Article

Space and Text in Setswana Proverbs

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Abstract

This article looks at the concept of space and text embodied in proverbs, with reference to Setswana—an African language spoken in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The study follows the theory of Structuralism to understand the use of proverbs among the Batswana. It is argued that the Batswana are a performative nation; their idiom, represented by their sayings, expresses how they relate to their land—terrestrial and celestial. A catalogue of Setswana proverbs is presented, accompanied by their European equivalents, where applicable, as contained in Sol Plaatje's *Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and Their European Equivalents* (1916).

Keywords: space and text; proverbs; culture; language; gender

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Overview

The author proposes that most Setswana proverbs revolve around the Batswana's love for their land, which is a giver of life. Their identity expands and is enriched by the places in which they feel at home (Mieder 2012). This article contends that the space in which a nation finds itself defines its worldview, ethos, culture, beliefs, and norms, among others. All these are encapsulated in the idiom of that nation and find expression in their proverbs. The equilibrium that provides sanity and sustenance to a country is influenced by how that nation appreciates its pure form, namely, the proverb.

This equilibrium was tilted when colonialists invaded their land and usurped their claim to it. The names that they had given to their areas of dwelling and other aspects of their lives were changed. With such change, these aspects lost their meaning. Where the longest mountain stretch was known as Thaba tsa Mogale (which literally means Mountains belonging to Mogale), it came to be known as Magaliesberg; Matlhako—a village in Madikwe, North West Province, came to be called Tampostad, from *Tapose*. These, and other place names, when changed, meant that the people lost their affirmation and identity in their land. This is because the relationship between humans, language, culture, and habitat, is a system. When any of the elements is removed, the system is affected.

The book by Solomon T. Plaatje, *Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and Their European Equivalents* (1916), is the main text on which the discussion in this article will be based. Other sources will be used to complement what is contained in the main document (Plaatje 1916). For the discussion, a proverb will be identified, and its primary meaning given. Thereafter, its relationship with land will be provided. "Land" here should be interpreted over and above the soil or geography. It refers to the institutions that the Batswana revered, which enabled the rites of passage they believed in and respected. Such institutions include, among others, the family, the *kgotla* (tribal court), *bogosi* (chieftaincy), *bogwera* (female initiation school), *bojale* (male initiation school), and *lenyalo* (marriage). All these institutions are connected to the land wherein meaning is derived.

Proverbs form part of the identity of the Batswana, and an attempt at revealing this identity is made in this article. It is through the cultural processes of imagining, seeing, historicising and remembering that space is transformed into place, and geographical territory into a culturally defined landscape (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 1996). As Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall observe,

> The myth of the "empty land" can be seen not only as something willed in the imagination of the would-be possessor but, also, in its vastness, as potentially devouring and overwhelming. Anne McClintock has recently argued that British colonial maps, with their "edges and blank spaces" filled with cannibals, mermaids, and monsters, are vivid reminders of the contradictions of colonial discourse. (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 1996, 4).

All residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial space was racially determined and controlled (Darian-Smith, Gunner, and Nuttall 1996). It is in this spirit, thus, that the association between the Batswana's proverbs and the land is given prominence in this article. The next section looks at the theory of Structuralism as a lens through which proverbs can be understood in Setswana.

Theoretical Background: Structuralism

According to Monyai (2018, 11),

> individual elements (of life, beliefs or consciousness) have no value on their own but are tied to a structure and the meanings of each element can only be identified or described relative to their relationship with other elements in that structure. According to the theory of structuralism, nothing makes sense when observed on its own and everything can only make sense when observed in relation.

In simple terms, Structuralism is a system that uncovers certain structures related to how human beings think, perceive, and so on. If there is an interference of any kind, the system loses its original aspect of completeness.

It is on this principle of the system that Structuralism finds its way into the study of language and literature. Jefferson and Robey (1986) assert that this theory is a brainchild of linguistics because language is about human communication through spoken, unspoken or written words in a particular structure and conventional way. On the other hand, Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (2005) argue Structuralism is based on anthropology because it seeks to uncover the codes, rules, and systems that underlie all human social and cultural practices. These human social and cultural practices are encapsulated in each society's idiom, expressed through its proverbs.

In his work, Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of Structuralism, was able to distinguish between langue and parole, signifier and signified, syntagma and paradigms in an attempt to bring literature closer to linguistics, and thus explain the system. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, he argues "the laws discovered by semiology will apply to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts" (Saussure 2011). He defines langue as the overall shared system of a language (as with phonology) (Saussure 2011). Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2005) add that it is the social aspect of communication; it is the shared system that speakers draw from, which happens spontaneously. On the other hand, Culler (1975) views it as a system, an institution, a set of interpersonal rules and norms. Language, asserts Lechte (1994), is a social institution.

Briefly, langue is thus the more significant part, "the collective, the iron-ore from which the refined metal is smelted, the phonological system from which the smallest unit in an utterance derives, the gestalt philosophy of the entire man, the nervous system which

aids sensation" (Monyai 1997, 23). Structuralism holds that the linguistic system is the carrier of meaning and not the individual speaker.

Parole, as with phonetics, is the actual performance of a given language by the individual. Whereas langue is about ability, as explained by pragmatics, parole is about performance, as explained by semantics. Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2005) assert that it is the individual realisation of the system in actual interlocution, and also that parole comprises the practical manifestations of the system during the speech. According to Jefferson and Robey (1986), the speaker does not give meaning to an utterance—the linguistic system to which the speaker belongs does. The individual elements have sense only in so far as they are part of the overall system (Monyai 1997). Proverbs, by their nature, are part of this system, and individual speakers draw from them to make sense of life. They are linked to the space in which people dwell, both air-bound, in water and on land. Nature informs and provides sense to the experiences of the people, and since experience is the best teacher, individuals draw from them to explain their existence. The next section is a discussion of proverbs according to what they signify. After a brief discussion, a selection of proverbs is presented, accompanied by their European equivalents, where available.

Discussion of Selected Proverbs

Proverbs that Signify Family

According to Schapera (cited in Dube et al. 2016), the family unit comprises both parents and children, but extends to all relations outside but related to the unit. When the Batswana say *motse o lwapeng*, it is a recognition of the evolution of society and the fact that fertile ground for this unit should be established. It is generally considered appropriate that the family of the man should have either built him a house and yard (*'lolwapa*) before marriage or at least given him one already in existence. In any case, *bogadi* (bride price) must be ready for transition either before, or on the day of marriage (Campbell 1970). Since the Batswana definition of family is not confined to the Western concept of a nuclear family, the "extended African family" characteristic refers beyond the Western definition of the nuclear family to the practice of the traditional African responsibility towards blood relatives (Makward 2007). Marriage also established social and economic ties between families because of the very close relationship enjoyed by an individual and the brother of his (or her) mother, which even death could not break (Campbell 1970).

Proverbs that Signify the Land

The land is an integral part of the heritage of any people. If it were not the case, there would not have been colonisation by respective colonial masters of the world. Land and identity are inseparable entities. In Setswana, one's place of birth is known as *bowela kalana* (the place where one's umbilical cord fell). The umbilical cord has a special connection with one's belly since it takes over the bond between the biological mother

and the newly born child. Land does not only provide shelter to its inhabitants, but also provides food security and a sense of belonging.

The land is not confined to the ground people walk on. It includes the air they breathe, the rivers, the forests, the mountains, and minerals, among others. Land gives a sense of hope to its people since it exposes the religiosity of the people, which reflects their view on life after death. This view determines how people value and preserve life. The rites of passage, for instance, were in tandem with the seasons. There was a meaning attached to each entity; hence naming was very important. Territories were given names according to kingdoms and totem animals that were revered by nations.

When the Batswana—Botswana citizens—proclaim *pula* (rain) in their coat of arms, it is loaded with meaning. Their land is mostly on the Kalahari Desert stretch, which is arid. This is a cattle-breeding nation, and their livelihood depends on the rainfall. Land, thus, encapsulates the means of production, that is, livestock, rainfall, and vegetation, among others. When a Motswana says *Pula* at the end of deliberations or meeting, the other members reply in unison: *a e ne* (let it fall). This is to acknowledge not only the importance of this elusive commodity but the need to preserve it. The motto is further corroborated by the coat of arms of erstwhile Bophuthatswana (one of the four homelands in South Africa during apartheid rule), which was *Tshwaraganang lo dire, pula e ne*, meaning "be united" to make the rainfall. Once again, the land is implied here. Being industrious requires land, and if it is tilled correctly, God will bless His people, as with the parable of talents in the book of Matthew 25:14–30, where each man was consecrated according to performance.

Places were given names to signify history, war victories, the birth of significant people of a particular era, natural disasters, and other important events. The Batlhako who reside around Sun City in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality named their village Tlhatlaganyane, meaning the place with boulders on top of one another. The boulders are amazingly on top of one another and have stood this way for hundreds of years, as if arranged by the villagers. Any interference by way of a name change will be very emotional, and tempers will flare in defence of the name. Sadly, for posterity, in his article, "Inscribing Identity on the Landscape: National Symbols in South Africa," Maake states that there was no major town or city with an African name, except in the Bantustans (Maake 1996). Below are some of the proverbs that signify land, courtesy of Sol Plaatje (1916).

1. Proverb: *Ga go naga e senang masilo*.
Literal meaning: There is no country without its fools.
European equivalent: Were there no fools, bad ware would not pass.

2. Proverb: *Khudu-tlou e robetse bo lobeto ba ipha naga*.
Literal meaning: The giant tortoise is asleep and the little ones graze where they like.
European equivalent: When the cat is away, the mice will play.

3. Proverb: *Motho ga itsioe ese naga*.
Literal meaning: A human being, unlike a country, cannot be thoroughly known.
European equivalent: *Les hommes ne se comprennent pas les uns les autres. Il y a moins de fous qu'on ne croit*. (French)

4. Proverb: *Lo se bone maje jo katogana, bosigo aa atamalana*.
Literal meaning: When you see stones apart by day, you may depend upon it that at night they come together.
European equivalent: Friends may meet but mountains never greet. (Con.) They that see you by day will not break in upon you at night.

5. Proverb: *'Ina le senya motse*.
Literal meaning: (To mention) the name will destroy the city.
European equivalent: It is the cause; it is the cause, etc.

6. Proverb: *Motse o loapeng*.
Literal meaning: The real home is in the courtyard (the women's quarters).
European equivalent: The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

7. Proverb: *Motse o senang makoloane logora loa one ga loo*.
Literal meaning: A city without young men has no outer walls.

Discussion

The above proverbs attest to the importance of land to Batswana. In proverb 4, a reference to *maje* (boulders) alludes to kingdoms. Kings established their kingdoms on mountains to signify power. Mountains gave them the ability to see their enemy and its troops from far. This helped them to get ready to defend women, children, and the weak. Mountains gave rulers a sense of dominion and invincibility. A mountain was like a foundation on which one's kingdom was built.

Marshal et al. (cited in Gear 2012) ask a very important question of whether it is possible to discuss indigenous knowledge and wisdom without focusing on the land and people's experience. In this section, it is argued that it is not possible to isolate humans from the land since the two are inseparable. The Freedom Charter strengthens the strong relationship that exists between humans and the land, as expressed by Nelson Mandela: "The land shall be shared among those who work on it" (Mandela 1994, 102). The Bible asserts that "[b]y the sweat of your brow you will have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made" (Genesis 3:19). This means that the land must be tilled and worked on for humans to benefit from it. The Freedom Charter does not promote entitlement and free-for-all behaviour, both of which lead to unhealthy dependence. It promotes ownership with responsibility. In other words, the land is an inalienable right to any self-respecting human, without which there will be lack of food security, shelter, and personal pride. Without land, a Motswana man cannot own cattle,

because they require a kraal and the land to graze. He cannot get married either. A woman needs a house to establish a home, and all this depends on land acquisition.

Proverbs that Signify Children

Children provide a sense of continuity and future. Procreation is an extension of creation by God after the fall of man, and the products thereof—children—are sources of joy. Children are full of energy, which has to be harnessed and directed appropriately. They are prone to making mistakes, and adults are there to guide them accordingly. Society has values and mores, which are intended for transmission to the young ones (Jirata 2011). According to Mangaliso (2001), in African communities, children are socialised from birth to pay attention to the spoken word and the context of the speech. They are given names that reflect the circumstances surrounding their birth, be it their birth order, the season, or perhaps the state of the economy. In Zimbabwe, among the Shona and the Ndebele, children are essential as they reflect a father's presence and importance in society (Muhwati 2010).

Children are a blessing from God. The Batswana affirm this by using the expression *Gabaiphiwe*, meaning children are not a gift from a man but a gift from God. As such, they have to be fended for and taught acceptable ways of life that are sustainable. They are taken through phases in life that prepare them for future responsibilities. They are trained to respect authorities on different levels. They are taught to take all elderly persons as their parents within the family and society.

Where it happened that the biological father passed on, and *rangwane* (paternal uncle) took over paternal responsibilities, his role would be understood precisely as that, that is, a younger father. If he sired an offspring out of the engagement with the late brother's widow, both the biological children to the brother and his biological child would continue to refer to him as *rangwane*. This was because the children knew their position and their responsibilities. They owed their allegiance to their parents in their echelons.

This section looks at how modernity and invasion of the Batswana's space have tampered with the sacred relationships between parents and children. Migrant labour destabilised the stable family unit with the absence of the father as the head and the authority in the family. The vicious cycle continues when a boy is initiated and thereafter expected to look for a job (usually at a mine). Like his father, he stays there and ultimately starts a family and spends most of his marital life in absentia. Children are born and primarily raised by the mother with the assistance of the maternal and paternal uncles and aunts. This is because while the young man is still looking to build his own home, he and his family stay with his in-laws. This happens to be the very first corrosion of authority for the father. He is not part of the milestones of his children. Relative strangers teach them values and norms. His voice is absent, and usually, by the time he starts to build his own home, the rod has cooled down to be struck. His own identity is not evident, starting with name-giving. Usually, the children are born while he is away, and the maternal uncles, as male figures, do the honour of naming the

children. The connection gets lost, primarily, at birth. Resultantly children are likely to rebel against the authority of their father because they feel, rightly so, that he is not part of them. He becomes an intruder in his homestead. Below are a few examples of proverbs that signify children (Plaatje 1916):

1. Proverb: *Go thsego eo o tsetseng ngoana oa mosetsana; oa mosimane moroa mogogadiagoe*.
Literal meaning: Happy is she whom the gods have given a daughter, for a boy is the son of his mother-in-law.
European equivalent: My son is my son till he has got him a wife, but my daughter is my daughter all the days of her life.

2. Proverb: *Mosimane oa gae ga na lobelo*.
Literal meaning: The home courier is never a good runner.
European equivalent: (a) A cow from afar gives plenty of milk. (b) A prophet is not without honour save in his own country.

3. Proverb: *Ngoana oa mosimane o bolaoa ke se o se jang*.
Literal meaning: The male child is injured by what he gains.
European equivalent: Without pains, no gains (or: Nothing ventured, nothing won)

4. Proverb: *Chukudu e senang ngoana e ikisa mokgobeng*.
Literal meaning: The rhinoceros which has no calves betakes itself to the muddy lake.
European equivalent: There is not so much comfort in having children, as there is sorrow in parting with them. (Con.)

5. Proverb: *Chukudu ga e ke e coa sekgoeng fela, ea bo e utluile botlhoko*.
Literal meaning: The rhinoceros never leaves the forest without it has been hurt.
European equivalent: When the hound is in the greenwood, the hind keeps the hill.

6. Proverb: *Moroa mmidibidi oa tlhaga, ngoana a sena gabo-mogolo, a ijela mashori*.
Literal meaning: The Bushman is a son of the meadow, having no relatives he owes no nephew's duties to any uncle.
European equivalent: He is the best gentleman, the son of his own deserts.

7. Proverb: *Ngoana eo bonya le eo o bonako ke ba rata 'mogo*.
Literal meaning: The slow child and the quick one, I like them both.
European equivalent: *Festina lente*. (Latin)

8. Proverb: *Ngoana eo mogolo o tlhokoa ko o leong*.
Literal meaning: The eldest (= dutiful) child is missed even where he is.

9. Proverb: *Ngoana 'ma-ngoane 'nyala, kgomo di boele sakeng*.
Literal meaning: Marry me, cousin, and retain the dowry cattle in the family fold.

European equivalent: *Gleiches Blut, gleiches Glut, und gleich Jahre machen die besten Heirathspaare*. (German)

10. Proverb: *Ngoana oa ntlha molekana oaga rragoe*.
Literal meaning: The first child is its father's companion.
European equivalent: Like father like son. (A chip off the old block.)

11. Proverb: *Ngoana oare go lelela logodu a lo neoe*.
Literal meaning: When a child cries after soup, give it to him.
European equivalent: He that will to Cupar, maun to Cupar.

12. Proverb: *Ngoana o sa leleng o shoela tharing*.
Literal meaning: The child that never cries dies on its mother's back.
European equivalent: Dumb folks get no lands.

13. Proverb: *Ngoana o sa utloeng molao oa ga rragoe o tla utloa molao oa manong*.
Literal meaning: The child that heedeth not its father's teaching will obey the law of the vultures.
European equivalent: He that will not be ruled by his own dame shall be ruled by his step-dame.

Proverbs that Signify Women

Women have been revered among the Batswana as not only custodians of knowledge, values, and culture, but transmitters thereof. Men have been considered erratic, greedy, and lacking focus. For a man to be complete, he needed to be complemented by a woman. This explains arranged marriages among the Batswana. Future brides were handpicked to ensure completeness and continuity. Any self-respecting man knew that one had to be married for self-preservation. A woman brings continuity to a man's family by giving birth to children. A man who has children carries his name into posterity through the woman as a vessel (Phillips and Ohwovoriole 2011). Women give men a sense of purpose, and thus they were valued.

Women are responsible for the formative development of society's young ones. The mother's importance starts from giving birth and extends throughout all the milestones in the development of a child. There is an "irreplaceable warm contact between mother and child" (Makward 2007, 632). In the same vein, Merry (2010, 75) asserts "much of this derives from the mother-child bond, in which the earliest sense of identity that involves mutual trust and recognition is to be found." A mother is always protective of her child, as exemplified in the proverb: "A baby on the mother's back is never aware of the distance of a journey" (Phillips and Ohwovoriole 2011, 128).

Virginia Mollenkott (cited in Jakobsen 2001) explores the critical importance of women by providing parallels between God and women. She paints a feminine picture of God, which confirms the compassion and love that women have as divine grace. In one

instance, when Jesus was lamenting over Jerusalem, He likened himself to a mother hen (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34). She continues to equate God to a mother eagle, as contained in Deuteronomy 32:11 and Job 39:27–30. Mollenkott further paints God as a mother in labour, and as a nursing mother, based on Deuteronomy 42:14 and Deuteronomy 49:15 (Mollenkott 1983). In essence, women are naturally utilitarian.

The big question is whether modernity and the invasion of the space and text of the Batswana changed the texture of the canvass. Writing on the oppression women faced under apartheid, but which continues to this day, Veitch explains African women in South Africa face triple persecution because they are both black and female. As Africans, they had to struggle with the restricted and repressive apartheid legislation, which imposed control over all aspects of their existence. Women are also socialised to believe that they are reliant on and inferior to their male counterparts, and as a result, they were discriminated against much more under apartheid (Veitch 2012).

This is further confirmed by Mothoagae (2015), who discusses proverbs as a confirmation of structures of "patriarchy" and the marginalisation of women's identities. Other scholars such as Blauvelt (1901) and Mathonsi and Mpungose (2015) agree with the above definition by Mothoagae (2015). Below are a few proverbs that signify women (Plaatje 1916):

1. Proverb: *Mosadi choene o jeoa mabogo*.
Literal meaning: A woman is like a monkey, you can only eat her hands (labour).
European equivalent: All women are good, viz. for something or nothing.

2. Proverb: *Mosadi ga coe Boroa e se phefo*.
Literal meaning: A wife never comes from the south, only winds do.
European equivalent: He that goes a great way for a wife is either cheated or means to cheat.

3. Proverb: *Mosadi ga jeoe matlho ese kgomo*.
Literal meaning: You cannot eat the eyes (pretty face) of a woman; only those of an ox can be eaten.
European equivalent: Fine words do not fill the belly (or rather). A beautiful woman, hell of the soul.

4. Proverb: *Mosadi mooka o nya le motshegare*.
Literal meaning: A woman is as useful as a mimosa tree, which yields gum all day long.
European equivalent: One hair of a woman draws more than a team of oxen.

5. Proverb: *Mosadi nca o okoa ka lesapo*.
European equivalent: He that will win a Lancashire lass must bait his hook with a good egg-pie.

Discussion

The proverb *Mosadi choene o jeoa mabogo* is one of the many proverbs with which men had deliberate intentions to dehumanise women. In her study, Obododimma (1998) echoes the same sentiment and suggests that in Igbo women are mostly portrayed as being senseless, morally debased, devilish, childish, and weak. The metaphor of a dog in the proverb *Mosadi nca o okoa ka lesapo* is double-edged. First, and most cynical, is a suggestion that women are useless since they are equated with a dog, which is non-utilitarian. As indicated below, a dog is described as *molatlhwa le bowa*, meaning that when a dog dies, there is no benefit to the owner. It is thrown away with no skin taken, nor any other part for that matter. A dog is a greedy and selfish animal and such a portrayal of women is dehumanising. Another image painted here is that of dependence and unquestioning loyalty. When men were away on migrant labour, women would be expected to wait patiently for their return. No questions were to be asked of what they were about during their absence.

Proverbs that Signify Men

In our patriarchal world, men are expected to lead as the head. During apartheid, the introduction of the Group Areas Acts made matters worse as its subtle tendencies to discriminate were responsible for making women believe they were below men. Boys were taught and forced to believe they were stronger than girls. Girls were bought toys that prepared them to serve men. There was nothing biological that rendered women inferior to men. It was the result of socialisation. Webster and Blatchford (2015) make an interesting assertion regarding the perpetual wrong attitudes that men have towards women, which is that the wife of a wealthy man is ranked high, regardless of her appearance, and one married to a poor man is not afforded the same status.

Mostly, men enjoyed and continue to enjoy greater advantages over women in almost all aspects of life. They enjoyed the right and the privilege to polygamy or multiple relationships. The background described above explains the proverb *Monna thekelele theko ea marumo, eare are thee abo aile; u mokokorietse* (Do not question your man about his whereabouts), suggesting that women must accept that men cannot be trusted. This goes to the extent that on their wedding day, the woman is advised never to ask her husband why he is late should he arrive home late. Also, as one wedding song, "Monna ga a bodiwe payslip" (Do not ask your man to show you his payslip), would insinuate, a woman does not have the right to ask her husband about his payslip. In her study, Schipper (1991 cited in Costandius 2007) found that women globally are depicted negatively in proverbs. In her study, she could not find any cynical proverb aimed at African men, but found numerous examples related to women.

Below are a few proverbs that signify men (Plaatje 1916), with a discussion of each proverb:

1. Proverb: *"E" ea monna ke "e", ea mosadi ke eone "nyaea."*

Literal meaning: A man's Yes is a "Yes"; a woman's Yes is often a "No."
European equivalent: (a) Between a woman's "Yes" and "No" you may insert the point of a needle. (b) *Ein Mann, ein Wort; ein Wort, ein Mann*. (German)

2. Proverb: *Go ja monna ga se go mo oetsa*.
Literal meaning: Getting the better of a man is not necessarily finishing him.
European equivalent: *Assommer un garde-champêtre, ce n'est pas assommer un homme*. (French)

3. Proverb: *Monna ga ipolele, o boleloa ke ba bangoe*.
Literal meaning: It is not for a man to praise himself; he lets others do it for him.
European equivalent: (a) Brave actions never want a trumpet. (b) *Méfiez-vous d'une femme qui parle de sa vertue*. (French)

Discussion

The patriarchal disposition of men in society tends to make them believe that showing emotions is a sign of femininity. There is a saying by elderly people among the Batswana that *monna ke nku, o llela teng*, meaning "man is like a sheep, he cries quietly," which suggests that he is not likely to share his heavy burdens or life troubles for fear of being considered a weakling. The proverb *Monna ga ipolele, o boleloa ke ba bangoe* (proverb 3 above) suggests that men are duty-bound to provide. A man who fails to fend for his family is perceived by society as not man enough. He must be able to provide shelter, security, and secure food for his family.

Men have been socialised to be providers. The size of a man's kraal tells the story of his success. The Batswana would express it better by saying, *mphemphe o a lapisa, motho o kgonwa ke sa gagwe*, meaning "borrowing is tedious, one should have his/her things." The proverb *"E" ea monnake "e," ea mosadikeeone "nyaea"* (proverb 1 above) attests to the patriarchal society's relegation of independence and responsibility among women. What is implied here is that men have the capacity and integrity to act with honour. Partly this was caused by the draconian laws of the past, wherein women did not have contractual capacity because they were seen and treated as minors. There is a general practice that when men greet among themselves, they normally say *bana ba kae?* (Where are the kids?), and by kids, they include the wife. As such, women are expected not to be able to reason or make reasonable judgments in the male-dominated society or world.

Proverbs that Signify Animals

As with all nations, South Africa uses specific animals on its coat of arms and associates them with their highest good. In the same vein, different groupings of the Batswana (spread across the different ethnic groups in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia) take pride in associating themselves with specific animals as their totemic clan. For example, the Bahurutshe's and Bakgatla's totem animals are the baboon and monkey

respectively. They believe that these animals are closest to humans because of their close resemblance to them, physically. The Bakwena chose the crocodile because of its power and agility in the water. These tribes revered these animals of choice and declared any defamation of them as taboo.

In everyday discourse, *kgomo*, meaning cow, is considered a sacred animal among most African nations, including Batswana. The Batswana knew its value and they were very much determined to preserve, protect, fight and die for it. Their proverbs around this animal exuded pride, to the extent that the dog, arguably man's friendliest animal, would be known as *molatlhwa le bowa* (when a dog dies, there is no benefit to the owner). The reader can agree with the writer that when a cow dies, nothing is left to waste.

Later on, the Batswana men were worried that their dominion over their possessions was usurped from them. For starters, they were dispossessed of fertile grazelands, which led to internal strife among members for space. Animals suffered from mild and severe droughts due to limited grazing space. That very sacred animal—the cow—became a curse instead of a blessing. Migrant labour and other eventualities were the results, with dire consequences, as explained under proverbs denoting men. While proverbs that signify animals are in abundance, the author chose to focus only on the cow as one of the best primary commodities for wealth and because it is a generally accepted form of pride and livelihood among the Batswana.

1. Proverb: *Foko ja maabanyane ga le tlhabe kgomo*.
Literal meaning: The evening word does not kill an ox.
European equivalent: Wishers and woulders be no good householders.

2. Proverb: *Ga go kgomo di senang bobi*.
Literal meaning: There are no cattle without a dung heap.
European equivalent: A wound never heals so well but that the scar can be seen.

3. Proverb: *Kgomo eatle e bapaloe, motho ga bapaloe*.
Literal meaning: You can earn (or work to buy) an ox, but not a person.
European equivalent: Life is a merchandise which no money can buy.

4. Proverb: *Kgomo ga e ke e nyela boloko jeotlhe*.
Literal meaning: An ox never relieves itself of all its dung at the same time.
European equivalent: A fencer hath one trick in his budget more than he ever taught his scholar.

5. Proverb: *Kgomo ga e ke e tlhaba mongoa eone*.
Literal meaning: An ox will never toss its owner.
European equivalent: A wise son knoweth his own father.

6. Proverb: *Mocoa-kgomo ga se lesilo*.
Literal meaning: The giver of the ox (= the donor) is not a fool.

European equivalent: He is an ill guest that never drinks to his host. (Plaatje 1916)

Discussion

Of all the animals close to the Batswana, *kgomo* is so important that it is considered close to a deity. It is referred to as *Modimo o o nko e metsi* (a god with moist nostrils). Every Motswana man aspired to own a herd, and like land, one's worth was determined by owning some. From paying *bogadi* (bride price) to slaughtering during bereavement, the cow played a pivotal role. The proverbs on this animal are thus a reflection of the Batswana's reflections on life and livelihood.

Proverbs that Signify Birds

The bird, as a signifier in language, is a symbol of versatility, freedom, and agility. It represents humans' desire to transcend the terrestrial and be part of the celestial. This can be better expressed in the following words: *nka ikhuna ka ya marung, ka ya go bona se tladi e se jang* (I can fly high up to the sky, and see what the rain bird feeds on), which is one example that confirms this yearning. Symbols, the bird in this instance, aim to communicate multiple meanings simultaneously through the use of only a word or an image (Costandius 2007). For example, the smooth movement of the eagle and the power of the vulture are a marvel to watch. These birds represent the age-old dream of flight by humans. They epitomise the desire for elusive freedom. They represent humans' wish to cover the expanse of the universe unhindered.

Most importantly, though, is Motswana's understanding of the sad reality that while the free bird may be powerful in flight, it feeds and drinks on Mother Earth. This acceptance of human limitations breeds sanity and humility. The proverbs on birds provide lessons on reality versus illusion and are a way of teaching young, feisty ones that one may have the advantage of youthful energy, but if abused, the feistiness can be destructive rather than constructive. In South Africa, the Nationalist Party had the power of the arsenal and legislation, which they used with the briskness and energy of the youth—the bird in our case. Like the strong vultures, which have the supremacy of the air, they were brought down and made to eat humble pie. The very downtrodden people they had trampled on for many years were the ultimate victors. Hereunder are relevant examples (Plaatje 1916):

1. Proverb: *Manong a ja ka ditshika*.
Literal meaning: Vultures eat with their blood relations.
European equivalent: Birds of a feather flock together.

2. Proverb: *Maoto a nong ke phofa*.
Literal meaning: The feet of the vulture are its wings.
European equivalent: Robin that herds on the height.

Discussion

The above-mentioned proverbs are the culmination of the essence of the Batswana's survival, which is *motho ke motho ka ba bangwe*, meaning "I am because of others." Young ones were taught to share from an early age. They belonged to regiments as soon as they were initiated. They were expected to show some loyalty to the royal family and the community/society. These regiments were like the vultures referred to above. They had to defend the pride of their kingdom in their respective regiments. For the people to appreciate ubuntu, they have to start by showing respect as soon as they become conscious of their existence (Monyai 1997).

Proverbs that Signify Chieftaincy

Bogosi (chieftaincy) was a sacred position among the Batswana when *kgomo* was considered as a form of deity. *Kgosi* (chief) symbolised authority and discipline among all his subjects. It was an establishment with a birthright. Not everyone was appointed into chieftaincy, even if one was born into the royal family. The chief's counsel knew the succession pattern to be appointed into chieftaincy. The subjects were taught, through socialisation, to respect their position and *kgotla* as their tribal legal institution. Their allegiance to the incumbent was unquestionable. They knew and accepted that they had to fight and die for their chief as subjects. Furthermore, they were obliged to protect their land and other essential possessions. The chief had the divine powers to declare war and peace. He declared the planting season, including harvest time, to the extent that no one was allowed to harvest and enjoy any of the harvests before the chief made an announcement. The chief was the final arbiter in all tribal cases including disputes, and his word was final and was respected. The proverbs that are discussed below attest to the great respect that the subjects had for their leader. However, as is evident in the proverbs below (Plaatje 1916), subjects had to be careful of their actions and words when they were around him.

1. Proverb: *Eare go tuloe roga kgosi, u roge*.
Literal meaning: When you are sent to insult the king do so (i.e. the fault lies with the one who sent you)
European equivalent: The principal is liable for the acts of his agents.

2. Proverb: *Foko ja kgosi le ageloa mosako*.
Literal meaning: Always build a fence round the King's word.
European equivalent: The king can do no wrong.

3. Proverb: *Kgosi e tsala diphera*.
Literal meaning: Chiefs often beget scapegraces.
European equivalent: Sweetmeat will have sour sauce.

4. Proverb: *Kgosi ke kgosi ka morafe*.
Literal meaning: A chief is a chief by grace of his tribe.

European equivalent: The wealth of kings is in the affections of their subjects.

5. Proverb: *Kgosi thipa, e sega molootsi*.
Literal meaning: A chief is like a knife that will cut the sharpener.
European equivalent: All Governments are to some extent a treaty with the Devil.

6. Proverb: *Kgosi thutubudu e oleloa matlakala*.
Literal meaning: A chief is like an ash heap on which is gathered all the refuse.
European equivalent: The higher the position, the greater the responsibility.

7. Proverb: *Moga morago kgosi*.
Literal meaning: He who eats the last is the chief (because hungry eyes are turned to him alone).
European equivalent: (a) The last suitor wins the maid. (b) I think it was lucky I was born so late.

8. Proverb: *Mo laea kgosi oa bo a e itaela*.
Literal meaning: He who enjoins the king to be strict often does so against himself.
European equivalent: Nearest the king, nearest the gallows (or Psalm 10:15).

9. Proverb: *Moseki ga itse kgosi*.
Literal meaning: A plaintiff (suppliant) knows no chief.
European equivalent: *Gesetz ist mächtig, aber mächtiger ist die Noth* (Goethe).

10. Proverb: *Mosimane oa kgosing kgosi*.
Literal meaning: A king's messenger is (as good as) a king.
European equivalent: The servant of a king is a king.

11. Proverb: *Ntlha ea kgosi e ioa ke Modimo*.
Literal meaning: God is (ever) on the side of the chief.
European equivalent: God helps the strongest.

Discussion

The proverb *Kgosi thutubudu e oleloa matlakala* (A king is like a dumping site) carries deep imagery of land. It should be borne in mind that *kgosi* was responsible not only for allocating land but also protecting it, as the custodian of the land. A dumping site is not some space outside the village. Dumping sites ensure that households are kept clean, and also serve to produce compost to grow fresh produce. The dumping sites and the land have a symbiotic relationship. *Kgosi* is not imposed on his subjects. He is born into the leadership role and is part of his community. He is an element of the system, having been born of a queen mother (*Kgosigadi*) who was raised to be the mother of a nation. *Kgosi* is initiated, not alone, but with his *mophato* (regiment), to make sure that he understands the heartbeat of his future subjects. His subjects learn to trust him and understand that he can be entrusted with their deep secrets without fear of them being

splashed into the open. *Kgosi* is duty-bound to give ear to all his subjects without fear or favour.

Conclusion

The above discussion was an attempt at unearthing the connection between the Batswana's proverbs and their land. This article focused on the concept of space and text embodied in proverbs, with reference to Setswana—an African language spoken in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The theory of Structuralism was used to understand the use of proverbs among the Batswana. The article argued that the Batswana are a performative nation; their idiom, represented by their sayings, expresses how they relate to their land. The land represents all earthly belongings of this nation, which include the sea, minerals, the skies and all fauna and flora. The proverbs reflect the DNA of the people and were an outcry of the dispossessed when their identity was tainted through name changes and forced removals.

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