Child abuse in Setswana folktales

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Abstract

This article examines the possible role played by African folk literature, taking Setswana folktales as a case in point, in justifying and perpetuating the abusive behaviour so often witnessed and decried in postmodern society. We found some evidence that certain folktales may depict real-life child abuse by adults (male and female), and, indeed, serve to perpetuate pre-modern societal beliefs. Ideally speaking, citizens should probably be educated about the possible negative impact of that part of folk literature that serves to perpetuate negative stereotypes of children as objects to be (ab)used. Since folk literature may be serving as a potentially significant guardian of these beliefs, a possible first step would be to identify folktales and other stories that may keep alive beliefs that reinforce obsolete views about children. This is a challenge to all folklorists.

Keywords: Child abuse; Folktales; African folk literature; Setswana; Societal beliefs

Introduction

In this article, we study the possible role played by African folk literature, taking Setswana folktales as an example, in justifying and perpetuating practices that in our postmodern dispensation are perceived to be instances of abuse. We will attempt to facilitate understanding of the universal origins of folktales and the link between different kinds of folklore. We also hope to provide some insights into the possible therapeutic value of folktales. In the article, we introduce the reader to Setswana folktales in particular. We begin by reviewing the factors involved in abuse and the way abuse is entrenched in folktales. We dwell on the meaning of folklore, folktales and abuse, and provide some indications of the possible link between these concepts. We then discuss the methodological dimensions of the research. A significant part of the article is dedicated to five Setswana folktales and to the challenges posed by clinging to certain ancient beliefs. The article ends with a discussion of the implications of the continued existence (survival) of traditional beliefs in modern society, epitomised by the folktales provided here. Pointers for future research are also discussed.

Implications of the continued existence of traditional beliefs in modern society

Internationally, more than 180 countries have adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides minimum protection for children from all forms of interpersonal violence and abuse (Child Rights Information Network, 1996). However,

in South Africa, the unconditional acceptance of authority (including violence against children) has not been in question until very recently. Ten years after the demise of the apartheid system, South African society is threatened by spiralling crime levels and unacceptable levels of abuse (Maree, 2005). Furthermore, in South Africa, child abuse often has its roots in the myths and beliefs perpetuated by adults. One such myth is the belief that sexual intercourse with virgin girls is a cure for AIDS. Following research in an African suburb of a metropolitan city, Leclerc-Madlala (1999), for instance, reveals that men infected with HIV and AIDS systematically rape young girls, hoping to cure themselves in doing so. Leclerc-Madlala maintains that almost everyone over 12 years old in the township may already be infected by the virus. This, she concludes, is an example of how cultural beliefs can undermine a nation. Van Niekerk (in Arkley, 2004, p. 1) confirms this view, stating that it is still commonly believed that sexual intercourse with a virgin could cure HIV and AIDS: 'It's a myth that's really putting children at risk.'

Several similar cases have been reported in the media. Beharie (1999a), in the same newspaper, writes of a young boy who had been sodomised by a man as a result of such cultural beliefs. Despite physical signs of abuse and a fairly accurate account of the event, the judge declared the victim an 'extremely unwilling witness'. The tragically inappropriate response to the rape by what many believe is a justice system steeped in traditionalist sentiments merely reinforces the view that children are regarded as objects, even today, despite legislation to protect them.

Also noteworthy is a case of child neglect reported in 1999 (*Sunday Times*, 25 April 1999). In an article entitled 'Child tortured to death', Beharie (1999b) tells of the torture of a two-year-old boy by his mother's lover, who poured boiling water over him. The man escaped arrest and three years later returned to kill the boy with an iron pipe after tying him up and burning him. The collusion of the mother in the abuse and subsequent murder of her son is testimony to the impact of cultural beliefs on the mistreatment of children.

More recently, Van Niekerk (in Arkley, 2004) provided conclusive evidence that child abuse in South Africa continues to rise, while the mean age of children who are sexually abused is decreasing all the time. The fact that, in South Africa, there is a comparative lack of support structures to serve these children, exacerbates the problem.

In spite of numerous deaths among boys at initiation schools in South Africa, many modern-day African families still insist that their sons undergo the initiation. Some initiation rites reflect the tyrannical nature of traditional child-rearing. In the Setswana culture, boys who prepare to enter the initiation school have to undergo gruelling physical 'tests' in the king's *kraal* (*kgotla*). After the traditional dance, they are told to bend over for a beating during which they are not allowed to cry out. Crying out incurs more lashes. Crying or running away results in exclusion from the initiation school and attracts derision and shame on the family (Mogapi, 1991). This may lead to more physical abuse and ends with embarrassment on the side of the family. The boy himself might be an outcast, especially if he reveals secrets/taboos of the initiation school, given that initiates are sworn to secrecy. (As an aside, the matter of initiation and concomitant/resulting deaths is an extremely sensitive one, which is currently hotly debated.)

The abuse referred to here is confirmed by numerous newspaper and electronic media reports of children who are physically abused for a number of reasons, including the fact that they sometimes do not conform to their parents' or families' view of life. Newspaper headlines such as the following confirm this view: 'Father smiles before trial of abuses begins' (Otto, 2004, p. 1), 'Child's death: no bail for couple' (Venter, 2004, p. 2) and 'Teen charged for raping 3 girls' (Hlatshwayo, 2006, p. 1). The defencelessness of children makes them easy targets. Unless attitudes change, this practice is likely to continue and to be justified on the grounds of cultural and traditional beliefs, which are often in direct opposition to the idea of *Ubuntu/Botho* - an African philosophy based on mutual love and respect, and a notion that was also transmitted to people through folklores. This belief corresponds with the saying *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* ('No man is an island').

Folktales as a mirror of societal beliefs

Folk literature reflects the thinking and real-life social traditions of the time, and, in this article, we argue that Setswana folktales' portrayal of children and their place in and treatment by society provides some insight into society's attitudes towards children, probably even today. The saying in Setswana *Logong lo ojwa lo sa le metsi* ('A wood is bent while still wet'), for instance, reinforces the belief that disciplining children through physical punishment or severe deprivation - considered today as physical abuse - - is (or used to be) a legitimate way to make children conform to social rules and become useful members of society. We will demonstrate that folktales are sometimes used to justify and perpetuate the abusive treatment of children. We will focus on Setswana folktales that portray some views on the treatment of children that today would qualify as physical, sexual, educational and emotional abuse and neglect. These types of abuse are defined to set the scene for the sociolinguistic analysis of Setswana folktales.

Problem statement

The main issue investigated in this article is: does Setswana folk literature play a possible role in justifying and perpetuating dated societal beliefs about child abuse?

Research questions

Broadly speaking, we will investigate whether any evidence exists that certain folktales may not only depict real-life child abuse, but actually perpetuate traditionalist societal beliefs. The following associated questions will also be investigated.

1. What are the origins and different types of folktales?
2. In what ways are folktales depicted in primary and secondary texts?
3. What is the link between folktales and child abuse?
4. Does the survival of folktales reinforce the abusive behaviour witnessed and decried in today's society?

Some salient aspects of folktales

Topics found in folktales

Windling (1995) asserts that folktales do not shy away from topics that are considered taboo, arguing that, rather, they address the same truths and realities that have been in existence for thousands of years.

Folklore

According to Wikipedia (2006, p. 1), folklore is 'the body of verbal expressive culture, including tales, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, and popular beliefs current among a particular population, comprising the oral tradition of that culture, subculture or group'. Jung (in Wikipedia, 2006, p. 2) argued that folklore may pertain to subconscious psychological patterns, instincts or archetypes, often including fantastic components (e.g. magic, ethereal beings and the personification of inanimate objects).

Folktales

Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1993) define folktales as narratives that stem from the lives and imaginations of persons or groups. According to Carney (2006), folktales started as an attempt to explain the temporal and the spiritual world and they originated in the oral tradition. According to the Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia (2003), the term 'folktale' is a generic term for any number of traditional narratives. The telling of stories appears to be a universal cultural phenomenon, and folktales do not differ noticeably from culture to culture (Answers.com, 2006b). Comparative studies have consistently revealed striking similarities in the themes and narrative techniques that characterise folktales. Sanchez (2006) argues that communication can be direct or indirect and can constitute either the sending or receiving of messages. Folktales form part of a centuries-old tradition in which they confirm or challenge the status quo of the storytellers' society. The most basic function of folktales is to 'explain the dangers of the world and the world in general' (Sanchez, 2006, p. 3).

Fairytales

Early folktales were the precursors of literary fairytales. Magical agents of change in folktales were often princes or princesses, hence the term 'fairytales'. Sanchez (2006) maintains that fairytales were not universal or timeless; rather, they reflected the *status quo* of a given culture at a specific time (when they were told) and place (where they were told). Furthermore, even though fairytales contain many figurative lessons, they 'bring no hocus pocus with them' (Folk Tales Examined, 2006).

Types of folktales

Carney (2006) distinguishes between the following categories of folktales.

1. In *cumulative tales*, which are the simplest types of folktales, no plot is involved, and events are linked in a logical way in patterns of intonation and repetition.
2. In *talking beast stories*, animals (and other creatures) talk like human beings. In most cases, these stories contain lessons that imply that courage, independence and resourcefulness are rewarded.
3. *Droll or humorous tales* are intended to entertain listeners and are meant for fun.
4. In *realistic stories*, little exaggeration and no magic are involved: the characters, plots and settings are feasible.
5. *Religious tales* are often either didactic or humorous.
6. In *romances*, enchantments and unachievable tasks separate lovers, while magic may reunite them again.
7. *Tales of magic* are often referred to as fairytales.

Distinctive elements of all folktales

According to Carney (2006), all folktales have the following distinctive elements:

1. the introduction (which is generally short and includes the setting);
2. the development (the action increases steadily until a climax is reached and the conflict or problem is resolved); and
3. the (short) conclusion, when everything is explained.

Child abuse themes in folktales

Defining child abuse

Child abuse is often defined as 'parents' or caretakers' actions or non-actions, resulting in the death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation of a child' (Answers.com, 2006a). The abuse of children has a long history and can be traced to laws that denied children their basic rights (e.g. English common law and laws passed in the American colonies and incorporated into early laws in the United States of America). Often, children were treated as their parents' (particularly their fathers') property. Child abuse is a 'complex and dangerous set of problems that include child neglect and the physical, [educational], emotional, and sexual abuse of children' (Answers.com, 2006a).

In this article, we will follow Saraga's (cited in Dallas & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 59) delineation of child abuse into the following categories: physical, sexual, emotional and educational abuse, and neglect. To better understand these types of child abuse, brief definitions are given.

- *Physical abuse* is manifested in smacking, deprivation of basic needs, beating, injury through various means, lack of protection against injury and the deliberate taking of the life of a child by an adult. Pelton (1985, p. 43) cites cases of beating, poisoning, suffocating or killing a child in any way as physical abuse.
- *Sexual abuse*, as the phrase suggests, is the 'actual or likely' (Gomes-Schwartz *et al.*, 1990, p. 30) sexual exploitation of a child for the gratification of an adult or adults, and includes sexual acts involving penetration, fondling, indecent exposure for arousal, and voyeurism. This type of abuse is highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989. According to the convention, child sexual abuse includes the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.
- *Emotional abuse* occurs when a child is persistently ill-treated emotionally; for example, through verbal abuse, humiliation, lack of affection, isolation and rejection.
- *Educational abuse* occurs when a child is permitted to play truant repeatedly, when a parent or caretaker neglects to enrol a child (who has reached mandatory school age) or when a child's special educational needs are not attended to (Answers.com, 2006a).
- *Neglect* occurs when a child is not protected against or is deliberately exposed to danger, including inclement weather, is deliberately undernourished or is not given proper medical care.

Abuse themes in common folktales and fairytales

Roberts (2003) argues that fairytales and folktales are natural sources for the examination of abuse themes. Windling (in Roberts, 2003, p. 1) maintains that 'the fairy tale journey …can be seen as a metaphor for the journey into the depths of the soul'. Furthermore, 'abstract ideas are represented by concrete images' (Snyder, 1995a, in Roberts, 2003, p. 3). Moreover, 'traditional storytellers have used terrifying events to create the emotional experience of grief and abandonment' (Snyder, 1995b, in Roberts, 2003, p. 2).

Shifting the blame in folktales

According to Ashliman (1997), storytellers sometimes protect fathers' reputations by making them unaware of the relationship between themselves and the object of their desires (e.g. a man has a daughter by a certain woman and then later returns and falls in love with the child, unaware that he has, in fact, fallen in love with his own daughter). Ashliman (1997) says that another version of this kind of relationship is when the perpetrator is a father figure and not the natural father himself.

A second common theme is where, for example, the dead wife of a king is blamed for the king's incestuous relationship with his own daughter (the king can fulfil a promise made at the queen's behest only by marrying his own daughter). In a third version,

responsibility for the father's incestuous relationship is shifted to the victim herself (Ashliman, 1997). In yet another version, incest is presented in a light-hearted and mocking way.

In a study of the depiction of women in Xhosa folktales, Mtuze (1990), using gender as a social construct, examines the role of literature in reinforcing the patriarchal view of male dominance and female subservience. Elsewhere, Mtuze (1993, p. 105) concludes that real-life female inequality 'permeates most of our [African] traditional and ...modern literature because literature, albeit in mediated form, reflects real-life social norms and values'.

The use of folktales to communicate complex dilemmas

In contemporary African society, folktales are often used to address complex problems (e.g. child abuse and HIV and AIDS). In Swaziland, for example, 'protectors' are sent into rural areas to work with children. These professionals, dubbed *mahlombe lekhukalela* ('a shoulder to cry on') by the children, use folktales to convey simple messages rather than the jargon of psychology and sociology (UN Integrated Regional Networks, 2002). A story entitled 'How the children of Chakijane put an end to brother Snake's abuse' is about a deceitful visitor (a snake) from the city who convinces Chakijane (a rock rabbit) that it is acceptable for him to sleep with his 12-year-old daughter. Humorous at times, the story, however, has a tragic ending: the snake is beheaded, the father is banished and the girl dies. After the story has been recited, protectors are chosen from local communities and they proceed to tell the story to others.

We will now turn our attention to the theoretical and philosophical premise of the article.

Theoretical and philosophical premise

Rationale for the study of folktales

Since folktales are used as a teaching aid for children to instil good behaviour, they have a potentially significant impact on the socialisation process and the values or belief systems that ensue and permeate throughout adulthood. Cognisance must be taken of the fact that children are exposed to folktales at a fairly young and impressionable age. The immaturity or lack of critical faculties at this stage makes it hard, if not impossible, for children to differentiate between mainstream values and beliefs and the discrepant values and beliefs perpetuated in the folktales. Unless meaningful intervention is initiated, these discrepant values and beliefs may be carried through to adulthood. Furthermore, both future perpetrators of abuse and future victims of abuse are exposed to the same folktales that allegedly perpetuate abusive behaviour. It could be argued that if future perpetrators have assimilated a propensity for abusive behaviour, similarly, their victims assimilated a tendency to silently endure abuse meted out to them. This silent endurance can be perceived as a form of acquiescence in some instances.

In many folktales, children are depicted as co-perpetrators with adults who abuse other children. Cinderella's stepsisters in the popular western folktale come to mind (Windling, 2006). This dimension may obscure children's underdeveloped perception to actually perceive the adult co-perpetrators as the real villains and themselves as unwitting victims of a more subtle form of abuse. This dimension could also be a precursor for the bullying of peers that is fast becoming a major social problem in our schools.

In the course of our study on folklore, we concluded that a folktale is meant to have a moral message. After investigating some well-known folktales in South Africa, we saw that the hero is often flawed; for example, the rabbit (called Hasie in the tale of the rabbit and the tortoise) is portrayed as the clever one because he knows how to lie, steal, cheat and 'get away with murder'. The folktales exemplified most types of abuse written about in popular newspapers. Even though folktales are allegedly passed from one generation to the next with the primary aim of teaching children good behaviour and the cultural/traditional way of doing things in society, we did not encounter many instances of good behaviour. In fact, the research indicated that only one folktale out of the 30 that we read dealt with *Ubuntu/Botho* or with the positive behaviour that is meant to take place in society.

Furthermore, the view frequently expressed in the past was that child abuse occurred only in white families and not at all in black families (because of the taboos in black cultures - if something unpleasant happens in a family, it becomes a family secret). Our aim in the article is to shed some light on these issues.

Research objective

Mouton (1996, p. 175) states that the objective of a research design is to 'plan, structure and execute the relevant project in such a way that the validity of the findings is maximized'. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 411), qualitative researchers, 'rather than deny human subjectivity, take into account subjectivity through methodological strategies'. Qualitative researchers rarely remain detached from their data; they maintain that the subjective view is what matters. We are aware that data collected through qualitative designs are often regarded as subjective, anecdotal and impressionistic, seemingly lacking in scientific rigour. Nevertheless, a qualitative design is preferred because we believe that research in psychology and education is better conducted through such a design. The paradigm according to which we collected and analysed the data is interpretivism. In other words, our vision of reality is subjective and simply constructed because we are trying to *understand* this reality rather than *know* it (as in a positivist paradigm).

We chose an interpretive approach because our aim in the research was to understand the data epistemologically, at the same time accepting that researchers' perceptions of reality can differ widely.

Qualitative research

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive, subjective and contextual research design was used in the study, and an inductive approach was followed based on information obtained from the narratives. The research was open and not guided by any preconceived ideas or hypotheses (Olivier *et al.*, 2000, p. 214).

The paradigms used in the research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.   A simplified scheme of the different perspectives, research strategies and methods of data collection and analysis used in the study

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Data collection
Interpretive	Reality can be understood and interpreted but not predicted or controlled	Knowledge arises from inspection and interpretation	Interpretive inquiry: reviewing narratives
Constructivist	Reality can only be known by those who personally experience it	Knowledge is constructed through a process of self-conscious action by those who are personally experiencing such action	Analysis of narratives (folktales)

Adapted from Schurink, in De Vos (1998, pp. 246–247).

Research methodology

Data collection and analysis

For the purpose of the first part of this article, a survey was undertaken of a number of primary and secondary scientific sources on the phenomena 'folktales' and 'child abuse'. In the second part, five Setswana folktales are analysed thematically. All five folktales are viewed as narratives, and these discourses are analysed and deconstructed. This approach is considered an alternative method to experimental methods. In this approach (discourse analysis), the narratives are analysed and placed in context.

Data were analysed on the basis of Morse and Field's approach (comprehending, synthesising, theorising and recontextualising) (Morse, 1994; Morse & Field, 1996). Table 2 records the criteria considered in the validation process and indicates how these criteria were applied in both the data collection and data analysis.

Table 2. Data collection and data analysis strategies: criteria implemented in the validation process

Strategy	Description
Data collection[a]	
Prolonged and persistent fieldwork	Fieldwork (i.e. communicating with traditional Setswana storytellers) allowed interim data analysis and corroboration to ensure the match between research findings and participant reality
Participant language: verbatim accounts	Obtained literal statements from participants (e.g. verbatim accounts of folktales and interviews)
Low-inference descriptors	Recorded concrete, precise and detailed descriptions of the participants' stories
Member checks	Rephrased and probed to obtain more complete and nuanced meanings during interviews
Participant review	Participants reviewed the researchers' synthesis of all interviews
Data analysis[b]	
Participant validation	Where possible, 'traditional' storytellers were asked to validate the data analysis process. They were also asked whether they could confirm the results of the data analysis throughout the process
Avoiding subjective interpretation	Acted as objectively as possible while analysing the research data
Avoiding poor review of qualitative data	Research data were carefully reviewed by the researchers and verified by external coders
Avoiding making unsupported inferences	Generalisations were not made beyond the capability of the data to support such statements. The external coders assisted in this process
Avoiding selective use of data	Data were not used selectively to falsely verify findings. The external coders assisted in this process
Avoiding researcher bias	The researchers guarded against their own expectations, misperceptions and the need to find answers that would support their preconceived notions about the research. The external coders assisted in this process

[a]Adapted from McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 408). [b]Adapted from Cohen *et al.* (2001).

Quality assurance: data verification

Ensuring validity of the research

Qualitative research requires the use of various strategies to enhance validity explained in Table 2 (Cohen *et al.*, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). These strategies are employed to ensure the least amount of interference while increasing the quality of the data.

Ensuring trustworthiness

Trustworthiness (Guba, in De Vos, 1998) of the results was ensured by the fact that all the authors are qualitative researchers with many years' experience in interviewing, and Ms Malimabe-Ramagoshi and Dr Molepo personally conducted all the interviews (where applicable) in an attempt to eliminate bias. All four authors have wide experience not only in teaching at tertiary level, but also in the implementation of anti-bias programmes. Mrs Ramagoshi and Dr Molepo are mother-tongue African-language speakers with many years of experience in the analysis of folktales. Trustworthiness was further enhanced through peer examination (critical external coders and critical readers reviewed the research work at all stages), independent 'coding' and comparison of information at different stages of the research. The relationship of trust between the four researchers also contributed to the trustworthiness.

Limitations of the research

The study had the following limitations.

- The study was limited in scope.
- Standardised questionnaires were not used in the research.
- Relatively few folktales were analysed, with little possibility of statistical inference or generalisation.
- Other researchers may well interpret the results differently.

In the next section, we will outline the plot of each of the selected Setswana folktales and explain the symbolism of the children's suffering in traditional Batswana society.

Depiction of child abuse in traditional Setswana Folktales

Monna wa moswagadi ('The man who was a widower')

This story is about a *stepmother's* plot to kill her stepchildren in order to prepare the way for her own children to become heirs. Although her husband refused twice to murder his own children, he nonetheless left it to her to do so if she wanted to. After giving birth to a boy, *the woman* plotted to kill her stepson so that her newborn son could inherit the family's wealth. The stepdaughter overheard the *stepmother's* plans and alerted her brother. During the night, the stepdaughter swapped the brother's and half-brother's blankets. Unaware of this, the *stepmother* ended up murdering the wrong person, her own son. The stepson ran away to his grandparents, and, after confronting his wife about her murderous act, the husband expelled her from the family home.

The story is more than a mere account of jealousy and the conflictual relationship between a stepmother and her stepchildren vying for the husband's and father's attention and favour. It is about ultimate physical abuse through murder to satisfy an adult's greed.

The *mother* does not even grieve for her own son. All she is interested in is eliminating the stepchildren, especially the stepson, to ensure the future of her own children and, by the same token, her own future. The story is a potent illustration of violence against defenceless children to satisfy an adult's selfishness.

The stepdaughter is unwittingly drawn into the murder plot. Instead of avoiding the murder of a fellow child by raising alarm, she merely switches the blankets of her brother and half-brother and thereby finally determines who the real murder victim will be. This story may instil a belief that it is in order if violence or abuse is meted out to those who are not family or fall outside of the interest group.

Mosetsana Saitsane ('The girl Saitsane')

Saitsane lived with her mother in a village where dogs played a central role in every family. The dogs fulfilled an important social role as food tasters. The licking of their lips and wagging of their tails were signs of satisfaction with the quality of the meals prepared by the young girls in the absence of the older women who had gone to work in the fields. One of these dogs was angered by the decision of its owner's daughter, Saitsane, to discontinue letting it (the dog) taste her food.

To show its displeasure, the dog howled until the other village dogs came to investigate. To penalise Saitsane, all the dogs ran into the fields and destroyed her *mother's sorghum*. As punishment, Saitsane was beaten by her *mother*. She then ran away and was eventually rescued by a compassionate family who later married her off to a prince. When her parents finally traced her, they received a large quantity of *sorghum* from the prince - symbolic of *lobola*, *id est* African dowry - and as recompense for the damage done to Saitsane's mother's *sorghum* by the village dogs.

The folktale illustrates abuse in four different forms: physical, sexual, educational and emotional. The dogs represent men who have sex with underage girls. In addition, Saitsane was 'given away' to someone she did not herself choose. Saitsane was abused emotionally when the whole village turned against her, and she also suffered physical abuse at the hands of her mother. The folktale is a typical example of the portrayal of children, in this case underage girls, as 'objects' of manipulation. Such manipulation happens regularly in Zulu and Sepedi traditions where a young woman may be offered to another family or clan as a wife to a young man or an older married man to settle interfamily or interclan disputes. Typical examples are cases where young women are offered in settlement of land or grazing disputes. It even sometimes happens that parents consult a traditional healer, and are unable to pay for the services rendered. If a wife who owes money to a traditional healer falls pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl, she (the wife) will raise the baby girl up to the age of about 8-10 years. The couple will then offer the little girl to the traditional healer as a servant or wife. In doing so, they will have settled the money they owe the traditional healer.

Segwagwa le Leswafe ('The frog and the albino')

This story tells about a couple who, after many years of struggling to have children, are eventually blessed with two children, a frog and an albino. The albino baby was covered with sores and was thrown into a thorny bush to die of exposure. The frog baby, who was very lazy, spent the day playing with her friend the hippopotamus. During the frog baby's absence, the albino baby came out of the bush, cleaned the house and cooked delicious food. The baby frog ate the food and relaxed, thinking that some magic person had done the household chores, and the parents were very happy. One day the *father* decided to remain at home to see how the frog baby did all her chores. He was astonished to see that the albino baby did everything. When the albino baby tried to get back into the thorny bush, her *father* grabbed her and held her tightly so that she could not escape. When the frog baby returned, her *father* picked her up by the legs and threw her to the ground killing her. From that day on, the couple cherished their albino baby.

This story illustrates both neglect and physical violence. Child neglect is represented by the child who is thrown away because she is an albino covered in sores. She is, in a sense, a shelterless street child. She is starving and yet does not receive medical attention. The frog baby is murdered as a form of discipline, but the parents are not punished by society. The story, therefore, illustrates child neglect and physical abuse that ends in murder. It shows how society in general promotes the inequality of children with a different physical appearance and attaches stereotypes to them. Such stereotypes expose these children to systematic emotional abuse and neglect, and some may even end up committing suicide to avoid the emotional brutality inflicted upon them.

Mosadimogolo yo o neng a tlhoka bana ('The old lady who did not have children')

A childless woman, who lives on her own, one day chases away a bird that is eating the bran (*moroko*) she put out to dry. However, the bird implores her to let it eat the bran in exchange for the promise of children. When the woman agrees, the bird instructs her to put five sticks inside a calabash and to cover it with a winnowing basket (*leselo*). After three days, three boys and two girls suddenly appear. The woman is very happy because the five children are a great help in the house. However, one evening, on returning home drunk from a party, she verbally abuses them for being rowdy. The children are deeply hurt when she tells them that they are not humans, but actually stick people. After hearing their cries of anger and sorrow, the bird makes them disappear despite the woman's pleas for their return.

This story tells of children who are abused emotionally. In this case, children are the subjects of abuse by a *female* adult. In spite of their love for and trust in the woman whom they considered their mother, the five children are mistreated emotionally and feel rejected.

Mosetsana Siele ('The girl Siele')

This story is about Siele, a teenage village girl, and a wild horse. She is not at all interested in men as a result of the physical, sexual, educational and emotional abuse she has suffered at their hands. Her *father* becomes suspicious of her dislike of men when she rejects the offer of marriage from a wealthy man. One day, he follows her to the forest where he sees her sing a song to entice a wild horse out of the bush, which she then pets before climbing on its back and riding it. Her 'eccentric' way of obtaining sexual satisfaction angers her *father*, who kills the horse after luring it out of the bush. Siele is devastated by the death of her horse. However, some years later, it suddenly reappears with *lobola* (dowry) cattle. After a night of waiting, the horse finally receives permission from Siele's *father* to marry her. The horse later turns into a handsome prince. It seems the *father* only accepts this deviant behaviour because of the *lobola* cattle. Cattle played a very important role in the lives of African men - it was an offer the father could not resist. In twenty-first-century South Africa, some parents charge abnormal *lobola* to the extent that men have to make a bank loan to pay *lobola*. Some parents do not even take into consideration the fact that the couple just started working.

In this tale, we see the adverse effects on Siele's emotional and behavioural development as a result of her abuse by adult *men*. The abuse is compounded by the contempt and derision she receives from the villagers because of her sexual preferences. Yet these preferences are merely a consequence of previous abuse. The story thus epitomises a child's abuse in traditional society.

Conclusion

The article set out to examine various types of child abuse as depicted in Setswana folktales. The main argument is that child abuse often results from the belief of 'ownership of the other'. Parents and society in general often regard children as their property in the same way that many men believe they 'own' women. This is reflected in the Setswana saying *Logong lo ojwa lo sa le metsi*, which justifies the disciplining of children through physical punishment or deprivation. This is mostly done in the knowledge that they (the children) will not fight back or defend themselves.

The five folktales dealt with in the article illustrate that folktales can, through the socialisation process, perpetuate practices that in today's world are perceived as abuse. Furthermore, Africans in particular may be living an 'ambiguous adventure', as depicted in one of Cheikh Amidou Kane's novels, being torn between a westernised lifestyle and their traditions characterised by the dated idea of children's subservience.

Further research is needed before clear guidelines can be provided to stakeholders. Collaborative (transnational, transcontinental and transdisciplinary) research on child abuse should be conducted before recommendations can be made with any degree of certainty.

The folktales cited in the article all point to the widespread existence of the different types of child abuse that permeated traditional Batswana society. Sadly, similar beliefs today still reflect the bias against children. Child abuse, often justified by moralistic views on parental authority and discipline or by religious dogma, is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs in South Africa. As long as literature includes stories that depict children as 'objects' in the hands of parents, abuse will continue.

An implication of the link between cultural beliefs and the mistreatment of children is that legislation alone may not eradicate child abuse. Education that raises awareness of the inappropriateness of cultural beliefs that undermine the welfare of the child should be part of society's agenda. A logical first step would be to identify folktales and other stories that perpetuate traditional views about children and adapt the content to align them with the mainstream and acceptable values and belief systems. This is a challenge to all African folklorists. Furthermore, we concur with the view that folktales provide potentially powerful instruments that can be used to address complex problems (e.g. child abuse and HIV and AIDS), as is the case in Swaziland, where 'protectors' are often sent into rural areas to work with children. By providing these children *mahlombe lekhukalela* ('a shoulder to cry on') (UN Integrated Regional Networks, 2002), folktales could be used to convey simple and comforting messages to traumatised children.

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