Manche Masemola: Rebel or Revolutionary? Resistance and Subversion in the Manche Masemola Narrative

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Abstract

Manche Masemola's narrative is predominantly a portrayal of a strong-willed character who faces brutal attacks for her commitment to her faith. She is described as a martyr, and eventually a saint. Her struggle to project her voice and willingness to make her own decisions are largely reported from one side, that is, from the perspective of the Church recounting how she defied her parents and community to accept the Christian religion. Commentators on this narrative miss Manche's willingness to defy the same Church that was ready to promote her as a martyr. The purpose of this article is to argue that although Manche was described as an Anglican martyr, she was a revolutionary, and resisted the same Empire that hoped to colonise and Christianise her. She resisted colonial enslavement and continued to be initiated into *koma*, and refused to be baptised with Western clothing. Manche should be seen as a model of resistance against colonialism and female struggles against masculine dominance clothed in Christian education and conversion. The article uses archival records and secondary analysis to describe Manche's resolve to die for her commitment to her Sepedi culture. I will begin by examining Manche's ritual journey to adulthood using *koma*, and conclude by discussing the pertinent question of why she was finally not baptised.

Keywords: Manche Masemola; revolutionary; rebel; resistance; Western clothing; native clothing; *koma*; initiation; baptism; syncretism

UNISA university of south africa PRESS

Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies
https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SAJFS
Volume 30 | Number 1 | 2020 | #7553 | 18 pages

https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6697/7553
ISSN 2663-6697 (Online) | ISSN 1016-8427 (Print)

Introduction

The story of Manche Masemola is largely told to reveal her troubled journey to become a Christian, a story of a teenage girl who eventually turned into a celebrated martyr (Goedhals 1998, 2000; Kuzwayo 2013; Ledwaba 2004; Mokgoatšana 2019). Little is reported of how she resisted the Church that she chose to support. This article recognises Manche's struggle and her journey to be a witness; however, it acknowledges that her struggle involved resistance to conformity. In her attempt to exercise her rights Manche thus becomes a site for the struggles of children to be who they want to be and have the freedom to exercise their rights without inhibitions. As a result, this article examines how Manche resisted not only her parents but also the Church. I will demonstrate how she broke the very code that the Church encouraged, and went further to demand that she be baptised in her own clothes, to be precise, Sepedi traditional attire. The discussion will begin with locating Manche's journey towards initiation and will then proceed to explain how colonisation uses such simple things as dress, food, and language to deracinate a people and convert them from who they are to become new and metaphorically born-again members of the Empire.

Literature in Perspective

The role of the oral tradition in providing vestiges of history has been contested in historical circles denying that Africa had a history. Jan Vansina (1985) recognises the role of the oral tradition in historical writing. There are various sources at the disposal of the historian that offer the possibility of gaining accurate knowledge of events and actions that happened in the past. Oral traditions offer historians collected accounts of the past, handed from one person to another by word of mouth. These collections were traditionally dismissed as historical evidence until Jan Vansina fiercely fought for their recognition. Martins (2012, 160) contends that the oral tradition as a source of history does not only express emotions but also conveys knowledge, records and represents the various social institutions and arts. Although all oral traditions provide material for historical analysis, myths and legends are closely linked to history.

In Sepedi folklore, the stories of Marangrang, Kgashane Mamatlepa, Manatatise, and many religious leaders have been handed down orally to tell a story of the past. Friesen (1999) argues that legends transmit cultural values and beliefs. Writing on Indian legends, Friesen (1999) argues that as a primary construct of the oral tradition, Indian legends constitute a vast cultural store and serve as a primary tool for cultural maintenance and tribal history. By their nature, legends are connected with community history by recounting the exploits of a hero(ine) whose deeds are remembered and passed down from generation to generation. Legendary characters distinguish themselves through actions that occupy the minds of their communities for a long time, thus serving as historical narratives. Brendalsmo (2007) devotes attention to the legends connected with deserted churches in Scandinavia. Writing on this subject, legends are considered to be short stories, often consisting of only one episode and passing itself off as true (Brendalsmo 2007, 71). They deal either with historical incidents or with a

meeting with supernatural beings. Legends, among other forms of the oral tradition, embody indigenous knowledge, traditions, history and a repertoire of the knowledge economy that needs to be protected as a heritage resource.

Very little has been done in research on Sepedi folklore to subject these narratives to academic scrutiny. Bopape (2006) examines *Kgašane* by S.P.N. Makwala, highlighting the difficulties experienced by researchers in trying to record oral material in a context where there is conflict. Bopape's work uses the historical biographical approach to contextualise a Lobedu text, a community story of a legendary character who is considered a martyr of the Lutheran Church in South Africa. Bopape (2006) analysed *Kgašane* as a dramatic text using six parameters identified by Fleischman, namely authenticity, intention, reception, social function, narrative syntax and narrator involvement. Although this applied model helped the author to examine aspects of the historicity of the text, the analysis of the historical narrative was limited by the author's attention to dramatic techniques, which were, of course, important to discuss. This publication was inspired by the same writer's doctoral thesis (Bopape 1998), which examined three historical dramas, namely *Tswala e a ja* (Makgaleng 1982), *Kgašane* (Makwela 1962) and *Marangrang* (Maloma 1972).

Makgaleng's *Tswala e a ja* is a historical narrative centred around Matlebjane, the son of Ngwane (corrupted as Nkwane), an ancestor of the Batau whose prophecy is used to explain the split and dispersion of the Batau, a group originally of Swazi origin, now swallowed up by the Bapedi. Matlebjane was a logical regent after his brother Matlebo's death. Having usurped powered, he was believed to have diverted the privileges and tributes to his youngest wife, Photo's mother, an act that enraged his other wives (Masemola's mother, Phaahla's mother, and Seloane's mother), and Matlebo's widowed wife, Mogashoa's mother. Matlebjane's death is shrouded in this conspiracy theory and his alleged prophecy.

Marangrang details the exploits of the legendary Marangrang who sprang from a commoner to hero by conquering the Lowveld and the Highveld, subjugating local chiefs such as Rantho and Sekwati. His death is also a complex narrative of memorialisation and textualisation. Finally, *Kgašane* is a historical narrative recording the journey of a young Molobedu royalty who undertakes a journey to Kimberly to go and work for guns as it was the custom of the time for young men to collect armoury in defence of the land which was likely to be confiscated by the Afrikaners in the Transvaal. Instead of returning with a gun, Kgashane is reported to have come with a Bible and renounced the throne, choosing to die for his new religion rather than be a chief. Like all legends, these narratives are open to multiple interpretations. The veracity of the narratives is not always easy to determine; however, they are important in accounting for a community history that should be interpreted in context.

In "It Is Herstory Too …!" Mokgoatšana (1999) documents the story of Madinoge Kgoloko, a revolutionary woman who was arrested with 12 other men in her community

where she was *kgošigadi*. Madinoge led a *sebatakgomo* campaign against apartheid's betterment policy, which was used as a ploy rid people of their land and livestock.

The Manche Masemola story is a popular narrative in the Anglican Church, detailing the religious journey of a young girl from GaMarishane to become a Christian. Her desire to be baptised was short-lived, because of the tension between her and her parents. Her death is very topical, fraught with a multiplicity of interpretations. The dominant discourse is from the Church celebrating her death as that of a martyr, a girl who witnessed her death as a result of her faith. Goedhals (1998, 2000) was the first to provide an academic analysis of this narrative from a perspective of Church History. Mokgoatšana (2019) studies this narrative, exploring the claim that Manche prophesied that she would be baptised in her blood. Mokgoatšana argues that the story, like other hagiographies, centres on the myth of a prophecy that she would be baptised in her own blood. This study probes a similar narrative, examining Manche's role as a revolutionary who fought for her rights—first for her right to religion, then her right to culture. I will first examine Manche's defiance of her parents, then her ritual journey to adulthood using *koma,* and in closing the pertinent question of why she was finally not baptised.

Situating Manche Masemola in Decolonial Thought: A (W)riting Back

I have chosen to situate my debate within the postcolonial, Afrocentric theory that purports to locate discussion and interpretation from the African perspective. The concept of perspective, derived from the Latin *perspectivus*, *perspectiva* and *perspectusi*, signifies variously "sight of optics," seeing through, a way of seeing, and a point of looking. This concept helps us to understand that every society has a way of seeing and interpreting. This is contrary to the Eurocentric view that reality can only be gleaned from the Western perspective, denying the presence and possibility of any other modes of seeing and thus dismissing all epistemic, metaphysical, axiological, ontological, and teleological premises of others as invalid. Asante (2020, 208) reminds us that "the intellectual who is Afrocentric considers the centrality of Africans within the context of African phenomena. Whatever the question, the Afrocentrist seeks to determine how Africans have viewed the question in the context of African interests, values, perspectives, and centrality."

This article deliberately uses Afrocentricy to disrupt the epistemic hegemony that glosses over all other forms of knowledge and recognises the colonial slate as the instructive narrative to inform all other ways of seeing. Afrocentricity is described as an emancipatory movement that inscribes itself within a tradition of African resistance to European oppression (Mazama 2002, 219). Afrocentrism, as an emergent postcolonial theory, privileges African experience to interpret reality as Africans confront it. This is echoed by Mazama (2002, 219), who proclaims that Afrocentricity is a perspective on the African experience that posits Africans as subjects and agents, and which therefore demands grounding in African culture and the worldview on which it rests. The theory seeks to liberate and recover lost voices, histories, cultures and cultural productions of

Africa. This allows for a close examination of African texts from their embedded contexts, anchoring them on African epistemic thought.

I chose to use Afrocentrism as an alternative way to interpret the Manche Masemola narrative that has been constructed and interpreted from the English perspective. Being decolonial, the interpretation is grounded in theories anchored on African life as it is lived, producing knowledge with Africans instead of about them. This view does not pretend that the researcher is immune from the reflective self, as both the researcher and the researched have suffered colonial domination. The collection of the story, its distribution and interpretation have ignored that Manche Masemola has a cultural context that defines her being and her position in that society. Afrocentricity will deal with the deliberate exclusion and marginalisation of Bapedi culture and modes of knowledge construction and interpretation. In this way, the interpretation grounds Manche Masemola into a world that Eurocentrism avoids, erases and violates. While Manche is valorised and glorified as a martyr and a saint, the colonial narrative denigrates her people, including her mother who is accused of murdering her. The us/them dichotomy presented embraces Manche Masemola as one with the Church, but outside of the colonial world. She is integrated to some extent, and excluded largely as an African. In the period under discussion, she would have been treated like all other blacks, yet she is considered different from her community, which had not embraced Christianity as their faith. The Afrocentric stance purports to unravel these silenced stories and to subvert the hidden agenda of the oppressor's regimes (Mahfouf and Al-Shetawi 2019, 86). By liberating the Manche Masemola's narrative from Eurocentrism, the article will be able to show how Manche Masemola resisted the colonial order, attempting to resituate herself within Sepedi cultural frameworks. Like all other postcolonial writings, the story subverts the colonial master narrative that shapes the discourse by extending the debate to reposition, represent and to ground Manche Masemola into her world that defines her being. I have chosen to ground the narrative within Sepedi language culture to avoid a tendency to universalise and homogenise Afrocentricity and postcoloniality as though every postcolonial condition is the same. Asante's (2020, 203) argument that Africans should interrogate their own epistemological discourses in order to understand the history of knowledge construction on the continent of Africa is crucial because some of what passes off as African culture may be foreign knowledge. By doing this, they will be able to uncover truths about Africanness, and that which parades as African when it is not. Furthermore, they will be able to critique actions and practices that are no longer relevant in the changing world.

Because the Manche Masemola narrative is entangled in the politics of language, it is important to recognise the role of language as an agency of discourse and transformation. Manche Masemola's story is implicated in the complex of language politics, with Manche's original story told as a translated version. The Sepedi version was not important but the English one, because nativity is considered meaningless in a colony. Manche Masemola's narrative that was translated to Bishop Wilfred Parker in

1937 is, like most translations, not innocent, but represents a transaction of power. The original is marginalised and subdued by English discourse and conventions to which Moeka, the preacher and translator, hoped to adhere; unfortunately, he was not an English speaker himself. He functioned as an intermediary between English and Sepedi for the Bishop, who depended entirely on him to translate the Sepedi world for his consumption, and Lucia, Manche's cousin, hoped her message would be delivered without fail. The fidelity between language and cultures was compromised by the interpretation process. It is for this reason that the Manche Masemola story is best interpreted through Afrocentricity as an offshoot of postcolonial discourse.

Manche Defies Her Parents

Manche's martyrdom hinges on her capacity to be assertive, decisive, and forthright in terms of her desire to be baptised. This boldness to challenge the authority of her parents accords her a "witness" status, which receives much acclaim in recognition of facing persecution as a result of a strong-willed personality. Her resistance begins as soon as Lucia introduces her to the Church. Manche and Lucia notify Manche's parents of their intention to join the church, "but they refused" (Parker 1937); strangely, they resolve "then we said we would go." This is the first radical move by Manche to defy her parents who did not approve of her intention to join the Church.

This act disrupts the equilibrium of social relations between Manche and her parents. It violates the normal order, unsettling the rules and subverting the formal relations. From here going forward, it is expected that there will be tension between Manche and her parents, as she is a child who resists guardianship and chooses independence of thought in matters of religion. This is contrary to the common practice that children generally subscribe to the traditional religion, which had no competitor. Manche challenges the dominant discourse, the Bapedi traditional worldview, to court an "unknown" religion. Her continued resistance challenges the status quo, subjecting Sepedi religion to competition and self-scrutiny. The church provides the impetus to denounce the "dark" and embrace the "light." The idea of light was introduced to Manche by Lucia who persuaded her cousin with these words: "when we go to class we are told that we are turning away from the darkness to light, and we must never go back to the darkness."

The dark/light dichotomy is entrenched in modernist thought that sees Europe as the centre of civilisation, with a salvation campaign to save the world from darkness. Europe and its agents represented Africa as a Dark Continent, and Europe as enlightened. These representations of Africa situated Africa in savagery and superstitions, while Europe was described as the centre of knowledge. This knowledge about the world, *noumena* and phenomena were meant to be spread to all "uncivilised" people of the world to save them from primitivity.

Manche's parents had not expected their daughter to react in the manner in which she did. Because of this, she received constant beatings whose purpose was to wean her from the Church. Despite this, Manche defiantly professed that nothing could stop her

from joining the Church. Her statement "[e]ven if you thrash me, I won't [sic] go back from the church" complicates her relationship with the mother in particular, who according to Lucia was determined to force them to "leave the church" (Parker 1937).

Evidence advanced by Lucia suggests that her mother was so enraged that she used a spear and threatened to burn the hut in which she hid. These acts represent the highest form of abuse and torture. It is the amount of persecution she faced as well as her commitment to her new faith that won her the hearts of the Church and caused them to embrace her and consecrate her as a martyr, and later a saint. It is largely her revolutionary acts that transform her from being an ordinary child into a world-acclaimed heroine who set out a new path to fight for her right to religion.

Manche Breaks the Initiation Rule

Missionaries rejected African rites and practices and targeted them for eradication and extermination. These "heathen rites and festivals," as Gundani (2004, 304) explains, constituted the cornerstone of African culture. Unfortunately, missionaries wanted to wipe them out in the process of converting Africans to Christianity. Writing on the Bakongo, Gundani (2004, 304) tellingly explains how *bongaka* (indigenous healing) was condemned and targeted for annihilation:

> Missionaries and traders also viewed diviner-healers (banganga/n,'an,ga) as purveyors of lies and fraudsters. This was the sector that was given the most attention by the missionaries. The whole institution was targeted for eradication and extermination. A typically confrontational and cru-sading approach was adopted by the missionaries against African divi-nation [sic].

The whole crusade against traditional medicine and other rites and practices extended to the cult of initiation. Targeting traditional medicine men simultaneously involves subjecting initiation schools to the same attack because *bongaka* and initiation are two sides of the same coin. Working among the Barolong boTshidi, missionaries condemned dances and prayers for rain as the rudiments of "heathenism." This resulted in a cleavage between the converted and chiefs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986). The missionaries believed, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1986, 3) indicate, that these practices formed the fabric of native belief and chiefly power.

The whole conversion exercise was not only to "liberate" Africans from their ancestors but to completely erase chiefly power. Such an effort would not only simplify the colonisation agenda but would free the land to the coloniser. It is not surprising that among the Bakongo a religious war was raged with the Portuguese to protect Africans from losing their identity.

One of the practices typifying the eradication of African rites was the attack on male and female initiation. Among Bapedi, these rites are the epicentre of self-definition and tutelage towards adulthood. Although the Church objected to and despised traditional

practices of the Bapedi including *koma*, Manche steadfastly chose to undergo the rite of passage. Matobo, Makatsa, and Obioha (2009, 105) contend that these rites of passage such as initiation (*lebollo*), ancestral worship and others were regarded as heathen and superstitious and therefore very bad. *Koma* should not be confused with *lebollo* at all, because the latter is a surgical procedure involving a scarification ritual while the former refers to an initiation process punctuated by *molao*, instructing the norms and values of propriety, as well as skills associated with adulthood. *Koma* broadly prepares the initiate for participation in society. Mokgoatšana (2010, 22) hints that *koma*, erroneously associated with *lebollo*, represents the climax of the child's life. He goes on to suggest that once introduced to *koma*, the young man or woman takes an oath to shed the life of childhood and embrace a new beginning, that is, entry into adulthood. At this level, the newly initiated assume new roles and responsibilities, and are ready to be married and deliver the future defenders of the state. The greatest responsibility is to be part of a regiment whose task is civil duty:

> To be instructed into *koma* is to be conscripted to civil duty, making an undertaking to die for a fellow human being. Because it is a secret and sacred ritual, *koma* is a covenant with society to be a member of a regiment to defend the state. (Mokgoatšana 2010)

Because *koma* is central to the development of the child in Bapedi society, Manche, like all other young maidens, was expected to be initiated to become an adult in the manner that her community defined adulthood. Besides, entry into a regiment is a precondition to be accepted into certain cultural protocols because regiments define social and political ranks in which every member of the community should fit, lest one risks becoming an outcast in his or her community. During initiation, she would understand her political ranking, especially that her father was from the royal house (Goedhals 2000; see also Mphahlele and Choshane in Kuzwayo 2013).

Kuzwayo (2013, 21) laments the hypocrisy of the Church, citing its silence in respect to Manche's defiance of the Church's teachings against traditional rites and practices:

> Unfortunately, nothing is said about how Manche was viewed and treated by the Church after her return from the Pedi initiation school, also there is no mention of how her parents felt then, as she persisted with her quest of being a Christian. What is mentioned from various literature on Manche is that she continued with her baptism preparation classes despite having undergone traditional Pedi initiation. One wonders whether this is a sign of operating in double standards by the Church, or perhaps a need for the growth and promotion of Christianity against all odds.

Kuzwayo (2013) is rather timid to address this issue vigorously. True to her word, the Church applied double standards by rejecting Manche's culture and embracing her even after initiation. If initiation was inimical to the teachings of the Church, she was bound to face punishment that would serve as a deterrent for any would-be Christian who might cross the line. Choshane, interviewed by Kuzwayo (2013, 72), explains at length the attitude of the missionaries to Bapedi traditional practices and what actions would be

taken if the Church's teachings were violated. He concurs that the missionaries "wanted to eradicate Pedi cultural practices," affirming:

> Yes, it is quite true! As you also know that initiation is still held at a high value within our context. These wanted people to be initiated in Church and not in the traditional Pedi way, to the extent that the one who had undergone traditional initiation, would be ostracized in Church when attending Church services. (cited in Kuzwayo 2013, 72)

Excommunication or at best ostracism was the best remedy for Manche for her transgression. It should be noted that Manche's position is very special and tricky. First, she was neither baptised nor confirmed, as such she was a *persona non grata* in the Church. She was not part of the body politic of the Church and had not taken an oath to shed her culture. As a result, the Church had no *locus standi* or authority to sanction punishment for someone outside the body politic of the Church. Second, Manche was chosen to tell the story of a committed believer who witnessed her faith, was persecuted and died for her faith. Whatever happened to Manche, be it undergoing initiation or refusing European clothes for baptism, would not stop the Church's mission to declare her a martyr. This view is clearly put by Mrs Moffat who luminously explains that Manche's death was never going to be told as a murder story because it would not achieve the intended goal of rendering her a victim of persecution. Manche's narrative is, therefore, an allegoric and double-edged metaphor for transformation, representing the mission story of martyrdom and its disruption to bring about change. Her narrative is a tale of subversion, transformation, and revolution. A church elder, Choshane (Kuzwayo 2013, 74), defines Manche in this manner:

> I personally regard her as an agent of change, with the introduction of inculturation. See now during the Manche pilgrim service at Mass the drum is used for music, and it blends very well with the Hymns.

Long before calls for a transformation of the Church and demands that local cultures and experiences become part of the Church's script, Manche had already accepted that a syncretic approach to religion was the only solution to allow new converts to find peace with the newfound religion. She did not want to lose her identity as Mopedi and thus observed all cultural rites and customs, while on the other hand was prepared to be baptised into the Christian religion. The Church was not ready for such a move because it still harboured notions of colonial superiority. Tinyiko Maluleke (2003) cites such bigotry by Swiss missionaries who believed that Africans were like little children who needed to be held by the hand by their advanced brothers (Europeans) and guided towards civilisation. Gundani (2004, 300) calls this a dangerous theology that underpinned (white) Christians' deep-rooted belief that their religion alone represented the way and the life. Writing on the Portuguese Christian escapades against the Bakongo, Gundani (2004, 300) paints a telling picture of the missionary predisposition that combines prejudice and a colonial superiority complex when he maintains that the missionaries were, by and large, "predisposed to consider themselves the bearers, not only of a superior religion but a superior culture." With this kind of attitude, it would

not have been easy for African converts to hold both their ancestors dearly, by venerating and propitiating them, and at the same time accepting Christ as their Father.

The African was subjected to what Camaroff calls "cultural confrontation of domination and reaction, struggle and innovation" (cited in Kriel 1997, 171), with the missionary attempting to convert the African to Christianity and at the same time inculcating the signs and practices of Europe in their indigenous world. The purpose of this was to eventually destroy African cultures and practices and what remained would be a "converted" African who would find direction from the colonial master. This cultural subversion is part of the grand strategy of colonialism that intends to dominate, subjugate and control. Missionary work should always be seen as a subtle expression of the colonial expansion by the mother country. It is motivated by economic gain, imperialism, and nationalist pride that promotes and protects the interests of the countries that send missionaries on a mission. Missionary work was never a neutral expedition, but the very subtle core of the Empire that guided and funded it. Okon (2014, 199) boldly quotes Rodney who proclaims that:

> The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers … [M]issionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light.

Also, Rodney (cited by Okon 2014, 199) accuses missionaries of preaching humility and submission in the face of gross injustice, inhumanity, and dehumanisation. Rodney believes British traders were exploiting their African customers while the missionaries preached peace, forgiveness and good neighbourliness, which actually prevented genuine rebellion, self-preservation, and determination. Missionaries worked to preserve the status quo and to uphold the master-servant relationship between Africans and Europeans. They used various instruments to entice would-be converts into the missions.

Against this backdrop, one can suggest that Manche sacrificed her body, proclaiming to be African in the face of the strong colonial presence. After initiation, she feared no condemnation from the Church and continued with catechumens' classes. Because of her defiance, she risked her chances of baptism, which she lost entirely, dying without being baptised. This matter receives appropriate attention in the next section dealing with Manche's rejection of the Western dress code.

Manche Rebels Against the Western Dress Code

This section discusses how Manche resisted the colonial master narrative, subtly subverting the colonial power embedded in the teachings of the Church, personified by Fr Moeka. The narrative has several versions that seem to contradict each other, yet emphasise a common narrative of resistance, autonomy, and subversion. It explains why Manche was never baptised though it was her wish to do so. This explanation goes against the established narrative that argues that Manche was denied baptism by her

parents. It will explain how this narrative is twisted to create the martyr, though in essence Manche was rebellious and denied baptism by canon.

Manche resisted the colonial script, choosing to retain her African identity within the new religion, and thus preferred religious syncretism. Her story also offers contrasting versions of why she was not baptised and the dress code adopted for the baptism. Three dominant versions exist narrating the baptismal theme:

a) First, the church chooses European clothing for all catechumens, but Manche's parents object to this (Mankele n.d.);

b) Second, Father Moeka prefers "native clothing" but allows catechumens to exercise their right to choose between "native clothing" and European dress code;

c) Finally, the church chooses "native clothing" for catechumens, but Manche refuses the offer.

The first narrative takes away Manche's power to decide, thus assigning that function to the church whose authority is disrupted by her parents. This version, though not popular, suggests Manche would have accepted to be baptised in European clothing. This is very unlikely given the religious conflicts that were prevalent at the time. Not only Manche but her parents too would have resisted this because it would superimpose Western culture over their cultural canons and conventions regarding dress code. Among Bapedi, different age groups have designated and differentiated dress codes that signify gender and status. The Western code would subvert these socially demarcated lines, thus blurring lines of accountability and conduct. Having done so, the Church would also incorporate these girls into a select group to be raised as Daughters of Mary.

The Church attempted to uproot converts and to deracinate Africans by completely erasing their cultures and taking their daughters into the Wayfarers, a group of young black girls, ready to convert, used as guides and models to influence other non-Christian girls into accepting Christianity. As Wayfarers, they were prepared to become Daughters of Mary who would not have received favourable reception from the community. As a result, it is very unlikely that Manche's parents would have allowed her to be baptised regardless of clothing available.

The power of Manche's narrative is in her wish to be baptised in her blood. She died without baptism, and this was as a result of the choices she made. Writing on Manche's baptism, Mokgoatšana (2019) opines that

> Why she was never baptised cannot be blamed on her parents, but her personal choice. She never received water baptism because of her strong conviction of African beliefs and values. This idea is played down in the narrativisation of the Manche story.

In terms of this view, Mokgoatšana (2019) believes that the Church "played down" Manche's resistance to Western clothing. I concur with this view because her voice is subverted, and twisted, as Kuzwayo confirms:

> In October 1927 Moeka prepared the girls for baptism and confirmation, the group decided that on that day they would be dressed in Western clothing. *Manche retorted to the idea of Western clothing citing her wish to stick to her traditional Pedi dress*. That was when Moeka openly told her that she would not be baptised, to which she answered, "*Then I will be baptised with my own blood!*" (Kuzwayo 2013, 52; emphasis added)

This narrative has the same sentiments as the second version where Moeka allows catechumens to exercise their right to choose the type of clothing they wished to wear for their baptism. Although this offer sounds democratic and fair, it is, however, problematic in the sense that catechumens, who by nature are black, had to choose between two worlds, the European and the African worlds. The children were compromised as they were forced to resist one of the two worlds. They were not ready to stand firm and openly reject the imperial power personified by Moeka and the Church. When most of the catechumens decided on European clothing, Manche turned around and decided otherwise. In the narrative, Moeka forces girls to dress in Western clothes before baptism, but Manche refuses in favour of her cultural dress code. Another version exists that tells a similar story differently:

> The church gives her "European" clothes to prepare for the baptism ceremony. Her parents burn [the] clothes. (Mankele n.d.)

In the second version, Moeka convened a meeting of catechumens to choose clothes for their baptism. According to Lucia's testimony (Parker 1937), Canon Moeka's preference was "native clothing"; however, the catechumens voted otherwise:

> All the catechumens voted in favour of European clothes. We went away, and then both of us came back to the priest, and Manche said: "I am sorry that I voted with the other girls." (Parker 1937)

This version diametrically contradicts the first version that claims Moeka forced European clothes on the catechumens. Manche is then seen as a radical catechumen for violating the Church's decision to baptise in European clothing. The contrasting view paints Manche as an independent character who is not easily swayed by a mob and can stand firm with a voice of her own. She, however, subverts the hegemonic discourse with humility and modesty. She painstakingly offers an apology before she states her view that challenges the established custom. Another contradicting version is offered by Richard's History Bytes (n.d.), explaining the interaction between Manche and Canon Moeka in this manner:

> He recommended she wear her traditional Pedi clothing, something she no longer wanted to do. He said she could attend classes less often, she said she had to make her

> own decisions. Her stance was plain. Even if her family threatened her life, she would never leave Jesus.

In this version, Manche had already decided against her traditional life and embraced Christianity and its Western values as instilled in all catechumens. This view is propagated in different ways to project Manche as a committed believer who had begun to distance herself from her cultural practices. It is a problematic conjecture to fathom because Manche showed on various occasions that she would perform African rituals such as initiation without objection or finding a contradiction in fulfilling her obligations as an African girl. The narrative constructs Manche as a witness to her suffering. That her parents "burn" her clothes is subtly woven into the text to graphically imag(in)e the horrendous, villainous, and fiendish nature of her parents. Her parents are wilfully demonised to contrast the angelic image of Manche who is portrayed as a blameless victim.

Manche's decision not to conform and to reject the established customs is not only a statement of faith but a commitment to her culture and its core values. While she has selflessly sacrificed her life and soul to the Christian teachings, she does not want to do so by forsaking her own identity. This act needs to be seen against Manche's assertion of her own individuality and identity. She displays her unique character by avoiding a chorus response to embracing Western modes of expression and instead facing the colonial enterprise head-on. This act is very special because it allows us to understand children's need to belong and to be independent at the same time. This tension between self-identity and group identity is not easy to negotiate.

Western dress code is a representation of whiteness and the colonial enterprise that masquerades as a mere social code. Writing on the experiences of Afro-Americans, Covin (2001, 103) describes the dress code as a form of symbolic narrative. In his explanation, he maintains that such expressions may include food, clothing, and hairstyles. Symbolic narratives are statements people make about their identity with their conduct, appearance, and lives. These narratives constitute how ideology is developed and sustained to counter the hegemonic ideology. Manche's rejection of Western dress marks her clear statement of intent to disrupt and unseat the power of the colonial idiom and its subtle dominance over her culture and its people.

The concept of a symbolic narrative is closely linked with counter-discourse, which is employed by subalterns to challenge the dominant hegemonic discourse. In explaining counter-discourse, Shehla Burney (2012, 107) states:

> counter-discourse in this context is a form of deep resistance that speaks through creativity, words, and actions, deliberately negating the dominant discourse of colonialism. A counter-discourse is a re-inscription, rewriting and re-presenting to reclaim, reaffirm, and retrieve subject peoples' ownership of their own lives, which had been appropriated by the colonizers; it is a discourse that goes against the grain to challenge assumptions of imperial power.

By adopting this resistance as a counter-discursive strategy, Manche challenges the power of the colonial master. Comaroff and Comaroff (1986, 3) explain that power refers to the capacity to impose the conditions of being on others; thus it does not reside solely in palpable forces of influence. This is rarely an act of overt persuasion but requires the internalisation of a set of values, an ineffable manner of seeing and being (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986). By so doing, native peoples are subjected to subtle colonisation that involves forsaking modes of perception and practice, the economy and even modes of subsistence. Writing on the impact of missionary work on Batswana, they explore the effects of missionary-imposed European standards and systems. It began with the imposition of the geometric grid in building and later extended to dress. Christian decency meant the adoption of European standards of dress, thus relegating the African dress code to "nakedness." The two authors (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986, 14) quote MacKenzie who explains this point graphically:

> for if a man becomes a Christian he cannot continue to live in the habits of a heathen. The African who believes that Jesus is preparing for him a glorious mansion in Heaven will endeavour to build for himself a decent house on earth, and he who anticipates being hereafter attired in the pure white robe of the Redeemer's righteousness will now throw aside the filthy garments of the heathen.

The same idea is buttressed by Nkomazana and Setume (2016, 50) who proclaim:

> They also brought new European items such as clothing, food (e.g. sugar, tea, bread), all of which were used to demonstrate European superiority or power, thus making colonialism, or foreign power a desirable thing. Through trade and commerce, missionaries, directly or indirectly, participated as agents of their home governments.

Missionary work was a subtle political project that ensured the extension of the imperial code and order on the lives of the colonised. Basil Davidson (1992, 39) alludes to how Africa was destined to develop on the maxim that "no nation can civilise itself," which parodied the contention that Africa would be developed in accordance with the British or another European state model. Conversion to Christianity and admission to schools depended on conformity to the missionary body with its apparels of Western culture, aesthetics, and ostentation. Missionary education and evangelism became a doorway to enter the British world and enjoy the privileges of "superior culture." Europe considered herself a moral giant after abolishing slavery. Europeans entered Africa under the guise of a civilising mission, but in fact to colonise and expand the empire. Conversion has become the new code for imperialism. Davidson (1992, 42) explains this quagmire when he laments that "[a]bove the entrance to every school there was an invisible but always insistent directive to those who passed within the magic gate to the 'white man's world': ABANDON AFRICA, ALL YE ENTER HERE."

Manche's actions are a form of "writing back" to the empire, a repositioning of her identity and subversion of the authoritative power of the imperial religious discourse. The position Manche chose went so far that she was prepared to lose her life or that faith

if need be. When Moeka openly told her that she would not be baptised, she answered, "*Then I will be baptised with my own blood*!" (my emphasis). Her response to Moeka's insistence on Western clothing has always been distorted and misinterpreted. Mandy Goedhals (2000) cautiously warns of this uncritical tendency of hagiographical writings when she explains "these accounts have more in common with hagiography than history, and it is not surprising to find that they bear some of the crude and uncritical characteristics often associated with missionary writings."

Manche uses a language of resistance, betting with her own life not to succumb to Western indoctrination. She would rather not be baptised if conversion meant subjecting African culture to European domination. After that incident, the Church never succeeded to convince Manche to be baptised. Indeed, she died without receiving the sacrament of baptism. As to why she remained without baptism till her death—whether it was an act of heroism and charisma or if she fell to fate in the hands of her parents is a matter to be debated. The whole construction of her life into a narrative of martyrdom is done without regard to understanding that her parents' refusal of Christianity was an act of resistance to foreign domination, which was ready to engulf them. There are no better words to conclude this debate than Giselle Aris's (2007) view that:

> In different ways, power is represented, constituted, articulated, and contested through dress. Dress functions as a compelling political language, comparable in eloquence and potency to the words of the most skilled orator or the writings of the most persuasive propagandist. In Africa, the dress provided a powerful arena for colonial relations to be enacted and challenged and served as a method of cultural expression and resistance.

So, Manche's efforts to reject Western clothes is an attempt to reclaim her identity and to reposition her as an African and to refuse erasure. Manche openly resisted "Britannia's guardian hand," epitomised by the Church, and chose to follow her culture as far as she could. She attended the initiation school, which is a basis for socialisation among the Bapedi. This was a subject that the Church objected to vehemently as intimated in the body text.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Manche Masemola violated her cultural rights by defying her parents to join the Church; on the other hand, she defied the church by going to initiation and refusing to be baptised in Western clothing. Manche's story is one of a revolutionary who fought for the rights of individuals to make their own decisions and follow their dreams without undue pressure. She has become a subject to reflect on the role of teenagers in constructing discourse and (w)riting history. Furthermore, Manche represents for the Third World a revolutionary figure who resisted the colonial master narrative and chose not to be subjected to it. She refused Western clothing and had to face the consequence of dying without baptism. This debate presents fertile ground for future researchers who want to examine whether her actions were motivated by her adherence to Bapedi culture or were simply a fashion choice.

The Manche Masemola narrative represents a complex terrain. The narrative is shrouded in layers defined by political and cultural conflict and contestations of power. It reveals, among other things, the power of a colonial structure that, through one of its churches, subjects local culture to submission and conversion, and draws inspiration from resources within a local culture to enhance the story of that Church. Here, Manche is chosen as an instrument to promote Christian and English values and to influence young and old to accept the new religion, whatever resistance there may be from the Bapedi. Beyond this, Manche Masemola has come to be seen as a revolutionary figure and her pilgrimage stands for religious and political witnessing.

This article hopes to broaden the scope of such oral narratives as legends to be used in collaboration with archival material to reconstruct history. I, however, acknowledge the complexity of orality in historical writing because of the former's reliance on memory. The intersection between memory, recording and a story as a performative text provides an interesting groundwork for interdisciplinary studies into African, minority historiographies.

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