

Evaluation of the Elements of Orality in O. K. Matsepe's Novel *Lešitaphiri (Unsolved Problem)*

Mokgale Makgopa

University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa

Oral literature transcends from orality to scribality and then textuality due to technological innovation. This paper seeks to evaluate the value of the characteristics of orality as applied by Oliver Kgadime Matsepe in his novel *Lešitaphiri (Unsolved Problem)* (2008). This will be done by taking into account the significance of self and community in a developing and changing society. It is important to note that all cultures are born from orality. However, the changes that the self and community undergo have a strong impact on the communications models within the community. This is influenced by the self and community, as the writer expresses his/her views by means of language that is based on a particular community.

Keywords: orality, indigenous literature, intertextuality, scribality primary orality, secondary orality

Introduction

Indigenous literature has been in existence for a long time within societies with oral culture. In these societies, indigenous literature was orally communicated from one generation to another. The invention of modern technology in the form of schooling affected the mode of communicating this kind of literature. Firstly, authors in indigenous languages received formal education from missionaries. To some extent, this education converted some of the authors into literate cultures (secondary/residual orality). However, the literature they produced was still dominated by their cultures. This is evidenced by the availability of cultural and oral features which depicted oral cultures in the text that the authors published. The dominance of oral cultures in Western literature signifies the importance of oral cultures. The author, who is a product of oral cultures, seeks to show how cultural and trans-cultural knowledge of his/her community dominates his/her thinking. This paper would like to demonstrate how setting influenced Matsepe's fiction. Matsepe was raised in an area that was primarily an oral culture society, namely, primary orality. This had a strong influence on his fiction, which was primarily dominated by Northern Sotho oral cultures. These include cultural norms and beliefs, prose narratives and didactic prose, and formulaic constructions. Relevant examples will be provided from the text chosen: *Lešitaphiri (Unsolved Problem)* (2008) to support the argument. The concepts orality, scribality, and textuality will be approached from primary orality to secondary orality/residual orality, a literate culture as postulated by Ong (1982). One other challenge that this paper seeks to address is the scarcity of researches on intertextuality.

Mokgale Makgopa, professor of MER Mathivha Centre For African Languages, Arts and Culture, School of Human and Social Sciences, University of Venda.

Normally, this results in confusion among academics, where some classify orality as part of oral literature which cannot relate to Western fiction, something that intertextuality seriously disputes. The relationship signifies a close connection between primary orality and secondary orality. Finally, the presentation would like to investigate the applicability of the theory of Afrikan Humanism in the works of Matsepe. This emanates from what Rafapa writes about, basing his argument on the works of Mphahlele, critiquing the theory of Afrikan Humanism. Rafapa (2007) argued that the theory of Afrikan Humanism cut across all literatures.

The concept of Afrikan Humanism as defined by Mphahlele is helpful in understanding the characterization, images and dialogue in an exhaustive way. Afrikan Humanism is a potent tool that could be used to analyse not only Mphahlele fiction, but any Afrocentric work by the postcolonial writer of fiction. (Rafapa, 2007, p. 102)

This researcher seeks to test the applicability of the preceding statement made by Rafapa, that the theory of Afrikan Humanism is applicable to any fiction whose author has his/her roots in Africa.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Orality and Textuality

The concept “orality” is complex as it is differently interpreted. From a literate culture, the basic definition attached to the concept is that it has to do with speech and conversation (Weiss, 2006). From a secondary or residual orality, the concept refers to the aspect of communication that is brought about by different speech sounds that are verbally communicated. From a primary orality point of view, orality reflects on the oral literature that is verbally communicated from one generation to the next. This can either be done through apprenticeship, practice, and observation that communicate the oral literature of the community from one generation to the next by word of mouth. Wikipedia (2009) shared the same sentiments by defining orality as follows: “... As thought and its verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population”. The study of orality is closely allied to the study of tradition.

Oral cultures are the living cultures by their own right. The understanding of oral cultures results in proper understanding between individuals and nations. Failure to recognize oral cultures normally results in misunderstandings. Ong (1982) differentiated between two forms of orality which he termed primary orality and residual orality. The difference between the two is brought in the nature of writing and reading. In attempting to differentiate the two concepts, primary orality can be seen as how thoughts and verbal expression are communicated from oral cultures. Wikipedia (2009) buttressed this view on primary orality by saying the following: Primary orality... “refers to thought and its verbal expression within cultures” totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print. Residual orality is the opposite of primary orality. Under this category, thoughts and verbal expressions are viewed from literate culture. Wikipedia (2009) supported this view by defining residual orality as:

... Refers to thought and its verbal expression in cultures that have been exposed to writing and print, but have to fully “interiorized” the use of these technologies in their daily lives. As a culture interiorizes the technologies of literacy, the “oral residue” diminishes.

Primary orality shapes and develops the life of an individual and promotes self-identity as it is primarily based on the basics of a social life. Lack of the technologies of reading and writing, which are the components of secondary or residual orality, does not mean that this kind of orality should be undermined. This view is

supported by Ong (1982) who argued that primary orality was, by its nature, the living culture in its own right. The non-availability of the technologies of writing and reading cannot be used as a yardstick to undermine it. The point that Ong (1982) raised is observed in the fiction written by most African writers. These writers demonstrate their identity in the fiction that they write, which is common in European languages. The fiction of the following African writers, Chinua Achebe, Ngugu wa Thiongo, and Es'kia Mphahlele, demonstrates the significance of primary orality. These African writers grew up in an oral society in which they were acculturated. In their writings, they illustrate the importance of primary orality which lays the foundation for secondary or residual orality, as observed in their fictions. Their fiction, though written in English, is based on African orality. The oral literature of the Igbos community in Nigeria, which is Chinua Achebe's community, is observed in his fiction. This view is supported by Weiss (2006), who highlighted the importance of primary orality in the writing of Chinua Achebe: "A West African writer like Achebe, who incorporates folktales, legends, proverbs, and popular wisdom, stimulates this latter kind of orality in his fiction" (p. 7).

From the two quotations cited above, it is clear that primary orality plays a significant role in shaping the ideas of the writer in his/her fiction. It is very difficult for this writer to abandon his/her cultural traits as his/her thinking is closely connected to the primary oral cultures.

The milieu of the author plays a significant role in the writings of African writers. The setting of the author, together with its oral features, plays an important role in shaping the ideas of the author. This emanates from the view that the author's first experience of life comes from the environment. With his Pan-Africanist philosophy, Mphahlele demonstrates how his literature is influenced mainly by his oral literature. The presence of elements of oral literature, such as dreams and ancestors in his literature, supports this. In support of this view, Rafapa writes about the theory of Afrikan Humanism, signaling the importance of primary orality.

Eskia Mphahlele has through his narrative writings succeeded in developing and perfecting his concept of Afrikan Humanism with the result that it has been shaped into coherent, nuanced and lucid theory or philosophy. His Afrikan Humanism is dynamic and pervasive not only in so far as defying cultural and geographical frontiers; it defines and reconstitutes itself according to the mutations of historical and political and social milieu. It seeps through to pervade all spheres of life. (Retrieved from <http://www.eskiaonline.com/content/view/19/34>)

The fiction of Mphahlele shows the prevalence of elements of primary orality such as dreams, witchcraft, and ancestors. The prevalence of these elements is what makes Rafapa (2007) write about Afrikan Humanism. According to Rafapa (2007), Afrikan Humanism illustrates the significance of intertextuality in the study and analysis of literature. He noted that Afrikan Humanism advanced the idea that culture and tradition, which were the axis of oral literature, had a strong influence on the writings of Mphahlele shown in the usage of dreams, witchcraft, heathens, and ancestors. The fiction of Mphahlele illustrates the significance of the characteristics of oral cultures in the life of the author. Mphahlele supports the view that in terms of African culture and tradition, there is a connection between the living and the dead. Writings about dreams and ancestors fully support this. As an African writer, Mphahlele supports the theory of Afrikan Humanism. He is totally against Euro-centrism which encourages a total neglect of African culture and tradition. It is through his fiction that Afro-centrism is protected, illustrating the importance of Afrikan Humanism. Mphahlele, as cited by Rafapa (2009), wrote the following on the significance of the theory of Afrikan Humanism:

One of the premises of Mphahlele's theory of Afrikan Humanism is that of distilling and characterizing the underlying consciousness connecting African cultures, while at the same time conceding to superficial intra-ethnic differences that should confederally strengthen Africanist nationalism rather than hamper it. (p. 210)

The time has come for South Africans to "walk tall and boldly" in promoting indigenous African culture and tradition. The NCS (National Curriculum Statement), with IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems), is one of the nine principles that lay the foundation of the new learning and teaching in South Africa. The NCS provides the entire nation with a relevant platform to protect primary orality, the essential component of IKS. As a nation we should protect, promote, and disseminate these cultures, rather than destroy them. Gone are the days when we used to shun our own oral cultures, referring to them as barbaric and uncivilized, the reasons advanced being they are oral, cannot be scientifically tested. The mode of transmission was used as criterion for their neglect. It is against this background that Rafapa (2007) argued that Afrikan Humanism conscientized the African community about the significance of self-identity.

Scribality and textuality appear as examples of residual orality, as Ong (1982) referred to it. Culture and cultural traits of a particular group are not exposed to the entire community through the writing and printing technology. According to Derrida (1998), the concept "textuality" relates to the relationship that exists between speech and writing. It is through this connection that intertextuality is observed between oral and literate cultures. "Intertextuality" concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts. The relationship between oral and literate cultures demonstrates the connection between the two literatures, exemplifying the presence of intertextuality. One form of literature is dependent on the other.

Text that was initially communicated by word of mouth transcends into another kind of text, as it is recorded. The status of the text has changed from orality to textuality through scribality. However, the oral aspect of the text plays a significant role as it lays the foundation of the text.

In his research on oral expression, Ong (1982) differentiated nine characteristics of secondary orality: "additive structure, aggregative rather than analytic, redundancy, highly traditional or conservative set of mind, close to the human heart, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory, homeostatic and situational rather than abstract" (pp. 37-49).

Ong (1982) differentiated three characteristics of oral cultures. The three characteristics are the following: "(1) Personality structures are more communal and externalized and less introspective; (2) Thought relies on formulaic constructions (that is exactly repeated phrases and set expressions such as clichés, proverbs); and (3) Communication is always social, involving both a speaker and audience" (p. 1). She affirmed that oral culture lays the foundation for the textual culture.

However, this paper focuses on the features of primary orality in the Northern Sotho culture, as depicted in the novel of Matsepe, *Lešitaphiri*. Matsepe is regarded as a prolific writer of Northern Sotho fiction. He was born and bred within the rural milieu of kgoši Matsepe, located in the Nebo district of Limpopo Province. The immediate environment in which Matsepe found himself exposed to was indigenous, traditional, and rural. This had a positive impact as portrayed in his writings. The fiction of Matsepe is characterized by the infusion of oral oratures. Despite the fact that he came from a rural community, Matsepe received a formal education where he was taught how to read and write. However, this provided Matsepe with a good opportunity to translate his

primary orality into secondary orality. It is against this background that this researcher intends to investigate how primary orality is converted from “orality to scribality and textuality” in *Lešitaphiri*. This is done for the purpose of supporting Afrikan Humanism, which is visible across the fiction of all the writers from primary orality backgrounds. Primary orality forms a base for secondary orality which is characterized by reading and writing.

The Specifics of Oral Qualities of *Lešitaphiri*

Lešitaphiri demonstrates a rich primary oral culture. This is based on the author’s familiarity with indigenous knowledge systems, as will be evidenced in the following paper.

Dialogue and Conversation

Structurally, dialogue is an essential aspect of drama. However, dialogue is used in a novel to illustrate the conversation that normally takes place between two characters. Matsepe presents a dialogue between two elderly men from two different clans Mothomang and Nkweng. The man from the Nkweng clan decides to visit his friend so that he can share as well as update him about the latest news. The two elderly while away their time enjoying the traditional beer. According to indigenous culture, when conversations of this nature are taking place, they are always accompanied by the drinking of the indigenous beer. The two characters’ drinking is accompanied by the following conversation:

“Na ke Lekgaga yola a tlogo?”

“Ke lekgaga yola a tlogo. Ga o bone mesepelo ya ntshe? Go tla lona letšaga. Diporiana tša moroba di phepeulwa ke phefo mo nkego ke moleti wa thaga.”

“O a rereša ke yena. Ga o bone ge bjale a eme a šupa kua le kua ka gore ke motho wa go bolela a nnoši.”

“Ge a ilale?”

“Ge o mmona a ilale. Kganthe ga se wa be wa mo ela hloko?”

“Aowaowaowaa!”

“Ba ikhutšitše go hlwa ba re ba jewa ke bodutu bjalo ka rena gobane bona ba fo itlhamulela go hloke molato.”

“Mehlamu ya mohuta woo afa e ka tloša motho bodutu banna?”

“Bodutu tšei! Kua lahledi! Wena o re ba e holofetše ka lebaka la eng?”

“Aowa thaka’ kgoši, ba pherekane megopolo...” (Matsepe, 2008, p. 10)

“Is it Lekgaga who is coming?”

“It is Lekgaga who is coming. Can’t you see his movement? It is Letšaga. The praise poetry of Lekgaga is performed.”

“You are right, can you see that he is walking? He is pointing at different places as he is a person who speaks to himself.”

“As he is.”

“Do you see him. Haven’t you realized that?”

“No, no, no!”

“He is not suffering from boredom, like us, because he speaks to himself without any problem”

“Can such talks alleviate one from boredom?”

“Can they alleviate boredom? Why is he so serious about these?”

“No my friend, they are mentally disturbed...” (Translated by the author)

In this conversation, the two elderly men are talking about the challenges with which the royal family is faced, where Mmago setšhaba¹ has given birth to a child that is not fathered by the king, kgoši Taudi. In African culture, such a child, despite being a boy, cannot succeed his father. The reason is that ke hlaba². The dialogue

¹ Wife of the king married by the tribe in order for her to give birth to the new king.

² Illegitimate child. The child is not born by the real or rightful person/father.

between the three men takes the form of a conversation that normally takes place within members of a society, especially senior citizens discussing tribal matters. In the Western culture, when dialogue is presented, it is used in drama form. Structurally, dialogue serves as the essential feature of drama and it is always preceded by stage directions. In this instance, dialogue takes the form of a conversation, which reflects the traditional rural type of life, characterized by conversations as events unfold within the tribe. The nature of dialogue used by Matsepe in this novel depicts the primary orality of the Northern Sotho culture. It illustrates how dialogue is being used from a cultural point of view as well as the role it plays. The nature of the matter discussed in this dialogue addresses issues that are pertinent and relevant to a traditional society. Members of a rural community where the author grew up put their ears to the ground for such “news”. It is not surprising to see the man from the Nkweng clan travelling such a distance. His mission is to let others also share this valuable information which directly affects them all.

Traditional Court System

In terms of the African culture, men meet at the kgoro³. This meeting serves as a traditional court where the complainant presents his/her problems about the accused. In this tribal court, men cross-examine both the complainant and the accused. Deliberations in this court are verbally communicated, as the proceedings form part of oral culture. Matsepe presents men who are at the kgoro of kgoši Taudi discussing Mphoka, a layman who is alleged to have fathered a child with Khutšišo, the king’s wife. This is the bone of contention that kgoši Taudi’s men must address. What makes the matter even more complex is that Mphoka fathered a baby boy in a family where the first child was a girl. Oral culture does not allow the reigns of leadership to be given to a woman or an illegitimate son of a laymen who does not belong to royalty. It becomes a complex matter as the man suspected to have committed this offence denies this. This is evidenced by the following extract:

Banna ke motšhitšhi kgorong ya kgoši Taudi, ba di swere le ge maarogi a le ntshe, gobane ge košeng re ka thakga kamoka, hleng go ka se tšame go anegwa gabotse. Ditaba di ile di tla retela, Mphoka a phuruma gore a be a itshwarele ka maru. Ba ile ba mo iša kua le kua, ba mo swara dithamaga eupša ya ba mo ba thatafišago pelo ya gagwe. Makgomana a ile a tlalwa ke pelo ka mokgwa woo ba ilego ba mo hlokofatša mo nkego ke lethogošwahla. Kua kgorong go be go epetšwe diphatha tše pedi tšeo di nago le maphatha a mabedi ao go wona go bego go farageditšwe diphatha tše pedi tšeo di nago le maphatha a mabedi ao go wona go bego go farageditšwe phata ye telele ya thollo. Mphoka o ile ge a fela a phegelela tatolo, ba tšea marala ba mo tlamelela phateng yeo e faragaditšwego go tšeo di epetšwego, ba mo tlemile ka mokgwa wo a ka se kgonego go itlemolla le go dula fase. Bošego ka moka ya lala e le selalaseeme, maoto a opišwa ke kimelo ya mmele woo bjale o thothomedišwago ke lehla leo le louditšwego ke motshotshomane, fela a di kgotlelele molalatladi o soka. Aowa, a kgotlele gobane monna o bolawa ke se a se jelego. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 24)

Men gathered at the kgoro of King Taudi, they are discussing issues affecting the entire tribe. As they are discussing, some deviate, if we all perform well culturally, there will be nothing to talk about. Matters became complex as Mphoka denied everything. They tried to cross-examine him but he denied. The nobility lost his temper and decided to give him severe punishment. At the kgoro there were two cemented poles and two that run across the cemented ones. As Mphoka refused to tell them the truth, they decided to tightly tie him. He stayed like that the whole night with the weight of the body hurting his legs coupled with the cold. Let him persevere since he knows what he has done. (Translated by the author)

Unlike in the Western court system, the indigenous traditional court uses traditional methods to obtain evidence as shown by Matsepe. The methods used at the court demonstrate the significance of IKS in extracting information through torture and punishment of the perpetrator. After members of the kgoro and the nobilities

³ Tribal court used to address issues that are a thorn to the community.

realize that Mphoka is not willing to confess, the nobility gives a ruling that he should be severely punished. It must be noted that the severe punishment that Mphoka receives, is not a sentence but torture to make him confess. Matsepe shows the importance of African philosophy that culminates in the promotion of Afrikan Humanism.

Indigenous Healing Practice

Indigenous healing practice plays a significant role in the life of an African. Indigenous healers, with their *ditaola*⁴, attend to all matters pertaining to the life of a human being. The ground floor screen is used to find a solution to a problem that is not related to health, social, political, economic, or otherwise. When Khutšišo was giving birth to girls only, the services of an indigenous healer were sought in order to address the problem. In terms of African culture, indigenous healers, through their powers based on indigenous knowledge system, can change her *thari*⁵. An indigenous healer can change the child bearing of a woman who gives birth to boys or girls only. This is exactly what happened to Khutšišo who was giving birth only to girls. The challenge with the birth of girls is that none of them will ascend to the throne. African culture does not allow girls to ascend to the throne. The indigenous healer was able to change the gender of the baby Khutšišo gave birth to. Unfortunately, the baby boy was *hlaba*⁶ as he was not fathered by the king, *kgoši Taudi*. Though the indigenous healer was able to address the problem, the solution to the problem brought division within the community of *kgoši Taudi*. Matsepe shows how IKS is infused in Western literature and this promotes Afrikan Humanism.

Indigenous healers also have a role to play when the soldiers are to go out to war. Soldiers should be checked and medically strengthened before they do so. Through the knuckle bones, the indigenous healer of *mošate*⁷, and not just anyone, tells the regiment to go and *foka marumo*⁸. One cannot go out to face the enemy without proper backing from indigenous medication. Before the soldiers of *kgoši Mabothe* left for the war, the indigenous healer had to equip and protect them. “Mabothe are ge a fihla, dingaka tša hlabeledwa ba bile ba hlabeledwa le lebake ka gore monna ga a sepele ka maponapona. A ka ponapona bjang mola go thwe moyamahlong a tau o ya a swere serumula?” (“After the arrival of Mabothe he requested the indigenous healers to prick the men before they left. How can they leave without being pricked as a sign of strengthening them?” (Translated by the autor)) (Matsepe, 2008, p. 46).

Matsepe shares with the reader how human parts are used for certain purposes within the community. The medication used is obtainable from the environment. It is mainly medication from the bark and leaves of trees, natural vegetation, shrubs, and roots. Humans, as part of the environment, are used to perform certain valuable medicinal roles within the community. Matsepe shows how the two kings *Mabothe* and *Taudi* share human parts to strengthen their authorities.

Afa rurururi kgoši e kaaka e ka felelwa ke lanaka la borena etšwe aka hlahlelwa sesolo? Mokgonyana wa yo a swanago le Taudi, mokgonyana yo a katanago gore ratswalagwe a hwetše se sengwe se se sengwe seo a se nyakago, oa hlokwa, ka gona, Mabothe ruri o dungwa ke batho. Mola mokgalabje yola a felelago ba mo feafeela a sa fiša, ba ntšha tšohle tše ba di nyakago; tša go neša pula le tša maima, morago ga fao ba mo lahla ngwakwaneng gore se sengwe le se sengwe se ba se nyakago ba se hwetše se kgauswi. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 43)

⁴ It refers to knuckle bones made of a melange of animal bones, ranging from domestic to wild animals.

⁵ It refers to the children that are born from a marriage—either boys or girls.

⁶ The word refers to an illegitimate child.

⁷ It refers to the royal family.

⁸ A task performed by the indigenous healer of strengthening and sharpening the soldiers' spears before the war expedition.

How can the royal horn of such a big king get finished without being refilled? A son-in-law such as Taudi, who fights his in-laws should get what he needs. Mabothe is envied by everybody. They finished the old man while he was still fresh. They took what they were looking for, including medication for rain and personality. From there they dumped him in the small house to make it easy for them. (Translated by the author)

Human parts are used to perform rituals that will provide the community with much needed rain. These parts should be removed soon after the murder in order for the medication to work. This again reveals the importance of African philosophy on issues of this nature. Through indigenous healing systems, Africans had their own methods to address the challenges that they faced.

African communities lead a communal type of life. They always share anything vital for their livelihood. This is not something that is practised at the level of the community members only, even indigenous leaders used to do what is necessary to ensure that their administration is effective. Matsepe presents a situation where the two kings Taudi and Mabothe share some indigenous medication crucial for managing their daily activities of their communities.

Ke mo go botse bjang mme go ratega bjang ge bana ba motho ba dutše gammogo mme ba hlahlelana dihlare! Mabothe o tlile go thuša Taudi go tša motse wa gagwe, mme o bile o tlile le ka dikgopelo gobane sehlare sa kgole se epša mohla wa lesolo. Taudi, Taudi wee! Aowa ngwana' mokgalabje—wa hlahlelela ratswalago a o tla be o se wa thakga na? Mo hlahlelele hle ngwana' wa sebatagomo sa banna! (Matsepe, 2008, p. 13)

How good is it when kids of the same father sit together and share medication? Mabothe came to help Taudi to protect his homestead. He also asked them to make sure that a number of related issues are attended to. Taudi, Taudi, if you assist your father-in-law it would please him. Please assist your father-in-law. (Translated by the author)

After realizing that Taudi is experiencing some unresolved challenges within his community, Mabothe intervenes. The usage of the verb *hlahlela*⁹ in its three different verbal extensions, namely, “-ana”, “-ela”, and “-ele”, signifies the importance of communal life from an African perspective. In this instance, both Taudi and Mabothe share some indigenous medication that will in turn benefit their homesteads. The philosophy of Ubuntu “humanity” as applied in the South African context signifies the importance of sharing, caring, respecting, and assisting to one another during good or bad times.

Traditional Leadership and Its Dynamics

Traditional leadership is part of the African culture. As before, it is still observed. Support for traditional leadership is hereditary and mandatory. A traditional leader is not elected but acquires the status by birth. Matsepe supports this by saying “Bogoši bo a tswalelwa, ga bo apolelwe bjalo ka kobo, gobane kgoši e sego ya geno ke molata” (“Kingship is hereditary, not something one gets, like a blanket, because the king who is not yours is a lay man” (Translated by the author)) (Matsepe, 2008, p. 39). However, the opposite is also true, especially in instances where the leadership is flawed by controversies and other dynamics. This view is buttressed by Matsepe (2008) who wrote:

Ke mang wa mogopolo wo o itekanetšego wo a ka ntšhago lehlakore la kgomo yabo a ya go lefa motho yo elego yena nkabego a ntšha mahlakore le dibego, eupša lehono go thwe ke kgoši? Ke mang yo a ka dumelago go ahlolwa yoo a sa tsebe go le gore lapa labo ke la bokae mo kgorong ya mošate, motho yo a tlilego fela ka ge a nyetše morwedi wa kgoši? (p. 39)

Who can give half of the carcass of his cow to a person who was supposed to be bringing the tributes since it is said that

⁹ The word refers to deficiency.

today he is the king? Who can allow to be sentenced by a person whose household is not known to the royal family, the person who just came because he is married to the king's daughter? (Translated by the author)

In the preceding extract, Matsepe shows how traditional leadership has its own challenges and dynamics which compromise the leadership position. Sometimes the community can be divided when members of the community disagree on certain cultural matters. Obviously, if the incumbent is from a marriage marred by marital problems, as this one, the new leader may not be easily accepted. This is a cultural practice that must be observed as the leader is supposed to come from the royal family, fathered by the king or a member of the royal family tasked with the role of *lebone*¹⁰.

Matsepe grew up in an environment where he was exposed to the indigenous cultural practice of succession in leadership. This is vividly presented in this novel as he shares with the reader how Taudi went to Mabothe, his uncle, to marry Khutšišo, who was supposed to give birth to his heir. Tabudi, as a traditional leader, had many wives; something that indigenous culture promotes. However, the sons he fathered could not succeed him. In order for a son to succeed him, he must come from his cousin, Khutšišo. This is supported by Matsepe (2008) who wrote the following:

Bjalo ka magoši ka moka, le yena o na le basadi bao a ba nyetšego pele ga ge a nyala Mmagosetšhaba-lebone. Ba bangwe ba basadi bao ba setše ba godišitše bašemane le basetsana. Mmagosetšhaba o mo nyetše kgošing yeo go thwego ke Mabothe. Mabothe ke malomeago Taudi, gobane mmago Taudi letswele o le šietšwe ke Mabothe. (p. 130)

Like all other kings, he too has wives that he married before he could marry Lebone. Some of those wives boys and girls are grownups. Lebone is married from king Mabothe. Mabothe is uncle to Taudi because there are brothers and sisters. (Translated by the author)

This is a cultural practice that is still observed in African communities. Failure to observe this practice, normally results in unresolved problems.

Of *all* the wives to Tabudi, the position of Khutšišo is a crucial one. The reason for this is that she is a Lebone/Mmagosetšhaba. Unfortunately, her children are dominated by girls, who in terms of African culture cannot be kings. This becomes a challenge to Taudi and his community as Khutšišo is not fulfilling her primary obligation. The services of the indigenous healer were requested to change the gender of Khutšišo's children. However, when Khutšišo gets some medication, Taudi is strongly warned to stay away from her. As an indigenous leader, he complies with the instruction. Unfortunately, Mphoka, the helper to the indigenous healer who was treating Khutšišo, takes advantage of this and impregnates her. This is evidenced by the narration provided by Taudi to his in-laws.

Ka ge ke šetše ke boletše beng ba ka, go tseba Mokwena yo mongwe le yo mongwe gore ga ke ne thari ye kgolo, ke atetšwe ke ye nnyane fela. Mola go bago ka mokgwa woo, ka ya baneng bjalo ka mang le mang. Monna wa ngaka o tlile le dithebele tša gagwe tšeo a bego a di rwaletšwe ke lenaba le, ba tla ba dira ka moo ba tsebago ka gona. Ba feditše lebaka ba mo pholophota, eupša le mathomong ba mpoditše gore ke se bule sefero sa gagwe ka gore dikoma tše pedi ga di bollele mphatong o tee. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 28)

As I have already explained, it is you who knows. Each and every Mokwena knows that I don't have a big family. It is small, like anyone I went out for help. The indigenous healer brought some knuckle bones carried by this enemy. They did what they know. They took their time medicating her. Initially, they advised me that I must be very far from her household and not to interfere or disturb their work. (Translated by the author)

¹⁰ It is the synonym of Mmagosetšhaba, wife of the king married by the tribe in order for her to give birth to the new king.

Tšhwahledi, who was fathered by Mphoka, cannot ascend the throne. There is a tug of war between Taudi, the nobility, and the entire tribe as cultural practice does not permit this ascendance. Taudi further aggravates the situation by delaying to report this matter to his in-laws. When Mabothe is told about this matter, he also bases his argument on cultural practice. He argues that this matter should have been reported to him before the child was born. It is difficult for him to accept whether what is being presented carries water or not. The kgoro of Taudi acknowledges the mistake. Unfortunately the matter needs to be addressed. Matsepe shows how African culture serves as a measure to address issues that are culturally based.

The issue of succession in the leadership is worsened by the birth of Kgathola, the younger brother of Tšhwahledi. Kgathola is Taudi's child. One would think that his birth would address the challenge that Taudi's community faces. However, cultural practice again takes the centre stage, as Kgathola is not the first born child of Khutšišo, who is Mmagosetšhaba. Taudi attempts to address this challenge by sending Tšhwahledi to Mabothe's place. Unfortunately this does not address the problem, as some community members do not support it. The bone of contention is that Tšhwahledi is the first son of Khutšišo. Therefore, he is entitled to succeed his father. This is backed by the following utterances:

Kgoši ka mehla le mehla ke yoo a belegwego pele ga bašemane ka moka ka mo lapeng labo la bogoši, lapa leo mosadi wa gona a nyetšwego ka ditseka tša setšhaba e le gore le yena ke ngwana wa mosadi yo a nyetšwego ka mokgwa woo. Ka ge ngwana e le wa dikgomo, ngwana wa mohuta woo le ge e se wa ka gae, ga go ka mokgwa woo a ka se bego kgoši, gobane yoo a mo latelago (le ge e le wa ka gae) o belegwe morago, ka gona, a ka se kgone go mo tshela le go mo eta pele. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 29)

The king always is the first boy in the household. It must be from a legal wife in the household. Such a child, even if he is illegitimate, there is no way that he cannot be the king, because he was born first. The legitimate child that succeeds him cannot jump him and be ahead of him. (Translated by the author)

Since Khutšišo was married to Taudi to be mother of his heir, why cannot Tšhwahledi succeed his father? After all, African culture endorses it: "Ngwana ke wa dikgomo" ("The child is one born out a formal marriage" (Translated by the author)). This group is against the discrimination of Tšhwahledi based on the proverb, a component of primary orality. The other group that supported Taudi rejected the view that Tšhwahledi should be their leader. Their argument is also based on cultural practice. They argue that Kgathola is a legitimate child of Taudi. How can they allow themselves to be led by an illegitimate child fathered by a lenaba¹¹ as Taudi puts it. There is a tug of war within the entire community of kgoši Taudi, which ends up dividing the community. After the death of Taudi the community is divided into two groups: one for Tšhwahledi and the other one for Kgathola.

Matsepe demystifies the dynamics relating to traditional leadership based on indigenous cultural practice. As he grew up in such an environment, Matsepe transforms orality to scribality and textuality to prove a point in the theory of Afrikan Humanism. Afrikan Humanism has a place in his fiction, something that Rafapa postulates. Rafapa adds that the theory of Afrikan Humanism cuts across all fiction that is Afrocentric.

Matsepe's Point of View

As an African writer, Matsepe views life in an African way. In all his novels, Matsepe uses a unique philosophy pertinent to issues discussed in that particular novel. He uses this philosophy in his introduction and

¹¹ In this context, the word refers to Mphoka as the enemy based on his deeds.

repeats it in the middle of the presentation or at the end of the novel. The philosophy carries the theme or message that Matsepe wants to communicate in that particular novel. In his structural analysis of the novels of Matsepe, focusing on his style, Serudu (1987) called this philosophical introduction. It is in this philosophical introduction that Matsepe presents his views about life in general as well as how African philosophy is introduced to address challenges of the society. In his opening paragraph of this novel, Matsepe (2008) said:

Motho o tswetše le megabaru, motho o tswetše le bojato; motho o tswetšwe le tseba, motho o tswetšwe le borumolane. Re imela lefase, re imelwa ke lefase, re imela bophelo, re imelwa ke bophelo, re imela Modimo ka dikgopelo le dilo tša ka mehla, gobane ke tshwanelo a re mo imeleng ka dikgopelo le dilo tša ka mehla, gobane ka ntle ga Gagwe re swanetše go imela mang? (pp. 9, 53)

A human being is born with avarice, a human being is born with jealousy; a human being is born resentful; a human being is born with provocation. We trouble the universe, we are troubled by the universe; we trouble life, we are troubled by life; we trouble God with our requests and our daily troubles. Let us trouble Him with our daily requests and troubles because if we don't trouble Him who are we supposed to trouble? (Translated by the author)

Based on Afrikan Humanism, Matsepe uses a narrator to present the challenges and obstacles that he wants to share with the reader. If one critiques the view presented, one concludes that life is characterized by several challenges some of which are man-made. After one finds oneself in that dilemma, one usually blames others, and even goes to an extent of blaming God. This is what happens to Mphoka, who decided to sleep with Khutšišo, something that he was not supposed to do. When he was in pain at the tribal kgoro, he must confess. He blames himself. As an African writer, Matsepe uses this philosophy and repeats it in the middle of the text to illustrate the importance of Afrikan Humanism.

The Status of the Kingship

Another essential cultural aspect addressed in this novel is the status accorded to the traditional leader. In terms of culture, the king is always supported by his community in good or bad times. Matsepe presents a situation where this cultural practice is violated. Taudi decides to visit his in-laws without any accompaniment from his tribe. His kgoro is puzzled by his actions as this may lead to trouble if anything happens to him.

Banna ba gešo, le homoletšeng etšwe le bona meetse a bilogile, go tloga go bilogile a matala a mogobe? Na re tla ba setšhaba se se bjang se se hwelwago ke kgoši etšwe ditšhaba ka moka di hwela kgoši? A go ragotšwego banna (e sego masogana), ba mo šale morago go bona moo a yago ntshe, ka ge yo mongwe le yo mongwe a bona gore o tlogile mo nkego o tšewa ke sesesedi... (Matsepe, 2008, p. 27)

Fellow community members why do you keep quiet when you see things going wrong? What type of a nation are we whose king dies while all the nations die for their kings? Let us choose men and not youth, let them follow him to see where he is going, as we can all see that he left unceremoniously. (Translated by the author)

After his unceremonious departure, the kgoro decides to send out men (and not young men) to follow him. What kgoši Taudi did was against the norms and values of his society.

The arrival of kgoši Taudi at his in-laws shocks almost everybody. The first observation is made by the soldiers that are patrolling the main entrance. Fortunately, the first soldier decides not to blow his trumpet. However, Taudi's arrival without any accompaniment shocks his in-laws and the community at large.

Mabothe ga a ka a diegela go di kgobokanyetša banna. Ba ile go di kwa, ba sodiša maledu ka ge ruri mokgonyanana wa bona a šwahile sethokgwa ka hlogo a noši e tšwe a na le setšhaba seo a se ahlolalego melato nako le nako. Go godile taba go tee fela gore setšhaba seo se swanetše go bološwa ka nose. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 28)

Mabotho did not delay in calling his kgoro. After they had the news, the kgoro was shocked about the expedition taken by their son-in-law without any accompaniment. The entire tribe must be punished. (Translated by the author)

It is taboo for an indigenous leader to travel for such a long distance alone. It is not surprising that the men at the kgoro of Mabotho unanimously agree that the entire tribe must be punished. They add that the tribe was supposed to be respectful to the king and give him its utmost support, instead of distancing itself. Indeed the men of kgoši Taudi were punished by kgoši Mabotho for allowing the leader to travel such a long distance without accompaniment. They in turn accept the punishment.

Mabotho mandates his tribe to give Taudi some presents and a regiment to accompany him. A big function is held when Taudi returns home. This event shows how Mabotho wishes to teach Taudi's men a cultural practice that the leader of the community must always be protected and guarded by his subjects and that failure to do this may lead to serious trouble, as this person is vulnerable and exposed to different kinds of dangers.

After the discussion of his family problems with his in-laws, kgoši Taudi returns home. This time he is accompanied by soldiers from kgoši Mabotho. The accompaniment of kgoši Taudi is a sign of allegiance and respect for his culture. The first to see the soldiers that accompanied kgoši Taudi were village women who were working in the fields. Their response was to run to the tribal kgoro to notify them.

Ba ile ba sa kgobokane fao, gwa fihla basadi ba bego ba ile mašemong. Ba garile dithetho le dintepa, ba fegelelwa godimo ba kgapha kudumela ye e tonyago. Bona ba bega gore ba bone madira a theogela ka kua moeding. Ba tšhogile basadi ba batho, yo mongwe o lla sa masetlapelo ka lebaka la ge a tlogetše lesea meriting a be ile go nyakanyaka tša go ya go gotša mollo mantšiboa...ge banna ba di kwa, ba hlabana mokgoši ba kgobokana kgorong ya mošate ba se ba itlhama, gobane le ge ba ka itlhama ba hlabana-ba tla be ba hlabanela mang kgoši e ile le leswiswi, ya re a le kgauswi ya ba gona a tsebjago, fela ga se e le yo a itšhišinyago goba a gohlogo. (Matsepe, 2008, p. 31)

While they were still gathered there, the women from the fields arrived. They were scared and breathing heavily. They reported that they saw the soldiers entering the valley. The women are frightened, one even left her child under a tree, as she went to look for fire wood. When the men heard the news, they decided to assemble at the tribal kgoro disarmed. They didn't know why they should arm themselves because their king had disappeared. As he came closer, they started recognizing him. Nobody moved. (Translated by the author)

This is the respect that a traditional leader must command from his community. Travelling alone, regardless of the distance travelled, is taboo. Kgoši Mabotho attempts to teach the subjects of kgoši Taudi that what they do allow is against the norms and values of African culture. Kgoši Taudi went to kgoši Mabotho alone. However, on his return he is given the respect he deserves due to the position he occupies within the community. A line in the extract that says "... gobane le ge ba ka itlhama ba hlabana-ba tla be ba hlabanela mang kgoši e ile le leswiswi" ("... even if they can arm themselves whom are they defending as the king disappeared" (Translated by the author)) illustrates this.

Praise Poetry

Praise poetry falls within the category of oral literature (Mafela, 1997, p. 49). As an aspect of primary orality, praise poetry is orally circulated and not written from one generation to the other (Kgobe, 1997, p. 41). The principal objective of praise poetry is to praise a person after an achievement. This view is supported by Mtumane (2004), who defined praise poetry as "... a form of poetic composition in which praises a person, animal or any other object that has inspired him" (p. 9). The concept focuses on the positive achievements over the challenges that one was faced with. Praise poetry is an essential component of oral cultures. It makes statements of individual identity, and therefore acts as a vehicle for identification (Raditlhalo, 2004, pp. 39, 40). It is through

praise poetry that African philosophy is vividly presented to the audience. Praise poetry demystifies the challenges and opportunities of an individual within the community. It is through praise poetry that character portrayal of an individual can be clearly presented to the audience.

In this novel, Matsepe presents two kings, namely, Mabothe and Tabudi, who perform praise poems. The performance of praise poetry shows how they managed to conquer the challenges they were faced with. In the praise poem, Mabothe presents himself as a hero who is not easily cheated. This is evidenced by the solutions that he was able to bring to the crisis surrounding his daughter. Mabothe's personality is depicted. Matsepe presents Mabothe, the father-in-law to Taudi as a brave leader. It is not surprising that Mabothe is presented in this way. The reason is to assist the reader to understand his character. As a result of his bravery, he is able to give a judgment in the saga of his daughter. Mabothe asks them why they delayed in reporting this matter to him. The praise poem illustrates the intelligence of Mabothe. Mabothe preempted this scenario. Hence, he is able to address this challenge amicably. The praise poem illustrates the character of Mabothe as a leader who cannot run away from challenges.

When Taudi was coming back from his solitary trip from his in-laws, he was accompanied by soldiers from kgoši Mabothe. Taudi's return was accompanied by war songs performed by kgoši Mabothe's men. As he entered his palace, kgoši Taudi performed the following praise poem as he regarded himself as a hero. Tabudi presented himself as a hero to his tribe and the soldiers from Mabothe. Taudi was a brave man who always held the bull by the horns. Tabudi proved this when he undertook an expedition to his in-laws without any accompaniment. His arrival at Ga-Mabothe shocked everyone. As he returned to his tribe there was another shock. All these were signs of his bravery. He violated the norms by undertaking this trip without authorization from indigenous healers, something very unusual.

When Taudi comes back from his trip to Mabothe, he comes back a hero. This is evidenced by his reception at the tribal kgoro. It is during this moment that kgoši Taudi introduces himself to everybody. For those who do not know him, this is the time to know what type of a person he is. Through his praise poem, kgoši Tabudi portrays his personality. This has a bearing on his self-identity.

Praise poetry as a component of oral literature is, in this instance, used to demystify intertextuality in this novel. By incorporating praise poetry in Western fiction, Matsepe shows that the environmental milieu of the author has a strong influence on his/her work. Afrikan Humanism is fully illustrated in this novel.

Conclusions

The preceding exposition illustrates that oral literature is the pillar of Western literature irrespective of the language used for communicating the ideas. What serves as the axis in linking the two is that the "self and community" play a significant role. The writer representing the self in this context presents a text that is based on a particular community. The message or theme communicated by the self has a bearing on the community in its different forms. The text directly or indirectly addresses issues that the community is grappling with. In order for this to be properly communicated, the setting has to play a significant role.

Transition and innovation play a significant role in the growth and development of both oral and written literature. As illustrated, this paper supports orality and textuality, something that was not seriously considered in the past. For South Africa, with all its 26 languages, of which 11 are official, true emancipation of the literature of

the previously marginalized communities will be achieved if it is tested and accorded proper status. During the colonial era, some of it was suppressed through strict censorship, hence there was no growth and development. However, the dawn of the new democracy in South Africa brought some changes.

The theory of Afrikan Humanism cuts across all the literatures as African writers in fiction address the relationship between orality, scribality, and textuality. It is against this background that this researcher argues that oral cultures are as important as Western cultures. The indigenous literatures of South Africa illustrate the significance of intertextuality. Previously, research in these indigenous languages emphasized structuralism, leaving no room for intertextuality. The new dimension in research should encourage post-structural theories to prove the point that Afrikan Humanism cuts across all literatures. In this paper, the researcher has showed that the theory of Afrikan Humanism is observed in the fiction of Matsepe. The fiction of Matsepe, which contains characteristics of Western literature, is analyzed through the eye of oral cultures.

References

- Derrida J. (1998). *Of grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kgobe, D. M. (1997). Religion as reflected in Northern Sotho, a case of African religion and Christianity. *The South African Folklore Society Journal*, 8(2), 40-48.
- Mafela, M. J. (1997). Reflecting on trends in Tshivenda praise poetry. *The South African Folklore Society Journal*, 8(2), 49-63.
- Matsepe, O. K. (2008). *Lešitaphiri*. Nasou Via Afrika: Pretoria.
- Mtumane, Z. (2004). Some aspects of S. M. Burns-Ncamashe's praise poetry. *The South African Folklore Society Journal*, 14(2), 9-19.
- Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality & literacy: The technologizing of the world*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Radithalo, I. S. (2004). Praise and performance poetry and present: Possibilities for re-generation. *The South African Folklore Society Journal*, 14(2), 33-44.
- Rafapa, L. (2007). Esikia Mphahlele's etching of two axes of religion using the framework of his concept of Afrikan Humanism in Father Come Home. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 44(2), 89-103.
- Rafapa, L. (2009). The intersection of experience, imaginative writing and meaning-making in Es'kia Mphahlele. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 46(1), 206-212.
- Serudu, M. S. (1987). The novels of O. K. Matsepe: A literary study (Unpublished DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria).
- Weiss, T. (2006). Orality and the reader: Cultural and transcultural elements in Achebe's girls at war. *Journal of the Short Story in English (Online)*, 47(Autum).