can also be found in Ga Molepo.

The methodology employed in this article considers the multiplicity of epistemic realities represented by diverse African, mainly Black, ethnic groups in South Africa. The next section discusses the main findings.

Discussion and Findings

Now that there is documentary evidence of the existence of *mmino wa bana* (children’s music) in traditional African communities (see Mokgetle 2018), this section discusses the findings of this article. The themes covered are respondents’ understanding of what constitutes printed books (the researcher’s emphasis), examples of *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) as communicative language, and challenges as well as opportunities for improvement.

Respondents’ Understanding of What Constitutes Printed Books

The respondents were asked what they understand reading printed books to entail and the following are their responses:

Go bala dibuka tša sekolo [To read schoolbooks]

Gore ke kgone go tšwelela ka sekolong [So that I succeed in school]

Dilo tša ka sekolong [Things in the school]

What can be gathered from the above is that the word “school” features in all the responses. The respondents associate the reading of recorded knowledge with the school system. None of them seem to associate reading books with any of the activities they engage in at the village playground (refer to Figure 1). This suggests that they do not connect the reading of recorded knowledge with their natural habitat. This finding links with the assertion made by Rule (2017) mentioned in the introduction. Rule (2017) identifies the teaching of reading in schools by teachers as one of the reasons why rural teenagers do not attach meaning to what they read. In this article, the neglect of *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) in rural teenagers’ early childhood development is identified as a major driver of their thought processes. How they are socialised in their community influences their world view and therefore their determination in reading recorded knowledge. This finding is also linked to the assertion by Ong (1982) (cited in Felluga 2015, xii) discussed in the sections above.



Figure 1: Typical activities rural teenagers engage in at the village playground. Picture and text by Mahlaga Molepo, 2020

Examples of *mmino wa bana* (Children’s Songs) as Communicative Language

To highlight the influence of *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) on the thought processes of rural teenagers, the reader’s attention is drawn to two popular children’s songs in Ga Molepo. According to Mokgetle (2018, 168) *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) at Moletjie village consist of “a melodic pattern that reflects repetition in rhythmic patterns.” In Ga Molepo, a similar melodic pattern can be observed. For

instance, there is a song called “Mabele a Sekgowa”—a satirical composition meant to tease and downplay the authenticity of genetically modified mealie corn and malt.

The song is arranged as follows:

<i>Mabele a Sekgowa</i>	[Call]
<i>Ana dihloka</i>	[Response]
<i>Ke rile ke a hlokola</i>	[Call]
<i>Ana dihloka</i>	[Response]
<i>Dihloka ke marapo</i>	[Call]
<i>Ana dihloka</i>	[Response]

[Teenagers hold hands and move around in a circle]

<i>Tšhukule Tšhukule</i>	[Call]
<i>Ha!</i>	[Response]
<i>Tšhukule Tšhukule</i>	[Call]
<i>Ha!</i>	[Response]

In a typical traditional community such as Ga Molepo, genetically modified mealie seeds are perceived by villagers as a violation of the sovereignty of their traditional mealie corn seeds. As mentioned earlier, the lyrics of the song “Mabele a Sekgowa” are particularly interesting when translated into other languages. For instance, *Mabele a Sekgowa ga ana dihloka* (Mealie corn from the West]), *A na dihloka* (do not have bran), *Ke rile ke a hlokola* (I tried separating the bran from the gem), *Dihloka ke marapo* (the bran is skeletal), *Tshukule, tshukule* (brace yourself, hold your hands in unison). The kids would then respond *Ha!* in unison as they propel themselves into a cyclical motion. The activity is performative in nature, almost similar to rhymes that accompany a jump rope game (refer to Figure 2). The researcher visited a children’s playground at Mankgaile village and discovered that, after many years, there were still children who sing the song “Mabele a Sekgowa.” When asked what their understanding of the song is, five of them responded *a re tsebe* (we don’t know) while five said they heard it from their elders (i.e., brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, etcetera).



Figure 2: Performative activities of rural teenagers at a playground. Photograph and text by Mahlaga Molepo, 2020

The “call” in the song—*Mabele a Sekgowa*—is critical towards the agricultural practices of the Western world, and the “response”—*Ana dihloka*—emphasises the perceived shallowness of foreign Western mealie corn. The delivery of the song represents to a large extent the “ideological becoming” (see Bakhtin in Ball and Freedman 2004) of rural teenagers in their early developmental stages. Importantly, the song is sung in a local indigenous language, Northern Sotho. Rural teenagers enter formal education well aware of the differences in the nature of things and ways of knowing. A closer look at the translated lyrics of the song above indicates that rural teenagers are greatly influenced by their rural habitat. The composition and arrangement as well as the message in the lyrics of the song are reminiscent of the traditional community they grow up in. It also speaks to the broader struggles facing the traditional community at the time of its composition. Similarly, the decision to read or not to read rests on the orientation of rural teenagers towards recorded knowledge or texts. It therefore becomes an individual choice to acquire, learn and read in other languages or discard the object altogether.

Another song of friendship (*koša ya segwera*) is “Keledimo ke ledimo” (I am a scavenger) and is performed as follows:

<i>Keledimo ke ledimo</i>	[Call]
<i>Mee mee mee</i>	[Response]
<i>Ke ja bana</i>	[Call]

Mee mee mee [Response]

Ake kgethe [Call]

Mee mee mee [Response]

Group response at once: *Ma mma pitšā e ya swaa!*

[Everyone runs towards home to save themselves from being preyed on by *ledimo* (scavenger)]

This is a song rural teenagers sing in unison while playing at the playground. As Bernard (2019) asserts, the singing is rhythmic, direct, quick, and conclusive. The song dramatises the existence of a scavenger (*ledimo*) who preys on young children. The singing thereof signifies a level of consciousness, a moment in a rural teenager's life. From an early age, rural teenagers are able to differentiate between foreign and local mealie corn, Western and African, scavengers and friends. As a result, they are also able to differentiate between objects and symbols that speak to their existence and those that do not. The stage of rural teenagehood is, in Bakhtinian thinking, a stage of ideological becoming (see Ball and Freedman 2004). Rural teenagers do not only sing the songs because they are children. Through *mmimo wa bana*, they reaffirm the culture of the society they belong to. In addition, they are able to personalise and reconstruct the social world around them. Their reading struggles occur within "zones of influence." In the same way they personalise songs such as "Mabele a sekgowa" and "Ke ledimo ke ledimo," they have the autonomy to personalise and reconstruct the broader social world. Such manoeuvres can be characterised as unique forms of challenging established norms (see Michel de Certeau in Dick 2012). For instance, they are able to personalise and reconstruct real cars using wires and other materials they can lay their hands on (refer to Figure 3). Similarly, their rural upbringing influences the decisions they make about reading recorded knowledge or written texts.



Figure 3: An example of personalisation and reconstruction of the social world. Photograph and text by Mahlaga Molepo, 2020

Challenge 1

It was found that due to a rapidly changing society, fewer rural teenagers interface with *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) during childhood. The reason is that *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) are seldom appraised within the universe of knowledge (see Wilson 1968). For instance, no written records of indigenous children’s songs similar to the ones discussed in this section were found in the community library located 10 kilometres from Mankgaile village at Tshebela village. It would be interesting to find out whether books on *mmino wa bana* (children’s songs) are available in other libraries.

Opportunity

The reader’s attention is drawn to the definition of the word “book” as highlighted in the *Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* (2017) (Department of Arts and Culture [DAC] 2017). One of the cornerstones of the policy is to, inter alia, “affirm the right of everyone to enjoy, participate in and have access to artistic, cultural, heritage, linguistic resources, facilities, training programmes and related opportunities” (DAC 2017, 4). Furthermore, cognisant of rapid technological changes relating to literature, books and publishing, the policy asserts:

The Policy chooses, however, to retain the term “book” as it exists worldwide, but also to caution the reader to be conscious that “book” is used herein both in its traditional

sense and as a Literary Work—with far wider implications than the traditional printed and bound object. ... The term book describes and includes all the links in the book value chain: that is, the people, organisations and companies and all their separate skills, competencies, labour and activities that start with the creation of the Literary Work and lead to its consumption by the reader. The book value chain includes, but is not limited to: authors, translators, editors, illustrators, designers, typesetters, paper manufacturers and printers, publishers, book distributors and booksellers, libraries and readers. (DAC 2017, 29)

The description of the book in the quotation is relevant to this article. *Mmino wa bana* (children's songs), albeit not appraised as such, can be linked to the book value chain (i.e., people, systems, technology and processes). The skills and competencies of rural teenagers involved in the creation and performance of *mmino wa bana* may be construed as belonging to the category "Literary Work" because they share traits with those involved in the book value chain. Apart from Mokgetle's (2018) dissertation and Phala and Molepo's (2006) book titled *Ke tseo ditaola kgaphamamila: Sepedi Folk Songs, Proverbs and Indigenous Games*, very little has been written about *mmino wa bana* (children's songs). There are very few books on *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) available for description and appraisal. This presents community libraries and information professionals with new opportunities for growth and transformation. For instance, the *Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* (DAC 2017) lists the installation of gaming and automated systems equipment as current developments in public and community libraries. The integration of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) with technology in community libraries can result in new publishing formats that promote literacy and reading among rural teenagers. This should be in line with the three guidelines for rural (community) libraries proposed by Kempson (1986): the rural library should not solely be based on the provision of printed materials; the rural library should be rooted in the community and, for the most part, facilitated by members of that particular community; and the rural library service should be a channel for transferring information both to and from the local community. The community library at Tshebela village could benefit from these guidelines in order to preserve *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) using a variety of formats. These new formats may interest rural teenagers in reading programmes.

Challenge 2

Furthermore, it was found that *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) are at risk of extinction. Several factors were identified as the main drivers. The first factor is the availability of digital satellite television in rural homesteads. Most children aged between five and 15 have access to a variety of entertainment and educational materials on Digital Satellite Television (DStv). When asked about access to mainstream television channels, all 10 respondents indicated that their homes are connected to DStv. These are the same rural teenagers in rural homesteads. All of them indicated that they have watched programmes such as *Cartoon Network* in the last 12 months. It would be interesting to learn what holds for rural teenagers whose homesteads do not have access

to DStv. These findings corroborate the findings of the National Reading Survey into the reading and book reading behaviour of adult South Africans. According to TNS Research Surveys (2007), watching television, DVDs and videos was rated higher as a leisure activity than reading. However, the study overlooks the reading habits of rural teenagers since it is limited to adult readers. The findings also corroborate Mokgetle's (2018) assertion that *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) are at risk of being phased out by television programmes.

Opportunity

Reading materials that capture local episteme such as *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) in multimedia formats should be developed and incorporated into learning programmes on free-to-air and pay television channels.

Conclusion

This article argues that recorded knowledge in the form of books and other printed material is what drives reading within the school system and the ambit of mass reading. *Mmino wa bana* (children's songs) in traditional communities are created by rural teenagers as a form of negotiation for social, cultural, political, and economic space for expression, hence the need to explain the ideological underpinnings of the songs. The ideological underpinnings that inform *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) determine rural teenagers' acceptance or rejection of the technological inventions (i.e., recorded prints) from other cultures. Schäfer (2016) asserts that "the strength of music preference is mainly informed by the functions that music fulfills in people's lives (e.g., to regulate emotions, moods, or psychological arousal; to promote self-awareness; to foster social relatedness)." An improved understanding of the important role music plays in traditional African community life can assist in driving successful reading programmes for rural teenagers in various social environments (i.e., the classroom, reading programmes, libraries, etc.).

Any attempt to implement reading programmes among rural teenagers should acknowledge that the process of becoming a reader symbolises a cognitive transition from one (i.e., traditional) education system to another (i.e., modern education). Culture informs ideology and ideology determines rural teenagers' attitudes towards both education systems. "Call and response" is a pervasive pattern of democratic participation in African culture. The reality is that traditional oral education continues to exist on the margins of contemporary education, which is usually associated with the reading of recorded material such as books.

The implementation of reading programmes in South Africa and the continent at large requires a critical interpretivist approach that acknowledges the nature of being of traditional communities and their local epistemologies. Rural teenagers are more comfortable in a performative learning context. The style of learning embodied by reading a novel may be seen as alien in this performative learning context. A recognition

of local epistemologies in reading programmes can foster an environment of inclusivity and address the reading struggles faced by rural teenagers in traditional communities. This research makes the following recommendations:

- Policymakers in the realm of the arts, culture, and heritage (i.e., library and information services) should consider the important role music plays in the early development of rural teenagers.
- *Mmino wa bana* should be considered as a possible framework for the development of reading pedagogies in rural schools and information agencies.
- Librarians in public/community libraries should be proactive in identifying resources that capture local indigenous knowledge for inclusion in their collections, especially those published in local languages. New publishing formats (i.e., multimedia) should be introduced to attract rural teenagers to reading programmes.
- A repository and/or catalogue of *mmino wa bana* (children's songs) and similar folklore should be created for preservation. Existing catalogues and repositories should be strengthened and made accessible to rural communities. Community libraries can assist in this regard. This will lay the foundation for the exploration of new publishing formats aimed at promoting literacy and reading among rural teenagers.
- Reading programmes aimed at rural teenagers should consider their cultural and ideological orientation towards recorded knowledge that mirrors Euro-American cultural practices.
- Further research should be conducted to find out what holds in other regions and areas, including urban/semi-urban locations.

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