

Of Prophecy, Mythmaking and Martyrdom in the Manche Masemola Narrative: I Will Be Baptised in my Blood

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Abstract

This paper explores why the Anglican Church in Jane Furse used the Manche Masemola narrative to construct martyrdom. Like most hagiographies, Manche's narrative is told to inspire admiration and reverence. It uses Manche as a model worthy of emulation by Christian converts. She is a product of two conflicting worlds, the imperial Christian world and that of the Bapedi. The story of Manche Masemola hinges on the claim of a prophecy: "I will be baptised in my blood." The narrative imbues Manche with the power of this prophecy. This paper argues that the prophecy is part of a myth to authenticate church dogma and to validate conversion into Christianity when proselytising and evangelising were not warmly received. In that hostile environment, new recruits into Christianity needed to be strengthened and inspired to accept—and die—for their new faith. I will explore the controversies of the prophecy; its origins and place in the narrative; and finally examine the testimony provided to construct martyrdom. Although I draw on a few primary sources from the Anglican archives, I largely use secondary data to explain why it was necessary that Manche was to be turned into a martyr to achieve religious and missionary goals.

Keywords: martyr; prophecy; myth; hagiography; euhemerism; baptism; *Baptismus Flaminis*; Jane Furse; Manche Masemola

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to argue that the story of Manche Masemola is a myth told to enforce and consolidate religious gains in Sekhukhuneland. The story was born in a context of religious imperialism, and the myth was a necessary instrument to win hearts



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and to claim space in a political environment which was fiercely contested. The author largely uses secondary data of available documentary evidence widely published in various websites and on paper to explain why it has been necessary that Manche was to be turned into a martyr to achieve religious and missionary goals. Since the 1990s, I have had interactions over a long period when I worked at St Mark's College (a missionary-inspired secondary School in Sekhukhuneland) where this story is a common narrative told regularly, influencing children's lives. St Mark's College is built in the old buildings of the Anglican Church adjacent to Jane Furse Memorial Hospital. The chapel was built here when the hospital was built, and the Daughters of Mary stayed in the Priory on these premises. Here is where potential sisters would stay as soon as they accept an oath of celibacy. This place is about 15 kilometres away from the St Peters Church in GaMarishane, where Manche came from. I review the story as an insider/outsider and as a participant-observer. Other than working at St Mark's, I grew up in Jane Furse, familiar with how the English affected Bapedi polity and shaped the discourse of spirituality in the region. Before we delve into the argument, perhaps it would be essential to describe who Manche Masemola is.

Who is Manche Masemola?

Manche Masemola was born circa 1913 in GaMarishane, about 15 kilometres away from the Anglican Priory, in Jane Furse, Sekhukhuneland. In 1919, Augustine Moeka, an African Priest of the Anglican Church, established the St Peters Church in this village. Manche and her peers were attracted to the church and started attending catechumen classes to be baptised. Manche, like most local children, received resistance from her parents because of the diametrically different religious worldviews, namely that of the Bapedi and the church (representing English values). The latter was seen by her parents as being antithetical to the traditional religious beliefs they so dearly upheld and practised. The tensions between the English and Bapedi had not been fully settled following the Sekhukhune wars. The church's perceived condescending attitude towards African beliefs and rituals also increased the tension. In terms of her culture, Manche was to marry her cousin. To do this, she had to undergo an initiation (*koma*), which is central to Bapedi nurturing and socialising boys and girls to adulthood. When Manche rejected the prospect of marriage with her cousin, as a demonstration of her devotion to the Anglican teachings, her parents felt they had lost their child to strangers.

Because there were Daughters of Mary, nuns who would never marry as a result of their oath to celibacy, Manche's parents feared that she would eventually turn into a nun. Being unmarried in the historical epoch in question was abhorrent conduct, and disreputable. In a short report by Dr Hogson, entitled "Field Trip to the Manche Masemola Celebrations, Sekhukhuneland 10 August 1986," Hogson interviewed Lisa and Mrs Tsebe; the latter was very close to Manche's family, a Masemola too. Explaining why Manche's parents were against the church, she proclaimed that:

Christian people do not get enough *lobola*, cattle when they marry. Because Fr Moeka was teaching the people that they must not pay a lot of cattle for their daughters. It must

just be a small amount, just for thanksgiving ... Christian people do not get enough cattle when they are married. Therefore, they said that once Manche goes to the church we will also not get enough cattle. That was really their reason. The parents of the Daughters of Mary felt the same. (Hogson 1986, 9)

The preceding citation tellingly adumbrates the condescending attitude of the church towards African culture. Father Moeka is singled out as an instrument of the church to achieve its purpose of erasing practices alien to church and Western culture. In their limited understanding, *lobola* is seen as a mere transaction involving cattle. The value of cattle is missed. Cattle represent not only economic status and power, but are a means to communicate with the ancestral world. An African marriage is a spiritual bond between ancestors of both bride and groom; sealed by cattle as sacrificial beasts.

In addition, the extract cited also hints to the fear of parents losing their daughters to the church, becoming Daughters of Mary. That fear is not far-fetched because Manche “belonged to the Wayfarers” (Hogson 1986, 9) and the Daughters of Mary were in charge of the Wayfarers with the help of Mrs Moeka. As a Wayfarer, Manche would easily be snapped up into the Daughters of Mary; a condition that local communities feared. Joining the Daughters of Mary would mean spatial and spiritual displacement for Manche. As usual, she would be physically moved and relocated to Jane Furse where other sisters were. This physical displacement would heighten the gap between her and her family. Furthermore, she would be distanced from her own culture and heritage; thus dislocated and re-oriented into the new faith alien to her family religion.

Martyr Defined

Chawarika and Duncan (2018, 2) explain the aetiology of martyrdom broadly in this manner:

Generally, a martyr in the Greek word *martus* means witness—a person who testified his faith to death. It should be pointed out that (before the Greek martyrs) the apostles in the early centuries faced heavy persecutions until they suffered death for their convictions and faith. During this period, the term *martus* came to be used in the sense of a witness of Christ who suffered the penalty of death because of his/her faith. Hence, martyrs were Christians who suffered the extreme penalty of death upon refusing to deny their faith in God.

The Greek word *martus* refers to a witness, a testimony, yet in Christian mythology like in the New Testament, it acquired a new shade of meaning to refer to the testimony about Jesus. The English word “martyr” is considered a transliteration of the Greek concept. A martyr henceforth refers to someone who suffers a penalty for his or her faith and has to be a witness until his or her death. Martyrs suffer persecution and death for advocating, renouncing, refusing to renounce, or refusing to advocate a belief or cause as demanded by an external party, including society at large. To be a martyr, therefore, one has to profess a faith and defend it, even if it means paying a heavy price—death. The death of a martyr is preceded by brutal physical torture, mortification, sacrifice,

psychological torture and persecution. I will explore the controversies of the prophecy; its origins and its place in the narrative; and finally explore why Manche was constructed as a martyr of the Anglican Church.

Prophecy as a Myth

The story of Manche Masemola hinges on a claim of a prophecy: “I will be baptised in my blood.” The narrative imbues Manche with the power of prophecy that she will eventually be baptised with her blood. She will eventually die for her religious beliefs and conviction. A prophecy is a prediction of the future, a revelatory utterance or a prediction by divine revelation. The *Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (1984, 136) defines prophecy as preaching, proclamation (of the word of God), or prediction. Manche is said to have predicted that she will be “baptised in her blood.” Her construction as a martyr is modelled around this prophecy.

This prophecy is part of a myth to authenticate church dogma, teachings and also to validate conversion into Christianity at a time when proselytising and evangelising were not warmly received. This view is also reaffirmed by Goedhals (2000), who proclaims that the Manche story was essentially about the making of a martyr, a witness of Christ among a people the church considers to be hostile pagans. When the church was set up in GaMarishane in and around 1918, and a chapel in Jane Furse, the tensions were clearly visible. The tension arose from diametrically divergent religious conceptions and worldviews, and the attitude of the imperial order on colonial subjects and their beliefs. Goedhals continues to paint a picture of the tension in this manner:

Probably the rejection of Christianity by the Pedi was seen as having embodied the Colonial power and rule, because of the conquest of the Pedi which resulted in the loss of their land, under the Colonial rule which also demanded tax and hard labor. (Goedhals 2000, 35)

The Anglican Church set its foot in Sekhukhuneland just after the South African War (1899–1902) when the British collapsed the Boer Republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal into part of the British Dominions. The interregnum allowed them to expand their authority and influence on areas previously inaccessible to the English. This period marked almost 25 years after the Sekhukhune Wars with the British, where the latter humiliated Bapedi with the aid of Swazi regiments. In addition, Blacks in general had memories of exclusion by the South Africa Act (1909) and the wrath of the Native Land Act (1913). What this means is that the wounds were not healed and memories were still fresh, and as a result it was not going to be easy to infiltrate Bapedi so soon after such an atrocious defeat and social exclusion.

In that hostile environment, recruits into Christianity needed to be strengthened and inspired to accept and die for their new faith. The whole exercise of Christianisation, as a civilising mission, was met with serious opposition because it purported to destroy African cultures and supplant English culture and traditions. Worse still, colonisation,

it was argued, steals one's soul, and demands respect for foreign ancestors to the detriment of one's ancestry. It begins with alienating one from the land, which in Sepedi is defined as *bowelakana* "a place where one's umbilical cord was buried."

Like most hagiographies, Manche's narrative is told to inspire admiration and reverence. Its purpose is to use Manche as a model worthy of emulation by young Christian converts. This myth was told to reinforce religious belief in an environment that was not receptive to Anglicisation and other resultant religious dogmas. The term "myth" is advisedly used as a folklorist because it describes exactly what it means. In his explanation of the various subgenres of verbal art, William Bascom (1965, 4) identifies myth as:

... prose narratives, which in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, disbelief or doubt. They are an embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred, and they are often associated with theology and ritual [my emphasis].

Following Bascom's theory of myth, Manche's story is constructed and framed as a theological narrative to reinforce church teachings. It is a narrative to be accepted in faith and as a doctrine, and not to be questioned. Indeed, Father Moeka's narrative is not questioned. Its veracity and its sources have become sacrosanct. Moeka's inviolable narrative would fortify his catechumens, who faced ridicule and resistance from their parents and the community. Raphael's comment is apt on this matter when he says that someone with a point to make takes a historical person who is close to making that same point and writes a speech for him using the current language that would resonate with the people of the times (Raphael 2004).

A Finnish folklorist, Lauri Honko, aptly notes that a myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms; it provides a pattern of behaviour to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends, and establishes the sanctity of the cult (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth>, accessed December 20, 2018). In terms of euhemerism theory, storytellers repeatedly elaborate upon historical accounts until the figures in those accounts gain the status of gods. Manche's story operates in almost a similar way. The church's narrative is retold in the same manner, such that very few of the commentators may point to a source. To them, the source is inalienable, sacrosanct and authoritative enough not to pass the acid test of verification and validation.

To demonstrate Manche's narrative as a myth, perhaps it is necessary to elaborate on the credibility of Father Moeka's sources or his personal experience as a testimony to provide a window of historical truth. There is one common source that has several variations, as a folkloric text would always have. These variations include how she was tortured, why she was punished, how she finally died, and why she was not baptised. This source is Moeka's version of the events as they unfolded. The rest of the text is based on his reflections as he had heard largely from Manche's cousin, Lucia. Father

Moeka is not a primary witness—not an eye witness who can be trusted with obtaining first-hand information from the scene and time.

The distance between GaMarishane, where Father Moeka was stationed, and GaPhaahla (Lobethal) is so close that the competition was inevitable. I want to argue that the church was bound to create a martyr to attract catechumens and to lend credibility and legitimacy to the narrative. In this new environment, the Lutheran Church had already penetrated Sekhukhuneland and was beginning to take root in the communities. Its doctrine was also fairly accepted. This is also attested by Ledwaba (2004, 62) who maintains:

The evangelistic work for the Anglican Church had been carried on by Father Hill of the Community of the Resurrection and the Reverend Augustin Moeka. Both the Lutheran and Methodist Churches had already established missions and schools in the country round Marishane (Mooifontein). Here Augustin Moeka built up an ardent Christian congregation, the present St Peters Anglican Church.

Given the historical memories of the Sekhukhune Wars still fresh in the memories of the people, it was necessary to find an effective instrument to fend off a possible competition in the form of the Lutheran Church. This tall tale is the very essence of why the church tells the story of Manche. This act of prophecy is a creation of the church; using Father Moeka as a discursive agency to describe a *martyr* whose shrine would become the future altar and the seat of the Anglican Church.

Moeka was concerned about the persecution suffered by the catechumens he was preparing for baptism, to the extent that he advised them not to go against their parents' wishes. He records that Manche, in response to this, said to him: "*If they cut my head, I will never leave my faith*" [my emphasis] (Goedhals 1998, 38) and she went on to claim that she "*would be baptised with a 'better baptism'*" [my emphasis] (Goedhals 1998, 38). Lucia recalls her saying: "*I shall laugh the more they hurt me*" [my emphasis] (Goedhals 1998, 38). These are courageous words indeed, which reflect a sense of determination to hold on to what one believes in.

The utterances are futuristic, and in a way, eschatological. They proclaim a commitment to faith and preparedness for consequences coming with it. The first utterance offers the persona with a wish to sacrifice her own life, while the expression of "better baptism" seems too heavy for a fourteen-year-old to commit to. Whether historically true or not, the expression has ambivalent connotations. First, it refers to actual baptism as a sacrament, and secondly, connotes to "suffering" and the agony of facing persecution in the face of defending her faith against all odds. The third possible meaning is allusive of the baptism by the blood, which is ascribable by the church. These evocative expressions are possibly a product of the catechumens' teachings. Fourthly, the expression "*I shall laugh when they hurt me*" portrays Manche as someone who has already transitioned a worldliness spirit, as she acts contrary to the expectations of mere mortals. The expression is the strongest indication of her unwavering and unshakable

commitment to her faith, particularly if one considers that even Jesus Christ is said to have cried when he was persecuted at the cross.

This portrayal was a product of the mandate of the church of “planting clergy, building churches and preaching the gospel” (Ledwaba 2004). In a contested religious milieu like this one, it is very likely that catechumens are taught to renounce their world in favour of the promised future in heaven or the colonial world masquerading as Christianity, which Ledwaba (2004, 127) laboriously describes:

Western missionaries had for most of the time a very negative approach to African culture. In many cases, they did not only reject elements of culture that contradicted biblical principles alone but African culture in totality. In practice, it meant that Africans, when becoming Christians, had to adhere to Western cultural focus. This, coupled with the effects of colonial rule in Africa, intensified the whole process of acculturation.

Manche’s narrative should be understood in this context where catechumens were expected to renounce their culture and indigenous, religious views, and embrace the new religion without questioning. This sowed seeds of discontent and disapproval from local communities who were uneasy with shedding off their identities in favour of colonial identities.

Manche’s repeated claim that she would be baptised with her blood could be viewed either literally or figuratively, as nobody can tell what she meant or understood by that (Kuzwayo 2013, 53). The concept of baptism by blood refers to:

... martyrdom in the case of a person who died for the Christian faith before he or she could receive the sacrament. The effects of the martyrdom of blood are the complete remission of sin and the title to immediate entrance into heaven. The expression entered the Christian vocabulary during the first three centuries when many catechumens awaiting baptism and pagans suddenly converted to the Christian faith were martyred before they could receive formal baptism of water. (*Catholic Dictionary*, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32084>).

This idea is further amplified by the view that:

It is the teaching of the Catholic Church that when the baptism of water becomes a physical or moral impossibility, eternal life may be obtained by the baptism of blood or by the baptism of desire (voto). Accessed May 12, 2019. <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/modernproblems/currenterrors/bdesire.htm>.

This view is well articulated in the concept *Baptismus Flamini*, a Latin term loosely translated as Baptism of desire; used to explain the doctrine that the burning desire to receive the sacrament of baptism can be accepted as real baptism, should it be impossible to receive the sacrament (*Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (1984, 17). The baptism of blood accounts for a catechumen’s desire to be baptised. Whatever

happens, or whatever stops him or her and leads to death before the desire is realised, accords him or her entry to heaven. It seeks to account for the redemption of sins of the past, atonement, and sanctification. The baptism by blood invokes the killing of Jesus, and the blood that flowed down his body on the cross. This metaphor of blood is significant to transform Manche's status, and thus to sanctify her. Her consecration is accorded through baptism by desire, something she had wished. This teleological design is accounted for by design and her purpose exemplified by her attendance of catechumen classes and her new faith.

The claim that Manche said she would be baptised in her blood is far-fetched. It can best be understood as a construct of the Anglican, Church as Kuzwayo (2013) explains:

A martyr's death was considered a "baptism in blood" a cleansing of one's sin as baptism in water did. Martyrs are ordinary people, who put their whole trust in the crucified and risen Christ. A Christian martyr is one who is a witness of Christ and dies for this faith conviction

This explanation was used to describe Manche's death as that of a martyr. It is not convincing that she has professed her faith to an extent that she would lay down her life, and pay a capital price with it at such a young age. It is acknowledged that she was never baptised, and therefore, her baptism of blood would be the best instrument to influence the minds of the other catechumens.

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.

Manche's convictions are less reported or are subsumed in the metanarrative, and thus swallowed up by the dominant hegemonic discourse privileging Christian faith and its pursuit of martyrdom. Although she was a catechumen, she obliged to the initiation ritual which, in Sepedi culture, formally assigns her new status through a transition from *bothumaša* (state before a girl is initiated into *koma*) to *bosadi* (womanhood), which makes her marriageable.

GaMarishane, including all other villages in Sekhukhuneland, were pitted against a large imperial world. It was a contest between Sekhukhuneland and the British Empire. That local people have a social and political organisation governed differently from the English, was ignored. It was expected that Manche, Mabule and Louisa—and all other children—would undergo initiation before they were integrated into the community as full members with complete juridical rights. The teachings of the church contradicted those of the community in GaMarishane, and the whole of Sekhukhuneland. The tension between the church and the community was widened by these contradictions that could not be harmonised as is the case today.

Manche is reported to have chosen both worlds, without compromising her African life-world-view. When Father Moeka instructed the catechumens to prepare Western dress code for baptism, Manche's reaction was contrary to the church's expectation. Kuzwayo (2013, 39) comments on this experience:

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 blood!"

The church refused her baptism because of its attitude towards African culture and religion. Without a doubt, Manche held strongly to her cultural beliefs and values. Her open rejection of baptism with foreign clothing was witnessed by other catechumens. This is the story the church under-represents and foregrounds less. How the story is turned upside down that she is later dying for her convictions and Moeka's teaching is not convincing. Augustine Moeka, as a discursive agency, wields power in this narrative. He creates, recreates and transforms the narrative to constitute a "truth" that the church needed. Michael Foucault appropriately defines such power/knowledge when he says:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991, 3)

Believers adhere to objects of faith conceived as truths that the supernatural has bestowed upon them. Prophecy is one such religious medium connecting the natural and supernatural by word and action. Revealed truth is held high, such that it instils fear in the part of the believer that things revealed should be respected. Manche's revelation is baptism by blood. In Christian theology "blood" not only infers to Christ and his crucifixion on the cross but also as a metaphor for his body. Prophecy as a revelation of God's presence and power is an authoritative text, a voice of God to be universally accepted and actualised. In this way, prophecy is seen as divine truth and fact.

Moeka is aware of the power of revelation and the religious symbolism of blood and baptism by blood. Manche's death validates the prophecy, such that those who do not believe in the miracles of faith should see. This form of witness is intentionally constructed. Moeka understands the value and role of blood sacrifice concerning the forgiveness of sins. This narrative, therefore, is used to transmogrify Manche and turn her body into a sacrificial lamb to achieve theological gains.

That she will be baptised in her blood is a discourse to resist and oppose African religious beliefs, but also to shape, and transmit power to convert, and “coerce” other catechumens into action and belief; that a “better baptism” exists. The power of discourse lies in the power of the agency as well. Moeka occupies a pivotal position to determine and construct meaning. That she will be baptised in her blood was a response to Moeka as a representative of the church and not her parents. However, the discourse is transformed and twisted to serve and support the hegemonic discourse shaping the dialectics of power between the church and the local community. The interpretation of this expression is subtly subverted, and subdued in favour of what it would mean if uttered to her parents.

This episode is enough proof that the church has never played a neutral role in its missionary and civilising enterprise. It is part of a large network of a political, ideological and imperial structure whose mandate is to claim territories and spaces for the Empire. The mandate is to colonise souls, arrest and convict them for conversion to the doctrines of the Empire. Its colonising mission is perpetuated through religious dogma, which wittingly subverts cultures and heritages of the colonised people. It begins by disregarding the religious convictions of the colonised and uses its mythology to discredit any (mythology) of the colonised.

Versions Testifying Manche’s Death

Moeka’s testimony of the beatings and persecution is something he has never witnessed. His pursuit is to paint a picture of a Christian persecuted for her faith. The narrative extols Manche for fighting against forces of evil. Despite not having been baptised as the church wished, she is transmogrified and dies a good death, which later in life declares her as a martyr and saint.

Throughout the narrative, the central theme is torture and persecution. The testimony of her death is riddled with controversies and contradicting evidence of her killing. The motif of killing consists of variable versions explaining how Manche witnessed her imminent death:

- (a) Manche was *hacked to death with a machete*.

Several narrators describe Manche’s killing in callous aphorisms and phraseology. Manche is not only “beaten to death,” but “hacked” with a machete. The narrators deliberately choose to graft Manche as a helpless victim in the hands of her parents.

- (b) “The more Manche grew in her faith, the more disappointed her parents became, and her *mother tried to spear her and set her on fire, but she ran away.*” (Mason cited by Kuzwayo 2003, 32)

The version of the spear was also expressed in interviews where it is claimed that she hid in the barn, and the mother stabbed her several times with a spear. The narrative not

only describes Manche as a victim but her mother as a heartless assassin. Setting Manche on fire is very bizarre, to say the least. It is not *botho* (ethical) or proper to punish a child in this manner, irrespective of how well she has crossed the line in her conduct. Punishment is always done in moderation. What is not reported is the reaction of other family members because, in the period under discussion, Bapedi lived in communes populated by related households. These households shared a common sacrificial fire. Should we conclude that they were accomplices to the attempted murder? It is very unlikely that a special fire could be made to burn her alive.

- (c) Choshane, interviewed by Kuzwayo on 04/09/2013, further claims that “*Mabule, her younger sister witnessed all these acts of intimidation.*”

Mabule’s testimony is never corroborated by any other participant. Mabule was used as a window to witness and to interrogate the behaviour of the GaMarishane community outside the church. Commentators and researchers are not privileged with Moeka’s interactions and personal observations in this community. It is only in the voices of Mabule and Lucia that the Manche narrative is constructed. The power to (re)formulate the narrative, transmit it to shape further discourse and action lies with Augustine Moeka. Moeka’s position in the “Imperial World” should not be ignored. He is the actual mouthpiece of the Church (of England).

- (d) “The next day she was flogged to death and her body sewn up in a native way in a blanket, to be hurriedly buried.” (Higham 1941, 252)

Higham’s version should be contrasted against Lucia’s testimony as interpreted by Father Moeka to the Bishop of Pretoria in 1937. This version contends that after several beatings, they called a “witchdoctor” as they said that she was bewitched. The transcript reports that they went on thrashing her until she drank the stuff and eventually died (Parker 1937). This testimony seems to suggest that Manche not only died of the beatings but from drinking the concoction prepared to change her commitment to the church.

Pontsho Manyaka, the founder of *Greater Tubatse News* (2017), reports that on 4 February 1928, “*her parents and other community members led her to a secluded and exclusive place where she was killed with a hoe, and buried on a remote hillside before she was baptised.*” This narrative blames Manche’s parents for secretly conniving to kill her in a secluded place. Unlike in the original narrative where a spear is claimed to have been used, and eventually causing her to drink the solution prepared by a traditional healer, the *Tubatse News* report isolated a hoe as a chief weapon of killing her.

- (e) On the 4th of February 1928, *her mother and father took her to a lonely place, killed her, and secretly buried her.* Shortly after, her sister Mabule also died apparently of shock and was buried next to her grave. (*Sekhukhune News* 2017)

A new testimony contradicting (a) in the preceding analysis comes to the fore here: 1) that not only her parents killed her, but “her parents and other community members”; 2) the instrument used to kill her varies from machete to flogging as in (d) and a hoe as in (e). These conflicting memories are deliberate distortions to memorialise a heroine for the church and to demonise the community in GaMarishane. The Bapedi cultural milieu is constructed as a satanic world to be conquered by a strong Christian faith. Bapedi culture is maimed and butchered on the altar for religious gains. The local community is described as assassins, mercenaries, and heathens. These descriptions are, of course, constructed from a particular segment or class position. Moeka occupies a class position that is outside the uncivilised, uneducated, heathen, and impoverished Africans who have not yet seen the light. For lack of a better description, he was a “clever Bantu” of the time. Missionaries used these educated or converted Africans as interpreters and translators. Their versions became authoritative texts informing history and ethnography. They became “official” commentators for the outside world. As commentators and interpreters of the Western world, African priests, therefore, provided for the contact between the two worlds; and this mediacy was never perfect because it was informed by the hegemonic discourses of the West seeking domination.

Manche, seen from Augustine’s view, became an instrument to evangelise, educate, civilise and to convert young African children into the Anglican Church. This brings with it an acceptance of the English and Catholic worldview, and denunciation of their own. This brought about a pronounced tension visible in the Daughters of Mary, who represented purity of spirit and body (chastity). To the African worldview, spinsters and bachelors are abhorred as abominations that should be avoided at all costs. This conflicting perception about the world, and reality, was the source of the conflict that caused a rift between the church and the local community; producing misrepresentations, distortions, and selective memorialisation of the past.

Another controversy emanating from these testimonies is the actual date of death. It is accepted that local magistrate offices did not have records of births; however, reports regarding her death are contradictory. This extract is a transcript of Lucia Masemola’s interview with the Bishop of Pretoria in 1937.

The thrashings began in October 1927 and went on till March 1928. [There is obviously some mistake here; the Cowley Evangelist Magazine’s account written much nearer the time states that Manche died on February 4; this would seem to agree with Lucia’s statement that it was the New Year when the persecutions began to be bad.]

The interviewee continued to inform the Bishop of Pretoria that Manche died on Saturday in March; however, the Bishop is aware of this anomaly. These inaccuracies are a result of a story told many years long after the incident happened. What concerns us is the absence of testimonies reflecting fresh memories of the time. Reasons why Lucia’s version was not collected soon after her cousin’s death are incomprehensible. As expected, memory betrays historical records, especially when the storyteller is unable to represent his or her version. We have to rely on the memories of those who

tell the story. Lapses of time and memory combine to deny us the authenticity that history hopes to usher events to us. In addition, we have the inexplicable crossing of voices, where Lucia's testimony is corrected in the moment of collecting it and interspersed and juxtaposed with that of Mrs Moffat. This juxtaposition of voices complicates the veracity of oral testimonies and subjects them to manipulation by those who collect them.

Something strange about Manche's death is that, albeit the church's evidence of her brutal killing, no official case was lodged with the two local police stations or magistrate offices; one in Schoonoord, and the other in Nebo—the latter with full jurisdiction to settle cases in GaMarishane, the site of the crime. The two juridical systems are part of the world in which the church operates, and employs to settle cases. Whether it was a lack of confidence in the systems or insufficient evidence for jurisprudence, one cannot fathom.

Although Masegadike, alias Magdeline, was never brought to book to face the law for the killing of her daughter, and the husband as an accomplice as reported in other versions, she is later accepted into the church in 1969. As expected, a common biblical storyline would deal with the fall of a human being into sin, and conclude with redemption. Following this simple line, Masegadike, the sinner, is finally atoned through baptism without answering for the crimes she had committed. The sinner is redeemed; punishment or retributive justice is avoided. People consuming such texts will have no confidence in the law, but only the Word as the Supreme Law.

Drought Hitting Sekhukhuneland

Although Manche's beatings cannot be discounted, the possibility of dying because of the adverse conditions of the period cannot be completely ruled out. Sekhukhuneland, like the rest of the world, faced the onslaught of the depression and drought. The compiler of the *Jane Furse Memorial Hospital and Sekhukhuneland Mission, Sixth Annual Report* (1926, 3) confirms the difficult conditions that faced the church as well as the drought that accompanied such tribulations:

I have also to express the Committee's thanks to the Ven. Archdeacon Cameron for looking after "Jane's" affairs in England. We are fully conscious of all he does on behalf of the Hospital and Mission by keeping their work before the minds of our English friends, and feel that *during the year 1927, when our needs will be probably greater than ever before on account of the drought, he will, through his keenness and sympathy, touch the hearts of all* [my emphasis].

This was the beginning of the Great Depression which in the Union of South Africa was exacerbated by drought. In this cited report, the Jane Furse Hospital expressed the need to be supported better than ever before because, in this time, their needs would be "greater than ever before on account of the drought." That Mabule died in the same period is not surprising. Moeka is conscious of the dialectics between the church and

Bapedi cultural norms and values. He occupies a position where he has already embraced the English world as his own. He represents not only the religious and eschatological, but serves as a colonial hand that serves its master well. He mediates between the two worlds, whereas in essence representing the world of the church. As an apologist, he sacrifices “truth” from the Bapedi world as he replaces it with the master’s voice.

In the *Jane Furse Memorial Hospital and Mission in Sekukuniland Mission (Pretoria Diocese)* 1926 by *Transvaal Missions*, the report identifies the water challenge and severe drought of the time:

The water drought has been the most terrible ogre to face. Day by day we were faced with difficulties as to how to make ends meet in the supply and demand; and there was always the grave risk we took in the economy of water and infection, which in our case is of a virulent type. The diary recorded many gifts from kind friends in the district. (Matron’s Report) [my emphasis].

The report paints a grim picture of the year when Manche died. The reporter’s diction aptly describes the sordid and ominous atmosphere; “terrible ogre,” “difficulties,” “grave risk” and “virulent.” The author’s choice of words well describes the catastrophic nature of the drought and its consequences. The “ogre” represents swallowing a cannibalistic monster that swept away people’s lives through malnutrition, famine, and terrible epidemics. It is very probable that the “virulent infection” described here could have claimed Manche’s life. Even so, Mabule’s undetermined illness could be a result of the “virulent infection” or the “terrible ogre” that put the community at “grave risk.” The drought and eventual depression exacerbated living conditions and negatively affected people’s livelihoods.

In the *Jane Furse Memorial Hospital and Sekhukhuneland Missional Report* (1926), the superintendent also decries the same fate of having no water:

The water supply is still meagre. The well was taken to 90 feet with no result and had to be abandoned. It is rather sad that “expert water finders” are so confident that they guarantee results; but when there is no result, resent any naturally strongly expressed disappointment, and the expectant ones are left dry and penniless [my emphasis].

It is very clear that even the hospital, which was supported heavily by donations from the British world, was hard hit by the drought. In hindsight, how would an ordinary family survive such a terrible scare without external support? It is probable that this drought would have affected the livelihoods of the people and their resistance to illness and diseases. The period in question was characterised by famine and many diseases. The reported tension between Manche and her parents was on the work in the field. Being a subsistence farming community, in the year of the drought, the yields were usually low. Manche’s parents wanted her support in the chores to avert the famine that would ensue as a result of the drought.

For whatever reason, Manche might have suffered the consequences of the 1928 drought. A related view is expressed in the following quote:

The earliest written record that mentions Manche Masemola was by Mrs Moffat, wife of missionary Robert Moffat. Some have attributed *Manche's death to illness because many people fell ill during the rainy season*. But if this claim is true, it is unclear why it is ignored by many reporters. Second, Manche's time of trial was short while other accounts, including Moeka's, feature prolonged persecution. Mrs Moffat claimed that Manche laughed as she was beaten to death asking why the death of a young native catechumen should be chronicled. It is clear that *Moffat's report was deliberately prepared to support the claim that Manche died as a martyr rather than to foreground the value of human life*. [my emphasis] (*Dictionary of African Christian Biography*)

Two views are presented here to account for Manche's death. While I tend to agree with the first view that Manche might have been a casualty of the climatic conditions of the time, I dispute that August 1928 had any rains because this matter has been canvassed extensively in the *Jane Furse Memorial Hospital and Sekhukhuneland Missional Report* 1928 by especially the superintendent and the matron of the Jane Furse Memorial Hospital. Mabule is reported to have died of illness in Jane Memorial Hospital a few days after Manche's death. The cause of her death is not disclosed. These teens lived together in the same house, in similar conditions which might have subdued Manche first, and Mabule's resistance could not hold either. The probability of illness outweighs that of being killed, which I have disputed earlier; since no grievous bodily harm (Latin. *vim allaturum esse gravissimum*) case was opened. It cannot be the English, whose faith in the legal system is strong, who would allow such an alleged injustice and human rights violation go unpunished. This anomalous behaviour by the church accounts for the second possibility, which suggests that Moffat's report was deliberately crafted to construct a martyr. If it is true that Manche joined the catechumens in 1927, and died before Easter of 1928, the persecution was short-lived. In addition, it is questionable that within a year of joining the faith, a girl as young as Manche would risk her life for the sake of strange people whose history she certainly did not know. On a balance of probabilities, the church's account, lacking community recollections, was collusion to create a martyr in the face of the contesting missionary escapades. As explained elsewhere in this paper, the two oases, Jane Furse and GaMarishane, are positioned in the middle of the Lobethal Lutheran Centre in the North, and St Rita's Roman Catholic Mission in Glen Cowie, in the South.

Notes in Moffat's diary that Manche laughed as she was beaten to death, exclaiming why the death of a young native catechumen should be chronicled, seem far-fetched. It is a deliberate attempt to construct a celibate, witnessing her persecution and eventual death. Such portraiture creates an extraordinary character who will demonstrate the power of martyrdom in the church. Similarly, the prophecy as expounded by Moeka comes after Manche's death. The timing of these stories, though unfortunately questionable within the realm of hagiography and myth, may be left unquestioned

because myth occupies a high status within people's folklore. It is accepted without questioning. It does not have to make sense—but it must be believed.

Conclusion

Commentators speak of Manche's conflict with Moeka about the dress code, and also with her parents about leaving family chores and rushing to the church. Whether the alleged torture is truthful or not, is a matter for further investigation. Her death is shrouded in mystery, especially on who killed her, and how she was killed. The climatic conditions and epidemics afflicting the area between 1926 and 1929 are also thought to have contributed to many deaths in the area, and she is not excluded from this possibility. After her death, a shrine was created and has been visited by pilgrims on an annual basis. Manche has been consecrated as both a martyr and saint in the Anglican Church, just like Jesus Christ who died for all who believed in him to be saved.

This paper hopes to stimulate a debate on the construction of an African martyr in the person of Manche Masemola. Using narrative methodologies and textual analysis, Manche's story is explored as a prophetic myth that is used to break into a world already penetrated by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches—albeit very difficult to domesticate into foreign religion. It is argued that the story is a myth constructed and disseminated to entrench a dogma, and set the persona as a model who commits to her faith even in the face of death. The Manche narrative is an inspirational discourse to catechumens to accept persecution, suffering and rejection as the necessary journey to baptism, or at best baptism of fire.

To speak of Manche Masemola is to redefine the position of children in narratives and the manner in which they are used as instruments to extol new values. Children occupy a central role in narrative discourse as instruments for socialising, modelling, emulating and at times as a deterrent conduct. Manche's narrative can be seen as a catalyst for female struggles. She is, no doubt, a perfect instrument to unsettle male power and reposition the female voice. Her body is the site for constructing femininity, and the bitter struggle against patriarchy and imperial hegemony.

Her commitment to African attire and rejection of Western clothes represent a strong resistance to the hegemonic power of the West and the imperial code that shapes it. The narrative is undoubtedly a gendered narrative to transgress, transform and disrupt metanarrative, historical and hegemonic discourses that foreground men as pivots of history. Her narrative occupies a special space in historiography, rewriting and redefining the voice of the marginal; particularly Africans, children and the feminine in historical discourse.

Her creation into a martyr is a politico-religious myth to destabilise African worldviews and subject them to foreign domination and erasure. Manche, however, acts as a palimpsest that resists erasure. While she accepts a new faith, she does not throw away her African cosmogonic views.

This paper concludes that the Manche narrative is a political strategy to expand the horizons of the British imperial world, to gloss over African lives and cosmologies, and to recreate a historical narrative for repositioning feminine discourse.

While the paper examined why Manche was constructed as a martyr, future research may possibly examine other avenues of the Manche narrative. Researchers may explore how she was constructed as a martyr, thus examining strategies and tropes adopted for such portraiture. Those interested in studies of the body as a script may (de)construct how the virgin, blameless body was chosen as a site of defining her as a martyr. In addition, Manche's subjective self, and representative "I" construct a powerful narrative to textualise feminine subjectivities and power discourses. Finally, it could be of interest why Manche was declared a saint when the Anglican Church no longer has canons to canonise individuals as saints.

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