

GENDER, PATTERNS OF STORY-TELLING AND FORCED REMOVALS: A TRANSVAAL PERSPECTIVE

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One of the most enduring stereotypes in southern African oral literary studies is that of woman-as-storyteller. Almost invariably a grandmother, preferably seated in the vicinity of a fire, this figure has dominated virtually all local research into oral narrative. As one study of the Xhosa *ntsomi* notes, "That the woman in particular keeps folktale traditions alive is attested to by various researchers amongst various cultural groups". Yet, not a page later, the same study states that men often volunteered enthusiastically to relate stories for the researcher. [1] In some respects this study by Neethling is typical of many others which all note a preponderance of women narrators but simultaneously report a consistent, if small, presence of male performers. [2]

This predominance of women storytellers in southern Africa, both now and in the past, has been so widely and consistently noted that it cannot, of course, be without substance. Yet, in all the years that this situation has been observed, no one has thought to subject the stereotype to any form of critical scrutiny. Have women always predominated as storytellers? If so, how does this institutionalized speaking relate to the institutionalized silencing that characterizes women's subordination in pre-colonial southern African societies? What, if any, have the traditions of male storytelling been? How, if at all, do male and female storytelling interact? These questions have never really been broached. Instead, the fact that women should tell stories is often taken as self-evident, an assumption that in turn obscures a number of crucial questions about male traditions of storytelling and the politics of gender in oral literature.

These questions held particular pertinence for me since I was researching oral historical narrative, a form predominantly practiced by men. However, in the area in which I was doing work, male storytelling traditions were largely, but not entirely, passive while female traditions were stronger. How had this situation come about and how did the two traditions relate to each other? In turning for guidance to the available scholarship on South African oral narrative, there were few models to follow since this body of material was mostly rooted in tale-type analysis, performance studies or literary structuralism. While the latter model had no interest in issues of historical change, the two other approaches had the potential to address these questions. However, the works that implemented these paradigms had not pursued these historical themes in any detail. [3]

This paper will attempt to broach some of these larger questions by providing a broad, predominantly sociological, and speculative model of oral storytelling that will bring both men and women into view simultaneously. The initial step in such an analysis is to take an overview of gender relations in pre-colonial southern African societies. Thereafter, we turn to examine the household in more detail since it was here that most forms of male and female storytelling emerged and resided.

However, since all South African societies have undergone extensive transformation in the last two centuries, these patterns no longer pertain. Consequently, in considering any aspect of South African oral literature, one is obliged to include questions of historical change into one's calculations. The final section of the paper attempts to meet this prerequisite by examining one factor - forced removals - that weighed heavily on oral storytelling patterns.

Since this paper is concerned with broad-ranging processes, it is not located in any specific area. Much of the interviewing used here was, however, conducted in and around one

Ndebele-Sotho chieftdom outside Potgietersrust in the northern Transvaal. This interview material has been supplemented with Transval-based ethnography and historical analyses. It is on the basis of this mix of material that I have made certain generalizations which can be seen as having some applicability to most Transvaal societies.

I

As an increasing number of studies are beginning to show, the ordering force of gender in pre-colonial societies was profound and far-reaching. Guy has even gone so far as to suggest that gender was "the social feature of southern African precapitalist societies". [4] While these studies vary in the degree of precedence they allot to such gender division, they all agree that central to the operation of these societies was the subordination of women. Focusing on issues related to the control and appropriation of the productive and reproductive capacities of women, these studies have set out some of the key features of female subordination. These include the appropriation of women's agricultural labour which largely underwrote the household, the basic unit from which all societies were made. Lacking independent access to land except through husbands, fathers or sons, women were at a life-long disadvantage. In the rigid division of labour, controlled by household heads, women assumed responsibility for cultivation, while men controlled cattle keeping. Cultivation necessitated long hours of labour and it produced an unpredictable surplus that women could never dispose of entirely as they wished. Largely barred from access to stock, the major form of storable wealth, women could never really accumulate wealth nor trade in the products of cattle.

Alongside these economic constraints, women from an early age were subject to ideological controls. Initially these took the form of a gender-specific education backed up subsequently by an initiation process that aimed to make women into obedient wives, ready to donate their fertility to producing more people. This ideal of female obedience was also reflected in their virtual exclusion from political and legal forums, from which they were often barred or permitted only as spectators. Overall, then, a picture emerges of women who experienced both economic and intellectual forms of subordination. Prevented from accumulating wealth or ever gaining complete economic independence, they were equally cut off from controlling the major intellectual resources and media of their society.

The limitations that circumscribed women's lives were nowhere more apparent than in the area of speech and performance. As Kinsman points out in the case of Tswana women, they were expected to mind their own business "and leave the *mahuku* [words] to men". [5] Women could, of course, "speak" through storytelling, praising, dancing and singing, yet, compared to the wide range of performance skills available to men, this female repertoire was limited. Women's major business, as Comaroff makes clear, was to take care of the physical subsistence of society. Men, on the other hand, dominated its media and intellectual resources. They controlled words, ritual skills like sacrifice and judicial proceedings through which they could control the representation of the world. Through this representation, men and the agnatic lineages into which they were grouped, became models of society, history and permanence (all ancestors, for example, were male). By contrast, women were seen as temporary and, as Comaroff puts it, they were associated with "unstable and repetitive transformations, with seasonal production feeding, birth and death ...". [6]

Yet, as Guy stresses, because of their standing as producers and potential or actual mothers, women did enjoy limited forms of status, independence and security. Indeed, these features often made women, particularly older ones, fierce defenders of their societies. In certain spheres of social life, particularly religion, women could also gain prominence. Another such activity was storytelling. Compared to the intellectual resources at men's disposal, these areas like religion and storytelling were small. Yet, these patches of control, like the limited control over production, could attract certain forms of recognition and status and so, not surprisingly, women often defended these minor cultural prerogatives as well as the wider

social order on which these cultural resources commented.

This stark gender division in pre-colonial societies also expressed itself in spatial terms, and within any chiefdom there were clearly demarcated areas for men and women. This separation marked all aspects of life, particularly the household, the space in which storytelling most frequently occurred. [7] Within a polygynous homestead or family group (*kgotla*, *kgoro* or *motse/muti*), composed of individual huts or households (*malapaltighodlo*), the female area was associated with the cooking area and huts that housed the wives and children of the homestead. In some instances, these households were divided into a male area in the front and a female area that took in the hut and the yard behind it. The area that united the various households was also a public, male space which included various byres for the homestead's animals as well as a male gathering place (*kgotla/nkhundla*). Each homestead was, in turn, united into a larger unit, the ward (*kgotla*, *kgoro* or *mmoto/mmunru*), which, like its smaller counterparts, had a public, central, male arena from whence men directed activities such as joint work parties that gave the homestead economic definition. Wards formed the local administrative and political units of the chiefdom and it was through this institution that fields were allocated to household heads. [8]

II

Within this divided space and unequal world, women generally pursued their storytelling skills in the vicinity of the household. Male storytelling occurred in the various courtyards that dotted Transvaal settlements. For women, the staple genre was the *nonwane/ntsomi*, a story generally but misleadingly referred to as a "folktale", a term that not only diminishes the craft of this tradition by its overtones of quaintness, but also implies that the genre dealt only in make-believe. [9] In fact, the term *nonwane/ntsomi* did not only include imaginary stories; it could refer to non-fictional accounts touching on topics like local history and appropriate social conduct for girls and women that went under the rubric *megkwa le melao*, a complex phrase meaning law, duty, right, virtue, customary observance, order, justice, and so on. Riddling and proverbs also featured as part of the 'storytelling event, as did songs, jokes, gossip and conversation. Storytelling sessions, then, comprised a fluid galaxy of forms and, for many, the term *nonwane* embraced a sense of the entire occasion, not merely its storytelling core. [10]

As regards performers, they were, by all accounts, middle-aged to older women whose audiences were drawn from the homestead and ward in which their household was located. At times these spectators were young children - both boys and girls - up to the age of about eight, but older children as well as adult women (and by some accounts, men) could also participate. As with all performance events, the audience's contribution was crucial to shaping the occasion. Through the question and answer formulations of riddling, through the songs both in and outside of the stories, through the frequently intoned response *keleketla! kunne* that encourages the teller and indicates that the listeners are awake, the audience, along with the teller and her gestural and dramatic skill, co-operated in making the event a multi-dimensional performance. Storytelling typically occurred in the evening after supper but stories could also be told on an *ad hoc* basis, often to make a point to unruly children. [11]

Male storytelling, by contrast, generally occurred in the courtyard or *kgoro* of either the homestead or ward, depending probably on the size of the ward. If it were extremely large, then storytelling would probably take place in the homestead; if smaller, in the *kgoro* of the ward. In this symbolically central place as opposed to the peripheral women's area, men congregated to discuss and resolve issues, perform certain types of work and direct the activities like communal labour and the transfer of cattle that linked households into homesteads and homesteads into wards. [12] Another factor integrating households and homesteads was the storytelling that men performed the *kgoro* in the evenings. Boys above the age of about eight, on returning from their day's herding, would foregather, each having

brought a piece of wood for the fire. After supper, they would participate in storytelling sessions which, like the women's events, included songs, jokes, riddling, and stories on hunting, war and male custom. [13] Alfred Lesiba Kekana recalling his experience of storytelling as a child and an adult said: "At the *kgoro*, men taught boys the law, obedience, not to fight, stories of their forefathers, what happened in wars, family and kin relations." [14] Pitje describes a similar situation:

In furthering ... education, men teach courage and endurance through stories told of tribal heroes. This takes place by the fire-side at the men's place (*kgoroxong*). From actual narration or adult conversation, the boy also learns about tribal migrations, ethnic history, tribal lore, law and custom. In recognition of this type of training, they say: '*Ngwana'a mosimane o tseya molao kxorong*' (A boy receives his training at the men's place). [15]

While these storytelling sessions, like their women's counterparts, were made up from a variety of forms, some of which were lighthearted, these stories are remembered as having a serious edge to them. Their performance, for example, mostly excluded audience response, and was generally more restrained than the stories told by women. [16] The *kgoro* could also host daytime storytelling and, during seasons when work was not demanding, men would sit doing the kind of "quiet" labour like braying skins, making rope and carving objects that, as others have pointed out, facilitates storytelling since one can tell or listen without having one's work interrupted. [17]

Considered collectively, the historical stories of the *kgoro* comprised a fluid repertoire of subjects and styles that borrowed heavily from the *nonwane* tradition. The range of names by which people identify these stories reflects this fluidity. The most frequently used terms are *tiragalo* (occurrence, happening, episode); *taba* (story, affair, incident) or *taba ya kgale* (story/affair/incident of the past); *nonwane*; or *histori* (history). While most people use these terms, one informant, Molalagori Kekana, also suggested *dikanegelo* (narration); *tlhaloso-polelo* (discursive account); *tlhaloso ya setlogol/setshaba* (account of history/the nation); or simply *polelo* (discussion). What this range of forms suggests is the fluid nature of historical storytelling whose definition can stretch from a word with relatively clear outlines, like *nonwane*, to a much more open-ended term like *polelo*.

This fluidity of definition was also apparent in the wide range of performance genres that the *kgoro* hosted. These included marriages, piacular intercessions, ritual occasions, judicial deliberations and commemorative ceremonies. [18] All of these events required the display of historical information, which was expressed in a wide variety of forms that included genealogy, praising, beer-drink oratory, prayers, ritual intercessions and legal disquisition. These ceremonies were also characterized by a high degree of performance. Part of this performance lay in song, dance, music and mime. [19] But part also lay in the language of ritual which is itself a form of action rather than simply an accumulation of propositional statements. [20] As a focus for these various activities, the *kgoro* became, in Pitje's words, "an open theatre". [21]

Within the *kgoro*, then, a fluid range of forms were enacted, many of which touched on chieftaincy, the central thread of traditional history. This sense of chiefship did not, however, reside exclusively in any one form. Rather, it was the combination of forms that together created an intellectual analysis of chiefship. Or, as one informant explained,

The whole thing came in as a story, tale, something like that. My grandmother says this, and my auntie tells this, my uncle tells that, then this one tells a different story, and that one tells yet another story. When I tell my friend about the chief here, I tell him like this and that, and then this one is going to tell him about the same

chief, not the same story, though, a different story. So that's why our chief has many colours. [22]

One central point to note about this historical education was its universality, at least as far as men were concerned [23] Women could pick up historical information informally from their husbands, sons and fathers. "Stories of this kind [historical narratives] emanated from discussions around the day-to-day incidents in the community", one women explained. [24] Using these types of encounters as a source, as well as drawing on their own experience, women could include "true" stories in their repertoires. [25] Through a combination of talent and perseverance, a woman could accumulate enough historical knowledge to become recognized as an expert. [26] Yet, barred as they were from the *kgoro*, the real daily centre of historical education, women were never made entirely articulate in historical knowledge.

Overall, then, the craft of storytelling was ordered by the major divisions of gender that characterized Transvaal societies. Or, as Lucky Kekana explained, "After eating supper, the old men remain by the fire at the *kgoro*, the boys also remain with the old men at the *kgoro* ... We girls stay with the old lady in her hut at the fire". [27] Another women who grew up in Giyani in the north-eastern Transvaal recalled being told stories "in huts where fathers didn't go". [28] The spatial division of storytelling has been noted by others and was, in all likelihood, a feature of all Transvaal and probably southern African societies. Marivate, for example, who did research into Tsonga storytelling in the late 1960s and 1970s, reported that, while men and older boys gathered around one fire to tell stories of hunting, women and younger children clustered around another. Lestrade, talking of Sotho societies generally, describes an analogous situation. On a related point, Scheub, too, has pointed out that as far as oral narrative goes, there is a general, but not absolute, division of labour between male historians and female storytellers. Parenthetically, these comments bear out an observation of Ben-Amos, who has noted that "hypothetically it would be possible to assume an African society in which women tell stories to children, whereas men narrate them to each other". [29]

III

Yet, this division by gender was much more than simply a matter of who sat where. What is at stake is the very nature of storytelling itself which, for many people, is permanently embedded in sexual division. Or, as Lucky Kekana put it, "... stories go hand in glove with building a man and a woman ... stories cannot be separated from men and women". [30] The depth of this gender divide as well as the belief and investment in it are crucial to grasp since, in talking about storytelling, people frequently predicate its function and meaning on these two separate streams of life. [31] Male storytelling, for example, is often seen as being directed at boys of about ten to eighteen and is identified as a stage of male socialization that prefaces initiation, circumcision and marriage. This storytelling is also perceived as being linked to the practical "veldcraft" education which boys receive from their elders. [32] In discussing storytelling, people often talk about it as part of a gendered stream of experience through which boys become men.

Much the same goes for female storytelling. It, too, belongs to a parabola of experience that passes through childhood, initiation, marriage and childbirth. While the content of *dinonwane* is by no means as obviously gender-specific as the male stories of warfare and hunting, the skill of telling this type of story is seen as essential to the female craft of socializing very young children, both male and female. As with male storytelling, *dinonwane* are seen to be age-graded and, after about eight, the content of stories that girls hear is more gender-specific and is also linked more closely to forms of women's work. This strand of storytelling is often seen to continue, like a thread, into the world of initiation where the business of gender instruction is most visibly institutionalized. [33]

Yet, despite the huge gulf that seems to separate these two streams of storytelling, their craft and skill, are virtually the same. In terms of plot and content, too, as Doke has suggested, the areas of "folktale" and "legendary history" merge and overlap in significant ways. [34] What actually separates these two traditions - the place of their telling and the gender of their tellers - is, from one point of view, quite negligible. Nevertheless, seen from the view point of participants in the society, these related distinctions were so powerful that they could confer differential meanings on what was essentially the same set of skills.

In terms of this differential definition, female storytelling inevitably suffered. Despite their acknowledged importance in education, women's stories were often regarded as a rather frivolous pastime that dealt with the imaginary and fictional. Male storytelling, on the other hand, was seen as more important, partly because of its content which dealt with the "real" world, partly because of its more sober performance, but also because it was enacted in a prestigious, public, male space and concerned itself with the socialization of men. Considered within the complete range of oral forms open to men, like praising, praying, invocation, judicial pleadings and so on, historical storytelling was a relatively minor genre. Yet, because it belonged to the glamorous world of public male power and because it formed part of the serious male business of institutionalizing and handing on the past, it basked in a kind of reflected glory that outshone the substantially similar storytelling of women. Or, as one informant, Dikgopana Rampula, explained, "the grandfathers were the senior lecturers of the kraal". [35]

Yet, as with all social divisions, this one was never impermeable. Men could tell fictional stories, women could narrate local history. Those who probably crossed these boundaries most frequently were the ones with most talent. A good storyteller would always attract an audience and part of his or her appeal and excellence would be a wide repertoire which, in all probability, drew from both "real" and imaginary traditions. However, as in all societies, talent is rare and the majority of more pedestrian tellers plodded their separate gender routes. [36]

Its second-class status notwithstanding, women's storytelling remained a cherished skill. As one of the few public-speaking venues open to women, it probably represented a form of limited cultural power that could attract recognition and status, particularly to people regarded as expert performers. Part of this status was "borrowed" from age, which conferred its own prestige, and it was largely the middle-aged or older who were performers, perhaps, as Lucky Kekana suggested, because they had more time to tell stories. Recalling her grandmother, she said, "... she was old, she could not stand up, she could not work. That is why she told us stories ...". Another informant, Morongoa Kgosana, observed, "... young people cannot always tell [stories]... But when one gets old, one wants to tell them ...". [37] However, talent is not tied to age and younger women could also excel and so accrue recognition. [38]

In so far as storytelling was a resource that could attract minor forms of status, it can be viewed as a type of "cultural capital" that women inherited from their grandmothers and mothers. It was a form of "capital" that young brides could use to lighten their way in their new and often difficult circumstances, if only by supplying the household with some new plot lines. [39] Perhaps for this reason, women today often talk about stories in terms reminiscent of inheritance. Informants stressed to me again and again that their grandmothers and mothers had "passed on" and "handed down" the stories they knew, and very few people identified their affines as the source from which *dinonwane* had been acquired. Along the same lines, one informant observed that the stories of men and women differed because "they come from different places". In other words, your repertoire of stories and style of telling are shaped by the place you come from rather than the place into which you marry. [40]

Another reason why storytelling could confer some status on women was its importance in an educational system that entrusted the minds of the youngest to those of the oldest. [41] This status, of course, accrued to both men and women as storytellers but, to this day, women's

stories are accorded a special place as agents of socialization. As one analysis of Zulu stories observes:

Folktales have served as the mainstream of African education. Folktale images are readily remembered, and the lesson driven home remains attached to narrative cores which are not easily forgotten. The performer of tales fires the child's imagination, and produces an emotional involvement. [42]

One factor illustrating the importance of this narrative education was its universality, something that Livingstone noted more than 150 years ago in his observation of Tswana society. "The knowledge of some of these parables", he wrote in a letter, "is universal, and if we can believe testimony it was so of old." [43]

Since then, others have made similar observations which indicate that storytelling was an essential grace to possess if one was to be considered well-educated, cultured and good-mannered. [44] Those who couldn't tell stories were often ridiculed since, as Mbiti puts it for the Akamba, one "is unable to do the most elementary thing in life". [45] As with African societies elsewhere, storytelling, along with other arts like praising, was, in theory at least, a popular skill. [46] In the words of Naomi Teffo, a creche principal who, because of her role in education, has a great interest in *dinonwane*, "I remember at my home [near Pietersburg] where I was born ... everybody used to tell [stories]". Lucky Kekana remarked: "I don't believe there was anyone who was unable to tell stories." [47]

IV

Today, of course, this universality no longer pertains, which is not to say that storytelling has disappeared entirely. Indeed, as any number of studies have shown, orality and oral forms are extremely tenacious and can adapt to a wide range of situations. [48] Furthermore, the power of orality is such that in a confrontation with literacy and its agents, oral cultures can often transform literate institutions by, for example, forcing colonial religions to shift from the written word to the spoken word and image, or by requiring literate bureaucracies to rule through the central features of oral government, like public assembly, personal audience and oral messenger. [49] Even in South Africa, where the transformation of African societies has been so profound, oral forms still persist, but often in substantially transmuted forms.

These general points have some bearing on Transvaal oral storytelling, which has persisted, albeit in attenuated form, despite the range of forces impinging on it. These pressures have, of course, been numerous and include land dispossession, migrancy, limited and subsequently mass formal education (which, *inter alia*, appropriated *dinonwane* into its primary syllabuses), and then, from the 1950s, a radical apartheid programme of social engineering that forcibly rearranged most rural communities into overcrowded "bantustan" barracoons. At the heart of this programme lay a sustained policy of coerced removals that, on the one hand, cleared people out of "white" South Africa, and, on the other, forcibly rearranged existing "homeland" areas so as to ram in the vast influx of those who had been endorsed out of "white" areas. [50]

While this policy of rural intervention was strongly enforced in the 1950s, it had its roots in the 1930s, and since that time there had been a steadily mounting attempt to interfere directly in the internal affairs of Transvaal societies. This steadily mounting interference in rural societies, which sought to "tidy" communities into prescribed arable, grazing and residential areas, took a considerable toll on established social and cultural relationships. However, largely because of the exigencies of a war economy and resistance to these schemes, many of them were only half-heartedly implemented. By the 1950s, however, this faintheartedness disappeared to make way for the Nationalist party government's more determined implementation of its radical policies which sought to reach into the very heart of rural

societies. One method through which this was achieved was through rearranging residential patterns, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s the internal residential arrangements of any number of chiefdoms were altered as people were forced to move from cluster-style traditional settlements into grid-plan villages. While villagers tried to reconstitute traditional household shapes as best they could, the one institution that could find no exact equivalent was the *kgoro*. By contrast, the kitchen area and the storytelling traditions associated with it could transplant with less difficulty. Today, in the community and surrounding area where I did research, the number of women storytellers, while clearly in decline, far outstrips the number of male tellers.

One is, of course, tempted to draw a fairly direct link between the disappearance of the *kgoro* and a decline in male storytelling. But, such a one-to-one relationship is oversimplified and there are a number of factors complicating the situation.

Given the centrality of the *kgoro* as an institution, it obviously did not evaporate overnight. Many people had a high commitment to the *kgoro* and the social world it symbolized, and *kgoro*-type meetings were often reconstituted under a tree or at someone's house. The physical space of the *kgoro* may have vanished. Nevertheless, its forms of association, orature and interaction obviously continued in slightly different locales. But, as these gatherings often had to be fairly self-consciously reconvened, much of the former fluidity and spontaneity of the *kgoro* withered. Furthermore, the possibility of reconstituting the *kgoro* was only open to a limited number of people who were the first to be resettled. Often members of the ruling lineage, these families had the opportunity to settle with kin. Those who moved later, or arrived subsequent to the removals, had to settle at the periphery of villages amongst strangers. In addition, if one lived far from one's kin, the possibility of gathering for evening storytelling was remote, and under these circumstances the function of the *kgoro* narrowed as its wider cultural aspects gave way to more pressing concerns with problem-solving and the settling of family disputes.

Under these circumstances, the function of the *kgoro* as a place of performance and informal learning partly fell away. Lucky Kekana describes her experience of this informal learning that even she as an outsider and girl obtained in the environs of the *dikgoro*:

I know these stories and this history because I was born in a *kgoro*. I am the grandchild of the *kgoro* and I am the child of it. Villages used to have one *kgoro*. There was also only one gate, even when the village was big. We used to play around the gate. When the men in the *kgoro* had finished solving their problems, we used to imitate them. I would pretend to be someone's grandfather, another child would pretend to be someone else's grandfather. Just like that. [51]

Inevitably, the fluidity of these learning patterns could not entirely accommodate themselves to the more rigid plan of the betterment villages and, accordingly, they shrivelled. Add to this the effects of mass education that took off in the chiefdom during the 1960s, and one has a further factor diminishing the hold of a participatory, oral performance culture. [52]

Another way in which the storytelling context changed was that established gender divisions began crumbling since the new layout of villages could not accommodate the previous sexual division of space. Or, as one person explained, "boys and girls mixed together in the kitchen". [53] As we have seen, the ordering force of gender relations in African societies was extremely powerful and, against this background, the idea of gender "mixing" amounts to a heresy of considerable proportions.

This image of "mixing" is one that recurs often in peoples' recollections of how resettlement affected daily life. In keeping with this image, the disappearance of the *kgoro* and the world it sustained is frequently remembered as a loss of order and purity. As one informant put it,

"[The whites] stopped the *kgoro* of long ago. Then they mix us to be one thing." Elsewhere she said: "Nowadays ... we are mixed, because there is no *kgoro*." [54] This "mixing" that she alludes to concerns both gender and religion and language, and the betterment resettlements are seen as precipitating a chaotic and improper confusion between men and women, Christian and non-Christian and Sotho and Ndebele (or other ethnic groupings).

This "mixing" had, of course, had many dress rehearsals in both the mission stations and town locations, which, by comparison with chiefly villages, were ethnically extremely diverse. [55] Within these two areas, Christian households, in their architecture and gender division, assisted in the erosion of traditional models. One octogenarian informant commented: "... my father wasn't like other men ... he was Christian. He stayed with us." [56] Christian households were also noticeably smaller, something that one of Sansom's informants in Sekhukhuneland phrased as follows: "There is no *kgoro*. In the old days everyone lived together and we had cattle. But now we are like the Christians, each man's house is a *kgoro*." [57]

From the point of view of the chiefdom, then, mission stations and locations were sullied spaces that breached propriety. They also lacked the sense of order and proper division, particularly between men and women, that those in the chiefdom saw as essential preconditions for storytelling. This lack of order was, for many, roughly equivalent to the lack of *dikgoro* that symbolized the grid-style layout of areas under white control. Any place without a *kgoro*, or the social relationships that it represented, could only be graceless and uncultured. Or, as Lucky Kekana phrased it, "I don't believe that the people at the location were able to narrate stories because there was no *kgoro*". [58]

However, it might, of course, be argued that virtually a century of migrancy had already wrought many of these changes, even before the *kgoro* disappeared. For large parts of the year, men were away and so missed out on an inductive, informal education and, as Opland points out, the metaphorical richness of migrants' praise poetry often diminishes because of their lack of an ongoing, intimate interaction with chiefly life. [59] Furthermore, particularly when female migrancy gained momentum in the 1960s, the changes to gender relations must have been far-reaching. In addition, migrancy altered the profile of audiences and so tampered with another precondition of storytelling. However, as a number of studies on migrancy and cultural transformation have shown, migrants not only have a high commitment to traditionalism, they frequently reproduce the forms of the countryside in the town. Similarly, they appropriate metropolitan cultural conventions which they "traditionalize" by subordinating these forms to the precepts of their political world. [60] In addition, given that traditional education entrusted the very youngest to the very oldest, the absence of a middle-generation could, in fact, be accommodated for some time. All of this is not to say that migrancy had no effects on cultural patterns. Self-evidently it does. Rather, the point is that the impact of migrancy on cultural production is more heteroclitic and ambiguous than one might think.

While the effects of migrancy on male storytelling were ambiguous, there was one effect of removals that was less equivocal and this relates to the disappearance of an everyday, physical world. As Connerton has shown in his study of social memory, one of the most powerful mnemonics we have is the architecture and detail of our daily lives, and it is out of this that most people construct a sense of continuity and time flow. [61] Considered in this light, what the removals in fact did was to rob people of their mnemonic surroundings. Apart from depriving people of their fixed cultural assets, the removals had an added significance since traditional settlements carried a particularly loaded symbolism. In terms of this signification, chiefly villages represented one last, small enclave of independence from direct white authority. In these settlements, residents could maintain a degree of control over their everyday lives that was not possible in the more tightly policed town locations and rigorously controlled white cities. A significant symbol of this independence was the traditional, cluster-style housing with its *kgoro* that differed visibly from the grid-style lay-out of locations, a spatial arrangement that was seen by many as a key instrument and symbol of white control.

In losing the architecture of tradition, many people simultaneously lost a political symbol and a source of historical memory. Hardly surprisingly, many attribute to the removals a much longer process of change that has assailed rural societies for the past two centuries. These processes are summarized in the removals which are often held solely responsible for a perceived demise of tradition. Or, as one man, in talking of removals, said, "Now, it's all development, man, stories don't work, they don't work anymore". [62]

Yet, these demoralizing changes notwithstanding, many people have not simply abandoned traditionalism and its cultural practices. Many royal lineages, for example, have a high commitment to continuing traditional performance skill, and, since many of these were the first to settle in new villages, they are in a position to keep alive a vestige of the large, agnatic homesteads that characterized pre-removal settlements and the cultural practices of such groups. And it is largely within this group that one finds the few remaining practitioners of oral historical narrative.

However, at the margins of this group or even beyond it, one can find enthusiastic and often capacious historical narrators. Their presence is an interesting index of the ability of historical storytelling techniques to persist and it is worth briefly mentioning the resources with which these "marginal" tellers go to work. Firstly, the skills of historical narrative can be acquired via the cognate craft of female storytelling. A few households continue to convey these latter skills, as do schools that from an early date appropriated storytelling into their syllabuses. Content, too, is easy to come by since, as Levi-Strauss has shown, much oral historical narrative feeds quite indiscriminately on a wide range of forms and can reproduce itself easily by using, for example, narrative ballast from radio serials, school text books and local rumour. [63]

However, this style of narration is often highly corrupted and frequently amounts to no more than a comic inversion and repetition of dominant-class Afrikaner history that most schools purvey. [64] For some analysts, this cross-over style may represent a potentially radical departure since it seems to approximate the idea of subversive bricolage which "breaks down the images and symbolism of dominant and subordinate cultures in order to recombine them in a way that subverts cultural dominance". [65]

But, can this style of narration be seen as coherent? While it certainly manifests the necessary form and skill, it is often devoid of content and intellectual substance. And, it is this loss which has perhaps been the most telling consequence of the displacement of the *kgoro*. A key institution in which both the skill and intellectual meaning of history were purveyed, it provided a centre of gravity around which a variety of historical forms orbited. With its demise, one crucial prop that upheld a chiefly sense of coherence fell away. Add to this the processes of dispossession, fragmentation and political restructuring that chiefdoms have undergone, and one has a situation where a coherent sense of chieftaincy no longer pertains. Bereft of its intellectual content, much contemporary historical narration is a type of bricolage gone so mad that it often approaches farce. In the long run, it is this result that has been the most devastating legacy of forced removals.

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Notes

- 1 S J Neethling, "*Die Xhosa Ntsomi: 'n Strukturele Benadering*", DPhil Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1979, pp 245 and 246. The translation of the quotation is mine.
- 2 Examples include T Cope, "Towards an Appreciation of Zulu Folktales as Literary Art", in J Argyle and E Preston-Whyte (eds), *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa: Essays in Honour of Eileen Krige* (Cape Town, 1978), p 195; M Oosthuizen, "A Study of the Structure of the Zulu Folktale with Special Reference to the Stuart Collection", MA Thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1977, pp 38, 39, 44; and P M Makgamatha, "Characteristics of the Northern Sotho Folktales: their form and structure", MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 1987, pp 19-20.
- 3 The amount of scholarship in this area is large. The works listed here are merely representative samples. The major work is, of course, Harold Scheub's *The Xhosa Ntsomi* (Oxford, 1975). Other works that follow this performance studies tradition include C D T Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales: form, content and delivery: Vol. 1", MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 1973, and Makgamatha, "Characteristics". The latter thesis includes Proppian structural analysis which is also evident in works like Oosthuizen, "A Study", and I M Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales in Southern Sotho", MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 1979, p 10. Tale type analysis which predominated in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s produced works like S M Mofokeng, "A Study of Folktales in Sotho", MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1951, and his DPhil Thesis, "The Development of Leading Figures in Animal Tales in Africa", 1954.
- 4 J Guy, "Gender Oppression in Southern Africa's Precapitalist Societies", in C Walker (ed), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990). See, as well, the introduction to the volume by C Walker. Other studies include B Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 2, 1983, and M Kinsman, "'Beasts of Burden': the subordination of southern Tswana women, ca. 1800-1840", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 10, 1, 1983. The nature of gender relations also forms an important theme in J Comaroff, *Body of Power Spirit of Resistance: the culture of a South African people* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
- 5 Quoted in Kinsman, "Beasts", *op. cit.*, p 49.
- 6 Comaroff, *Body of Power*, pp 71, 80-81, 98.
- 7 On household space in Transvaal societies see G M Pitje, "Traditional Systems of Male Education Among Pedi and Cognate Tribes: Part I, II and III", in *African Studies*, 9, 2-4, 1950; A Kuper, "Symbolic Dimensions of the Southern Bantu Homestead", in *Africa*, 50, 1, 1980, pp 16-17; C Jansen van Vuuren, "Die Vestigingspatroon van die Suid-Ndebele", MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1983, pp 41, 45-6; and Comaroff, *Body of Power*, p 54.
- 8 Paragraph based on A Kuper, "The Social Structure of the Sotho-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa: Part I and II", in *Africa*, 45, 1, 1975, pp 67-8, and 45, 2, 1975, pp 139-49, and Kuper, "Symbolic Dimensions". See also A O Jackson, *The Ndebele of Langa*, Republic of South Africa, Department of Co-operation and Development, Ethnological Publication No 54 (Pretoria, n.d.), pp 119-22.

- 9 On terminology see, M J Herskovits, "The Study of African Oral Art", in *Journal of American Folklore*, 74, 1961, and B W Andrzejewski and G Innes, "Reflections on African Oral Literature", in *African Languages/Langues Africaines*, 1, 1975, 8.
- 10 Sara Teffo, interviewed by Rose Lephondo and Isabel Hofmeyr (hereafter IH Mahwelereng, 6 March 1990).
- 11 Paragraph drawn from discussions of Transvaal storytelling. H A Junod, *The Life of a South Africa Tribe: Vol. II: Mental Life* (London, 1927), p 214; P-D Cole-Beuchat, "Notes on Some Folklore Forms in Tsonga and Ronga", in *African Studies*, 17, 4, 1958, p 187; Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales", pp 19-20, 28, 33; M C Bill, "The Structure and Function of the Song in the Tsonga Folktale", in *African Studies*, 42, 1, 1983, p 1; and Makgamatha, "Characteristics", pp 19-20. For comparative southern African examples, I have relied on Moephuli, "Structure and Character", pp 251, 259. Also Madumelana Shiloti, interviewed by Ruth Khaas and IH, Mahwelereng, 28 February 1990; Helen Morongoa Kgosana, interviewed by Helen Maime and IH, Mahwelereng, 1 March 1990; and Mosiwa Martha Lekalakala interviewed by Jacobeth Ramupudu and IH, Makapanspoort, Potgietersrust, 13 March 1990; Moletsi Daniel Mahlangu interviewed by Jacobeth Ramupudu and I H, Makapanspoort, Potgietersrust, 13 March 1990; and Lucky Kekana, interviewed with Jacob Mthembu and IH, Makapanspoort, Potgietersrust, 9 April 1990.
- 12 D James, "Kinship and Land in an Inter-Ethnic Community", MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987, p 103.
- 13 John Maselela Maleka, interviewed by Johanna Moima and IH, Mahwelereng, 19 March 1988; Sophie Lekgoathi and Emily Mashishi, interviewed by Helen Maime and IH, Mahwelereng, 7 March 1990; Grace Karolo Kekana, interviewed with Jacobeth Ramupudu, Mosate, Valtyn, 23 March 1990 and 20 April 1990; Lekalakala interview; Mahlangu interview; and Job Kekana, interviewed by IH, Westdene, Johannesburg, 7 June 1990. See, also, Pitje, "Traditional Systems", *op. cit.*, p 61, and G P Lestrade, "Domestic and Communal Life" in I Schapera (ed), *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa: an ethnographical survey* (1937; Cape Town, 1966), p 127.
- 14 Alfred Lesiba Kekana, interviewed by IH, Sekgakgapeng, 29 March 1990.
- 15 Pitje, "Traditional Systems: Part I", *op. cit.*, p 75.
- 16 Alfred Lesiba Kekana, interviewed by IH, Sekgakgapeng, 22 June 1990, and Helen Maime, interviewed by IH, Mahwelereng, 23 June 1990. See also Sema Fransina Ramasela, interviewed by Rose Lephondo, Sara Teffo and IH, 15 March 1990. For comparative material on this point see M J Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative* (Evanston, 1958), p 17; R Finnegan (trans. and ed), *Limba Stories and Storytelling* (London, 1967); D Ben-Amos, "Folklore in African Society" in *Research in African Literatures* 6, 2, 1975, p 180; and D Cosentino, *Defiant Maids and Stubborn Farmers: tradition and invention in Mende story performance* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 6-7.
- 17 Lestrade, "Domestic and Communal Life", *op. cit.*, p 123, and F M Ding, *Dinka Folktales: African stories from the Sudan* (London, 1974), p 14.
- 18 H O Monnig, *The Pedi*, (Pretoria, 1967), pp 218-234.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p 56, and Kuper, "The Social Structure", *op. cit.*, p 115. See as well, P McAllister, "Inclusion and Exclusion in the Oral Transmission of Ritual Knowledge: a Xhosa Communicative Strategy", in E Sienaert and N Bell (eds), *Oral Tradition and Education* (Durban, 1988), pp 43-68; and his "Political Aspects of Xhosa Beer Drink

- Oratory”, in *English in Africa*, 15 (1) 1988, pp 83-95. See also J L Comaroff, “Talking Politics: oratory and authority in a Tswana chiefdom”, in M Bloch (ed), *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Societies* (London, 1975), pp 141-61, and J L Comaroff and S Roberts, *Rules and Processes: the cultural logic of dispute in an African context* (Chicago, 1981).
- 20 P Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), p 57. For a comparative discussion on ritual language, see McAllister, “Inclusion and Exclusion”, *op. cit.*
 - 21 Pitje, “Traditional Systems: Part 1”, *op. cit.*, 59.
 - 22 Isaac Thabankoane Motlatla, interviewed with members of the Bakenberg Tribal Authority by IH, Bakenberg, 27 July 1988. As Mr Motlatla spoke in English, he spoke with quite a few “ums” and “ers”. These I have removed to facilitate reading.
 - 23 W Eiselen, “The Suto-Chuana Tribes: Sub-Group II: the Bapedi (Transvaal Basotho)”, an article to accompany photographs by A M Duggan-Cronin in A M Duggan-Cronin, *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa: reproductions of photographic studies: Vol II, Section II* (Cambridge and Kimberley, 1931), p 44, and H Scheub, “Oral Poetry as History” in *New Literary History*, 3, 1987, pp 478, 484.
 - 24 Tshwane Mvundlela and Ledile Kekana, interviewed with Motlalepula Mashao, Debra Nails and IH, Mosate, Valtyn, 1 October 1988.
 - 25 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
 - 26 N J. van Warmelo, *The Bakgatla ba ga Mosetlha*, Union of South Africa, Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publication No. 17, (Pretoria, 1944), p 4.
 - 27 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
 - 28 Shiloti interview.
 - 29 Marivate, “Tsonga Folktales”, p 20; and Lestrade, “Domestic and Communal Life”, *op. cit.*, p 127. H Scheub, “Introduction”, in A C Jordan (trans.), *Tales from Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1973), p 2. Ben-Amos, “Folklore”, *op. cit.*, p 189.
 - 30 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
 - 31 Sara Teffo interview; Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990; and Ezekiel Dikgopana Rampula, interviewed by IH, Mahwelereng, 30 April 1990. See, also, Pitje, “Traditional Systems”, *op. cit.*
 - 32 Pitje, “Traditional Systems”, *op. cit.*, pp 68-9.
 - 33 See Kinsman, “Beasts”, *op. cit.*, pp 49-50.
 - 34 C Doke, “The Basis of Bantu Literature”, in *Africa*, 18, 4, 1948, p 287. See, as well, Cosentino, p 2, and M Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: ethics and ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1982), p 51.
 - 35 Rampula interview.
 - 36 This point is extrapolated from field work observations. Competent tellers like Alfred Lesiba Kekana and Lucky Kekana both had wide repertoires that drew from both historical and fictional traditions. Most other tellers stuck to one or other tradition. See also Scheub, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p 2.

- 37 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990, and Kgosana interview. See also Naomi Teffo, interviewed by IH, Mahwelereng, 9 April 1990, who made similar points.
- 38 Lekalakala interview and Mahlangu interview.
- 39 Lekalakala interview and Mahlangu interview.
- 40 Shiloti interview; Lekalakala interview; and Mahlangu interview.
- 41 For a fascinating comparative discussion of a similar oral educational system, in this instance that of ancient Greece, see E A Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton, 1982), pp 122-49. My thanks to Debra Nails for this reference.
- 42 N N Canonici, "Educational Aspects of Trickster Folktales", in Sienaert and Bell (eds), *Oral Tradition and Education*, p 111. See also J S Mbiti (ed), *Akamba Stories* (London, 1966), p 7, for a useful, comparative statement. Local commentary includes Neethling, "*Die Xhosa Ntsomi*", p 252, and Makgamatha, "Characteristics", pp 15, 19.
- 43 David Livingstone to Charles Livingstone, 16 March 1947 in I Schapera (ed), *David Livingstone: family letters 1841-1856*, Vol 1: 1841-1848 (London, 1954), pp 192-93.
- 44 G P Lestrade, "Traditional Literature", in Schapera (ed), *The Bantu Tribes*, pp 296, 297.
- 45 Mbiti, *Akamba Stories*, p 3.
- 46 On praising, see Lestrade, "Traditional Literature", *op. cit.*, p 296; A C Jordan, *Towards an African Literature: the emergence of literary form in Xhosa* (Berkeley, 1973), p 21, and J Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: aspects of a black South African tradition* (Johannesburg, 1983), pp 42-43. For comparative examples on the universality of storytelling, see E E Evans-Pritchard (ed), *The Zande Trickster* (London, 1967), p 19, and Cosentino, *Defiant Maids*, p 8. For local storytelling as popular art, see Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales", p 21, and Bill, "The Structure", *op. cit.*, p 1.
- 47 Naomi Teffo interview and Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
- 48 See, for example, J Goody, "Restricted Literacy in Northern Ghana", in J Goody (ed), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (London, 1968); M T Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (London 1979), pp 198-216; J Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge, 1986); and N Z Davis, "Printing and the People: early modern France" in M J Graff (ed), *Literacy and Social Development* (Cambridge, (1981).
- 49 On this point see I Hofmeyr, "Jonah and the Swallowing Monster: orality and literacy on a Berlin Mission Station in the Transvaal", paper presented to the ICS Literature Seminar, 14 January 1990, and Goody, *The Logic*, pp 89-90, 105, 114, 124.
- 50 The literature on removals generally is extensive and includes G Mare, *African Population Relocation in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1980); D James, *The Road to Doornkop: a case study of removal and resistance* (Johannesburg, 1983); and Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa: the Transvaal: Vol. 5* (Cape Town, 1983). For information on the removals within rather than into the homelands, generally called "betterment" relocations, see sections of the books just listed as well as J Yawitch, *Betterment: the myth of homeland agriculture* (Johannesburg, 1982), and

the special issue of *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 2, 1989, which deals extensively with conservation and betterment.

- 51 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
- 52 For a discussion on the effects of mass education on male, youth culture, see P Delius, "Dikgomo di ile (The Cattle have Gone). The Changing Context of Resistance in Sekhukuneland 1950-1986", paper presented to the University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop Conference, 6-10 February 1990.
- 53 Naomi Teffo interview. See, also, Rampula interview.
- 54 Lekalakala interview.
- 55 Calvin Mogahlaha Puka, interviewed by IH, Makapanspoort, Potgietersrust, 8 April 1990.
- 56 Kgosana interview.
- 57 Sansom, *Leadership*, p 126.
- 58 Lucky Kekana interview, 9 April 1990.
- 59 J Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: aspects of a black South African tradition* (Johannesburg, 1983), pp 246-47.
- 60 D Coplan, "Eloquent Knowledge: Lesotho migrants' song and the anthropology of experience", in *American Ethnologist*, 14, 3, 1987, and his *In Township Tonight! South Africa's black city music and theatre* (Johannesburg, 1985), pp 17-21.
- 61 Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.
- 62 Mahlangu interview.
- 63 C Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London, 1966), pp 16-22. For an interesting northern Transvaal example of this process see, R T K Scully, "Phalaborwa Oral Tradition", PhD Thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1978, pp 118-19, who mentions the use of radio serials in historical tradition.
- 64 For a more detailed discussion of this type of historical narration, see the chapter entitled "History as Farce? Oral Historical Narration as a Changing Phenomenon" in my PhD thesis, "Oral Storytelling, Literacy and Historical Narrative", University of the Witwatersrand, 1991.
- 65 R P Werbner, "The Political Economy of Bricolage" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13, 1986, p 151.