

The Immortality and Universality of a Setswana Folklore: *Setlhotsa le Sefofu* (The Blind and The Cripple)



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ABSTRACT

The taking over of African lands by imperial forces not only took away that substratum upon which all material life depends, but it also usurped the space of the dispossessed to perform their being. Subsequent to land dispossession was the near extinction of the African intellectual heritage, which suffered what in Marxist literary circles is referred to as social Darwinism, an ideological and cultural battle in which cultures of superior nations subdue those of the conquered ones. As part of the colonial project, a form of epistemic violence was committed against Batswana, and this could be generalized to other peoples who have suffered the same fate. Their intellectual heritage was systematically relegated to a pastime and the infantile form of literary expressions. This was particularly targeted at their oratory. In this paper, a folklore titled *Sefofu le Setlhotsa* (The Blind and The Cripple) was selected to demonstrate that the literary value of Setswana folklore transcends: creed, race, time as well as space, and like any literary product, it does also derive its material from the 'universal' human behaviour, and thus, it equally addresses superordinate thematic concerns such as vice and virtue. With the view to demonstrate the universality of this Setswana folklore, one juxtaposed it with some Western and African modern literary productions. Additionally, some concepts from modern Social Sciences were used to analyse characters and incidents in the story. Analysis of this folklore yielded that Setswana folklore is still capable of serving as a potent tool for the socialization applicable to the human race across time and space. This paper can, therefore, be regarded as part of the African renaissance project, which Ngugi calls the re-membering of Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Men and women make stories, and stories make men and women. As the writer of this article, who turned adolescent in South Africa in the 80s, one of the songs which kept 'invading' young people's psychic space was by Dave Loggins. The song was titled *Three Little Words – I Love You*. With the author growing up and following language and literature as a vocation, the lyrics of this song became even more crucial to one's *Weltanschauung*. In the author's cogitations on the song, almost 38 plus years later, a conviction was derived that the human species has learnt to utilize these three words. It follows then that if human conception follows these three words, then, like a plant that germinates in the soil as its substratum, words are imperative to human preservation, not only at a physical level, but as a species. It is against the background above that Batswana folklore deserves a probing into their mysterious power to preserve their intended audiences so long after other peoples have succumbed to extinction.

Like the people themselves, the immortality of their story needed to be appreciated and, like a mirror, be raised for humanity to attain self-audit, and perhaps learn to avoid the pitfalls so endemic in human history. This wisdom is acknowledged by one of South Africa's leading universities, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), which exploits the genius of folklore to "sculpt" world leaders through their leadership courses. In this study, it is therefore argued that stories and folklore, in particular, are wells of vicarious experience and, as Niccolo De Bernardo Machiavelli would have put it, a way of conversing with the departed.¹

This article provided some background to the role of literature (stories) as a genre in the Arts, a short summary of the story, and then discussed it as an act of socialization or a discipline providing a practical and robust 'literacy' on human nature. It attempted to demonstrate how this folklore is not limited to space, time and race. In the process of discussing it, some relevant lines were cited with the view to establishing its link with a plethora of other observations, aphorisms, proverbs and idioms of these indigenous people. In order to demonstrate its immortality, an attempt was made to juxtapose this story with modern fiction, both Western and African.

The Psycho-Social world of Batswana

Like most tribes and nationalities, Batswana also believe that humans do not become human simply because they are born to two biological beings classifiable under the species called humans. Once born, all of them are plunged into two options which are to either develop into humans or not. This idea can be expressed in a variety of ways. One of those ways provides a reason for the Setswana culture and its language would categorize an individual who has reneged from being humanized not as part of their first category of nouns, Mo-ba (root), which is more semantically neutral and ameliorative if the speaker chooses to be pragmatic. This name category, largely, accommodates humans and is semantically loaded. For example, in this language, the noun *motho* (person) in singular and *batho* (persons) in plural, fall in the first category of names.

In the Setswana socialization,² once a verdict has been arrived at that a particular person's "cultivation" has failed, and that the individual is held culpable, then that the person is regarded as a renegade or human "unkind". This means, despite one's physiological appearance, the person lacks human intrinsic attributes of the species their biological appearances and birth assign them. In this state, the individual has atrophied psychologically and socially and has become unfit to remain in the category of the 'kind' called human. The equivalent thereof is often expressed in the negatively (relatively so) charged morphemes 'se-di'. This category relegates the individual under the cultural lens to the third category of nouns instead of the first mo-ba, where the kind/species with traits of humans would ordinarily be found. That is to say, for someone who is held culpable for their personality not to take the form of the cultural template, the person will instead of being called the "refused one" (literal) which takes the prefix "mo", then the noun describing them takes the root *se-* plus the verb *gana* (meaning to refuse) and the diminutive suffix "-na" meaning a small "thing" that has not "become" and not 'someone' who has not become.

The semantic choice "thing" resonates with the negatively charged Greek phrase, *persona non grata*, which implies that the act of socialization in the individual's case has failed, and he or she is held liable. One other way the society in our current era demonstrates this is by locking such a one up in prison, which, in the politically correct concept, is called a correctional facility. In the case of this individual, their behaviour shall have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that they are, therefore, in dire need of a socializing agent. When all is said and done, the arts, particularly, literary arts whose building blocks are nothing but words, are a potent instrument to continue what the three little words (I love you) set in motion, a human in the process of being. It is, therefore, argued in this paper that withholding stories from humanity constitutes ontological subversion.

In the process of being human, men and women need words; they need stories. In the same manner that words were uttered even prior to their conception, their becoming human and the sustaining thereof, which eventually render them the "kind" that is called human, is dependent on stories.

¹ Nicolo Machiavelli, *Machiavelli's the Prince: Bold-Faced Principles on Tactics, Power, and Politics* (Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2008).

² J. E. Setshedi, *Ithuteng Setswana : Setlhophsa Sa Borobedi, Sa Borogongwe Le Sa Bolesome (Materiki) Le Ditlhophsa Tsa Borutabana Mmabatho* (Craft Press, 1980).

Batswana, as a tribe/nation, have from antiquity treasured their stories, which have become and are still a means of ensuring that their posterity remains 'human'. That is to say, they used stories to socialize their progeny, and in so doing, preserve, not only, the tribe, but humanity as well. In this article, an attempt was, therefore, made to interrogate one such activity of socialization as it is exemplified in a folklore titled *Sefofu le Setlhotsa (The Blind Man and The Cripple [sic])*. Deservedly so, this story has now become a cultural artefact from the ancients and was rescued from 'extinction' by Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, whose name deserves some place in this paper. Below, a brief discussion of this language activist is provided.

A Brief Biography of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje relevant to this study

Plaatje was born in 1876 in the Free State province of South Africa.³ Despite being highly proficient in several European languages, this writer and political activist became one of those African *literati* who took it upon themselves to preserve the cultural heritage of Africans by writing in indigenous languages. Besides his mother tongue, Setswana, Plaatje is reported to have been able to speak five other languages, which include English, German and Dutch with a native-like accent. Among his honours was an invitation by the Shakespeare society in 1917, where he contributed a chapter in a book, which was meant to commemorate Shakespeare's 300th centenary. Very important and perhaps relevant to this study is that his contribution was aimed at demonstrating the similarities between the English and Setswana cultures, thus demonstrating universalism in Literature. He translated five of Shakespeare's plays into Setswana; wrote the first English novel to be written by a Black person in South Africa (though published second); became the first secretary general of the South African Native National Congress (Later ANC), and the first South African to be elected president of this revolutionary movement,⁴ the first to be elected as president in absentia and without contestation. He was a court interpreter in English, Setswana, Dutch and German, a journalist and the first person to do a recording of South Africa's national anthem. All of these accomplishments earned him the status of an autodidact; for indeed, his formal education went only up to standard three or what in the modern education system is renamed grade 5.⁵ The folklore selected for this study was accessed from an anthology of Setswana fables, Plaatje transcribed, and most probably owing its verbal transmission to him by his paternal grandmother, Masweamotho.⁶

Words, Literary Arts and Becoming Human

The creating and re-creating force in Literature as a discipline and an art form is innate to Bantu cultures and languages. For instance, the Gikuyu people of Kenya call the artist *Mumbi*, which is a cognate of the Setswana word *Mmupi*. These two words also mean the creator, which is an equivalent of the English noun God.⁷ In order to buttress the idea above, further probing into this language art genre was conducted. Ngugi develops the idea above further by making reference to the Bible.⁸ He alludes to the books of Genesis and John, where literature exemplifies the creative force inherent in the word whose Greek equivalent is *logos*. Pertinent to the argument being attempted here is the derivative of the word *logos*, which is logic. Among its senses, this word also means the capacity to reason well. Ngugi draws attention to how the biblical account represents the origins of the universe, wherein the word became the force behind all creation.

Yet another view of literature is provided by the East African philosopher, Okot P'Bitek. In his work, *Artist the Ruler*, P'Bitek views the artist as the number one person with the role to socialize what could otherwise become a being without humanness.⁹ Drawing from antiquity, he claims that the artist does this by using his voice to sing his/her laws and rules to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as the nanga, the harp and the twisting of his body to the rhythm of the drums(dance). He further maintains that humans cannot be 'kind' (synonym of type) without the creative work of the artist which constitutes the

³ Brian Willan, "Sol Plaatje: A Life of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje 1876–1932," (*No Title*), 2018.

⁴ Peter Midgley, *Sol Plaatje: An Introduction* (National English Literary Museum, 1997).

⁵ Midgley, *Sol Plaatje: An Introduction*.

⁶ Willan, "Sol Plaatje: A Life of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje 1876–1932."

⁷ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁸ Wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*.

⁹ Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (Heinemann, 1984).

mental pictures that guide men's[sic] lives. Most relevant to this study, he emphasizes his point by citing John Dewey, who argues that, "The sum total of the effect of all reflective treatises on morality is insignificant in comparison to the influence of architecture, the novel and drama, on life becoming important"¹⁰.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework against which this folktale was read is called Reader Response Theory. One of the tenets of this theory of Literary Criticism is the emphasis it places on the relation between the reader and text during the construction of meaning. Instead of placing emphasis on the reading of a text on the writer or the text itself, it deviates from theories that precede it by adopting a stance which views the construction of meaning as a transaction during which the self of the reader and the text are more flexible. Among other cognitive benefits of this approach to text is envisionment. Coined by Langer, the concept 'envisionment' encapsulates the idea that "Knowledge is crafted and honed. It requires an understanding of social and disciplinary conventions surrounding the ideas...Like knowing someone, all knowledge is relational and requires an active and probing mind."¹¹ Bringing this closer to home, Langer avers that: In literature, we make interpretations by exploring multiple perspectives from within and outside the text and consider possible implications through analysis of the text itself as well as its relationship to other texts, literary theories and life. Here we use the text, relevant knowledge and personal experience as substantiating data.¹²

In light of the above, this folklore was read as a hyponym of the superordinate, Social Sciences. That is to say, the literary text was not read with strict focus on the letter on the page itself, but was read against the background of sister disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history and religion, among others. The rationale for the choice above hinges on Judith Langer's observation, where she argues, "...the end of literature instruction is to create envisionment builders." Booth Olson defines envisionment as an evolving text world in the mind that develops as the individuals use their experiences with literature, literacy, and life as threads from which to weave new understandings".¹³

The cognitive engagement that constitutes the construction of knowledge and the instantiation of the reader and her/his text above was elucidated further in Booth-Olson that, "Literature exists not only to be understood, but to be undergone. Serious fiction, plays and poetry are meant to act on our whole being-to astonish, decondition, purge, exhilarate, or dismay, for example."¹⁴ This is the humanization she also refers to as the benefit of literature. To buttress her idea, she also cites Rosenblatt who propagates the idea that, "meaning resides neither exclusively in the text nor in the reader but in the transaction (negotiation) between the reader and the text. The reader draws upon her [sic] past experience with life and language as the raw material out of which to shape the new experience on the page."¹⁵

Synopsis of the Story

Being a work of creativity inspired by the *muse*, this product of orature is equally a product of authorial craft and literary 'stratagem'. This point is elaborated by stating that, firstly, the story's creator is overwhelmed by a trance-like presence to communicate a socio-psychological and, by extension a political observation. Fulfilling this essence of her/his existence requires a shrewd manipulation of the elements of the text they are weaving, as well as prudent indulgence in poetic licence. The next paragraph elaborates on this point by borrowing some concepts from the language of drama and film.

Among the elements of the story is the dramatic personae or the cast. In the case of this folklore, the unknown author of antiquity populated his story with only two characters and still managed to convey enormous data on a universal human aspect of behaviour. He has, astutely, appealed to his/her audience's

¹⁰ p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol*.

¹¹ Langer. J.A., *Envisioning Knowledge: Building Literacy in the Academic Disciplines* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015).

¹² Langer. J.A., *Envisioning Knowledge: Building Literacy in the Academic Disciplines*.

¹³ C. Booth-Olson, *The Reading Writing Connection: Strategies for Learning and Teaching in Secondary Classroom* (New York: Pearson, 2007).

¹⁴ Booth-Olson, *The Reading Writing Connection: Strategies for Learning and Teaching in Secondary Classroom*.

¹⁵ Booth-Olson, *The Reading Writing Connection: Strategies for Learning and Teaching in Secondary Classroom*.

capacity to release their suspension of disbelief by ‘exiling’ the rest of the community into oblivion so that his/her “camera lens” remains only with two personae with infirmities or what one could also call “invalids”. In the context of the Setswana culture, this “community of two” makes a whole lot of sense as it represents real people. A reader with a Setswana cultural background and perhaps numerous other African ones and the possibility of the cosmopolitan being, will certainly not wonder at a community made up only of individuals with infirmities as their ancestors have left behind an idea that all humans have weaknesses as encoded in the proverb, *Ga go mokgoro o o sa neleng*; meaning, there is not a single house without leaks in the roof, the English near equivalent of this idiom is, “To err is human, and to forgive is divine.” This is better understood in the words of Martin Luther King Jnr, as he argues that in every good man, there is a little bit of evil and in every evil man, there is a little bit of good.¹⁶

The evident physical infirmities of the only characters in the story are actually symbolic of the pervasive inward deformities which are often hidden from the naked eye, but cannot escape the keen eye of the *vates*-the artist. Like the playwright of the Elizabethan tragedy, the author, firstly, presents the beauty of the two’s personalities out of which the common struggle arises, which is to escape the volatile space and possible elimination in which the traumatised members of their tribe have abandoned them. It is learnt through his introduction of the characters that when common threats are present, cooperation is natural. The Setswana cultural heritage represents this in the proverb, *Mabogo dinku a a thebana*, meaning, hands always rely on each other. At this stage of the twosome’s interpersonal relationship, the characters are evidently operating at the fifth stage of moral reasoning as expounded by Kohlberg and Hersh. They observed that during this stage of development, individuals have matured to the level of recognizing others and have outgrown the me! me! Complex.¹⁷ At this stage of moral reasoning, there is a repression of the *id*, which is characterized by individual narcissism. These rounded characters are transformed, or rather deformed, by victory and immediately narcissism and its “comorbidity”, *hubris*, set in. Consequent to that is *hamartia* (a tragic flaw), which overtakes humanness.

Manifesting in a very myopic fashion, once the vultures have been chased away, then The Cripple laid claim to the booty. Here, the use of the word “booty” is deliberate. The two had not killed the animal. Something had done the job, and the results thereof were enjoyed by the vultures who, in turn, suffered eviction from food security by the powerful species. Ecologically speaking, in a pecking order which manifests here, the law of the jungle or survival of the fittest has ensued. This has, actually, started extra-textually, and below this is elaborated further.

The composer of this story has successfully created a plot which provides a sympathetic perspective towards The Cripple and the aetiology of his narcissism. This almost tragic character has suffered a series of betrayals which have the potential to alter his personality. First, he has suffered collective victimization as part of a probably peaceful tribe that has been invaded and evicted. Secondly, he has been betrayed and perhaps embittered by his own family, who, in response to the exigencies dictated by self-preservation, had abandoned him. Thirdly, he could have sunk into an existential vacuum just like Nick Vuyicic, an acclaimed motivational speaker who was born without limbs, also did and dragged himself into both apathy and savagery, which almost culminated in suicide.¹⁸ A psychoanalysis of this character does justifiably diagnose him with an existential vacuum and possible regression to the *id*.¹⁹ Psychology reveals that prolonged exposure to this disabling mental state, coupled with detachment from society, can set in motion psycho-social and moral retrogression, which at times manifests as savagery. Whoever suffers from it and is not rehabilitated may find ‘inhumanity’ normal, and without compunction, indulge in it.

Probing deeper into the personality disorder above, an etymological definition of the word “savagery” or its derivative, savagery is conducted. Berry-Dee traces the origin of the word ‘savagery’ to its Latin root, which is *silvaticus*; meaning he/she of the woods, and it came to English through French ‘sauvage’. He demonstrates this regression by using William Golding’s Novel, *Lord of the Flies* in which

¹⁶ M. King, *Strength to Love* (Ohio: Fortress Press, 1963).

¹⁷ Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H Hersh, “Moral Development: A Review of the Theory,” *Theory into Practice* 16, no. 2 (1977): 53–59.

¹⁸ N. Vuyicic, *Life without Limits* (Sydney: Waterbrook Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust* (Random House, 2004).

the perils of staying in the woods negatively impacted the personalities of the characters.²⁰ Ngugi has demonstrated this character deviation of former protagonists in his *Weep Not Child* in the character of Boro, the guerrilla, who eventually loses the moral essence of his initial philanthropic and patriotic goal for staying in the woods. The character distortion he eventually suffers from is that he begins to view human killing as a way of being. That is to say, the tendency turns itself into the essence of his existence.²¹

The development of the plot in this story involves an intra-specific competition. The manifest jungle law principle begins, firstly, when one army invades a weaker tribe. This savage tendency is synonymous with Hitler's or the Third Reich's concept, which in German is called *Lebensraum* or living space,²² where his seared conscience unbridled the bully's tendencies in him to evict other communities/tribes/nations and take over their lands. Against the background of the wars of looting, ravaging and displacement called *Difaqane* or *Mfecane*,²³ in South African history, one surmises that the reason behind this bullying was material gain or the satisfaction of physiological needs. For example, this would include cattle, grains, land or even the right/quest to mate, which would manifest in the kidnapping of women.²⁴

Secondly, the vultures being weaker in this ecosystem and could legitimately lay claim to the carcass, providentially, provided to them by serendipity, are, in an interspecific symbiosis, bullied by humans. Then, the cycle reverts to an intra-specific competition between former allies, or to place this in an authentic political discourse, "comrades". This is induced by indiscretion. The post-struggle manifestation of regression leads to possible mutual elimination. This is averted in the *denouement* of the story when the gift of rationality takes over. According to Green (2018), the Greeks believed that humanity had been endowed with this survival tool by the gods as their 'mediator'.

Bringing this story to its communicative end or application to human behaviour, the story provides a window into the understanding of both liberation and post-liberation literature and the psyche it attempts to depict. To elaborate on this claim, scenes from modern literary works from both Africa and Europe were then used.

Situating the Story within the Parameters of Comparative Literature and the Universality of the Setswana Folklore

Several factors endow this story with eternity and universality. First of all, this folklore possesses the capacity to 'mirror' and address a universal human character deficit beyond space and time. What one is trying to state here is that the story is about human character, which is common to every tribe, ethnic group, race, gender or nationality. It deals with the dangers of selfishness and greed. The conflict between two friends can also be read as being caused by the same character flaws which caused many civil wars in pre- and post-colonial Africa. For instance, after some tribes had fought collaboratively against the common enemy and immediately after gaining independence, they then started fighting against each other. Among such wars are the Biafran War in Nigeria, which is partly captured in the short story *Civil Peace* by Chinua Achebe,²⁵ the Mandebele massacre in Zimbabwe, and perhaps the latest is the Rwanda genocide, whose gruesome scenes are replicated in the movie *Hotel Rwanda*.²⁶ This story demonstrates that this type of attitude, which follows after victory has been foreseen by an ancient Motswana sage and the object of the story is to warn, firstly, the posterity of Batswana and the human race in general against the vice of selfishness. Further to that, it also sends the same message, which, when obeyed, can avert civil wars in Africa, hence the importance and relevance of the story even in the current dispensation of the continent. Most importantly, as the story is populated with individuals with disabilities, it can also be surmised from this deliberate choice of characters that the story composer's observation on human nature is that humanity is not perfect or that no individual is without susceptibilities; hence, the ancient wisdom encoded in the proverb *Ke motho ka batho ba bangwe*, which in English becomes 'I am because you are'.

²⁰ Christopher Berry-Dee, *Talking With Psychopaths-A Journey into the Evil Mind: From the No. 1 Bestselling True Crime Author* (Kings Road Publishing, 2017).

²¹ T. Ngugi, *Weep Not Child* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1964).

²² A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Pimlico, 1943).

²³ K. Shillington, *History of Africa*, 3rd ed. (London: MacMillan, 2012).

²⁴ Midgley, *Sol Plaatje: An Introduction*.

²⁵ M. King and R. Jannisch, *Cross Currents 11* (Cape Town: Nasou Via Africa, 2003).

²⁶ E. Kayihura and K. Zukus, *Hotel Rwanda* (Google Books, 2014).

Secondly, while the story sends caution against greed, it should also be stated that the story corroborates several Batswana observations encoded in proverbs. These include *Mabogo aa tlhapisana*, which in Nguni languages, becomes *Izandla siyagezana*, meaning hands wash each other. The English people say something close to this in the proverb “No man is an island.” In the case of the folklore in this article, the message is that as human beings, we need each other as hands need each other to become clean. This story can also be understood as propagating the same message in the proverb, “Two heads are better than one”, and that unity is strength. When people are united, they can contribute their special talents and abilities to the collective good—a truism the National Party in South Africa missed. This story can also be didactic in institutions such as marriages, where avarice and selfishness may sometimes cause divorce between two people who have had a long and beautiful relationship, and suddenly, when one of them stumbles upon success, they then think they deserve “better” partners than those who have always been with them.

Yet another benefit of this story is that, despite using characters such as vultures, this story also teaches a universal lesson on human relations. The inclusion of the vultures is a warning against unbridled competition among humans. The unfolding of the plot substantiates this. Firstly, there is a war declared on humans by fellow humans. This war causes the whole tribe to flee and leave behind the weak, laying bare the fact that, at times, self-preservation takes precedence over such venerable values as empathy. There is a moral lesson here. The lesson is that sometimes, for reasons beyond their power, people may not be available during exigencies, and becoming human may also demand readiness for such existential moments in life.

The story invites the reader to observe the fact that in both intra- and inter-specific competition, the weak, in one particular instance, may become the powerful in another. While rendered vulnerable, the two still find a way to survive. Discovering the dead animal becomes their success while simultaneously being a loss on the part of the vultures. However, instead of jointly enjoying their achievement, egoism overtakes them. They almost fight. Their quarrel is stopped by a compromise, and their lives are spared from the repercussions of their moral regression. This is a typical lesson in favour of altruism.

Further to the above, the folklore demonstrates three realities about human nature, which should be celebrated and avoided. The first of these is the complexity of human behaviour. Secondly, it also touts the resilience of the human soul. These points on human behaviour are elaborated by making observations and inferences on factors which are likely to have had a bearing on the characters’ path to individuation. Intra-textually, there is evidence of both of them being abandoned, and perhaps left to die from one of the several possibilities, namely: the sword of another invading army, hunger or mauling by wild beasts. As humans, they certainly should have had families and relatives to empathize with and rescue them, but this act of kindness or empathy was never extended to them. Two viewpoints attempt to theorize around the multi-pronged answer to this conundrum. (1) Family members may have been too self-centered. (2) Family members could have been excessively traumatized by the threat to personal safety, such that the urge for self-preservation overwhelmed them and may have only thought of themselves (the invalids) when adrenaline had subsided. It follows then that the two characters were susceptible to egocentrism and some psychosocial comorbidities in their relationships, and only moral resilience could save them.

History, psychology and literature abound with incidents confirming that, more often than not, the violated and humiliated, subconsciously, covet the power of their oppressors. What this means is that, when conditions suit the oppressed, they are likely to redeem their lost sense of self-worth by releasing the very savage tendencies visited upon them by the perpetrators of their pain. Alternatively expressed, when power shifts to them, they are, inadvertently, likely to avenge their hurt on the nearest person, be it their spouses, children or fellow countrymen and women. For instance, the 1976 uprisings in South Africa were the result of the imposition of Afrikaans upon the Blacks by the National Party Afrikaner government. The irony here is that the Afrikaners themselves had earlier on rejected the Anglicization of all the Europeans in South Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s by Lord Milner.²⁷ The Jewish holocaust, though not the only reason, was largely a reaction to the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles

²⁷ Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: [The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid]* (Heinemann, 1990); Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2012).

after the First World War.²⁸ Belgium, after gaining its liberation from France, then colonized countries such as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and last but not least, this human complexity is also demonstrated by the Rwandan genocide.²⁹

The moral of the folklore, here, emerges from two considerations. In the first place, one's background should not become a determining factor for their moral and ethical standards and choices. Secondly, life may not always afford care from those hopes are pinned on. In philosophical circles, this idea is expressed in the concept of existentialism. Returning to the first assertion, ancient Batswana rejected the absolute power of the environment on the individual through the proverb, "*More mogolo go betlwa wa taola, wa motho oa ipetla*". Loosely translated, this is what the saying means, unlike a lot/prophetic/shamanic bone called *moremogolo* in Setswana, which is made by humans, an individual is an agent of his/her own making/destiny. This is observable in the denouement of the story, wherein the two characters have been exposed to similar adversities. However, the conflict in the story reveals that while one member of the partnership, which has endured collective victimization and then ensured collective success, exhibits latent narcissistic tendencies after the struggle, the other exudes altruism. Alternatively, this truism can be expressed as, while one maintains his fidelity to group cohesion, the other regresses into ego-centrism or what Kohlberg calls the unconventional stages of moral reasoning. The denouement of the story then demonstrates the myopia (short-sightedness) of selfishness and grandiosity, and in the same vein, extolls self-abnegation as virtue.

The assertion made above is encoded in the words of the two characters. The text explicitly uses language to chronicle both the evolution and devolution of their relationship in phrases such as " ... the Blind man carrying the Cripple.", "...and they went towards the animal", "After they had driven the vultures away." A close reading of the above lines with focus on the pronoun "they" foregrounds collective effort, which is a socially empowering and humane symbiosis. The whole plot, in the folklore, parallels the struggle for liberation, which normally unfolds through collective effort. The pronoun encodes the semantic choice of an appropriate plural form "they". It encodes the attitude, which had hitherto prevailed until the one most important milestone of their struggle had been reached. The narrator states, "After 'they' had driven the vultures away, a dispute arose between them." Well-articulated by the psychologist, Pinker (2007), here one observes language as it helps to understand "they" and "my" against the title of his work, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*.

Post adversity, immediately, the narrator's semantic choice changes as it now encodes a sudden change in relations between companions. The Cripple argues, "It was my[self reference and ceseding] eyes that saw the carcass." Authorial craft here is such that the Cripple's words are captured *verbatim*, while the Blind Man's words are paraphrased by the narrator in this manner: "The Blind Man argued that the carcass was reached through his legs". This implies the overt egocentricity of The Cripple. It is only in the representation of The Cripple's thinking that the discourse/conversation shifts to the pragmatically selfish possessive 'my', a pronoun, 'iconic' to ego-centrism. Hence, the resolution to this conflict does not even come through this self-obsessed character, but by The Blind, who uses the inclusive pronoun "our" in the line "My[cohesive] friend, it is evident that you are "our" eyes." Characterization here satirizes the conceited. It implies that he (The Cripple) has the eyes (The Cripple), physically, but inside he is blind. By extension, his sense of judgement is maimed, and trauma can do. This observation is common among Africans on both the continent and the diaspora. The writer exposes an injury to the *psyche* of The Cripple, which Mzwakhe Mbuli laments in the stanza of one of his poems below, as he states in his home language (translation follows the stanza):

Ukulimala kwe nqondo, ukulimala komuntu.

Ukulimala komuntu, ukulimala komndeni.

Ukulimala komndeni, ukulimala komphakathi.

Ukulimala komphakathi, ukulimala kwesizwe.³⁰

²⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*; M. Van Dyke, *Radical Integrity: The Story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2001); Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

²⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers* (Princeton University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400851720>.

³⁰ Mzwakhe Mbuli, "Before Dawn" (Congress of South African Writers, 1989).

Mbuli's words convey the idea that national destruction evolves in a cancerous pattern. Firstly, it begins with an injury to the mind of an individual and progresses in a linear pattern to the family, next, to the community and eventually, the whole nation. Having sufficiently laid bare the entrails of the narcissist's tendencies, the author of the story then extolls the virtues of altruism. The plot of the story tapers to its end with The Blind 'out foxing' The Cripple. The Blind uses the same stratagem that was used by Bertolt Brecht during the 1947 Hollywood 19 trial, where he faked surrender and outmaneuvered the paranoid committee set to investigate the allegation that Brecht and eighteen other artists were alleged to have infiltrated Hollywood with communism.³¹

The Blind exudes leadership; he knows how to massage the ego of the narcissistic companion. In a Machiavellian style, he rubs down the ego of the narcissistic partner in the words "... I know that the animal was found by you and it's yours". This demonstrates his ingenuity as a *connoisseur* of the human *psyche*. He has cast his vision (psychologically) beyond the here and now and distanced himself from the betrayal of The Cripple, which had been induced by myopia. Casting a "longshot" into the future granted him the benefit of watching a life devoid of the gregarious nature of humans and the mutual benefit inherent in it. Represented differently, this has assisted him to, firstly, conquer his savage tendencies of disintegration, which had subverted reason in his *comrade*. This capacity to exist in the present and the future helps him to diminish the self for the benefit of the communal and collective. This capacity for self and other literacy is touted by Greene, who admonishes that to succeed in power, one has to master one's own emotions.³² This concept is elaborated in Daniel Goleman's seminal work titled Emotional Intelligence.³³ There would be a need to mention that what Goleman says in the seminal book has been captured centuries before his birth by Batswana in the proverbial saying, "*Pelo pholwana, e golegwa ke mong.*" Literally meaning, a man's or woman's heart is like a young (untamed) ox, only its possessor can hitch it.

While there is textual evidence that a fellow victim of similar circumstances (abandonment, betrayal and starvation), The Blind, has succeeded in maintaining his integrity against the odds. Conversely, there is evidence to the fact that another, The Cripple, has failed, and the weakness of his soul has allowed narcissism, a moral deficit, to ensue. It is, however, in the spirit of academia, worth mentioning that narcissism is not wholly a thing to be disdained. According to human behaviour specialists, all humans possess this attribute.³⁴ All that is needed is the ability to manage it. The verb "man+age" has deliberately been separated into its morphemes so as to draw attention to its morphology and semantic properties. Failure to do so can inhibit the release of social bonding hormones such as serotonin and give way to narcissism to evolve into a *psychosis* that can run amok and wreak havoc in human relations.³⁵

The psychology professor, Paul Vitz, provides some biographical evidence where historical traumas of some renowned characters in history interfered with their personalities to the detriment of society and perhaps even their destiny.³⁶ Among them are Adolf Hitler and Joseph Dzhughashvili, who later renamed himself Stalin, meaning steel, in the Russian language. Vitz asserts that these two leaders, who became responsible for killing millions of people, were, actually, victims of the latent childhood traumas visited upon them by their fathers.

Drawing parallels with the text under discussion, it can be inferred that The Cripple lacked the emotional and moral fortitude, which are evident in the reading of Thabo Mbeki's speech titled *I Am an African*. In his famous speech, the second president of post-apartheid South Africa demonstrated self-mastery over his own latent savage tendencies and the Black race's pain by giving a legitimate citizenship place to the race, which was responsible for the atrocities committed against black people in South Africa. Note well, this is not to say that all Whites were and are racists. To say that is unacademic and can be a form of reverse racism. In light of the above, it then suffices to conclude that in the case of The Cripple's latent narcissism, there was "no man to manage" the trauma. Among Batswana, when someone has lost control

³¹ R. Greene, 2018. *The 48 Laws of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2018).

³² Greene, 2018. *The 48 Laws of Power*.

³³ D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (London: Bantam Books, 1995).

³⁴ Greene, 2018. *The 48 Laws of Power*; Berry-Dee, *Talking With Psychopaths-A Journey into the Evil Mind: From the No. 1 Bestselling True Crime Author*.

³⁵ Alan R Harvey, "Music and the Meeting of Human Minds," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 762.

³⁶ P. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).

over their behaviour, this form of alienation from oneself is often described in the metaphorical expression “*Batho ba ile*,” meaning there is no one at home (the mind) to manage the whims. Among the corollaries of this state of being is that this character had purged his mind of the history of their arrival at the carcass where his crawling could not have transported him.

Despite the moral infirmity evident in his personality, this character (The Cripple) is nevertheless still human. He possesses an amnesia similar to the one observed by Olusoga and Erichsen in their work, *The Kaizer holocaust: Germany’s forgotten genocide*.³⁷ In this revisit to the ‘muted’ history, the two historians unravelled the massacre of the Africans at the hands of the Germans long before the Second World War. These historians claim that during the Nuremberg trials, the prosecuting nations had pretended ignorance of the atrocities of Germany’s *lebensraum* quest, as analogous to the very Scramble for Africa, which led to the massacre of millions of the colonized elsewhere. With African post-liberation writers such as Ngugi having stated long before the liberation of Kenya that “Blackness is not all that makes a man.”³⁸ African liberation was followed by instances of indulgence into this amnesia, represented in literary works by the *literati* such as Achebe and Ahmar. With the intention of demonstrating the importance of folklore, the discussion focuses on another relevant aspect of the study.

Drawing Parallels between African History and the Folklore

A complete reading of the whole story evokes the Setswana proverb, “*Fifing go tshwaranwa ka dikobo*”, meaning, in perilous times, sticking together as people is imperative. Textual evidence reveals that the invalids had become mutualistic in their *symbiosis*. They had hitherto, jointly, managed to escape the danger of death and then procured food by chasing the vultures. Then came the defining moment captured in paragraph five of the story. The narrator states, “After they had driven the vultures away, a dispute arose between them.” The one whose sense of sight, The Cripple, no demanded a bigger share. With the eyes being located in the head, or to put it metaphorically, the capital, where it cohabitates with the brain, the seat of the mind, the authorial craft seems to be satirically apportioning to The Cripple, the role of the *intelligentsia*. The Blind, who by extension possess only the physical ability to perform what the brain has instructed, would then inherit the raw deal. Achebe represented the above post-struggle socio-psychological regression in his novel *A Man of The People* in the words:

*We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us - "the smart" and the lucky and hardly ever the best had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within, they fought to persuade us through numerous loudspeakers that the first phase of the struggle had been won, and that the next phase, the extension of our house - was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease, and the whole people speak with one voice, and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and break down the whole house.*³⁹ (p.37).

The “smart” and “hardly the best” in the context of folklore is represented by The Cripple. These are the elites, who in their reprobate mind, believe that it is their exclusive prerogative to escape the adversarial conditions outside their house, leaving the masses outside and even voicing their disdain for the legitimate voices of discontent outside the should-have-been communally owned shelter.

This discontent is further represented in Ahmar’s novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The narrator, who is simply called The Teacher, laments:

*True, I used to see a lot of hope. I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they have power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful. They made many more. Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all.*⁴⁰

The human eccentricities counterfeited above are not unique to Africa. They resonate with a famous observation by Niccolo Machiavelli, famous for his treatise, *The Prince*. The shenanigans of the

³⁷ D. Olusoga and C.W. Erichsen, *The Kaizer’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

³⁸ Ngugi, *Weep Not Child*.

³⁹ Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Penguin UK, 1966).

⁴⁰ A. Ahmar, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born* (London: Heineman, 1968).

post-liberation politician above make the post-liberation elites appear as though they were and are Machiavelli's disciples. A snippet from his chapter titled *How a Prince Should Keep His Word*, Machiavelli states:

How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his word and to live by integrity and not by deceit, everyone knows. Nevertheless, one sees from the experience of our times that the princes who have accomplished great deeds are those who have cared little for keeping their promises and who have known how to manipulate the minds of men by shrewdness and in the end, they have surpassed those who laid their foundations upon honesty.⁴¹

Intertextuality with Western Literature

The first literary work which parallels this folklore is by Shakespeare. The focus here is on the last but one act of the play *Julius Caesar*. In Act 4, Scene 1, line 12-40, Shakespeare draws the attention of his readers to the latent narcissism which Lepidus eventually suffers. In a similar fate in the last but one scene of the folklore, in this play, which is set in Rome, the last triumvirate consisting of Brutus, Mark Anthony and Lepidus falls apart immediately after victory has been attained.⁴² The scene counterfeits the pervasive regression to the *id* and the (mis)appropriation of the reward of the struggle to only two members of the triumvirate who narcissistically perceived themselves as more deserving of the fruit of their historically joint "enterprise", that is, overthrowing the regime which they had perceived as illegitimate. In their conversation, Octavius and Mark Anthony argue about the role of Lepidus during and post the war against the triumvirate led by Caesar. While Octavius believes that Lepidus contributed significantly towards their victory, Anthony sees him only as a mindless fellow who could not contribute intellectually but was merely carrying out the orders like a well-trained horse, a creature he (Anthony) had trained to fight. He explicitly refers to him as a mere donkey, which, after carrying the luggage placed on him by Anthony, should just go, "...shake his ears and graze among commons". The poor Lepidus was never told he was perceived that way. Neither would he ever get to know that he had been categorized as such. This then makes a former "comrade" feel no remorse in excluding him, post *coup d'état*, though he had also risked his life for the same cause. Various Artists have raised this concern in their artistic genres. Among them is Lucky Dube, who in his song titled: *That's the way it is*. The persona in the song plaintively asks and states:

*Didn't I raise my voice high enough for you?
I was running like a fugitive, all the way
Risking rejection from my own people yea!
Now that you got what you wanted
You don't even know my name*

The second literary production which illustrates this character flaw is available in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Snowball, who had contributed selflessly to the victory of the animals in their political struggle against the owner of the farm, Mr Jones, was 'anathematized' through libel by Squealer. This character served as the ideologue in the service of the other pig, Napoleon. The projection of the adrenaline that was initially directed at Mr Jones was now diverted inwards and against a former comrade, Snowball. Justice and truth about him were being subverted in the quest to eliminate him in the post-struggle power magnetism. Squealer diminished the role of Snowball in the war against Mr Jones and eventually "ideologized" everyone into perceiving him as a traitor. The end of this "cadre" could be summed up in ostracism and alienation.

The European and, indeed, human (universally) account of the narcissistic post-collective success outlook and capacity for betrayal cannot be relegated to fiction alone. To substantiate the claim above, the discussion turns to Zacharias, who cites Sergei Aitmatov, revealing the sadism with which Stalin treated the peasants post the Russian revolution. This novelist unravels the callousness with which Stalin treated those who helped him gain power and caused the genocide of millions of them, including his family members.

⁴¹ Machiavelli, *Machiavelli's the Prince: Bold-Faced Principles on Tactics, Power, and Politics*.

⁴² W. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (Cape Town: Oxford University, 1979).

Taken verbatim, Aitmatov reports:

On one occasion, Stalin called for a live chicken and proceeded to use it to make an unforgettable point before some of his henchmen. Forcefully clutching the chicken in one hand, with the other, he began to systematically pluck out its feathers. As the chicken struggled in vain to escape, he continued with the painful denuding until the bird was completely stripped. ‘Now you watch’, Stalin said, as he placed the chicken on the floor and walked away with some breadcrumbs in his hand. Incredibly, the fear-crazed chicken hobbled toward him and clung to the legs of his trousers. Stalin threw a handful of grain to the bird, and as it began to follow him everywhere, he then said quietly, ‘This is the way to rule the people. Did you see how that chicken followed me for food, even though I had caused it such torture?’⁴³

After every collective success and the antagonists have been deposed, what often follows, if unguarded, is a pathology known as Narcissistic Personality Disorder. A typical condition of the psyche, the Blind has demonstrated in folklore. Borrowing from two sources, which are the American Psychiatric Association and Raskin and Terry (1998), as well as Zhang.⁴⁴ Narcissistic Personality Disorder is defined as a pathological constellation of traits characterized by impairments in interpersonal and self-functioning. In contrast, from a social psychology perspective, narcissism is a personality trait which is associated with: grandiosity, entitlement, empathic difficulties, and positive self-concepts along a continuum, rather than a discrete cut off for a disorder.”

The question is, “Has this narcissism, like the influenza virus, been dormant and waiting for the opportune moment to strike, or is it a psychosocial virus the powerful become susceptible to, once power has shifted to their side?” There is, therefore, a need to further investigate the complexity of this human behaviour. To ancient Greeks, this was probably the reason why they would ostracize an individual who showed signs of power mongery, even though the individual could not be held culpable in some instances.

CONCLUSION

With the view to demonstrate its transcendental, universal and timeless communicative purpose as well as the moral lessons which are inherent in folklore, this paper discussed the story, *Sefofu le Setlhotsa*. The Reader Response Theory was used to analyse the story. In an attempt to demonstrate its universality and the place it deserves in creative and language arts, the author juxtaposed it with some modern literary productions.

This folklore demonstrated that the intellectual heritage of Batswana and, by extension, humanity encoded in the folklore incorporates enduring concerns about human nature and why the modern curriculum needs to incorporate folklore as a way of inculcating their mores among their progeny for the preservation of the species. It can, therefore, be stated that without having a categorisation of knowledge into disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and many others, the sage who weaved this story was a devotee to the study of human nature.

As stories such as this one were told to children, normally in the evening around a fire, an appraisal of the story teaches that raising children is not just a matter of providing food, shelter and clothing, but it should also be an act of exposing them to the self and other selves. This is a strategy to arouse their consciousness against possible foibles inherent in human nature. What necessitates this cultural practice is the potential of such character deficits to interfere with the process of becoming human. The study has demonstrated that greed and selfishness can be self-defeating.

Thematic concerns in this story delved largely into human nature and focused on character manifestations such as narcissism, and its corollaries, which include: self-imposed amnesia, personality retrogression, avarice and their counter personality trait, altruism. It further demonstrated that greed is a psychosocial substratum upon which numerous human eccentricities spring.

The folklore further presented itself as straddling the two eras of African fiction, which are the colonial and the post-colonial eras. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that the teaching of literature in South African schools and even the whole of Africa should start treating the folklore genre, not only as a primitive form of literature, but also accord it the status similar to that of modern literary texts. This form

⁴³ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live without God* (Thomas Nelson, 2004).

⁴⁴ American Psychiatric Association., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington DC, 2013).

of literature has proved itself universal, timeless and equally potent to perform its socialising role just like the rest of modern literature from any part of the world does. It should, therefore, be 'repartriated' in the curriculum and be allowed adequate space to serve as the foundation of literary appreciation and humanization.

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APPENDIX A

Transcribed and translated versions of the folklore

Sefofu le Setlhotsa

Motse wa Batswana o kile wa tlhaselwa ke ntwaga bogologolo, ya leleka batho mo gae. Mo maropeng ga sala monna a tlhotsa, le mongwe wa sefofu.

Dikoa tse pedi tse, tsa dumelana gore Sefofu se belege Setlhotsa ba tshabe; ba latele morafe.

Erile ba tsamaya mo nageng, Sefofu sa belega Setlhotsa, Setlhotsa sa bona matlaka a sekelela mo lefaufaug. Ke fa a bolelela yo o maoto gore ba tsamaele teng.

Ba fitlhela manong a kokoanetse phologo.

Erile ba sena go leleka manong, ga tsoga kgang. Setlhotsa sa re: "Phologolo e bonwe ke matlho a me".

Sefofu sa re: "E fitlheletswe ke maoto a me." Erile fa kgang ya bona e golela pele, go se wa bona yo o ineelang, Setlhotsa sa rita, sa katoga Sefofu ka se sa bone motho, se sa bone phologolo. Sefofu sa bo se bitsa se re: "Ao monna kana e ne e le wena matlho a rona gee, o befelang ka ke fa phologolo e le ya gago."

APPENDIX B

Folklore title: The Blind Man and the Cripple (The English version)

Once upon a time, a Batswana village was attacked by an army, which chased people from their homes. There remained among the ruins a Cripple and a Blind Man[sic].

The two invalids agreed that the Blind Man should carry the Cripple, that they should flee and follow the people.

While they were passing through the veldt, the Blind Man carrying the Cripple, the one who could see, saw some vultures hovering. So he told the one who had the use of legs about it, and they went towards the place (where the vultures were hovering).

There, they found some vultures surrounding the carcass of the wild animal. They chased them away. After they had driven the vultures away, a dispute arose between them. The Cripple said, "It was my eyes that saw the carcass." The Blind Man argued that the carcass was reached through his legs. When their dispute became more heated, and they would not give in to one another, the Cripple crawled away from the Blind Man.

Then the Blind Man, being unable to see either his companion or the animal, called out: "My friend, it is evident that you are our eyes. Why should you lose your temper? I know that the animal was found by you, and it's yours"

Then the cripple came back and led the blind man to the animal.

Provide full reference for - Raskin and Terry (1998),

About Author

Moagisi Edwin Seleka, is a senior lecturer and head of department-Academy Literacy and Science Communication at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. He obtained a BA in Education, majoring in Setswana, History and Education. He then started a pursuing a four-year non-degree program in English (Language and Literature). Upon finishing this program, he enrolled for an honour's degree in English Literature, followed by Master's degree in English (General and Applied linguistics & African Literary Debates). In 2008, he was offered a Fulbright scholarship to study another master's in English

(TESOL) at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania which was preceded by an advanced certificate in Academic Literacy from the university of Syracuse in New York. He came back to South Africa and enrolled for PhD in English Literature at the University of the Northwest, Mafikeng Campus. Among other qualifications he holds are a one year certificate in Strategy Implementation with Wits University and a one year course in Jungian Psychology which he completed last year. His recent passion is the relationship between Language Arts and human wellness as well as an understanding of the human psyche through literary works. This has led to the following: a jointly presented paper on bibliotherapy at the 2023 conference of the Gauteng Library Association of South Africa (LiASA) with Dr Grace Phalwane, another co-presented paper on the Arts and human wellness at the South African Association of Health Educationalists (SAAHE) in 2023, and the last being a paper on bibliotherapy, using a short story by Ngugi to demonstrate the efficacy of stories to inoculate, restore and preserve human wellness at an international conference hosted by the SRM University in India in 2024.