Adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition: A case study of Gcina Mhlophe's work.

ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF THE AFRICAN STORYTELLING TRADITION: A CASE STUDY OF GCINA MHLOPHE'S WORK

By

Tintswalo Millicent Mashele

Student number: 207024198

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, **Adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition: a case study of Gcina Mhlophe's work** submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master Technologiae: Drama at the Tshwane University of Technology is my own original work. It has not been submitted to any other institution of higher education and I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

Tintswalo Millicent Mashele

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the staying power of African storytelling using the South African *imbongi*, Gcina Mhlophe as a case study. Despite her recognition in terms of artistic awards and honorary doctorates, Mhlophe's work as storyteller, poet, playwright and educator has not received much scholarly attention. The study examines Mhlophe's contributions through a critical exploration of her adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition.

In its most basic form, storytelling is a process where a person (the teller), using vocalization, narrative structure and mental imagery, communicates with the participating audience who, in turn, communicate back to the teller through body language and facial expression in an ongoing call and response cycle. By virtue of its creative, interactive and performative functions, storytelling continues to be one of the most powerful forms of artistic communication known to mankind.

The study focused on the adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition as a peculiar indigenous knowledge system that has not only been able to withstand the test of time but has also continued to affirm its relevance within the modern context. As a case in point, Mhlophe has crafted the art of storytelling and turned it into a force to be reckoned with in the performing and creative arts of South Africa. Through the continuous intersections between orality and literacy, the study shows how the processes of adoption and adaptation have acted as survival strategies for the African storytelling tradition.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

According to Tingöy, et al (2014) storytelling is the art of portraying real or fictitious events in words, images, and sounds. Stories are told for entertainment purposes, and often to teach lessons and provide morals. Storytelling is often considered a crucial aspect of humanity. Human beings have a natural ability to use verbal communication to teach, explain, and entertain, which is why storytelling is so prevalent in everyday life. Rohrich and Pellowski (1980) say that storytelling may be learned from oral, printed, or mechanically recorded sources.

The National Storytelling Association (1997) regards storytelling as the art of using language, vocalisation, physical movement and gesture to reveal the elements and images of a story to a specific live audience. Thus, the tradition of storytelling was passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth in a variety of ways. The ancestors handed down their experiences, exploits, customs, and traditions to succeeding generations by way of oral narration, which served as the foundation of storytelling. Folktales and fables are among the oldest forms to instil cultural values, beliefs, and wisdom in society today. The storytelling tradition dates back to the time before written sources began.

Gcina Mhlophe is arguably one of the most respected artists to integrate traditional storytelling elements to shape her work. By writing and performing stories, she strives to preserve the art of storytelling. Mhlophe “has positioned African storytelling as a significant performance genre in South Africa” (Litkie 2003, p. 196).

1.2 Problem statement

The nature of the African storytelling tradition has suffered many misconceptions and arguments. Scholars differ about the tradition of oral storytelling. For instance, Scheub (1985, p. 1) notes that African oral traditions have been treated with contempt and intellectual disdain by Eurocentric scholars. As a result, many and

varying misconceptions and arguments over the tradition of oral storytelling exist. Paramount in the arguments is what the tradition is or is not.

A widely held view by scholars is that oral tradition is a tradition associated largely with societies that do not have a writing tradition. However, Moss and Mazikana (1986, p. 3) note that oral tradition is also present in highly literate societies.

It is argued that the inherent changeable nature of traditions makes it difficult to ascertain the original form of a tradition. Moreover, it is a waste of energy and resources to expect to collect traditions that cannot be captured within their original framework. Traditions must be assessed for their value as historical sources against a background of a thorough understanding of their nature (Scheub 1985, p. 2).

A vigorous oral tradition has existed throughout African history, where oral narrative performances have been important features in society for centuries. Stories have been transmitted orally from generation to generation and have only later been committed to paper to be accessible to the broader community. While a few storytellers took to the stage, Mhlophe continued to entrench African storytelling firmly as a persistent tradition and a form of performance in South Africa. Despite the recognition of Mhlophe's work in terms of awards and honorary doctorates, the full extent of her contribution as a creative and performing artist has not received comprehensive scholarly investigation.

1.3 Aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the staying power of African storytelling. I will use Gcina Mhlophe's storytelling as a case study for her continued contribution through her adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition.

1.4 Research question

- To what extent has Gcina Mhlophe adopted and adapted the African storytelling tradition?

1.4.1 Sub-questions

- What are the emerging themes that Mhlophe addresses in her written stories?
- Which elements of storytelling does Mhlophe employ in her performances as a storyteller?
- To what extent is Mhlophe's work grounded in an African milieu?
- What impact has Mhlophe's work as a performing artist had on storytelling in South Africa?

1.5 Conceptual framework

For my conceptual framework, I will be using content analysis to analyse data on Mhlophe's written stories and storytelling performances.

Content analysis involves the study of recorded human communication, such as diary entries, books, newspapers, videos, text messages, tweets, and even facebook posts. As a scientific study of the content of human communication, content analysis focuses on analysing the contexts, meanings, subtexts, and intentions contained in the messages. In other words, content analysis examines what has been said, written, or recorded. Through a systematic process of coding and decoding, content analysis identifies themes and patterns, and then subjects them to the interpretation of the given textual data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

The content analyst views data as representations not of physical events but of texts, images and symbolic expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings. Thus analysing texts in the context of their usefulness distinguishes content analysis from other methods of inquiry (Krippendorff 2004).

I will analyse Mhlophe's work to determine the subjects and themes of her storytelling work within a South African context. The themes in Mhlope's stories, tales, and fables express critical perspectives on people's lived experiences. Mhlophe has written and published numerous stories, including S*tories of Africa: Our story magic* (2006);*Hi Zoleka* (2002); *Horns only* (2002); *The snake with seven*

heads (1989); *The singing dog* (1992); *MaZanendaba* (1995)*;* and *How stories began* (1996).

I will undertake a critical analysis of these written stories using content analysis. I will include in my analysis elements of storytelling that are part of the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the images of the story. According to Forest (2000), elements of storytelling such as facial expression, gesture, body language, and voice become important during storytelling. In storytelling three elements must fuse, namely the story, the storyteller, and the audience who are listening to the story.

Mhlophe's performances are based on both oral and written texts, but she changes the texts to suit each context of performance. Vivan explains that:

> She retrieves ancient forms while renovating them, and so re-states the continuity of tradition and the sense of history while asserting the freedom of the artist and expressing the need for individual invention (2004, p. 349).

Thus, content analysis will be the most appropriate conceptual framework for interpreting the work of such a versatile and engaging artist.

1.6 Research design and methodology

I will employ the qualitative research approach in the case study as the most appropriate method. Yin (1994) states that in qualitative research, data comes largely from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts. Also, Webster (in Denzin & Lincoln 2011) asserts that a case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit such as a person or a community stressing developmental factors about the environment. According to Bromley (1990, p. 3), a case study is a "systematic inquiry into an event, or a set of related events, that aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". The unit of analysis can vary from an individual to a corporation.

I will use Mhlophe's work in storytelling as a case study to gain an understanding of how Mhlophe has adopted and adapted the African storytelling tradition. I will examine Mhlophe's contribution to the art of storytelling and its staying power. I will do data collection using a literary survey, open-ended interviews, and personal observations. I will attend to Mhlophe's storytelling performances and watch recorded videos of her performances. The data will include Mhlophe's career as both a storywriter and performing artist.

1.6.1 Literary survey

According to Mathers et al. (2007, pp. 5,6,8)survey is an assessment of the status, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes using questionnaires or interviews with a known population sample. Although surveys are usually conducted using questionnaires, information can be obtained in several ways, including interviews, telephone calls, and observations.

I will use a literary survey on Mhlophe's work as a means of answering the study's central research question. I will survey both scholarly and non-scholarly articles and reviews to collect data. The literary survey will inform the interviews and will fill in missing information apart from sourcing more information.

1.6.2 Interviews

An interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks questions to collect data on the ideas, beliefs, opinions, and behaviour of the participant. I will hold face-to-face or telephone interviews with Mhlophe to hear how she creates her work, including her views on the staying power of the African storytelling tradition.

The purpose of interviews is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters, to see the world through the eyes of the participant. Participants can be a valuable source of information, provided they are used correctly. The aim is always to obtain rich descriptive data to understand each participant's construction of knowledge and social reality (Gill et al. 2008, p. 292).

Foddy (1993) says that an interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to draw information from the interviewee. Interviewing is a technique used to understand the experiences of others, when considered as a method of qualitative research.

Before conducting an interview, I will explain the purpose of the interview, address matters of confidentiality, indicate how long the interview might take, and allow the interviewee to clarify any doubts about the interview.

I will use various recording methods such as audio recording, observation, video recording, and photographs to collect data.

1.6.3 Observation

According to Nieuwenhuis (2014) observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects, and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. Observation is an everyday activity where we use the senses of hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, and intuition to collect data. As a qualitative-data gathering technique, observation is used to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon being observed.

I will observe some of Mhlophe's work either live or recorded, to determine her performance style. I will document the events observed and conduct a subjective assessment of those observations. Where recordings are used, I will make them available so that others may view what I see and confirm the validity of my observations.

1.6.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is the range of processes and procedures where one moves from the qualitative data that has been collected into an explanation and interpretation of the situations under investigation. The idea is to examine the meaning and content of qualitative data (Taylor & Gibbs 2010). From the data collected, I will determine how Mhlophe's adoption and adaptation of storytelling has contributed to the staying power of the African storytelling tradition.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will introduce the background of and contextualise the study. It will also elucidate the motivation, the aim, and the methodology of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter will provide a critical literature review of Mhlophe's work.

Chapter 3: Gcina Mholphe's background

This chapter will containMhlophe biographical information and a summary of her work as a writer and a storytelling performer.

Chapter 4: Adoption of the African storytelling tradition

This chapter will look at the history of storytelling in Africa and South Africa. It will also deal with aspects of storytelling and Mhlophe's adoption of the genre of African storytelling tradition as a performance artist.

Chapter 5: Adaptation of the African storytelling tradition

This chapter will examine Mhlophe's work in terms of her continued contribution to the genre of African storytelling in South Africa, through her adaptation of the African storytelling tradition. It will include Mhlophe's work as a writer and performer of stories across different mediums such as literature, radio, stage, and film.

Chapter 6: Analysis of selected written stories

This chapter will look at Mhlophe's work as a writer of stories and include a review of a selection of her written stories in terms of the adoption and adaptation of the African storytelling tradition

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of and conclusion to the research study and provides appropriate recommendations based on the outcomes of the findings.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling is among the oldest forms of communication. It exists in every culture and is the commonality of all human beings, and at all places, in all times. It is used to educate, to inspire, to record historical events, to entertain, to transmit cultural morals and values. According to Wilson (2006), storytelling is a performative art form and can be centred on a solo performer or a group of performers.

The oral storytelling tradition, as a spoken tradition, has suffered many misconceptions and arguments. Scholars differ, in some instances rather strongly, about the tradition of oral storytelling. This argument is supported by the writings of Scheub (1985, p. 1) where he notes that African oral traditions have been treated with contempt and intellectual disdain by Eurocentric scholars. As a result, many and varying misconceptions and arguments over the tradition of oral storytelling exist. Paramount in the arguments is what the tradition is or is not.

A widely held view by scholars is that oral tradition is a tradition associated largely with societies that do not have a writing tradition. Moss and Mazikana, however, note that oral tradition is also present in highly literate societies (1986, p. 3). According to Alagoa in (Brett et al. 1984, p. 33) at some point of transition, when the people in the Nigerian area came into contact with the art of writing, oral traditions of antiquity were turned into writing; they then became historical plays, ballads, or sagas.

It is argued that the inherent changing nature of traditions makes it difficult to ascertain the original form of a tradition. Scholars argue that it is a waste of energy and resources to expect to collect traditions that cannot be captured within their original framework. They further argue that traditions must be assessed for their value as historical sources against a background of a thorough understanding of their nature (Scheub 1985, p. 2).

Although the latter school of thought disagrees with the former, a view that affirms something from both arguments is the view of Aryal (1970) who regards oral traditions as historical sources of a social nature that derive from the fact that they are unwritten, and their preservation depends on the memory of successive

generations. Aryal (2009)further argues that oral tradition is a valuable source for a reconstruction of the past, which has no written cultural practice. Even among peoples who have writing, many historical sources, including the most ancient ones, are based on oral traditions.

Schueb (1985, p. 2) acknowledges that traditions are forever changing, but cautions that this cannot be used as a way of ignoring oral traditions as methodologies have been developed to trace and analyse their changing processes. He argues that oral traditions are similar to other sources of historical evidence in so far as they exist and therefore have to be consulted. Like all other sources of historical evidence, this consultation does not imply usage; it merely requires that they be taken into account, and that when used, they must, like all other historical sources, be used critically. Those who use oral traditions must also be conversant with the oral tradition methodologies that have been established to assist in their exploitation.

According to Moss and Mazikana (1986) oral traditions are not static, nor are they handed down from generation to generation in a perfect form. They argue that each retelling results in a different version of the initial story or tradition in which the latter is recreated afresh from the original source. Contrary to earlier opinion, oral traditions, while communally derived, also have individual authorship and originality. It is an individuality that is related to the narrator's own inventiveness and mood, to the occasion as well as to the audience. There is continual regeneration of traditions as they are adapted to express the existing collective conscience and as the past adapts to the values and images of the present and take on contemporary meanings. It is this characteristic that places oral tradition above other human traditional endeavours and enables it to remain a source of important historical record; because of its ability to preserve the societal culture and wisdom.

Schueb (1985, p. 1) takes this argument further by suggesting that oral history is more of a comment than a record. It is a way of observing a society that reveals the way the community feels about itself. It preserves for posterity important moments in a cultural movement through time, and it does this by means of images that are often found in imaginative tales and poems. This, Schueb argues, is because oral tradition is the only form that can express aspects of tradition in that way. Schueb (1985) further notes that oral traditions are sometimes fantastic, often cyclical, always

mythic, and are found permanently trapped in the images of epic. There is an unbroken continuity in African verbal art forms, from interacting oral genres to such literary productions as the novel and poetry. All this demonstrates the seemingly persistent strength of the oral tradition.

The greatest interest in oral tradition has, however, been exhibited in countries of the developing world. Not only was literacy a relative newcomer in these countries, but by and large these countries had been under colonial domination for varying periods of time. When the colonial yoke was cast aside and independence attained, there was a realisation that such documentation was largely a chronicle of the deeds of the colonizers. Indeed, the colonizers had in many instances deliberately suppressed any indications that the indigenous populations had a history or culture of their own. Sentiments of this nature found expression in the views of such European historians as Hugh Trevor-Roper, who declared that in places like Africa only the activities of the colonizers were fit subjects for proper history in (Moss & Mazikana 1986, p. 12).

That is why, over the years, it has become fashionable among social commentators to lament the decline, if not erosion, of traditional African values in modern society. Nyerere (Olasunkanmi 2015, p. 3) corroborated this when he said that: “of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that [Africans] had no indigenous culture of [their] own or that what [they] did have was worthless or something of which [they] should be ashamed of, instead of being a source of pride.” Despite the fact that colonialism disoriented the African system of values embedded in rich tradition and custom, there are still some aspects of the great African system that withstood the colonial onslaught. Africans continue to examine and practise those aspects of their culture that stood firm despite the adverse influence of westernization in Africa. Gcina Mhlophe is a case in point.

Mhlophe has adopted and adapted the craft of African storytelling as a legitimate genre within the performing and creative arts of South Africa. Her work has reached out to many people across race, culture and language through her books and storytelling. With Mhlophe, orality and literacy have intersected continuously. Mhlophe’s use of the written word adds a new dimension to her expressive range.

The adoptions of both performative and written versions of storytelling have resulted in a peculiar hybridity that has brought an additional attractiveness to her art (Vivan 2004, p. 349).

CHAPTER 3

GCINA MHLOPHE'S BACKGROUND

Nokugcina "Gcina" Mhlophe was born in 1960 in Hammarsdale, KwaZulu-Natal to a Xhosa mother and a Zulu father. Her name, Nokugcina, means "the last" child in a large family. When her mother left the family, Gcina's early years were spent in Durban in the Zulu culture, where her grandmother played an important part in her life, particularly with regard to storytelling, as she would later acknowledge.

Her mother returned when she was ten, to take her back to live with her in the Eastern Cape. There she had to learn and receive her schooling in isiXhosa – a language which she came to love along with isiZulu and would also write and later perform in. Mhlophe found the initial transition difficult and also felt that her physical attributes and her deep resonant voice made her 'ugly' and different, "I prayed to God to give me a soprano, but he gave me a bass, a double bass" (Mhlophe in an interview with Ayanda Allie-Paine 2016). She took refuge in excelling at school, especially in languages, adding English and Latin at high school and later learning seSotho in Johannesburg and German when she married her German husband, Kallie Becker. She also excelled in reading and later writing poetry and short stories:

> I was at the boarding school in Umfundisweni and I thought I was the ugliest girl in the whole school. I looked at my legs and they were not right, and my ears were wrong, and my voice was terrible. Everything was not right about me. I used books to hide in […] I wrote my first poem. And after I had written it, I stood up and read it aloud, and for the first time I liked my voice, I thought, this voice was meant to read poetry (Mhlophe, interviewed by Walder, 1999:29-31).

After school she joined her sister in Johannesburg - illegally under the apartheid era's Group Areas Act – and the constant fear of police raids shaped her political consciousness. Like so many Black women at the time, she found a job as a domestic worker in a White household (Litkie 2003, p. 198).

Mhlophe later began her working life as a newsreader for the Press Trust and BBC Radio, after which she became a writer for Learn and Teach, a magazine for newly-literate people (Litkie 2003). She then ventured into the creative and performing arts.

She has been writing and performing on stage and screen for the past 24 years and has been acknowledged as one of South Africa's most successful black and female theatre practitioners. Mhlophe is also internationally recognised as some of her works have been translated into foreign languages such as German, Swahili, Japanese, French and Italian. She has written many children's books, as well as adult-orientated material. Mhlophe was the first female artistic director at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg between 1989 and 1990 (Flockeman & Mazibuko 1999), as she expressed it, "Storytelling called me" (Mhlophe in an interview with Ayanda Allie-Paine, 2016). She approached the management of the Market Theatre with the idea of holding a week-end storytelling festival, which was enthusiastically supported. It was here that her love for storytelling came to fruition.

Mhlophe has been involved with developing young people in the art form of storytelling since the late 1980s (Blumberg 1995, p. 34). She also strongly believes in instructing children and has established literacy and educational projects such as *Nozincwadi*, Mother of Books and *Zanendaba* [Bring me a story]. According to Vivan (2004, p. 349), "With Mhlophe, orality and literacy intersect continuously".

Mhlophe credits her storytelling ability to her grandmother, who brought her up in Durban. According to Mhlophe:

> "My grandmother taught me everything about telling stories. When I was growing up, half the kids in our neighbourhood would come and spend the evening at home so that they could listen to *izinganekwane* (tales). She was so good that she took me to worlds beyond those I knew. My world was much bigger: I could travel to where the clouds are, to the bottom of the ocean, to other countries, to the bellies of the fishes in the sea. I could see many things and fly with the birds. The ability to let my imagination run free has remained with me. I also learned to close my eyes and to see colours and shapes and hear voices; see life being enacted by animals and birds and by people who didn't look or behave like me" (Litkie 2003, p. 196).

Mhlophe performs on the basis of a written text, but she changes the text at each performance, adding new developments to a story and new verses to a song or poem. "She retrieves ancient forms while renovating them, and so re-states the

continuity of tradition and the sense of history while asserting the freedom of the artist and expressing the need for individual invention" (Vivan 2004, p. 349).

As a performer storyteller, Mhlophe is in tune with her audience. As Vivan (2004, p. 349) notes, "… in the middle of an African gathering, [Mhlophe] becomes physically part of it, part of the people, and her movement and rhythms find continuous echoes in the audience."

She has also found her voice as a singer and songwriter in recent years, releasing three compact discs, with all the songs written by her. The proceeds from her latest compact disc (released in 2016), *Hope Song*, will be used to fund *Khumbulani* Memory House.

Mhlophe's career as a storyteller has brought with it a focus on preserving culture and educating both adult and children in South Africa and across the world. Much of her work is directed at children, ensuring that the crucial tradition of oral storytelling is transferred into print and that the wisdom of generations is passed on to the youth. Mhlophe says, "I personally tell stories in order to wake up stories in other people, because I truly believe every living being has a story to tell. The story is that magical, invisible, golden thread that connect people from heart to heart it doesn't matter where that person comes from, how old they are, how young they are, it just connects us (Steirn 2014, pp. 224–225).

The beauty of Mhlophe's art form is that it uses the basic impulse that connects people to one another: narrative. It's the link between everything, from the spark between individuals to the way that a nation defines itself (Steirn 2014, p. 228).

During the course of her career, Mhlophe has received numerous awards, these include the Award for Life Time Achievement in Contribution to Traditional Arts; A Lifetime Achievement Award*,* Arts and Culture Trust; eThekwini Living Legends Award, Department of Arts and Culture, KwaZulu Natal and an award for Contribution to Arts in Education, by the Department of Education, KwaZulu Natal. Honorary doctorates were conferred on her by five South African universities, as well as by the London Open University.

Mhlophe currently serves as a patron of ASSITEJ South Africa, the International Association for Theatre for Children and Young People. She performs in schools and fringe theatre venues around the world as a storyteller. In her pursuit to teach and instruct children, Mhlophe has advocated literacy and educational campaigns among young people. She was a Nominee for the Noma Award for *Queen of the Tortoises* and received the Book Chat Award for *Molo Zoleka*, including the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Actress for *Have you seen Zandile?*

Mhlophe's performance genre - the oral storytelling tradition has had its share of proponents and opponents. It is only recently that it has begun to receive a grudging acceptance; particularly from the academic community.

There is no denying, however, that the pace of modernisation and political change in Africa has affected the preservation and transmission of oral traditions. Some traditions which, for instance, were preserved for their political functions, have ceased to exist with the dismantling of the political system that necessitated their existence. Through her storytelling work, however, Mhlophe has ensured the recognition and endurance of oral storytelling which is an important tradition within African cultures (Banks-Wallace 2002, p. 412).

CHAPTER 4

ADOPTION OF THE AFRICAN STORYTELLING TRADITION

4.1 Introduction

There is a rich tradition throughout Africa of oral storytelling. Oral tradition is an important cultural institution among most societies. Martins (2012, p. 160) notes that it is a communal activity which informs, as well as embodies the principles and values that are permanent, including those that are changing in society. African oral tradition holds, within the stories, the communal wisdom and achievements in art, politics, religion and health care. Oral tradition in essence, almost always tends to capture cultural reality and covers a wide range of subject matter and can be found in a variety of forms. The form of oral tradition is determined more by its functional character than its oral nature.

Although written history existed for centuries in Africa, most of the writing was in Arabic, and the majority of the people did not read or write Arabic. The transmission of knowledge, history and experience in Africa was therefore mainly through oral tradition and performance rather than written texts. Oral traditions guide social and human morals, giving people a sense of place and purpose. Brown (1999, pp. 1–3) adds that oral performances have been important features in African society since the development of the first communities.

4.2 History of storytelling in Africa

For thousands of years, as man evolved, stories were used to pass on what wisdom and knowledge had been accumulated. Tobin and Snyman (2004, pp. 34–35) state that stories and storytelling help to define our humanity.

According to Moss and Mazikana (1986, p. 2) oral traditions are those recollections of the past, orally transmitted and recounted, that arise naturally within and from the dynamics of a culture. They are shared widely throughout the culture by word of mouth even though they may be entrusted to particular people for safekeeping, transmission, recitation, and narration. They are organic expressions of the identity,

purpose, functions, customs, and generational continuity of the culture in which they occur. They happen spontaneously as phenomena of cultural expression. They exist, and indeed they have existed, in the absence of written texts or other more sophisticated recording devices. They are not direct experiences of the narrators, and they must be transmitted by word of mouth to qualify as oral tradition.

Oral communication normally requires at least two people, one to speak and another to listen. In the oral tradition, members of the community, most often the old and young must spend time together. Oral tradition therefore reinforces interpersonal relationships, or social bonds, at many levels. For example, a story might communicate the importance of relationships, while the process of sharing a story reinforces the same value. Much of the oral communication traditionally took place during labour-based activities or rituals. Sometimes specific oral communication required a particular activity in order to convey its full meaning. For example, the sights, sounds, smells, and physical experience of digging up a particular root at a specific time of the year, in combination with observation of spiritual prayers or rituals surrounding the activity, teach much more than a description of what to do. Much of the wisdom from the oral tradition involves this kind of sensory, experiential knowledge.

According to Moss and Mazikana (1986, p. 12) the most respected person in traditional African society was the man or woman who kept the stories. This person, the Griot, was the oral historian and educator.

Long ago, the guardians of oral traditions enjoyed leadership status and were often considered “wise” women and men. Other tellers were renowned entertainers and early “motivational speakers” who could mesmerize crowds of kings and commoners alike. They did not simply tell a story; rather they created an experience that evoked emotions from the listener. They made an impression; changed a mood; transmitted values; inspired listeners to action; and catapulted groups over significant challenges.

The Griot was responsible for maintaining the connection between the cultural or historical past, and the present, and they also had to have knowledge of the society

in which they were created, the purposes for their existence, the manner of transmission and preservation, and the circumstances of their narration or recitation.

As a storyteller and oral historian, the Griot was the social memory of the community and the holder of the word. Thus, Griots were the keepers of the important events of their time. It was their responsibility to pass this knowledge to future generations.

Originally the Griots were court musicians who sang at weddings, naming ceremonies, and religious celebrations. They later evolved into advisors to the nobility and messengers to the community. They sung songs of praise for their leaders and recounted the great deeds of ancestors. Griots were also ambassadors, negotiators, mediators and advocates of the king to his allies and noble families. They were rewarded for their service to individuals and the community.

Griots have been practicing their craft for hundreds of years and came to be known and described as the all-seeing, all-knowing eyes of society. There was a spiritual and ethical dimension to their performances and it was believed that supernatural forces are released through the spoken or musical part of their performance.

The Griotte was a female storyteller. She traditionally sung at ceremonies, celebrations, and special occasions. When a woman is married, a Griotte will sing to her to prepare her for her new life. West African women sing about a woman's role in society and their relationships with husbands and in-laws. Griottes also use songs to express their independence and self-reliance or to give comfort, encouragement, and empowerment to other women.

The period of transition between storytellers of different generations poses a possible challenge within the African oral tradition because the older informs the younger. This is particularly concerning because the storyteller holds the cultural wisdom of a society.

Rimer (1986, p. 50) explains that, when the transition from one generation to another takes place in the traditional performing arts, the connections between those involved function in terms of the restrictions and conventions of the cultural philosophy. This has a consequence in affecting the people's collective cultural memory and way of life.

To counter the possible challenge posed by the transition, some stories in the oral tradition, such as those about creation or the reasons for spiritual ceremonies, are passed on with scrupulous exactness. These old stories hold essential cultural teachings. Some stories are a method of prayer. Certain sacred stories are traditionally never told to a person from outside one's own group. Elders are the living memory of their community. Past generations depend upon Elders to pass along their stories, and future generations depend on the young to learn and remember the Elders' knowledge. Each generation is like a link in a chain that connects past to future. Dupree (2003) agrees that, in this way, the elders in primarily oral societies were the custodians of a community's culture.

African folktales are inundated by animal tales. When we consider the many animal tales that have been collected from Africa, the main factor that has struck most observers is the great emphasis on animal tricksters; small, wily, and tricky animals who cheat and outdo the larger and more powerful beasts. They trick them in a pretended tug-of-war, cheat them in a race, deceive them into killing themselves or their own relations, gobble up their opponents' food in pretended innocence, divert the punishment for their misdeeds on to innocent parties, and perform a host of other ingenious tricks (Finnegan 1995, p. 344).

Finnegan (1995, p. 345) mentions that besides the leading animal figures, there are also many others who come into the tales in secondary roles. Some of the stock characters associated with them are common to many areas: the lion, strong and powerful but not particularly bright; the elephant, heavy, ponderous, and rather slow; the hyena, the type of brute force and stupidity constantly duped by the small quick animals; the leopard, untrustworthy and vicious, often tricked in spite of his cunning; the little antelope, harmless and often clever; the larger deer, stupid and slow.

The animals act like human characters, experiencing human emotions. And yet the fact that they are also animals is not altogether lost sight of (Finnegan 1995, p. 346).

One of the obvious points in these stories is just the sheer entertainment afforded by the description of the amusing antics of various animals, and they are often told to audiences of children. The fact that most of the animals portrayed are well known to the audience; their appearance, their behaviour, their calls, so often amusingly

imitated by the narrator, adds definite wit and significance that is lost when rendered for readers unfamiliar with this background (Finnegan 1995, p. 350).

Hutchison (Banham 2004, p. 320) introduces the sophistication of genre as an element of the oral tradition of storytelling. As in all performing arts disciplines, Hutchison notes that oral forms are often divided into genres. These genres include stories, songs and dances that may be further divided into praise poetry, work songs, love lyrics, wedding songs, lullabies, children's verses, riddles and prayers. These genres, however, are rarely performed exclusively.

This sophistication of genre is supported by Nogueira (2003, p. 164) who writes that, "[there exists] a vast system of forms and modes of communication in the oral tradition which congregates knowledge, memories, values, and symbols generally configured in linguistic objects of non-literary or aesthetic-literary nature, accomplished vocally and recognizable collectively and during consecutive generations."

4.3 Contextualising storytelling in South Africa

Hutchison writes that storytelling is a form central to all southern African societies, called *litsomo* or *dishomo* in Sesotho, *inganekwane* in isiZulu and *iintsomi* in isiXhosa. It includes fables and moral tales. In South Africa there are formulae used by both the narrator and audience for starting and ending folktales (Banham 2004, p. 320).

Most of South Africa's cultures have transferred knowledge through oral tradition, where history, knowledge and philosophies have been passed from generation to generation by storytelling. These stories fall into two main categories; the conveyance of history of knowledge (current or historical), and telling fictional stories that convey social messages and abstract cultural beliefs, such as beliefs about the natural world and spiritual. The second type is known as folklore or fairy tales.

South African folktales are acutely influenced by the natural environment and often revolve around animals, seasons, weather and landscape of Southern Africa. The beliefs about some animals passed on through certain stories even resulted in these

animals being considered sacred by some cultures, and sometimes hunting them was prohibited or restricted by those cultures. Tales are rooted in nature elements and the animal kingdom. At the heart of the folklore is the necessity to communicate the need for generosity and cooperation between people.

There are also a few other favourite trickster characters who occur often enough in stories but without any clear-cut geographical domain: the little antelope, often portrayed as innocently ingenious; the squirrel, the wren and a few with more purely local reference: the small weasel who appears among the Zulu and Xhosa, most often apparently personified as a small boy; and the jackal trickster in Khoi animal stories, as well as in some Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho tales. Though all these trickster figures tend to get up to the same kinds of tricks in story after story, they cannot altogether be compared to each other. The spider, for instance, though often wily, is also, in some areas at least, depicted as stupid, gluttonous, boastful, and ineffective, not infrequently outdone by his own wife. There are also instances of the same image being applied to the tortoise. On the other hand, the sly effectiveness of the hare is what we notice in most Bantu tales. All these tricksters, however, are adaptable. They are able to turn any situation, old or new, to their advantage (Finnegan 1995, pp. 344–345).

According to Hutchison, elderly women are usually the storytellers in Tsonga or Ronga societies, but men may also tell stories. Riddles and proverbs, which are often included in everyday speech, are highly valued and give the narrator greater status if cleverly interwoven in the tales. Early African literature was influenced by traditional storytelling in the plot, characters, moral themes and endings. It has also shaped the rich metaphoric language and imagery used in contemporary South African theatre, (Banham 2004, p. 320).

Hutchison states that the naming of an object may signal a particular kind of story. During the narration the narrator may sing songs, which the audience picks up in refrain. If the songs are unknown to the audience, the narrator teaches them. The songs are often a magic formula that produces a specific occurrence. These tales are traditionally narrated at night around the fires when everyone has finished their work and before they sleep. In Ronga society, it is taboo to relate tales during the day (Banham 2004, p. 320).

In South Africa, praise poems (*isibongo*) are composed by praise poets (*iimbongi*, singular *imbongi*, in Nguni (Xhosa, Zulu and Swati) whenever an occasion arises or whenever there is something to recite an isibongo about. An imbongi can compose a praise poem about virtually anything. For example, there may be praise poems about people, animals, natural phenomena, important events (good or bad), life and death. One may find isibongo of censure, elegiac ones, besides ones of real praise. Isibongo are composed on the spur of the moment. An imbongi wears a special dress, usually animal skins, and a hat called *isidlokolo* in Xhosa. A praise poet may be a special imbongi for a chief or king. The only qualification that one needs is expertise in praise singing, this is a form of storytelling.

South Africa's oral traditions serve to unite communities, and preserve societal ties and ideologies. In this way, they are fluid and never static. Oral storytelling in the culture is a pathway to pride, to identity and to preserving culture in a country that fears losing its roots to Western influence.

Storytelling has been used in conflict situations. In a nation like South Africa, storytelling has another purpose to serve, namely to heal, reconcile, and bear testimony to the experiences under apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a national platform for people to tell their stories. It was an important model for socio-political transformation for the nation.

4.4 Aspects of storytelling

In studying oral tradition, scholars have found that certain characteristics and elements have to be present in order for it to qualify as oral tradition. For storytelling to happen there must be three elements fused together: the story, the storyteller and the audience who are listening to the story.

I. **Story**: The story is the full sequence of events as we assume them to have occurred in their order, duration and frequency. The story is the abstractly conceived "raw material" of events which we reconstruct from the finished arrangement of the plot (Baldick 2008, p. 317).

II. **Storyteller**: One who tells the story in a given narrative. A storyteller is a performer who recounts directly to the audience a summary of events preceding or during a scene or act (Baldick 2008, p. 220).

III. **Audience**: The group of people who have gathered to watch or listen to the story.

4.4.1. The story

Stories are a medium for sharing and a vehicle for assessing and interpreting events, experiences and concepts to an audience. Through stories we explain how things are, why they are, and our role and purpose within them. They are the building blocks of knowledge and can be viewed as the foundation of memory and learning. Stories link past, present, and future and telling stories is an intrinsic and essential part of human experience. Stories can be told in a wide variety of ways, which can be broadly categorised as oral, written and visual. They are so all-pervasive in our everyday lives that we are not always aware of their role as a tool of communication. In *Healing through remembering* (2005, p. 5) it is stated that a story or narrative in its broadest sense is anything that is told or recounted, normally in the form of a casually linked set of events or happenings, whether true or fictitious.

In *The Lost Art of Storytelling*, Beam (2012) describes a story as something that should resonate with our core values while simultaneously creating cultural buzz. Guber (2007) notes that sometimes, a well-crafted story can even transform a seemingly hopeless situation into an unexpected triumph.

The process of structuring experiences into stories is known as storying. The form of a story is its communicative structure and meaning. Constructing stories has been called, is one of the most fundamental means of making meanings; as such, it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning.

According to Kurz (2014, p. 15), a story works because it fits our cultural expectations of what a narrative ought to be like. Within those expectations, many

structural and stylistic nuances of setting, character, plot, value, conflict and theme can be used to produce particular effects for the story's intended audience.

The key to a good story is structure. The Structure needs to be sharp and planned. A basic story structure consists of a beginning, middle and end. The storyteller needs to ensure that the story presents a chain of logic designed to prove its core assertion. Each event and action must be pertinent and in keeping with the subject and tone of the story.

Narratives have configurable episodes that all consist of beginning, middle and end:

- The Beginning

The beginning sets the tone and mood for the story and hints at the surprises that lie ahead by raising the right questions in the minds of the audience.

- The Middle

A story moves progressively forward to a final action. The events become bigger and better and their excitement and involvement gradually increase as the story moves forward. Each event and action needs to be pertinent and in keeping with the subject and tone of the story.

- The End

The end is usually a reiteration of the core assertion of the story. In many stories, this is done by hammering home the assertion with a 'key feature', which could be anything from a phrase to a visual, or many visuals, to one last event that sets the impression. All or many issues are hopefully, or at least temporarily, resolved in the end of a story.

Within the basic structure - beginning, middle and end. Other essential elements of storying include characters, setting, plot, conflict and resolution.

Every culture has its own set of tales and passes it on from generation to generation by word of mouth. The purpose of these stories was varied and complex, and included stories concerning the creation of the earth and the cosmos, the creation of humans, their trials and death, moral lessons, religion, and tales told purely for entertainment.

4.4.2The storyteller (Narrator)

The ability to visualize, create images in the mind, is at the very heart of storytelling, not just for the listener, but also for the teller. To create the visualization and images in the listener's mind; the storyteller must have a clear visual image in their own mind. The artistic ability of the storyteller is determined by the manner in which the audience participates. Green (Sirayi 2000, p. 48) points out that the storyteller's presentation is aided by the audience, whose responses motivate the storyteller. The audience has an impact on the outcome of the story. Through imagination, the minds of the audience are carried to an unknown world, full of positive and negative lessons.

The storyteller is typically face to face with his audience and can take advantage of this to enhance the impact and even the content of his words. Storytellers know how to captivate the audience with more than just words. They use gestures, singing, facial expression, and impersonations to arouse the audience. They can add a sense of drama, careful timing, appropriate voices, and sustain a dynamic relationship with the audience. Experienced storytellers narrate the story using repetition, rhythm, imagery, proverbs, and similes. The use of repetition helps the audience remember the chorus and join in with the storyteller. Using short phrases makes the stories easier to understand and memorize. When the audience is familiar with the story, they actively participate. Storytellers are at once the weavers of fantasy, the keepers of genealogies, and the keepers of history, wisdom-sayers and spinners of ideas.

Sometimes masks and costumes are used to enhance a performance. A storyteller performs epics that can be hours or even days long that relate to the history and genealogy, battles and political uprisings of a community. They use riddles, proverbs and myths to educate and entertain. Storytelling is an important shared event with people sitting together, listening and even participating in accounts of past deeds, beliefs, taboos, and myths.

The talents of a mature storyteller are naturally more fully developed than those of a youthful storyteller. An old storyteller, by drawing on the richness of his own personal experience, can reach the fullest flowering of his talent.

Storytellers expressing their stories in a professional context may, for personal reasons, omit details of a story, exaggerate it or even make some of it up. This can be influenced by the role of the listener, whether they are distracted and indifferent or engaged and interested.

Guber (2007) insists that the storyteller must enter the hearts of their audience where their emotions live. Sharing emotion demands generosity on the part of the storyteller, because it often requires being vulnerable. Being true to self also involves showing and sharing emotion. The spirit that motivates most great storytellers is 'I want you to feel what I feel,' and the effective narrative is designed to make this happen.

This journey which may result in an altered state of mind and heart on the part of the listener, is the essence of storytelling. Listeners must remain curious and in suspense; wondering what's going to happen next, while trusting that it is safe to give themselves over to the journey and that the destination will be worthwhile.

There can be no doubt, as mentioned in *Storytelling as Performance*, that no matter how good a performer a story teller may be, unless they are able to tailor their material to suit the needs of a given audience they will fail in their objective. It is not necessarily the raw material of the story that may be inappropriate but rather the way it is adapted and how it is delivered, which makes for successful communication to any given audience.

According to Benjamin (Wilson 2006, p. 56) a 'great storyteller will always be rooted in the people'. Benjamin identifies the storyteller as a subversive, an artisan whose job it is to offer meaningful narratives as a way of developing strategies for change. The storyteller is not only a community's link with its past history; it is a connection with its future.

4.4.3The audience

According to Sandström (2010) an audience is a gathering of people who in some way interact with an artistic expression in any form. Sandström (2010) argues that there is no specific audience because one can be part of a narrative performance whether one likes it or not. One does not have to interact directly, but one can in some way be part of the performance.

The type of audience can affect the presentation of a story. The storyteller may omit obscenities, certain types of jokes, or complex forms in the presence of a young audience. There is no escape for the oral artist from a face to face confrontation with his audience, and this is something which he or she can exploit as well as be influenced by. Sometimes he or she chooses to involve the listeners directly, as in storytelling situations where it is common for the storyteller to open with a formula which explicitly arouses his audience's attention.

If storytelling is a skill that is both inherent to humans and one that can be polished with practice, so is listening. Listening is the companion skill to storytelling as the story arises in the space between the teller and the listener. In essence, a story *needs* a listener or audience to become what it can be.

The role of the audience is vital in creating the conditions for performance. The audience is a creative force in a dyadic relationship, where they may either suggest, inform or encourage performers to incorporate new elements in their acts, address new issues, add new content and adopt new forms (Harding 2002).

It is necessary to have an idea of who your audience would be. While some stories can be enjoyed by young and old, others are aimed at specific age groups. The storyteller needs to communicate with the audience through an audible voice, eye contact and gestures. The degree of interaction with the audience depends on an individual storyteller. In African storytelling, the audience is closely involved in participating in the story and give back to the storyteller by clapping, dancing or repeating a refrain. "Throughout the performance there are favourable and unfavourable reactions, the spectators functioning as immediate critics" (Schipper 1982, pp. 11–12).

Sandström (2010)states that members of an audience interact with others in the process of negotiation, selection and conflict. The drive of the audiences is built on expectations of what they may acquire from contact with the storyteller. Their expectations may include intellectual challenge, aesthetic stimulation, moral instruction, emotional experiences, or entertainment. In this sense, storytelling can offer a totality of expressions.

Members of the audience too need not confine their participation to silent listening or mere acceptance of the chief performer's invitation to participate, they may also in some circumstances break into the performance with additions, queries, or even criticisms.

Pavis writes that, "the spectator touches with her eyes, her body is only immobile and passive in appearance, it imitates tactility and gesturality internally. Understanding can only occur if movements are re-played on an imaginary level and bodily schemata are activated." (2003, p. 154).

Conversely the opening formulas serve to rouse the interest of the audience, sometimes eliciting a formal response from them as well as setting the mood for the start of the narration. Tellers end their stories with various stylized forms, usually a wish for the narrator and audience (Finnegan 1995, p. 380).

In all this the participation of the audience is essential. It is common for members of the audience to make verbal contributions, spontaneous exclamations, pose questions, echo the speaker's words, and react to the development of yet another parallel and repetitious episode. Further, the audience contributes the choruses of the songs so often introduced into the narration, and without which, in many cases, the stories would be only a bare framework of words.

The role of the audience is vital in creating the conditions for performance (Harding 2002, p. 4). The expectations of the audience are triggered by the visual and/or aural presentation, by their knowledge of the history of that character and by their own personal circumstances, needs and preferences.

The spectator serves as a psychological and empathetic collaborator in the maintenance of the fictive world of the performance. They are taken out of themselves and become, for the time, part of an ad hoc collective consciousness,

ready to find meaning and significance in the events taking place in the story (Bennet 1997, p. 139).

Audiences can respond cognitively and emotionally in predefined categories of approval, disapproval, arousal or passivity. Audience interaction with the performance may enhance it, but it is not meant nor allowed to become part of its definition. A performance can activate a diversity of responses, but it is the audience which finally ascribes meaning and usefulness to any cultural product.

Harding (2002) points out that the audience is a creative force in a two-way relationship, where they may suggest, inform or encourage performers to incorporate new elements in their acts, address new issues, approach new audiences and adopt new forms. The narratives engage the attention of both the narrators and the audience. As the narrator tells the story, they accompany it with various paralinguistic devices such as gesticulations and facial movements. The audience, for its part, identifies with the plights of the characters or at least adopts a critical attitude towards their behaviour. Audience members also frequently laugh, exclaim, make comments, and do various other things to participate fully in the narrative experience (Okpewho 1992, p. 108).

4.5 Mhlophe's adoption of African storytelling

Mhlophe, as a storyteller, uses storytelling to pass on knowledge, teach and entertain as part of African oral tradition. By so doing, it demonstrates that she has not abandoned the ways of African oral tradition but has adopted the form.

Mhlophe has expressed her passion for storytelling and preserving the African oral tradition on many occasions. Speaking at the KwaZulu Natal Museum, for example, she said:

> The chain must not be broken. The old people didn't tell us stories to hide them under the chair; they told them to pass them on to the next generation and hopefully they will do the same (Steirn 2013).

Storytelling is usually low-tech in terms of light, sound, set, props and costume (Wilson 2006, p. 8). Mhlophe, like in the olden days, relies purely on her voice and body gestures, and because of that, she can perform under a tree or standing on top of a building, keeping her costume to a minimal, "So I don't call it costume… costume is for theatre to me it is simply the way I dress, the way I present myself… that I am a proud African the way I'm dressed" (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

> You can give me the smallest stage like the size of a dining-room table…you can give me a massive stage in a big main theatre at the Market Theatre I'll take it or put me under the tree and give me 50 people, I'm okay with it. Or you put me on a massive stage with 2000 people, I'll take it. So for me the size doesn't matter…what I create are the images and the atmosphere in the mind of the audience. It's not about the stage…leave that for the theatre world, because a storyteller delivers the images and puts them in the mind of the audience (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Although oral tradition primarily centres or relies on the human voice, music is another integral part of oral tradition in African societies (Omotoso 2009, pp. 174–175). Mhlophe often intersperses her stories with song and/or dance, while her audiences enthusiastically clap along with the rhythm of the story. Her passion and love for her art shines through in every performance, which is why she continues to draw capacity audiences of all ages, races and cultures.

Song is one of the most important techniques in the creation and performance of storytelling. Apart from contributing to the development of structural patterns and the development of the story, song is usually used as a communication technique between characters, especially human and non-human characters. Lastly, the song, like the story, is used to entertain and to educate the audience (Sirayi 2012, pp. 52–53).

Songs are characteristic of African tales all over the continent. They do not occur in every story, and in some cases there are local distinctions between 'prose' and 'choric' stories. But songs are infinitely more common than would appear from a cursory reading of the published collections (Finnegan 1995, p. 385).

The song in the story is employed to entertain and educate the audience. Songs can be used to report and comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mould public opinion.

Storytellers usually work from a repertoire, in the same way that a singer or musician may. Storytellers rarely work with a director or a choreographer, but they do often choreograph themselves or prepare carefully for an event as actors do. Wilson (2006, p. 40) explains that storytellers hold stories in repertoire for years, constantly recycling material. Mhlophe, as a professional storyteller, is also a repertoire-based performer. Her performances rely primarily on the vocal dynamic, but are punctuated by hand movements, gestures and facial expressions. It is also interspersed with jokes and local topical references. She addresses the audience directly, the audience feels involved in the performance, as if they have contributed, as opposed to having been performed at.

Storytellers sometimes involve the audience in their storytelling. A regularly used technique to achieve this is throwing questions to the audience in order to open up the performance to audience participation; a technique that has proved phenomenally successful. The audience responds to questions and comments with approval and even fairly complex analysis of the issues (Harding 2002, p. 316).

In adopting this, Mhlophe often makes use of the technique of ‘call-and-response’ employed in African praise poetry. She would call out a word or phrase and encourage the audience to respond with a set word or phrase, repeating this, three or four times to draw in and rouse the audience.

Cooper (2005, p. 192) says oral traditions are generally stories about the past that local communities produce and reproduce through oral performative transmission, as a means of preserving their own history and consolidating or contesting a sense of belonging and identity. Cooper (2005) adds that oral traditions often begin with myths of creation and go on to provide tales that make-up answers about the origins of communities. He further explains that these oral traditions frequently celebrate the achievements of more or less legendary heroes of the cultures; and that they are dramatic and episodic.

Myths are also educative in that they teach people, especially the younger ones, the meaning of the universe and man's place in it. They place the world before us as an object of indifferent investigation, a world to be known not just as an abstracted object but as a holistic entity.

People can look down upon the folktales, but their catchy expressions can lead them in the right direction. If people use tales to adjust to the present circumstances, their chances of success are better than ever. The folktales are big whistle-blowers which keep people under control. They serve as building blocks for correct thinking. The performance of folktales gives African people awareness of themselves in a way no other subject can (Mphasha 2015, p. 300). Even if folktales have been handed down from one generation to the other, they still fully satisfy the demands of modern society. Folktales have been servicing communities in the past and will continue to do so as long as the communities exist.

> I tell stories that are from my background…I had a very good storyteller of a grandmother…so the stories from Zulu and Xhosa background…Nguni culture…the traditional folktales, but also because I'm a writer, I write a lot of stories. If I feel like there's a message I want to put across, then I write a story to put that message across, in the idiom of African folktales (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Folktales and fables are among the oldest forms of expression by which cultural values, beliefs and wisdom have been instilled in the young. Storytelling dates back to the time before written sources came into being.

The functions that stories serve within a particular society, the historical setting in which they were created, and the immediate context in which they are shared, influence the story themes, language, and style.

CHAPTER 5

ADAPTATION OF THE AFRICAN STORYTELLING TRADITION

With modern living and the arrival of radio and television, oral storytelling as a community activity declined. This downward turn changed during the early 1970s when there was a renewed interest in the art of storytelling, as many storytellers began to be influenced by the oral narrative tradition (Wilson 2006). Storytelling clubs, societies, competitions and festivals promoted the revival, which brought storytelling to the fore as a performative art form. In South Africa this revival occurred in the 1980s. It was Gcina Mhlophe who rekindled the traditional art form and brought it into the public performance space.

South Africa is very rich in oral traditions. There is a great interest in safeguarding intangible heritage by collecting, recording and archiving memories of community members from different parts of the country. Conservation of these memories requires the use of oral history, testimonies and personal recollections of daily occurrences and routines. To this end, an effort has been made to record South Africa folklore in written form in recent years.

For many years, Mhlophe dreamt of establishing an oral history museum. In November 2015 she announced that a space in Pixley House in Durban had finally been secured for *Khumbulani* Memory House. She envisaged that the museum:

> …will give people a space to tell their stories […] there will be stories of triumph, loss, some personal history. It will be a place belonging to all South Africans, a place where young people can come and listen to stories of the past(Mhlophe in an interview with Sinkins, Durban, 11, June 2015).

At the oral history museum, Mhlophe plans to have recording booths for people to set down their stories, a digital archive and regular storytelling events (Sinkins, 2015).

Hutchison (Banham 2004, p. 321) states that people such as Mhlophe have reclaimed oral storytelling forms, particularly in the urban context. In 1992 she founded Zanendaba Storyteller, which aims to reintroduce storytelling, especially to

children. It is also evident in her more formal playwriting. Her first play, *Have you seen Zandile*? 1985, created collaboratively, draws on these storytelling traditions as she relates her own childhood.

In her pursuit to preserve the tradition of the oral African storytelling tradition, Mhlophe has adapted the performative genre across multiple disciplines and platforms. Mhlophe is contributing to the preservation of the art of African oral tradition in South Africa by employing the elements and techniques of storytelling art using different mediums such as print, live, on screen and radio.

5.1 Adaptation through writing

In an era of written communication, it has become increasingly important to ensure that stories are not lost as the younger generations lose interest in hearing and telling stories. Organisations such as the Southern African Folklore Society have been established to promote the study of these stories and to ensure that the wisdom of South African folklore does not disappear from human memory.

Storytelling seeks to evoke a time and place, along with the person or people who live there. The best writing brings emotional depth and visual imagery to the description of a setting or event. Writers aim to provide an enjoyable reading experience, filling their stories with journeys and conflicts that test their characters. Heroes have to make choices and learn from their mistakes. Readers enjoy tales for many reasons, including vicarious pleasure and personal enrichment.

With Mhlophe, orality and literacy intersect continuously. Unlike storytellers of the past who did not use the written word, Mhlophe's use of the written word adds a new dimension to her expressive range.

Mhlophe has written and published numerous stories that include S*tories of Africa: Our story magic* (2006); *Hi Zoleka* (2002); *Horns only* (2002); *The snake with seven heads* (1989); *The singing dog* (1992); *MaZanendaba* (1995)*;* and *How stories began* (1996).

According to Showkat Ahmad (2015, p. 2) literature has two roles, an active, engaging role and a passive, reflective role. The active role represents the very action of reading. This role is a significant part of an individual's development. From reading an individual forms ideas and concepts about the world in which they live. These ideas and concepts combine together to form an ideology of sort. From this ideology stems individual motivation, action, and engagement. This is true for Mhlophe's written works which unpack the ideas and concepts of the world we live in.

The second role is distinguishable from the first in that it is a thing observed, rather than a thing done. The reflective role of literature is to show society the history of ideologies, of thought and of action. It allows the individual to understand how a society functioned and why it functioned that way. "Literature is thought provoking; it allows us to raise questions and gives us a deeper understanding of issues and situation (Showkat Ahmad 2015, p. 2). It is capable of bringing about different emotions and a general sense of spiritual well-being. Mhlophe confesses that she loves history and books.

Mhlophe has written many short stories that are both filled with cultural themes and universal themes. Most of Mhlophe's stories are packed with moral lessons that don't only apply to children but also to adults. Most of these storytelling themes deal with greed. As Mhlophe states;

> …They deal with people being unfair to each other. Or jealous or people exercising power when they shouldn't be so horrible to each other. And also you find [that] they deal with marriages…how people treat each other in marriages. Or the way people treat each other as parents to their children. Or children believing a particular way to what their parents think. And even when African people used animals…you know that those animals were acting out parts that were part and parcel of our lives (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

The language in Mhlophe's work is always in simple text but adults get to enjoy the subtexts and meanings. It's filled with descriptive details of the setting and characters. The African storytelling tradition is about sharing knowledge, wisdom,

love, lived experience and hope for a better tomorrow. Thus, children's earliest experience with such literature is of the utmost importance.

To this end, Mhlophe travels with her Nozincwadi reading show to donate books and tell stories to rural schools, townships and other disadvantaged communities to encourage literacy in the country. Creative participation in children's literature is the best training for literacy and taking pleasure in inferring and discovering. Mhlophe encourages children to read and awaken their curiosity, share knowledge and activate their imagination.

Mhlophe's written stories are mostly accompanied by images and illustrations. Images can provide a stress-free beginning. Practising the skill of visual literacy means searching for meanings in images, and interpreting what the pictures tell you. For example in *MaZanendaba*, the text is filled with images, and these images on their own tell a story of the journey MaZanendaba embarked on in search of stories to share with her children.

> MaZanendaba had many children whom she loved dearly. Her husband was a big, strong man who carved beautiful figures from stone and wood. But Mazanendaba was very sad. She so much wanted to tell her children stories, but nobody knew any stories. People worked, had their meals, and sat quietly round the fire at night before going to bed. Nothing interesting ever happened (Mhlophe 1995, p. 1).

The use of images and illustrations in most of Mhlophe's short story books shows that they are as important as the written word. There is interplay between images and words in Mhlophe's short story books. Images may influence or manipulate the reader. Images become a key to unlock new understanding. Authors leave gaps to fill with the confidence that the young reader will be an imaginative, tolerant and creative addressee, giving time generously and with as yet few cultural prejudices. Literature is a highly expressive carrier of cultural meaning. For this reason, the attention to detail and accuracy in the pictures is of prime importance, along with the aesthetic value.

Draper & Freedman (2010, p. 6) argue that it is first and foremost necessary to motivate children to read because written stories help children connect prior

knowledge and experience with the larger world of the text. The sparkling, larger-than-life illustrated characters of children's stories can help them find meaning in, and understand stories. Written stories promote reading comprehension in children and adults alike.

With this medium, Mhlophe manages to reach a wider South African and international audience. Her works have been translated into German, Swahili, Japanese, French and Italian. Because representation matters to Mhlophe, her books have also been translated into South African languages such as isiZulu, Xitsonga, isiXhosa, Tshivenda and Setswana.

> I'm a writer, I write a lot of stories. If I feel like there's a message I want to put across, then I write a story to put that message across, in the idiom of African folktales (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Utley (2007) says repetition is a central part of oral tradition; the words are heard many times throughout a person's life and stories are told and retold. Eventually they become an integral part of an individual's sense of identity and everyday life. The words are then passed on to younger generations in the same fashion. Oral storytelling emphasizes repetition of language and rhythm, which are two of its most important characteristics. Storytellers often repeat words, phrases, refrains, sounds, whole lines and even stanzas. The use of repetition helps the audience to remember and allows them to join in with the storyteller. For example in *Moonlight Magic*, one of Mhlophe's published short story, we see the following phrases or words repeated.

> Mpophoma nawe Nyanga!
> Ngiyazithodakinina
> Ngicelingane,Hemh!Hemh!
>
> Oh Waterfall and you Moon!
> I humble myself before you
> Asking for a baby, Hemh! Hemh! (Mhlophe 2006, pp. 41–42)

The storyteller has the role of preserving not only the art of storytelling but [also] the appreciation of language. She helps the people learn about how things were done in the past and how they can be carried into a more contemporary lifestyle by using the values carried in those stories.

5.2 Adaptation through radio

A radio is an early device that allowed people to listen to music, news, stories and sports. In areas where access to technology is expensive, radio continues to play an important role in information sharing.

Radio is effective in not only informing the community, but also in creating awareness regarding many social issues and the need for social reformation, developing interest and initiating action. According to Nwagbara and Nwagbara (Nwagbara & Nwagbara 2017), having a radio around helps to create a positive climate for growth and development.

Radio, as a sound-based medium, has always been seen as a more natural home for storytelling. Certainly as early as the 1950s, storytelling, in the form of oral testimony was being used in radio (Wilson 2006, p. 37). Today, millions of people listen to the radio every day in their cars, on their smart phones, and over the internet.

A storyteller on radio depends solely on their voice. Their voice is their tool. Because they cannot be seen, they can only be heard and imagined. And their voice plays the major role; without voice you cannot tell stories on this medium. The way storytellers tell stories, should evoke the imagination and interest of the listeners to pay attention.

A storyteller working in this medium is responsible for managing his voice by engaging in voice practice. He may practice accents and tones to master the skill of voice versatility. Practice also helps the storyteller avoid voice strain. As Mhlophe has said:

> …if there needs to be sounds, if there needs to be waves of the ocean, if there needs to be thunder and lightning, I create all of that ,So you've

> got to use your imagination in such a way that it creates a power-point presentation in the minds of the audience (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

You can make your subject sound tedious and boring by the sound of your voice. Or you can make it sound colourful and exciting by the sound of your voice. The voice is more than powerful. The voice and how you use it, is just as important as anything else. It binds the audience, expresses emotions and reflects confidence. Speech becomes interesting and allows the teller to draw the attention of a listener. Voice brings clarity in communication.

> The number of times I have heard people saying they were listening to me telling a story on the radio and they could see everything I was talking about; because I am not just sitting on a chair and just saying the words and telling them nice, I'm in full flight – I'm in full performance, even though I am in studio. It's like listening to alive recording of your favourite musician; even if you were not there, you start visualizing that live recording (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Storytellers create the tone and style of the narration to establish a relationship with their listeners. A good radio storyteller knows how to captivate and engage their audience. It is important that you understand and relate to your audience so that they can relate to you. Keeping yourself informed about the latest news and trends so that your audience can connect with you.

Radio is an intimate medium, one must try to address ones audience as himself or herself as much as possible rather than referring to them as "listeners". One should never pluralise ones audience as this will break the bond between them and their listener. One should always present as if one is talking to themselves. Listeners are usually multi-tasking and only half-listening, so you must know how to get their attention. Mhlophe calls her listeners friends.

You can make a conscious decision about your vocal style, decide how you want to come across with enthusiasm, belief, passion and tenacity. The sound of your voice will create feeling and atmosphere.

A storyteller has to bring out the personality of a character through his voice. The ability to tweak your voice to suit a particular character or mimic other people or sounds is important. A storyteller also needs to know how to alter the pitch of their voice depending on the temperament of a scene such as loud or soft tones. The quality of voice of a storyteller also helps in enticing the audience. What radio tries to capture, since the day it was invented, is the listener's imagination. Once this is captured, a person's attention is held. Mhlophe is able to do this and more with her vocal techniques such as tone, pauses and emphasis. This skill is important in transmitting and understanding the emotions portrayed in the story and the relationships between characters.

Since radio reaches a wide array of areas covering many households and reaching many individuals at a given time, Mhlophe saw it fit to use this medium to keep the art of storytelling alive. Even illiterate people can listen to radio, in contrast to newspapers, which require that the audience be literate to use and enjoy the content. Through doing storytelling on radio, Mhlophe uses this medium to awaken the listener's imagination.

Radio has remained popular today, amid the rise of new and interactive media. This is because of radio's accessibility, reach, flexibility and its ability to leave something to the imagination.

5.3 Adaptation through the stage

In traditional performing arts, the stage is the place where all of the beauty and richness of human experience are given focus, and the changes brought about by human experience are made palpable, through the storyteller's skills in representing mankind's commonality (Rimer 1986, p. 49).

Stage is a designated space for the performance of productions. The stage serves as a space for actors or performers and a focal point for members of the audience.

It has already been mentioned that a very common context for telling stories is in the evening when the day's work is over. In some cases, this general pattern is even expressed as a definite rule. Stories are generally told in the evenings or at night

and that “a dramatic narrative can begin spontaneously in the family circle after a meal or on special occasions when the whole village is gathered around the fire” (Schipper 1982, p. 14).

Mhlophe performs her storytelling in any venue or location: small and large theatres, museums, class rooms, lecture rooms, libraries, festivals, convention centres and outdoors. Mhlophe has not only changed and expanded the context in which oral narratives are told, she has also changed the times in which they are told.

> Often I don’t know what the stage is going to look like unless it’s a festival or our festival as an organization as Gcina Masiko. You can give me the smallest stage like the size of a dining-room table…you can give me a massive stage in a big main theatre at the Market Theatre I’ll take it or put me under the tree and give me 50 people, I’m okay with it. Or you put me on a massive stage with 2000 people, I’ll take it. So for me the size doesn’t matter…what I create are the images and the atmosphere in the mind of the audience. It’s not about the stage…leave that for the theatre world, because a storyteller delivers the images and puts them in the mind of the audience (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Performing on stage is good for interaction. It brings people together from every corner of the world and helps build a bond among the audience.

> I like to interact with my audience. One of the first things I did when I left theatre and went into full time storytelling was asking for the lights to be up enough to see the audience. So that thing of knowing that the energy is going out and its coming back so there’s that constant energy (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

With Mhlophe’s stage performances, stories tend to be interactive, with both herself and the audience in collaboration and adjusting the details to fit the circumstances. Details are told as they’re remembered rather than in the order in which they happen.

To create a tangible and emotional connection with your audience when performing live on stage, one needs to make eye contact and go for the personal value. As a

storyteller, you must be able to take your audience on a journey. Your audience must be able to connect with you and the story. They must be able to suspend reality, not forced but because the storyteller strives for truth and people connect with the truth.

Your set should be built around your audience. From song choice to stories between songs, every decision should have a purpose. You need to develop the presence you create on stage and the image you project to the audience. You should be genuine, but remember that you are putting on a show.

As a storyteller, Mhlophe, like other stage performers, has to rehearse and practice her art. An important part of artistry is creating a distinguished sound. When practicing, one should find a common theme in one's songs and develop a unique style. Practice is the most important part of developing your storytelling abilities.

> I prepare for performances. It always depends on which story I want to tell or I am writing a brand new story as I want to present a particular message on that day. But when I am telling a story I have told before, I rehearse and prepare in terms of how I want to portray it and present it on this particular occasion. And sometimes you are not planning to go and perform but people pressurize and they say "give us a song" or "give us a poem" and then you stand up and you do it because you have a vault of stories. And so that is a wonderful thing to have instead of having 3 or 4 stories and then I have to rehearse them over and over again. You rehearse yes… but often, you stand up and deliver (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

On stage, the storyteller manipulates her voice, gaze, and body movement to shift among different roles in her story. She uses body movement to indicate her shift in roles from the narrator to the characters.

She moves around the stage to accommodate everyone. She is big on stage and visible, she repeats and emphasises words or phrases she wants the audience to remember. Repetition is important when telling stories.

In most of her stage performances, unlike other stage performers, Mhlophe does not need a microphone or megaphone, because her voice is sufficient, it's commanding. She mainly uses English, isiZulu and isiXhosa when performing.

Mhlophe does not only use stages to perform stories, she also uses them to conduct storytelling workshops and she mainly focuses on how to delve into one's own personal journeys, using the 'book of our lives' as a guide to create and tell stories.

5.4 Adaptation through film and television

Film is a story or event recorded by a camera as a set of moving images and shown in a cinema or on television. Films are a type of visual communication which use moving pictures and sound to tell stories. Films convey emotions to viewers or raise awareness about an issue.

It is frequently claimed in both popular writing (Mander 2005) and scientific literature (Greenfield & Beagles-Roos 1988) that television (TV) viewing hinders the development of the imagination. That said, TV reaches many audiences and builds conversations.

TV is a source of information or communication. It improves the world, raises curiosity, encourages education and gathers millions around common interests. Television is a fantastic educational tool. It broadens knowledge of different cultures, promotes tolerance and global understanding of international issues. Through current affairs, discovery, lifestyle, cooking shows and children's programmes, television encourages scientific and cultural curiosity.

For the reasons stated above, Mhlophe uses this medium as a storyteller.

When storytelling to a camera, your relationship with the viewer is far more intimate and it's important to be aware of this. When storytelling to camera your audience can see your face clearly and therefore every facial expression will be noticed. You therefore have to try to imagine that the camera lens is your friend and that you are engaging in a conversation with it, making sure you keep eye contact with the lens, remaining focussed and feeling confident but relaxed. This will come across in your facial expressions. This will make you appear more relaxed and in turn, make the viewer feel friendlier towards you, enabling them to trust you more easily.

TV is either pre-recorded or live. Although there might be 30 crew members standing around when a TV show is being filmed, sometimes there's literally no

audience present. The camera is there only to record. The storyteller has in mind her audience; it's just her and the camera. The audience at home can see her but cannot communicate with the teller. In this context, audiences can share their thoughts to their family members and spark a discussion that opens up new understanding.

Actors are told to never look directly into the camera lens unless specifically requested to do so by the director. But with a storyteller, since the viewer at home is the main audience and co-performer, the storyteller needs to look straight into the camera and connect with the viewer at home since the medium requires intimacy. But this is different when she has a studio audience; where she needs to entertain both audiences equally.

Mhlophe has not only adapted storytelling to the television medium, she also 'adapted' the audience. She can have a live audience and can have face to face interaction with the studio audience and still make the viewer at home feel equally important.

Mhlophe knows that there are long shots and close ups. When it's a long shot, her entire body performs but when it's close up, Mhlophe puts her thoughts and emotions on the face; she tones down her body gestures.

As she is performing, she educates while she entertains. She plays different roles, makes exaggerated facial expressions and hand gestures as she embodies her characters.

In television and film, cameras and microphones are perilously close and capture even the smallest gesture and sound, but the 'internals' for the actor are exactly the same as they would be for the stage, only their outward expression must be much subtler; so it is advisable to do less on television.

Storytelling on television requires telling the story as simply as possible using the body, the voice, and the face. Some people are wired to internalize emotion, meaning what they are feeling is not being revealed, whereas there are those who externalize who know what emotions look like but they don't connect with the intensity.

Over-enunciation on TV is an enemy, even if you're loud enough on stage, you still have to speak clearly and enunciate your words so the audience can understand you as well. But when stage storytellers bring that practice on camera it becomes distracting.

As the plot thickens, you would expect the voices to rise, but since the shots are liable to get tighter, you have to square the circle by getting more intense and quieter at the same time. When speaking at low levels, all other sounds seem too loud, so be aware of all footsteps, clattering cups, newspaper rustling even breathing. When speaking at low levels do not lose energy or adopt a slower pace.

As a storyteller using this medium, you must be comfortable when narrating, make sure you are breathing, because the camera can pick up anything, and if the camera can pick it up, so can the viewer. To come across as truthful and believable, one needs both talent and technique. Relax into your performance. You need to get out of your head and into your body. It's important to physically loosen your body. Remember to keep your eyes up. Eyes can be very effective. You need to have rehearsed very well because during the shoot you will be concentrating on all the new things, such as remembering camera angles and hitting marks.

TV plays a very important role in the building of a society. Its duty is to inform, educate and entertain. It is a powerful and flexible tool that influences the public to a great extent. Mhlophe uses this medium to that end.

Television can teach the young who are an important audience in Mhlophe's storytelling work.

Traditional storytelling differs from multi-media storytelling in that it is experienced within the mind and body of the audience. For example, the description of a dragon will be different for each audience member, while a visual representation will be more specific. Since traditional storytelling relies on the recipient's personal experience and imagination, it tends to be stronger in terms of impact (Tingöy et al. 2014).

According to Wilson (2006, pp. 6–7) storytelling manifests itself in many ways. It might be performance or workshop-based, it might be site-specific, it might be

centred on oral history, it might form part of a therapy programme or used as a teaching tool.

Storytelling is constantly developing and reinventing itself; a view widely believed by Mhlophe:

> Another thing we should be graduating to is having more animated African stories; that is the future, that is where we need to go to, to work towards convincing our government to put more money into animation so that those stories can live for many years to come. Animation has come at full force and our government has to put money in animation. Those stories should live for generations to come. Stories cut across culture and colour barriers and different backgrounds (Interview with Mhlophe, Pretoria, 25th February, 2018).

Stories make it easier to understand things as people can connect with them. Stories interrogate, bring understanding and motivate, hence Mhlophe uses different mediums to share her stories in order to reach more people. People in turn, will spark conversations about burning societal issues and help each other come up with solutions whilst also enjoying the stories as they learn. Mhlophe's transition from one medium to another is impeccable.

Stories can be oral, written, visual and digital. They can be communicated in various formats and in different voices. They communicate the physical through the body and verbal language, voice and intonation as well as the intellectual and emotional aspects of life. A good story combines the explicit with the tacit, the information with the emotion (Drumm 2013, p. 4).

In his thesis, Sirayi (2000, p. 71) states that within a family context, an old woman, usually a grandmother, tells oral narratives immediately after the lamps are put out. The old woman becomes a storyteller and the grandchildren become the audience. Gcina Mhlophe, who grew up in this tradition, has expanded the context in which oral narratives are told. She performs stories in public places to unfamiliar audience members. Because of this, Mhlophe is a custodian of language and preserver of culture. Her main goal is to awaken stories in others.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WRITTEN STORIES

6.1 Introduction

Mhlophe has written and published numerous stories and story collections. Amongst these are: *A Mother's search for stories* (1995)*; Stories of Africa: Our story magic* (2006); *Hi Zoleka* (2002); *Horns only* (2002); *The snake with seven heads* (1989); *The singing dog* (1992); *MaZanendaba* (1995)*;* and *How stories began* (1996).

She began her writing career around the same time she transitioned as a theatre actress and re-directed her career as a storyteller. Mhlophe's written stories are, I would argue, adapted from oral literature, as she does not view them, as mutually exclusive from her work as a storyteller. She, instead, views the two as fundamentally linked; the writing, an extension of herself as a storyteller and performer.

Mhlophe's strongly held view is affirmed by Finnegan when she writes:

> The significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition: for the nature of the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited. If we take forms like a [written story], the actual delivery is a significant aspect of the whole. Even though it is true that these instances may also exist in written form, they only attain their true fulfilment when actually performed (Finnegan 1995, p. 5).

It is because of this view that Mhlophe's stories have both been adopted and adapted from the African oral tradition.

Five works of Mhlophe have been selected for the purposes of analysing how she has adopted and adapted the African oral tradition. The selected works are; *Moonlight Magic (2006), Jojela's Wooden Spoon (2006), Tie Me Up! (2006), Dad Is Eating Ashes (2006), Singing Dog (1992) and Brave Ox Bhatom (2006)*. Five oral tradition elements will be analysed for the purposes of determining both their presence in the text, and how she has either adopted or adapted them. These

elements are; themes, characters, story beginnings, story endings and moral lessons.

6.2 Adoption of the oral tradition in Mhlophe's written stories.

The LEXICO dictionary defines 'adoption' as "the action or fact of choosing to take up, follow, or use something." By this definition we assess whether Mhlophe has actionably taken up the oral storytelling tradition in her written works.

6.2.1. Themes

This study has demonstrated that African oral storytelling is not just a tool of entertainment but also holds the collective memory and cultural achievements of society. To this end, traditional oral stories carry valuable moral lessons that awaken the commonality of particular themes. These popularly recurring themes include, but are not limited to respect, honesty, hard work, obedience, greed, disobedience, bravery, selflessness, fear, loyalty and jealousy. An analysis of Mhlophe's selected works reveals that she has adopted these popularly recurring themes from the African oral tradition.

The themes found in her work are usually universal truths related to people and, like the oral tradition, are stories of what happens when people do not obey or are not kind to one another. Thus, an assessment of traditional narratives shows that these stories unpack serious concerns and relevant social issues. These issues and concerns are audience specific. This is the case in Mhlophe's written stories. Mhlophe frequently addresses the issue of gender politics and is moved by ethics against an African in particular, and, a South African background. Felix et al. supports this view;

> Storytellers that are still stuck with the old themes are an endangered lot. In the face of social realignments, oral narrators have devised ways of remaining vibrant and relevant (2014, p. 201).

Finnegan, in *Oral Literature in Africa*, also points out that:

> Narratives have never and will never be conservative. Flexibility of narratives greatly empowers the storyteller, who can re-embroider a story to give it contemporary relevance as well as suit it to his audience and occasion (1995, pp. 318–319).

The existence of narrative forms based on the same traditional motif/design is what Mhlophe is doing by using written stories adapted from oral literature to suit the emerging realities. Her work includes modern themes such as bullying as shown in the story entitled *Brave Ox Bhatom:*

> "Then we will teach him! We shall take you with us and you will make him come along. Or both of you are dead meat right here and now!" the ogres growled (Mhlophe 2006, p. 14).

This, however, does not preclude the fact that her written stories, like oral traditional stories, are sometimes filled with history and nostalgia.

6.2.2. Characters

The African oral stories are populated with many types of characters. Chief among them are two essential characters; the protagonist and the antagonist. The characters are either human beings or animals or a combination of both. Sometimes the characters are the cosmos; stars, moon and the sun. The type of story influences the type of characters that populate it. For instance, stories about how the earth was formed will include the cosmos as characters with humans and/or animals as characters within them.

The protagonist in the stories is usually a well-intentioned character who is undone by the antagonist who is usually a trickster.

Another popular and essential character in the African oral tradition is the sage; the wise character of the story. This is usually the character that unravels the trickster's tricks or helps the other characters find a solution to a persistent and collective problem.

Different African regions have different animals that represent the various recurrent character types. In West Africa, the trickster is predominantly represented by the spider – and to a lesser extent, the tortoise. In East, Central and Southern Africa, the trickster is represented by the Hare or Rabbit. Interestingly, in Southern Africa, the Tortoise character predominantly represents the sage.

When we look at the selected works for this study, we see that Mhlophe has adopted these representative characters in her written works. In *The Singing Dog* and *Tie Me Up* stories, Mhlophe uses the trickster character in the form of a Rabbit. In the former story, the Rabbit does a bad thing by tricking his friend into swallowing thorns.

> I have some medicine right here: I got it yesterday. Everyone talks about your voice but this medicine will make it even sweeter...He asked Dog to sit still and open his mouth wide so that he could pour the medicine down Dog's throat. The trusting friend did as he was told. Also, he did not see the cunning look on Rabbit's face...Rabbit pulled out four long thorns of umnga tree...He scratched Dog's throat so hard that Dog felt the most unbelievable pain. He was bleeding a lot. He cried out loud...What have you done to my voice? (Mhlophe 1992, p. 11)

In the latter story, the Rabbit uses his tricks to outsmart Rhamuncwain order for the animal kingdom to get life-saving food and water and to showcase his skills of deception.

> The owner of the garden woke up and roared angrily, "What is all this noise in my garden?" Nogwaja stepped forward. "Are you still here? Haven't you heard that the world is coming to an end? I have to tie all those animals to tree trunks so they will not be blown away by the great wind." Rhamuncwa was horrified at this news. "Tie them up? Tie them up? No, that is not good. Start with me. Forget all those other fools. Tie me up!" he demanded. "Tie me up first!" (Mhlophe 2006, p. 36)

As with many stories, the storyteller uses personification to humanize the animal characters and allow them to interact with the humans and/or to behave as humans.

This is also the case in Mhlophe's *Brave Ox Bhatom*, where the young herd boy is able to communicate with his favourite brave ox, Bhatom, through a song.

> This ox seemed to understand him very well. When he whistled for Bhatom to lead the other cattle home, the ox did this with joy. His strong neck and head held high, he ran down the hill with the rest of his herd following happily (Mhlophe 2006, p. 11).

In *Moonlight Magic*, we see the use of a cosmic character, the Moon, interacting with a human, Nolita, who sings to it pleading for a baby, whilst in *Jojela's Wooden Spoon,* and *Dad Is Eating Ashes*, Mhlophe uses human characters interacting with each other to communicate her story.

Characters in the oral stories are what one can call 'flat' characters as they normally only have one side to them; they are either good or bad, and these qualities of good and bad are often exaggerated. Mhlophe has adopted these types of characters as well as juxtapositioning them in her written stories. In all the selected works, the protagonists are good and the antagonists are exaggeratedly bad. *Moonlight Magic* is a story about a young woman who loses her husband and, in her loneliness, desires to have a baby. The only exception to this representation of such a character is that there is no antagonist. The characters in the story serve only to drive the moral themes of magic and faith.

Characters in oral stories are also predominantly young people. I believe that this is so because of the moral element in all the oral stories. This is very much the case in the selected written works. Mhlophe also uses young characters. In *Moonlight Magic,* as mentioned earlier, the character is a young woman – Nolita - and her friends are young children. Although adults are in the story, they barely interact with the young characters. In the story *Dad Is Eating Ashes,* half the characters in the story are the children who eventually discover that their father has selfishly tricked the whole family by hiding the fact that he had lied about eating ashes. And lastly, in *Brave Ox Bhatom*, the story about a brave, magical ox, the protagonist and supporting characters are young boys who herd cattle.

It is thus evident that Mhlophe, in her written stories, has adopted the characters in traditional oral storytelling and places them appropriately in the stereotypical roles in which they appear.

6.2.3. Story beginnings and endings

Structure is important to narratives. A story has a beginning, middle and end; one part generally following the other. This formulaic structure enables the child audience to follow the story.

During an oral performance of stories to a mostly child audience, the storyteller – who would be the grandmother - would begin the story formulaically. This would be in the way of a phrase which indicates that the story is beginning. The formulaic opening is different for different groups throughout Africa.

The Hausa people of West Africa begin their folktales with: "A story, a story. Let it go, let it come." The Yoruba, also of West Africa begin with: "Here is a story! Story it is." In South Africa, with over eleven tribes, the story beginning phrase is different across the different tribes. The beginning phrase functions normally as a call out to the audience for their attention, and in order to affirm that they are paying attention, they would respond (Madrid 2018).

The most popular formulaic opening phrase is "Once upon a time."

This is also true for Mhlophe's written stories. She has adopted this formulaic beginning. In the stories selected for review in this study, for instance *Brave Ox Bhatom,* starts with the isiZulu beginning phrase, "Kwesukesukela," which is loosely translated as: "it happened a long time ago," or "once, long ago, it happened." Her stories also begin with: "Sukela ngantsomi," which is loosely translated as, "once [upon a time], the story begins…" or "once [upon a time], the story happened thus…" Mhlophe also begins her written story; *Tie Me Up!* with the phrase: "Here is a story I heard. It happened a very long time ago."

In Mhlophe's indigenous South African context, the audience would respond to her beginning call with the phrase: "Cosi," which is loosely translated as: "we are ready to listen," or "we are listening." This is an indication that the audience are ready to go

through the journey of the world's story with the storyteller. In her written stories, to compensate for the absence of a live audience, the responding phrase is written, which enables the reader to accept their journey through the story with the written as opposed to the spoken words of the storyteller.

Folktales waste no time in unfolding the story. Mhlophe's written stories have adopted this quick beginning. For example, *Dad Is Eating Ashes* and Tie Me Up! begin as follows:

"There was once a man called Zangwa who lived with his family." and "In those long ago times when the rains came on time every year, there was more food than the animals could eat," respectively (Mhlophe 2006, pp. 31–47).

The story's beginning, as with oral storytelling, gets right into the root of the matter, leading the audience to what the story is about. When recording oral stories and transcribing them, ethnographers try to convey the atmosphere of the storytelling scene to provide the reader with the setting, which is often charming. Mhlophe's written stories, through the way they begin and end, attempt to instil this charming quality.

Just as the oral stories have a formulaic beginning, they also have a formulaic ending. The storyteller, at the ending, resolves the issues presented in the story, then 'closes' the story.

People around the world do this differently. The world-famous one is the English-speaking; "and they lived happily ever after." In Russia, for example, the storyteller ends the story by inserting themselves into the narrative by telling the audience that they were there and witnessed the end or ending of the story. Within the Nguni of South Africa, to which Mhlophe belongs, the story is ended in many ways; each according to each tribe. The Xhosa and the Zulu, to which Mhlophe belongs, respectively end their tales in this way:

"Phela phela ngantsomi," which in IsiXhosa is loosely translated as: "and here the story ends."

"Cosicosi.lyaphela," which in IsiZulu is loosely translated as: "here I rest my story."

It would be hard to deny that the formulaic beginnings and endings of oral stories functions as a means to involve the live audience in the act of storytelling. By adopting these formulaic phrases in her written stories, Mhlophe not only maintains the structure of African oral storytelling tradition, but she also adopts some of the charm, atmosphere and practise of the art of storytelling into her written texts.

It goes without saying that reading a written story is different to listening and hearing it in person. That said, Mhlophe's adoption of the oral storytelling tradition and techniques ensures the continuity of the oral tradition. One of the greater challenges ethnographers have had in their quest to preserve oral narratives is translation. With Mhlophe as a writer of stories, she negates that challenge as things are always translated in a way that preserves the meaning, intention and integrity of the story. She becomes part of the society from which the stories come from. This opinion goes against scholars such as Albert Lord who emphatically state that:

> It is conceivable that a man might be an oral poet in his younger years and a written poet later in life, but it is not possible that he be both an oral and a written poet at any given time in his career. The two by their very nature are mutually exclusive (Rubio et al. 1999, p. 75).

Mhlophe, who is a woman, and is perhaps not what Albert Lord imagined would one day exist, is breaking the barrier with regards to the oral tradition. She is expanding its reach by writing the oral stories. Her adoption of this genre in written form, allows more people to, for a while, live in the world of the African oral narrative tradition.

6.2.4. Moral lessons

African oral stories are littered with moral lessons. It is perhaps the desire to teach the audience that supersedes their entertainment value. In fact, I would go as far as to argue that the primary reason for oral stories is to pass down knowledge. This view is supported by Chinyowa who argues that:

> Each narrative performance introduces the audience into the value systems of the group. The story [thus] becomes a symbolic image of

> what has or has not been sanctioned by the culture [as acceptable behaviour] (2001, p. 25).

As has been demonstrated throughout this study, the entertainment part of the story is used as a way to convey the instruction in such a way that it is delivered in a non-judgemental way to the audience and thus received openly by them. This, I believe, is also the reason oral stories are predominantly told in the third person.

The way in which these lessons are delivered is that the story explores, in a simple but effective narrative, the good versus the bad. This is achieved by using characters who reflect the range of human strengths and imperfections. The audience is made to deduce new insights and understanding. Stories generally have more than one moral lesson. This has also been adopted by Mhlophe in her written stories.

In *The Singing Dog*, we enter a world of personified animals where the singing dog who is best friends with Rabbit, has Rabbit turn on him when Rabbit's sweetheart, Pig, falls for the singing Dog's beautiful voice. The moral lessons in this story are as old as time itself. They include that love is a powerful force and that if not handled properly, can cause people to turn to hateful behaviour such as jealousy; as was the case with Rabbit. Through Dog we learn that surrounding ourselves with bad company opens room for bad things to happen to us, so we ought to be careful who we trust.

Brave Ox Bhatom is a story about a young herder with his most trusted ox, Bhatom, taken, hunted and abducted by scary beastly trolls. The boy and the ox are bullied and threatened but they never leave each other's side – even after the ox's death – which later comes to life through the boy's magical faith. We learn in this story that true friends stick together, even in bad times. We also learn to have faith. From the antagonists, we learn that crime does not pay.

Some of the moral lessons in Mhlophe's selected written stories include, but are not limited to:

- You shall reap what you sow– in *Dad Is Eating Ashes* we observe how Zangwa, the husband and father, tricks his family by lying to them about his food being worse than what the rest of his family eats. When his wife

discovers that he is eating delicious honey and pretending that its ashes, she swaps his honey for real ashes as a punitive measure.

- No bad deed goes unpunished–in *Tie Me Up!* we learn the importance of sharing and that when we do not share, this can breed negative relationships between us and others. When Rhamuncwa does not share his food and water during the draught, other animals plot against him to get the food and water that he has greedily hogged for himself
- What's done in the dark, shall come to light – we observe this lesson in *Jojela's Wooden Spoon* through the character of Jojela's wife who, out of a jealous curiosity uses her husband's magical spoon, only for it to get stuck in her throat, nearly killing her.

The embedding of moral lessons in the imparting of desirable human knowledge and sanctioned behaviour is, in my opinion, what makes storytelling the pinnacle of human achievement. Because we do not merely tell stories for entertainment, we use stories as an investment for the development of society and as an instruction on desirable behaviour.

Mhlophe's written stories often have strong moral endings. An analysis of her written work has proven that, like oral storytelling, she utilizes the various genres of traditional African storytelling such as folktales, songs, idioms and proverbs.

6.3 Adaptation of the oral tradition in Mhlophe's written stories.

Adaptation means "changing to suit different conditions," according to the Cambridge English Dictionary. In looking at Mhlophe's written stories, I will show how she has adapted the African oral tradition.

Scholars have set the storyteller and the story-writer at opposite ends of the creative spectrum even though, in my observation, I would argue that oral art and written art are closely intertwined.

> Most critics now admit that literary and oral artistry overlap; but there are many who hold that oral and written art are so fundamentally

> different that no individual can possibly master both forms of expression (Lindahl 1978, p. 98).

Adaptation is seen as a destructive force which corrupts the purity of the oral storytelling tradition and which must be done away with. That said, in order to maintain the relevance of the storytelling tradition in a contemporary world, Mhlophe has had to make some changes.

> The skilful and conscious use of certain elements of tradition and legendary characters…could be useful in terms of linking the past and present, especially in the case of a society experiencing the transition from a traditional to a modern way of life (Felix et al. 2014, p. 203).

This is particularly true in the context of South Africa and in the context of Mhlophe's primary operational space, the African storytelling tradition.

6.3.1. Text

Mhlophe does not distinguish her story-writing from her story-telling. She regards one as an intrinsic part of the other. She performs her written stories and she writes her performed stories. Mhlophe's written stories are in fact no more highly developed than the sources of her adaptation. Her writing does not diminish her as a storyteller. Nevertheless by writing oral stories, Mhlophe has been able to adapt oral storytelling from word to text.

Mhlophe's written oral stories have altered the oral tradition because writing has a fixity that the oral tradition does not have. Once a work has been committed to print, it can never change. An oral performance, on the other hand, is unavoidably going to vary even when memorized.

Perhaps an undeniable factor of Mhlophe's adaptation in writing oral stories is that there is no question about the creator of the story; as is the case with traditional oral stories. Mhlophe's written stories are created by herself only, whilst oral stories are created by the storyteller in front of an audience. That is not to nullify that the stories she creates are from the values and experiences of herself and the society she lives in, in as much as traditional oral stories do not come out of the collective mouths of

the masses. By writing her oral stories, Mhlophe is designated the recognized author of the stories; although, I would argue, she does not necessarily hold sole 'authorship' of the stories. Her discretion in penning the story also allows her to commit to paper things that she might not be able to say to live audiences because they were not things that they agreed with her. Even though she has adapted the stories from oral to text form, Mhlophe has reformed the structure, style and meanings of the art of the oral storytelling tradition.

Perhaps the most noteworthy effect of Mhlophe's adaptation from oral form to text has been with the audience. The oral narrative simply cannot exist without a live audience.

> The audience often determines which story the narrator will tell, how long the story will be, and whether the teller will be permitted to finish his or her tale at all (Lindahl 1978, p. 98).

By using the written text to tell her oral stories, Mhlophe has, unlike the oral artist, given up the ability to choose her audience as the reading audience have to choose her in this context.

6.3.2. Morals and Motifs

The previous section has already demonstrated how Mhlophe has adopted moral lessons in her written stories. In this section, we will look at how she has adapted traditional motifs, which in turn affect the moral lessons themselves.

Because of the moralistic nature of oral stories, what the story ends up articulating is dependent on the existing world view of both society and the storyteller. When adapting a story, the storyteller-cum-performer bears in mind the values and beliefs of their audiences.

The modern-day concept of gender equality has also found its way into Mhlophe's narratives. She has subverted the traditional motif of helpless women, and this in turn has opened up new ways to learn about the value of women in society and their own sense of liberation. This is particularly true in the story titled, *MaZanendaba (1995)*.In this story, the people of the village are leading mundane lives without

stories. And so in order to get stories for her village, MaZanendaba takes it upon herself to travel to the ends of the earth and into the depths of the ocean to find stories. She eventually returns with stories, and life was never the same for her people. MaZanendaba presents us with a lesson on how women can be assertive, capable and in control of their own situations and destinies.

Felix et al. Also supports this view of adapting traditional motifs:

> It may also be worth mentioning that some features [have to] change in order to reposition themselves in a changing social spectrum. There shall, with all likelihood, emerge motifs built on such contemporary issues as climate change, poverty reduction, liberalization, globalization, among others…These will become prominent themes in African oral narratives (2014, pp. 205–206).

Mhlophe's written stories, like oral stories, are creative, varied and fluid. Both her written and oral works are to be seen as inseparable, organically related expressions of African and South African storytelling and should be treated as of equal value. Her written work should not be seen as the demise of orality and live interaction between performer and the public. Her written works democratize access to the stories and the important messages they carry.

CHAPTER 7

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the staying power of the African storytelling tradition using Gcina Mhlophe as a case study. In this chapter I conclude by providing a summary of my findings on Mhlophe's adoption and adaptation of the indigenous storytelling tradition through different platforms such as television, film, literature and the performance stage. I will also provide some recommendations on the continued application, manifestation and preservation of the African oral storytelling tradition. Lastly, I will conclude with final remarks on the staying power of the African oral tradition.

7.1 SUMMARY

Originating with the dawn of society and enduring into this age of instantaneous access to information, African storytelling has proven its resilience and necessity beyond any shadow of doubt. Its effects have shaped our worldview in various ways. Any age, race or gender has been affected by the same story. Stories are infectious and easier to remember. Stories allow us to make sense of a rapidly changing world, whilst also providing a method to learn valuable lessons. Storytelling is timeless; it has always worked and always will.

Mhlophe once expressed her views about storytelling in an interview with Dennis Walder as follows:

> I have a strong belief THAT storytelling is an early form of theatre in Africa, because it involves so many things – mime, voice, singing, creating characters, everything you can find in theatre. I started doing traditional folktales, mostly Xhosa and Zulu. Now I tell stories from all over Africa, from Japan, Native American stories, wherever…If a story is told well, you remember it (Mhlophe, interviewed by Walder1999, pp. 38–39).

This study examined how Mhlophe has and still contributes to the preservation and development of the storytelling tradition in South Africa by employing different mediums of expression. As an accomplished storyteller, Mhlophe has adopted and adapted the storytelling tradition to suit different platforms and reach a wider audience both locally and abroad. Through her adoption of the oral tradition, Mhlophe makes use of the technique of 'call-and-response' to encourage the audience to respond with a set word or phrase, and repeats this technique three or four times in order to draw in and rouse the audience. In her own words, Mhlophe has said, "I love the flexibility. I like the extremes that you can reach with storytelling. You can enliven ordinary people's lives and you can tell a story by using a whole range of disciplines" (Flockeman & Mazibuko 1999, p. 44).

At a time when the written word has taken over the spoken word, it has become increasingly important to ensure that stories are not lost to present and future generations. This study has demonstrated that African oral storytelling is not just a tool for purposes of entertainment but holds the collective memory and moral philosophy of the community. To this end, storytelling carries valuable lessons that awaken the communal spirit through a variety of popular themes. These recurring themes include, but are not limited to respect, honesty, hard work, obedience, greed, disobedience, bravery, selflessness, fear, loyalty, love and jealousy.

The study has also demonstrated that storytelling can adapt to suit the changing times. In order to keep up with the pace of modern change, storytellers have devised ways of remaining vibrant and relevant. As Ruth Finnegan has asserted, "Narratives have never and will never be conservative. The flexibility of oral narratives empowers the storyteller who can re-embroider a story to give it contemporary relevance as well as suit it to the audience and occasion" (1995, pp. 318–319). Thus through adaptation as a survival strategy, oral narratives have been transformed to keep in tune with the emerging realities. To this end, orality and literacy intersect continuously thereby creating a new dimension to the African oral tradition.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Today oral narratives are modified and changed in order to be performed outside their original context and linked with modern technology. While they are performed for entertainment and wisdom, they also are performed for commercial gain (Sirayi 2012, p. 54).

State-of-the-art technology is a great tool for capturing and transmitting words, images, and ideas, but the power of storytelling resides most fundamentally in 'state-of-the-heart' technology. At the end of the day, the words and ideas presented in a way that engages listeners' emotions are what carry stories. It is this oral storytelling tradition that lies at the centre of our ability to motivate, sell, inspire, engage, and lead (Guber 2007).

With that being said, let us not be ignorant, times are changing and in order to preserve this art form, we now need to adopt and adapt the art form onto social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat for purposes of documentation. In short, we need more and more 'Gcina Mhlophes' to bridge the gap between past, present and future generations.

Mhlophe's career as a storyteller has brought with it a focus on preserving culture and educating both adults and children in South Africa and across the world. Much of her work is targeted at children, ensuring that the tradition of storytelling continues to enrich the wisdom of future generations. As Mhlophe has remarked, "I personally tell stories in order to wake up stories in other people. I truly believe that every living being has a story to tell. The story is that magical, invisible, golden thread that connects people from heart to heart. It doesn't matter where that person comes from, how old they are, how young they are, it just connects us (Steirn 2014, pp. 224–225).

7.3 FINAL REMARKS

It is apparent that storytelling remains one of the most important traditions that humans can share with each other. As long as human beings exist, storytelling will continue to exist. The society we live in today could not exist without the influence of past generations.

Even today we tell stories in a variety of contexts. We tell stories when we are with friends, at social gatherings, and even when we learn. Thus in spite of the emergence of the mass media like books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet and social media, African storytelling still remains perhaps the most valuable means of communication in the world.

The staying power of African oral tradition will continue to sustain the consciousness, identity and collective memory of the African people for posterity. If I may end with these words of wisdom from Chinua Achebe, “It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story…that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without which we are blind” (1987, p. 124).

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ADDENDUM

Interview with Gcina Mhlophe (The storyteller)

Tell me a bit about how you became a storyteller?

- Because it is something that matters to me…it is something I am passionate about.

What kind of stories do you choose to tell?

- The stories that I choose to tell are the stories that are from the culture that I come from; African stories…to preserve the stories that are my heritage.

What role does the Storyteller have in society?

- The storyteller has the role of preserving not only the art of storytelling but [also] the appreciation of language. And also to help the people learn about how things were done in the past and maybe how they can be carried into a more contemporary lifestyle by using the values carried in those stories

Do you tell only what you have written or other stories by other writers and storytellers?

- I tell stories that are from my background…I had a very good storyteller of a grandmother…so the stories from Zulu and Xhosa background…Nguni culture…the traditional folktales, but also because I'm a writer, I write a lot of stories. If I feel like there's a message I want to put across, then I write a story to put that message across, in the idiom of African folktales.

What subjects and themes are explored in your work? Why these particular subjects and themes?

- It's very varied…very wide the subjects that are dealt with. But a lot of storytelling themes deal with greed…they deal with people being unfair to each other. Or jealous or people exercising power when they shouldn't be so horrible to each other. And also you find [that] they deal with marriages…how people treat each other in marriages. Or the way people treat each other as

parents to their children. Or children believing a particular way to what their parents think. And even when African people used animals…you know that those animals were acting out parts that were part and parcel of our lives.

Do you perform the same story differently to different audiences? And Why?

- I don't think I will be able to tell the same story that same way every time. The story is the same but is inspired by the audience in front of me…depending on what I want to put across on that particular day. And also if it's just a fun story to share and just have a good time or me telling a story for young people trying to put a message across. Or you are telling a story because it is a women's gathering…women's day…and you are want to put a gender message at that place. Or you are talking about power and people using power in a particular way. And I use stories as a motivational speaker looking at leadership…looking at how we use resources in order to grow as a community; whether you are talking about gold, whether you are talking about people 'skills or knowledge. And people having to deal with change…which is something that happens again and again and again…and its shocking that we never want change even though we know that change is the most common thing.

What is your general style of performance?

- I would say my way of telling stories depends a lot on what language I'm using and also has to do with interacting with the audience…I like to interact with my audience. One of the first things I did when I left theatre and went into full time storytelling was asking for the lights to be up enough to see the audience. So that thing of knowing that the energy is going out and its coming back so there's that constant energy. And I love using trance and I love using music to sing and sometimes using soundtrack of my CD's that I have recorded…I love using them in my performances…so it's that interaction. And I'm on stage and I'm not sitting down and telling a story…or some people say are you going to be reading a story? I'm performing the story…I'm having a good time and I'm living it.

How important is costume in your story telling?

- So I don't call it costume… costume is for theatre to me it is simply the way I dress, the way I present myself… that I am a proud African the way I'm dressed. So whether I'm performing in South Africa, Japan, and South America or in Ethiopia or wherever, I represent my background, my culture. And so that thing of being presentable as an artist, whether I do poetry or storytelling or I'm singing or I'm a motivational speaker…every time. It is important how I dress how I present myself. And I take my job seriously. So it is not a costume…it's presenting me…part of who I am. One of the biggest lessons we've learnt from our older pioneers like umama Miriam Makeba…I don't think you've ever seen Miriam Makeba looking like a disaster on stage.

How long does it take for you to prepare for a performance, do you rehearse?

- I prepare for performances. And some stories I have told many times but I want to tell it in a new way now… so there's no "how long" it always depends on which story I want to tell or I am writing a brand new story as I want to present a particular message on that day. But when I am telling a story I have told before, I rehearse and prepare in terms of how I want to portray it and present it on this particular occasion. And sometimes you are not planning to go and perform but people pressurize and they say "give us a song" or "give us a poem" and then you stand up and you do it because you have a vault of stories. And so that is a wonderful thing to have instead of having 3 or 4 stories and then I have to rehearse them over and over again. You rehearse yes… but often, you stand up and deliver.

The space where you perform, do you need it arranged in a specific way, in terms of setting?

- Often I don't know what the stage is going to look like unless it's a festival or our festival as an organization as Gcina Masiko. You can give me the smallest stage like the size of a dining-room table…you can give me a massive stage in a big main theatre at the Market Theatre I'll take it or put me under the tree and give me 50 people, I'm okay with it. Or you put me on a massive stage with 2000 people, I'll take it. So for me the size doesn't

matter…what I create are the images and the atmosphere in the mind of the audience. It's not about the stage…leave that for the theatre world, because a storyteller deliver the images and puts them in the mind of the audience.

Have you ever worked with other storytellers or is storytelling a solo activity for you?

- Mostly, a storyteller should be able to tell a story from beginning to end. A lot of people I see, now want to perform with 6,7,10 other people; then it's a dramatization of the story! You see another person does one line, another beats a drum, another one starts dancing, another one does what…that's one thing to capture the audience, yes, but a good storyteller can do that on her or his own. You can bring the audience on the stage to have a crowd…make it happen! Create that crowd; and if there's a need to have a large migration of animals, you make them…bring the audience onto the stage…you don't need props for that. That's a storyteller.

Who do audiences see when they watch you on stage?

- They see me in the beginning; and from that Dr Mhlophe they came to watch, they see many characters that I'm creating depending on the topic or content in the story. If there are crowds that need to be there; if there needs to be sounds, if there needs to be waves of the ocean, if there needs to be thunder and lightning, I create all of that until they are not bothered about me in particular because they are taken to those places. So you've got to use your imagination in such a way that it creates a power-point presentation in the minds of the audience.

How has your practise changed over time?

- I think that changes that have taken place is to be able to perform in studio; to do that for radio. I have performed in studio and recorded my stories on TV. And the number of times I have heard people saying they were listening to me telling a story on the radio and they could see everything I was talking about; because I am not just sitting on a chair and just saying the words and telling them nice, I'm in full flight – I'm in full performance, even though I am in studio. It's like listening to alive recording of your favourite musician; even if

you were not there, you start visualizing that live recording. It's the same thing with me when I'm doing it on radio or I'm captured on camera, or animation. Another thing we should be graduating to is having more animated African stories; that is the future, that is where we need to go to, to work towards convincing our government to put more money into animation so that those stories can live for many years to come. Animation has come back full force and our government has to put money in animation. Those stories should live for generations to come. It cuts across culture and colour barriers and different backgrounds.

What has been an important experience for you as a storyteller?

- There have been many experiences, but one of them has been honouring women through illustrations. I love illustrators because I cannot draw. One of them is called "The Queen OfInvira," the story I wrote specifically to honour the Zimbabwean singer called Stella Chiweshe. And when I perform that story I feel so proud I become so big on stage because I'm honouring an amazing woman, she was an mbira player and was a pioneer when women were not allowed to play that instrument. And if you can see the illustrations on that book, I'm sure you'd feel honoured that women like --- were able to illustrate that book or me. And also, one of my most translated stories is called MaZanendaba, the woman who went to the bottom of the ocean to find stories…and when you look at MaZanendaba it's because there was a shortage of women represented in all the stories that I read or heard. It was always Anantsi who went to find stories…it was always Kalulu the Rabbit who went to find stories when there were no stories in the world; there never was a woman mentioned. So I could sit around moaning that there was no story or I could write it; a story that has women represented. But one of the highlights, I would say, was when the women from Winterveld who do embroidery – they were found by my Japanese publisher – and they are called MaPula women, illustrated one of my books; so beautiful, just by listening to the CD of MaZanendaba and me telling the story of MaZanendaba. It's one of the best representations of uMaZanendaba. Another highlight will be when Massimo, an Italian glass artist, did illustrations of MaZanendaba in glass…many statues all over the place. When I went to launch the book in Italy, I was on

stage with all these statues, I couldn't move I was so terrified of breaking one of them. Those are highlights; it's a great honour indeed. And I'm grateful for that. And the many storytellers I have trained who became a part of Zanendaba, they've grown to do many, many things and that is brilliant to see.

What is the art of storytelling from your personal perspective?

- I'd say story is the mother of all art forms. Music, all the songs that you know that you would say are evergreens – why are they evergreens? There's a story in them. Who would go to the opera if they were not telling stories? Look at fine art, when you go to an exhibition, there's a story in there in each piece. Look at jewellery, there's a story in that. The traditional Basotho blanket, it's got a story in there. There's a story in the traditional attire of every culture. The way people eat food, look at the French with their wines and baguettes; there's a story in there. And so I'm convinced that story is the mother of all art forms.

What is the state of storytelling in South Africa?

- It is growing. Many people telling me; "oh don't you think it is dying?" Okay, if you are looking to the left and not to the right, you can say the art of storytelling is dying. But it's never going to die…for as long as there are still people on earth, there will be stories. There are so many stories around. People look at storytelling as this monolithic thing where there are just folktales…there are many stories. And people are looking as though stories are dead. Look at plays like "Have You Seen Zandile?" those, the theatre pieces, they've survived because there's a story that we would like to see again and again and again. And then there are books that people want to convert into a movie…why…because there's a story that speaks to them. The storytelling is not dying in South Africa instead it is growing; it's manifesting itself in many forms.

FIGURES

Dr.Gcina Mhlophe presenting a storytelling workshop at the Sibikwa Arts Centre in 2015