

Poetry and Patronage: The Sociocultural and Historical Vision of Raditladi's *Sefalane sa Menate*

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Summary

This article illustrates different dimensions of social change regarding the Batswana and Western cultural norms. L.D. Raditladi was chosen, his poetry blending indigenous African- and Western-influenced themes and forms, and portraying common and shared ethos, beliefs and practices of the Batswana. His poetry also addresses social issues that are of particular significance to Africans who for so long have negotiated and navigated a world of contrasting social norms and values. Many modern Batswana continue attempting to harmonise their cultural values and norms with what they perceive as useful and relevant from so-called modern norms and values. It is a journey beset by fearful odds. Two poems, "Tshwano-togo" and "Fatshe la Batswana", were chosen for this study. They exhibit the gist of the topic under discussion, and together with references to other poems by Raditladi, are employed to vividly display elements of societal transformation. Global changes – brought by new religion and education, artistic as well as edifying rudiments which exposed people to Western and other cultures – caused many nations to challenge their traditional practices. This article investigates the creative aptitude of the poet and his portrayal by means of poetry of the sociocultural setting of his time and the Batswana's journey from past to present.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel illustreer die verskillende dimensies van sosiale verandering met betrekking tot die Batswana en Westerse kulturele norme. L.D. Raditladi se digkuns wat inheemse Afrika en Westerse temas en vorme meng en terselfdertyd die algemene en gemeenskaplike etos, oortuigings en gewoontes van die Batswana uitbeeld, word bespreek. Raditladi se gedigte spreek ook sosiale kwessies aan wat veral vir Afrikane – wat oor 'n lang tydperk hul pad moes vind in 'n wêreld van uiteenlopende sosiale norme en waardes – van belang is. Vele moderne Batswana sukkel steeds om die kulturele waardes en norme wat hulle as nuttig en relevant beskou, met sogenaamde moderne norme en waardes te versoen. Vir hierdie studie is twee gedigte, naamlik "Tshwanologo" en "Fatshe la Batswana", uitgesoek. Dié gedigte illustreer die kern van die onderwerp onder bespreking en word tesame met verwysings na ander gedigte van Raditladi gebruik om elemente van sosiale transformasie bloot te lê. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die kreatiewe talent van die digter en sy uitbeelding van die sosiokulturele konteks van sy tyd en toon aan hoe die geskiedenis van die Batswana vanaf die verlede na die hede deur middel van die digkuns weerspieël word.

Introduction

A few scholars have previously written on Raditladi's works, amongst others Manyapelo (1998) who focuses on Raditladi's use of metaphor in three poems, "Loso"; "Bosiela"; and "Motlha-bani"; van Staden in his 1985 study "Beeldspraak in *Sefalana sa Menate* van L.D. Raditladi" who focuses on the techniques used by Raditladi to create images from apparently disconnected worlds; Malambane (2002) in her dissertation "L.D. Raditladi – *Mokwadi wa Setswana*" that undertakes a critical analysis of Raditladi's texts, content and plot as well as techniques Raditladi employs in his works; Mothoagae (1993) with a focus on the study of syntactic foregrounding in poetry, with examples from Raditladi, Magoleng and Motlhake.

The above-mentioned researchers focus mainly on literary criticism, paying more attention to form, device and technique. My study illustrates that Raditladi's work cannot be fully appreciated using one theory. It applies eclectic theories such as postcolonialism and Afrocentrism. With this critical caveat, the study demonstrates the breadth of Raditladi's creative canvas.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Afrocentricity is the paradigm that underpins this study. The objective of Afrocentrism is to generate knowledge that frees and empowers Africans. It questions the march of European culture, with its values and world view paraded as the only culture and its values as neutral (Mazama 2003: 4). In a relatively new field of inquiry, the quest for methods is also new. That there is still a need to define an Afrocentric cultural aesthetic betrays the continuous dislocation of Africans from their own peculiar and collective centres (Welsh-Asante 2003: 220), and the extent to which Europe has dominated the mental space generally and the academic disciplinary space in particular.

Raditladi employs oral art forms to challenge stereotypical views of both the art forms and the people – the Batswana and other Africans in particular – who most frequently use them. What is at stake here is the contestation over identity between Raditladi and those who think poetry does not exist in African languages. Raditladi feels this thinking threatens the cultural integrity of the Batswana and other South Africans.

Social Change among the Batswana

In the 40s there were different aspects of social change for the West and for the Batswana and Africans in general. The West has intergenerational tensions but not enculturation confrontations. Moreover, whereas racism was

becoming entrenched in law for Africans, including the Batswana in the 40s and 50s, racial desegregation was becoming legal in the West in the 50s and 60s, especially in the USA. A good example is that of societal norms for love and marriage expressed in Raditladi's poetry.

The 50s, for the Batswana, was an era of intergenerational issues involving amongst others the conflict between traditional, arranged marriages and modern love relationships and choosing for oneself. Batswana marriage is a social contract between families versus Western norms which endorse individual person-to-person love, characterised by public shows of affection such as hugging and holding hands. On another level, there was emergent interracial conflict. This was a period of intensified white-on-black racism, including laws entrenching racial segregation, for example the Mixed Marriages Act of June 1949, the Immorality Act of June 1949 and the Group Areas Act of April 1950.

For the West, and the USA in particular, "intergenerational" was an era when the youth were challenging the authority of their parents by defying stringent sexual mores and experimenting with so-called "free love". For the West, "interracial" was a period of civil rights struggles, especially laws enforcing racial integration and desegregation and giving equal political rights to blacks. These ideas spread across the world. Batswana society was changing from traditional to modern, embracing Western ideas and ideology through religion and education. Young people during Raditladi's era were challenging some traditional practices and wanted reform in the 60s.

The poem "Tshwanologo" [Acculturation] will be examined to show the validity of this argument. In this poem, the first of his anthology, Raditladi introduces a theme that permeates his collection, namely the distortion brought about by the materialism of a foreign culture to the Batswana tradition. The title of the poem is appropriate: *Tshwanologo* means "contrast". Raditladi recollects the time when African people were in control of their own destiny. This was the time when the African's creative aptitude was at its best. Africans were innovative and inventive. They designed and manufactured their clothing, shoes, hats, transport facilities, musical instruments and dancing gadgets:

A namane e tona tshwanologo!
Diaparo tsa borrona di ile,
Go setse dikhai di re bofang mabogo,
Di re khinang di re šoboloke mmele

[Oh, contrast is an immense entity!
 Our fathers' garments are gone
 We are left with clothes [that] bind our hands
 They tie and bind our bodies]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

In these lines Raditladi reflects on days gone by. He remembers the clothes they used to wear and refers to them as the garments of his forefathers because the manufacturing trade was passed on from one generation to the next. According to Raditladi, the garments were fitting and appropriate. By *Diaparo tsa borrarona*, Raditladi refers to *tshega* (loinskin), *magabe* (reed-skirt), *motlokolo* (long skin-skirt). He remonstrates against the use of modern garments. He says they are not suitable for Africans. *Di re khinang* means they tighten one's body; they make one feel uncomfortable and irritate one. Raditladi disapproves of Western clothes, saying they constrain bodily movement. Raditladi continues thus:

Ga re rate manyebi le diseisei
Malakalaka, diphatsimane thamong

[We don't like shiny and silky clothes sparkling,
 Reflectors on our necks]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

Here Raditladi continues with his disapproval of the Western way of decorating the body with *manyebi le diseisei ... Malakalaka, diphatsimane thamong*. Raditladi objects to Western body ornaments and feels these should be replaced with traditional African ornaments. He declares that these garments are yokes around the necks of African people. The image used may also refer to imperialism and colonisation. Raditladi uses physical objects, such as clothes, to represent his ideology and philosophy. He appeals to African people to return to their roots, to stop following and worshipping a strange and foreign ideology. Before the arrival of the Europeans and other foreign inhabitants to the continent, Africans had their own norms, values and a belief system that governed their way of life. Raditladi is calling for sanity to prevail among Africans and is appealing for soul-searching and cultural restoration. *Go bofa matsogo*, in the first stanza, confirms that Raditladi uses garments as a symbol to represent domination and enculturation. If one's hands are tied, one is unable to perform any function. One has no control over oneself or over anything one wants to do. If one's hands are tied and one's body is constrained, one will have to rely on the mercy of others. Raditladi suggests:

Re neeleng dikoloi tsa rona dilei
Koloi tsa rona tse di gopang ka mpa mmung

[Give us our traditional vehicles, dilei
 Our vehicles that crawl on the ground]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

Raditladi appeals for use of the traditional mode of transport, *dilei* (plural). A *selei* (singular) is made from a large tree with two big branches forking from the trunk. This tree is felled and the smaller branches are removed, until a flat, triangular structure remains. Strong sticks are placed across the two big branches. A large hole is made in the trunk through which ropes made from hides are laced and used to pull the *selei*. It does not have wheels and therefore slides along the ground when it is pulled. Drawn by a span of two or more oxen, a *selei* is usually used to transport big loads and may also be used to transport people over long distances. Very popular among the Batswana, the *selei* is easily assembled and does not need a sophisticated craftsman to build it. Raditladi questions Africans for relinquishing their own inventions and embracing foreign products. *Dilei* represent genuine African inventions; the products made in Africa for Africans. The raw material is obtained from the environment, the people share what the natural environment offers and use what is accessible in the vicinity. Expertise is gained from exploring their surroundings and this is passed from one generation to the next, becoming further refined and mastered. People should not buy cars but rather manufacture *dilei*. Unlike the expensive maintenance on cars, *dilei* require occasional minor repairs. Raditladi is appealing to Africans to return to their roots, to revisit Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and reap the benefits.

The same approach can be used for manufacturing and using an entertainment instrument:

*A re newe matlhowa re ko re bine,
Basadi ba opele ba phanye magofi,
Leoto le sete, bo bine didumane,
Thokwana kgolo di benye le lefifi.*

[Give us seed pots so we can dance
Let women sing by clapping hands
Let the legs hop, and the music play
Let dark brown females shine in darkness]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

Herein the poet conveys his wish for traditional cultural expressions such as dancing, clapping of hands and stamping of feet. He longs for the integral, traditional recreations of singing, dancing and ululating. Ceremonies such as marriage, graduation from traditional school, the inauguration of a new *kgosi* or ancestral worship ceremony, were celebrated with song and dance.

Raditladi Continues Petitioning His People in the Poem “Fatshe la Batswana” [Enculturation]

In “Fatshe la Batswana”, Raditladi highlights the tensions that are created by enculturation. As a sojourner, he travelled from one place to the next and worked in cities such as Francistown and Johannesburg. At a time when he

was writing his poetry, he felt like a homeless person, lost. Loneliness brought back the memories of his childhood in Serowe where life was uncomplicated. Raditladi thinks of his family and his friends. There is a strong feeling of nostalgia about his village and all its beautiful spots. The poem goes on to describe the melodious sounds of guinea fowl in the veld and the sounds of cows bellowing, serenading him, and continues with colourfully dressed women dancing with *matlhoa* (seed pods) strung together and tied around their ankles.

Raditladi is deeply emotional about his fatherland. His heart is breaking, he longs to touch the soil of his village; he aches deep inside to chase the steenbok and the duiker, to see the cattle and smell the sorghum in the field; he is longing for the meat of the giraffe and the eland. Raditladi paints a contrasting picture of *Sekgoeng* and *Sekgweng* in the following lines:

*Pelo ya me nna tota ga e mono sekgoeng
E kgakalagakala fela kwa dikgweng*

[My heart is no longer in the city
It is far away in the veld]

(Raditladi 1975: 22)

Sekgoeng represents a place where the *makgoa* (white people) live. It is a working place for Africans. The Africans stay in cities while they serve their masters. After having been exploited, when they are old and weak, they are supposed to pack their belongings (if any) and go back home. In the city they live in compounds or tiny shacks with no home comforts. *Sekgweng* represents the village, with forests and open spaces where people could dance freely. The forests have big and small animals, birds and reptiles. People live in harmony with one another and with the environment. This romantic picture of pastoral life comes out in the poem.

Raditladi is tired of the noise caused by trains, buses, cars, sirens, alarms, machines and hooters. He would like to listen to the music of the birds. City life is fast and dangerous, with many criminals. His village is quiet and serene, a place where people can think constructively in a quiet atmosphere. The contrast between *sekgoeng* and *sekgweng* is clear. He restates his yearning for his fatherland by asserting:

A re newe matlhoa re ko re bine
Basadi ba opele ba phanye magofi

[Give us seed pods so we can dance
Let women sing and clap their hands]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

The phrase *re newe matlhoa re ko re bine* refers to this burning desire to dance and hear the *matlhoa* (traditional device worn on dancers' feet). Made

of seed pods, it produces a beautiful, resonating, rhythmic, percussion that blends well with the movement of the dancer and the melody of the song. Song and dance are important cultural instruments used to communicate feelings of love, sadness or disappointment. Song and dance also communicate feelings of unity, separation or farewell.

Go bina dipina ka matlhoa means doing things the African way, according to Raditladi's text. He objects to Africans wanting to become carbon copies of Europeans. Before, during and after Raditladi's era, certain Africans worshipped and still worship Europeans. They speak, walk, and behave like them. He is appealing to the Batswana and Africans in general to return to their roots. He articulates this desire emphatically in "Tshwanologo" by declaring:

*Re fe mpheetšhane setlhako sa bontate
Ka tsa direthe di re kgola mangole*

[Give us mpheetšhane, our forefathers' shoes
For high-heeled shoes will break our knees]

(Raditladi 1975: 1)

Raditladi is asking for the old shoes of the forefathers. He compares the old-fashioned shoes with modern shoes, still expressing the feeling that the old is better than the new. He highlights the pain and discomfort of the present vis-à-vis the calm and comfort the images of the past communicate.

Modern Devices and Social Change

The context of social change is apparent in Raditladi's work. His poetry blends the indigenous African and Western themes and forms a true Setswana literary gem. Some poems deal with history and historical figures (e.g. "Kgosi Kgama", "Isang a Lentšwe", "Kgosi Tshaka"). In "Selelo sa morati", the social issue involves the conflict between the traditional Batswana and the modern Western practices of love and marriage, and highlights the problem and phenomenon of tribalism. From many available literary devices, the researcher will concentrate on imagery, metaphors, symbols, descriptions and sound repetition as they occur repeatedly and vividly to illustrate social change.

Imagery: In Various Poems

In the following poems (only titles listed), Raditladi uses various images to portray his ideas. He uses landscape and sound ("Aferika"), affection ("Selelo sa morati"), emotion ("Bosiela"), fantasy ("kgosi Kgama", "Isang a

Lentswe”) as well as ingenious creativity (“Lewatle, Thamalakane”). He has the skill to blend Western and Batswana cultural images to create new reflections.

Poetry communicates experience, and experience comes to us largely through the senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and touching). Imagery may be defined as representation through the language of sense experience. The word image perhaps most often suggests a mental picture, and visual imagery is the most frequently occurring kind of imagery in poetry. Yet an image may also represent a sound, a smell, a taste, a tactile experience and an internal sensation. “Imagery is best defined as the total sensory suggestion of poetry” (Ciardi 2008).

Metaphor in “Fatshe la Batswana”

Metaphorical language and figurative language have been treated as instances of unimpeded blending and are freely interchangeable. Metaphorical language communicates ideas-based transference of meaning, suggested by the relationship between the signifier and the signified, apparent in some of Raditladi’s poems but specifically in “Fatshe la Batswana”.

Symbol in “Selelo sa Tonki”

An example of symbol in Raditladi’s anthology is the poem “Selelo sa Tonki” [Donkey Expresses Grief]. The donkey is making an appeal to be freed from the shackles of oppression by man. In this case, the donkey represents the oppressed people. Moletsane suggests that

looking at the place setting of the poet, an area where people own others as their servants who were maltreated just like donkeys until during the Colonial period when the Law started to protect it. The donkey in this case may be a Mosarwa, San. The human characteristic behaviour suits the San well when he makes his appeal to his master and to God.

(Moletsane 1983: 9)

Raditladi was a cosmopolitan writer and a citizen of the world. He personally witnessed oppression in Botswana and South Africa under colonisation and apartheid. He read about inequality and racism in the world. It is the researcher’s contention that the donkey symbolises all the oppressed people in the world, for example, Bayei and Bushmen in Botswana, black people in Africa and the diaspora, the Jews, the Indians and other people of colour. The donkey epitomises occurrences like slavery,

colonisation and globalisation, where the oppressed are abused and exploited.

Description in “Fatshe la Batswana”

Words are significant instruments to depict an idea, impression or opinion. All poets, including Raditladi, choose words from the same system, yet they use words differently. Words in poetry are not strung together haphazardly but in a definite pattern or word order. Each poet selects words carefully to form a desired combination. The meaning of words in poetry is constructed by the reader. Words do not give one meaning to a concept but suggest different meanings to one idea. It is for this reason that one poem may have different interpretations.

Sound repetition in “Aferika”

Raditladi has clustered related sounds together as a musician does to create melody in the ears of the readers. Whilst reading Raditladi’s poetry, readers make numerous associations among words with similar and different sounds. Sound repetition in poetry can also serve specifically as a marker of metaphorical information in that it establishes a relationship between elements of metaphorical constructions.

“Aferika” extends an investigation of how orality manifests itself in the sound of Setswana poems. A hidden assumption, on which this research aim is based, is that there is of necessity, a specific and strong relationship between orality and the phonic organisation of poems, which requires description. This is narrowed down to the specific area of sound repetition, which may be viewed as a manifestation of parallelism. It is widely accepted by many researchers that parallelism in general, and sound repetition in particular, characterise orality in literature.

Portrayal of Culture in “Bosiela”, “Selelo sa Morati”, “Tshwano-logo”

Culture is a way of life, a way of thinking, of doing things and of expression, which is learned or embedded in an individual throughout his/her lifetime. It manifests itself in the individual’s behavioural and thinking patterns and is derived from the community in which he/she lives.

Not only does life express itself through man as a social being, but the movements of life in the environment are also determined by the character of the individual. It could be asked to what extent the movements of life in

society are determined by the character of the society. Bradley (1905:168) examines this principle from an evolutionary perspective: the movement of physical elements such as water is fully determined by physical laws. Water flows according to the principles of gravitation, friction, etc. When we turn to the animal which is vital, we see a similar determination at the vital-physical level, e.g. reproduction, respiration, digestion, etc. But at its own level of vital life, there is little coordination among animals, or organisation of the life around them. In other words, the vital animal is fully organised at the next lower level but only partially so on its own level.

During Raditladi's era, the youth of his time were torn between Setswana traditional culture and modernity paraded by Western education. The activities of Batswana society were subject to social and cultural restraints in the form of custom and history. Raditladi as a member of society conveys the aspirations of the Batswana youth of the time. He expresses this yearning extensively through poetry.

While prose primarily addresses the intellect, poetry goes beyond the thought-mind and employs its images and rhythm to evoke sheer vision. Poetry expresses hidden and infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning carried by the word. For a revelation of life's deepest secrets and for the expression of spiritual truths, poetry is the supreme artistic medium. As with prose, there is an infinite gradation of types and quality among the world's poets. Here we are not concerned with poets of imagination and subjective emotional experience, nor with the mystic poets of the spirit. Our interest is in the great revealing poets of life among whom Raditladi is the supreme example.

To borrow from Bradley's (1905: 168) conceptual frame one would say Raditladi almost alone among first Setswana poets seems to create in somewhat the same manner as Nature. His portrayal of the minutest details of human character and life is true to life and it is just because he is truthful in these smaller things that in greater things we trust him absolutely never to pervert the truth for the sake of some doctrine or purpose of his own.

Going through Raditladi's poetry one is tempted to borrow an inspirational picture painted aptly by Sri Aurobindo in Bradley (1905: 168) when he says,

[L]ife itself takes hold of him in order to recreate itself in his image, and he sits within himself at its heart and pours out from its impulse a throng of beings, as real in the world he creates as men are in this other world. It is this sheer creative Ananda of the life-spirit which is (Raditladi) ... Raditladi is not primarily an artist, a poetical thinker or anything else of the kind, but a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life.

(Aurobindo in Bradley 1905: 168)

Culture in Practice

Different Setswana cultural aspects are inherent in Raditladi's poetry. These relate to norms, customs, values, ethos, ancestor worship, upbringing and philosophic sayings. In Setswana, culture and marriage are inseparable as two sides of the same coin. In the light of this, marriage cannot be divorced from the culture in which it is being contracted. Marriage is a love relationship between two or more people, which is welded and legalised by certain cultural rituals or ceremonial acts that are highly held by the cultural group. Among the Batswana, marriage is legalised and contracted by the transference of bridal property called *bogadi* from the kraal of the groom to that of the bride. Hence Raditladi says:

*Bogadi jwa me jwa wela ka lebitla
Tse di khunwana tsa fapoga Bakgatla*

[My bridal price was lost into the grave
Cows were turned aside from Bakgatla]

(Raditladi 1975: 14)

Marriage is not considered a private affair of the couple in love, but an extension of communal relations that bind the two families together. Another important milestone that the Batswana had to grapple with during this transitional period was their standing as a people relative to other peoples'. Traditionally they were an oral society, with a "backward" system of education where teaching was transmitted through word of mouth. The West was offering a "sophisticated" system of education on printed material, in many fields of study. This looked attractive to young people who were eager to change the course of history.

The Role of Influence in Literature

Even before Raditladi's generation, many African thinkers were concerned about the way Africa was portrayed by the Western world. Many Eurocentric writers gave false and misleading information about African history, geography, culture and intellectual development. Pixley Isaka Seme's impassioned speech of 1906, "The Regeneration of Africa", reminds one of a traditional African poem. He depicts the physical appearance of Africa with its hills and plains, its forests and desert plains and brightening sun. He recounts Africa's rich history by alluding to the great civilisations of Nubia, Kush and Kemet. He refers to Africa's scientific and technological achievements: the pyramids in Egypt and Ethiopia. This is a reminder that education started in Africa and that the first Greek philosophers studied in Egypt under Africans. In short, he is reminding Westerners of the stolen legacy.

Seme's oratory illuminates bondage, slavery and colonisation that did not deter Africans from their desire to enlighten the world. He continues to show developments from past to present, like a traditional African poet. He uses repetition, parallelism and linking to fortify his arguments. Like a true African, he selects appropriate sounds and rhyming phrases to state the history of the African people:

“The brighter day is rising upon Africa. Already I seem to see her chains dissolve, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science and religion, reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities.”

(Seme 1906: 10)

In his speech he alludes to African people wrapped in cultural and social variables. There was a rapid increase of churches, schools and universities as well as innovations in the field of commerce and business. African leaders were giving direction and vision in the quest to refine Africa's mission of rekindling and educating the world like their forefathers had done.

“These monuments are the indestructible memorials of their great and original genius. It is not through Egypt alone that Africa claims such unrivalled historic achievements. I could have spoken of the pyramids of Ethiopia, which, though inferior in size to those of Egypt, far surpass them in architectural beauty.”

(Seme 1906: 10)

Seme's Influence on Raditladi

Pixley Isaka Seme's "The Regeneration of Africa" speech given in 1906 while he was studying at the University of Columbia, is a good example of tone and lyricism of words which can create a mood and evoke feelings. The music of the speech conveys the feeling of grandeur, inspiration, greatness, achievement, "civilisation", as well as a love for and belief in the innate greatness and potential of his beloved Africa. Pride in being African can be expressed in many ways, such as lyricism, which evokes a mood and an atmosphere. It can be expressed in creative works, such as poetry. Raditladi is one of the first generation of writers of creative works in Setswana.

The works of Raditladi are powerful, captivating and showcase African storytelling at its best; dramatic, proverbial, metaphorical and lyrical. Raditladi deals with experiences hardly touched in African language literature. These are poetic works that can rekindle reading interest. He puts Setswana writing on a par with the very best nationally and internationally.

His works inspire others to explore similar territories in African languages writing.

To this Okot p'Bitek opines that

African writers who choose English or French set themselves certain problems. They wish to express African ideas, but they have chosen a non-African tool to express them. There is a grave danger that with the tool of language they will borrow other foreign things. Every language has its own stock of common images expressing a certain people's way of looking at things. Every language has its own set of literary forms which limit a writer's manner of expression. How many of these tools can a writer borrow before his African ideas are affected by the influence of foreign ideas implied in them?

(p'Bitek 1972: 1)

The above strong nationalistic statement is reminiscent of Raditladi's creative exploits. As was common during his time, he could have chosen to write in English, but he was aware of the significance of his language, of writing in Setswana. His poem "Tshwanologo" sends a clear message to Africans to be proud of their cultural heritage, and not imitate other nations. Being one of the few educated people of the time and still choosing to write in a language of the people, speaks volumes about Raditladi. Many black poets wrote in English and other colonial languages, claiming that they wanted to reach a broader community. His works are proof that he practised what he preached.

Raditladi's Influence

Raditladi's works influenced other Batswana writers not to shy away from expressing their views regarding social transformation and its ills. Pheto (1984) in his novel *Botlhodi jwa nta ya tlhogo*, which could be translated as "The Miracle of a Head Louse", uses a different metaphor to convey the same idea.

Pheto's analogy foregrounds the story of Batswana social transformation. He tells of a head louse's conversation with a body louse. The head louse was ashamed of her black colour. She asked for advice on how to change her colour to red. The body louse advised its sibling to plunge into a tub of boiling water. The head louse plunged into the boiling water – and died.

In this story, Pheto is trying to teach people not to abandon their culture and tradition. People who throw away their customs are committing suicide, like the head louse. There is definitely a crossover between the two tensions, described as intergenerational and enculturational. However, in the first there is a hankering back to the past, before the West restricted life and put people in bondage. In the second, there is a hankering back to the life in the countryside, rather than the city, which is a life of bondage to blacks. The

images used denote colonisation of the African mind. This signifies a generation that lost its identity and designation. Asante (1994: 12) asserts that Afrocentricity means treating African people as subjects instead of objects, putting them in the middle of their own historical context as active human agents.

Conclusion

This article illustrates the cultural identity of the Batswana as a repository of knowledge and philosophy and an understanding of values, ethos and belief systems unearthed by Setswana poetry. It also demonstrates the social fabric that binds the people together; their behaviour, thinking, ambitions, desires, hopes and expectations. The history of the Batswana and Africans is explored, and this history can be taught through the dignified genre of poetry. In short, it is shown that while Setswana poetry is functional in its thrust, it also preens itself with poetic aestheticism. The article analyses how through Raditladi's poetic imagination the Batswana people's identities constantly changed in the face of changed political contexts, whether induced by local factors or external ones.

Raditladi's works, like other works of art, use symbols, signs and images that need to be studied and interpreted. His works are also available for deconstructive criticism. Additional to what has been discussed in this article, his poetry may be dissected to show the materials from which it is constructed. One way of doing this is through intertextuality, which constitutes an integral part of deconstruction. The significance of symbols in poetry warrants further research into Setswana literature. The gap this article attempts to bridge is to provide a new reading of Raditladi's works, particularly in a context where the project of African decolonisation is not only celebrated to bring political independence but also criticised for limiting the benefits of independence to a few people. It is hoped that the exploration of this dialectical reality breaks new ground in the study of Setswana poetry.

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