

# THE OPERATION OF MEMORY IN TRANSLATION: ON MOFFAT'S DESECRATION OF THE BATSWANA LINGUISTIC HERITAGE IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE 1857 ENGLISH- SETSWANA BIBLE

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## ABSTRACT

The translation of the Bible into Setswana stands out in the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries' project to expand Christian religion among the Batlhaping of South Africa. While the translation of the 1857 English-Setswana Bible into Setswana can be regarded as a revolutionary achievement, unsettling questions are raised that centre on issues of standardisation of Setswana; whose interests were served, tensions around representation and justice, and preservation of semantic and stylistic equivalences. Progressing from the idea that translation is neither just an act that is neutral or an instance nor product, but a complex activity



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during which the translator transmits cultural and ideological messages, we seek to argue in this paper that the production of the 1857 English-Setswana Bible by Moffat is an exemplar of a product caught up in aforementioned seductions of translating. With an understanding that memory is an important tool and force in the accomplishment of translations of texts, decolonial epistemic perspective is deployed to unmask the manner in which coloniality of knowledge operated in the process of translating the 1857 English-Setswana Bible, leading to a desecration of the linguistic heritage of Batswana. In addition, we illustrate how Moffat as a primary beneficiary and supporter of the institution of imperialism and its systemic violence, renders Batswana invisible in the creation of the 1857 English-Setswana Bible and displaces them as legitimate bearers of their own historical and cultural memory.

**Keywords:** Colonisation; decoloniality; 1857 English-Setswana Bible; identity; memory; translation; racial classification; representational justice

## INTRODUCTION

Africa is deeply indebted to missionaries who first reduced the indigenous languages to writing – in South Africa seven languages had to be dealt with. Missionaries also distributed literature on the [African] continent [early], and later went on to encourage Africans to produce the first fruits of indigenous authorship.<sup>1</sup>

The history of Christianity in South Africa, according to Oosthuizen (1970),<sup>2</sup> is integrally connected with the translation of texts into indigenous languages. Oosthuizen's assertion orients us to debates around the role that missionaries played in the invention of an Africa and its people, and most importantly around how Christian religion was instrumentalised in Africa and its regions through literature imported from foreign shores and later through processes of translation. Very distinct analytical areas are discernible from the claims made by Oosthuizen in the opening quotation above. The first relates to the distribution of foreign written texts on the continent and particularly in South Africa by missionaries. If we accept that written texts are equally often the consequence of the knowledge of a maker, who is historically situated as suggested by Mbembe (2001), we immediately get confronted by the idea that texts contain in themselves aspects of the memory of the maker and the collective memory of the community to which the maker belongs. The second, which is directly related to the former, refers broadly to translation of source texts into indigenous languages. Bassnet and Trivedi (1999) argue that translation is not an isolated act that happens in a vacuum, but part of an 'ongoing process of intercultural transfer'<sup>3</sup> characterised by asymmetrical relations between texts, authors or systems.

1 Oosthuizen, G.C. 1970. *Shepherd of Lovedale* (Johannesburg: Hugh Kwartland), 140.

2 Oosthuizen, G.C. 1970. *Shepherd of Lovedale*, 140.

3 Bassnet, S. and Trivedi, H. (Eds), 1999. *Postcolonial translation: Theory and practice* (London &

Shamma (2009) maintains that translation always involves tinkering with issues of difference and as such it is never a neutral and innocent activity. This foregrounds questions that centre on how similar or different the language of the source texts were to the target language(s) and the extent to which translation as a practice was able to minimise linguistic deviation from the target language(s). Based on these insights, it can be argued that the translation process is an act of memory and contains within itself the politics of hegemonic construction.

Robert Moffat's translation of the 1857 English Bible into Setswana signifies a historically significant moment in the advancement of Christian religion among Batswana. This article examines the manner in which the process of translation of this authoritative text reflects Moffat's colonial imagination and the effect it had on how he conceived of Batswana. The arrival of the missionary in South Africa coincides with the period of colonisation when Europe was seeking to expand outside its boundaries for territory to appropriate. It is within this context that Moffat's undertaking to translate and create<sup>4</sup> the 1857 English Bible into Setswana is viewed in this article. The conquest and invention of Africa and its regions has been substantiated by a principal axis of subjugation of African people. This has been voiced most notably by scholars such as Mbembe (2001)<sup>5</sup> in *On the postcolony* and Mudimbe (1988)<sup>6</sup> in *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge*, to name just two examples. For a great many postcolonial and decolonial scholars interested in dismantling Africa from colonial imaginations, the task of critiquing the logic of the colonial matrix of power, analysing how it has produced social discrimination and delinking the histories of power emerging from Europe, has been extremely important. To take this clarion call seriously, we locate the translation of the 1857 English-Setswana Bible in South African history to explore how this translation was used in the early period of colonisation and how memory was inscribed in this process. For the purpose of this article, we follow Ndlovu-Gatsheni's definition of decoloniality:

By decoloniality it is meant here the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that

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New York: Routledge), 2.

- 4 We use the term 'create' deliberately to underpin the fact that through translation, Moffat was in fact trying to preserve the English language and the memory representative of this language by disqualifying anything in Setswana and about Batswana that contested the protocols of foreign memory and power. As such, translation as performed by Moffat served to (re)create a new memory which subverts common communal memory and mores of Batswana.
- 5 Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the postcolony*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
- 6 Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern colonial world.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the above definition of Ndlovu-Gatsheni, it can be argued that translation is neither apolitical nor ahistorical. Thinking about translation in decolonial terms introduces a thought shift towards the figure of the translator, those who are the object of the translation and their relation to each other. This rethinking makes it possible to expose the pervasiveness of power in translation undertakings as well as their connections to dominant institutions. Investigations in the field of translation studies are framed around debates about the duty of the translator and the degree of permissible linguistic and stylistic deviation from source texts (Shamma, 2009). Offering a radical view of translation, Paz argues that language ‘is already a translation – first from the nonverbal world, and because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase.’<sup>8</sup> While a full-scale review of literature on the role of language in translation is beyond the scope of this article, it is however important to establish certain premises. Language as an apparatus has the capacity to create. Moreover, language has a discourse in itself in that it names, it defines and it signifies. It can be argued that through these three mechanisms language is power and as such it has the capacity to regulate who is allowed access and who is kept outside of the discourse and the practices that make the discourse possible. Hence where there is language, there is discourse and in the presence of a discourse there is a consensual or relational community. Translation in its essence is an act of memory. Within a decolonial framing, translations and how memory gets inscribed in such activities to represent conceptions of the past acquire a different significance. The translation process we could argue is an act of memory and contains within itself the politics of hegemonic construction.

The aim of this paper is to discuss issues of history and memory and how they operated through Moffat’s translation of the Bible into Setswana by examining a few pivotal testimonials in the letters contained in *Words of Batswana: Letters to Mahoko a Becwana 1883–1896* from intellectuals who engaged the missionaries regarding how Setswana was written and represented. Two specific issues are discussed with regard to the conversion of the English Bible into Setswana by Moffat. The first pertains to the grafting of colonial thought in Setswana orthography, and the second concerns the modifications of the language which can be related to differences to national memory. We argue that translation had a moralising aim and that the numerous letters that Moffat wrote to report back to Europe (giving details of historical occurrences in his mission field) bear testimony to the argument that his mission to translate the Bible into Setswana had a cultural-specific function to pass on

7 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2013. ‘Why decoloniality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?’ *The Thinker* 48: 14.

8 Paz, O. (trans. Irene del Corral). 1992. ‘Translations of literature and letters.’ In *Theories of translation from Dreyden to Derrida*, edited by R. Schulte and J. Biguenet, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 154.

memory of the imperialists and also cultivation of imperial life and standards to the Batswana readership. By omitting or downplaying elements important in Batswana cultural memory (notably the battle of Mantatees) in his account of the events that were happening at the time around his civilising mission, and by altering details in the semantic structure of Setswana language which did not accord with his own cultural memory, Moffat committed an epistemic defilement which functioned to fortify and consolidate the position of colonial power and to increase the legitimacy and credibility of European standards. It is possible to argue that translations are influenced by the particular national memorial context in which they are produced.

## THE ADVENT OF TRANSLATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The arrival of missionaries at the Cape in South Africa more or less represents the advent of translation in South Africa. Above all, due to the fervent zeal of the missionaries who were bound to spread the word of their god and who recognised the importance of literacy in the influencing of people, memory became a central tool in the process of reducing Setswana into a written language. Literacy through memory, we maintain, became a technology of power. As a technology of power, memory becomes a complex phenomenon that ought to be understood in at least two distinct senses. First, memory stands out as our only access to the past, and second, memories are of the past. Through memory we are able to remember events that we did not personally witness but that have become part of the symbolic order of our heritage.<sup>9</sup> Understood in this way, each element of memory when taken in the missionaries' objective to hasten the establishment of Christianity in African nomadic and other tribal cultures through the written word of Christian theology, without which the Christian doctrine may never have lasted into the 18th century (and beyond) in those cultures, then has significant implications at the level of identity formation. These implications, when viewed from an ethical-political point of view, raise questions around representational justice. Here we are confronted with issues that concern what foreign memorial instruments (used by missionaries in the form of literary texts) encourage that which is to be remembered, as well as whether (through translation) such memorials are able to preserve the identity of those that are being represented and incited to remember. A significant number of the early missionaries also learnt indigenous African languages. Moffat, for instance, saw Batswana as incapable of teaching him the language and decided to embark on a self-teaching exercise in order to learn Setswana language.

The acquisition of the language was an object of the first importance. This was to be done under circumstances the most unfavourable, as there was neither time nor place of retirement for study, and no interpreter worthy the name. A few, and but a few words were collected, and

9 Leichter, D.J. 2012. Collective identity and collective memory in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur, *Études Riccueriennes/Ricœur Studies*, 3(1): 114-131.

these very incorrect, from the ignorance of the interpreter of the grammatical structure either of his own or the Dutch language, through which medium all our intercourse was carried on. It was something like groping in the dark, and many were the ludicrous blunders I made. The more waggish of those from whom I occasionally obtained sentences and forms of speech, would richly enjoy the fun, if they succeeded in leading me into egregious mistakes and shameful blunders; but though I had to pay dearly for my credulity, I learned something.<sup>10</sup>

To teach himself the language, Moffat relied on his memory, a vessel that contained linguistic and cultural signs of his European origins to translate the 1611 King James Bible into an English-Setswana Bible. It would appear that John Evans, the London Missionary Society's (LMS) missionary who preceded Moffat, was academically well equipped to translate the Scriptures from the original languages. Evans 'had a good grounding in French, Latin and Greek and a sound knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic' (Lubbe 2009, 18-19). Indeed, some of these men were highly interested and gifted linguists who made it their life's work to study and record one or more of the African languages.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that Moffat produced a Bechuana spelling book in 1826, even though he had problems with his interpreters and the fact that he was not a linguist.

Moffat had no training in acquiring languages, neither were there any aids such as grammars and dictionaries that he could use. He also did not attempt to create such language guides, but instead learnt the language by immersion – ultimately succeeding by force of determination. After this, Moffat was ready to start translating. His goal was to produce a Tswana bible, but little did he realize that this task was to belabour him for several decades. Besides having had no training in language work whatsoever, he had no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek.<sup>12</sup>

Books such as: *The lives of Robert and Mary Moffat* (Moffat 1885); *Missionary labours and scenes in southern Africa* (Moffat 1842a); *Mr Moffat and the Bechuanas of South Africa* (Moffat 1842b) and *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat, missionary to South Africa 1871-1870* (Wilder 1887) present us with the various versions of how Batswana 'converted' to Western Christianity. For example, the letter of Mary Moffat to her parents and that of Robert Moffat present two different versions of the same event, namely the Mantatees battle, which eventually led to the 'conversion' of Batswana. It is in these narratives that we see how memory becomes a discursive tool. In his book, Schapera (1951)<sup>13</sup> compiled the letters and journeys

10 Moffat, R. 1842a. *Missionary labours and scenes in southern Africa*, (London, J Snow), 291.

11 It is worth mentioning that though Moffat was interested in learning Setswana, he was not interested in Batlhaping as people with lives of their own, but merely as souls to be saved. It is for this reason that throughout his letters and journals he insists upon their degenerate character over and over again. His attitude to the tribal culture is most clearly shown particularly when it comes to their religion (cf. Schapera 1951, xxvi).

12 Northcott, C.W. 1961. *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa 1817-1870*, (London: Butterworth Press), 121.

13 Schapera, I. 1951. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: Being the journals and the letters of Robert and Mary Moffat 1820-1828* (London: Chatto & Windus,).

of Robert and Mary; it is in these letters that one gets a glimpse of how memory was used as a tool. Furthermore, these letters point to how memory is neither apolitical nor ahistorical.

It is for this reason that organisational frames point out that the organisation that the missionaries belonged to, also had some form of influence. This is because these organisations were representing the stakeholder institutions. As a result the translator is not immune from these influences; as he had a sense of responsibility and aspirations of job satisfaction connected with his work environment. All of this can be summarised as the rights and responsibilities of ‘allegiance’.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, organisational frames are also cognitive. This can be seen in the individuals’ psychological conceptualisations regarding the Bible, translation, methodology, and so forth. With regard to translating the Bible into Setswana we argue that organisational frames included various difficulties. Firstly, they encountered linguistic challenges as there was not a written word in Setswana, including sources such as alphabet or grammar books to enable a translator to learn the language. Moffat (1842a) refers to interpreters as illiterate, and to Batswana as ignorant and intentionally misrepresenting the message of the Gospel – which also points to his organisational frames.<sup>15</sup> Moffat states:

The natives will smile, and make allowances for the blundering speeches of the missionary and though some may convey the very opposite meaning to that which he intends, they know from his general character what it should be, and ascribe the blunder to his ignorance of their language.<sup>16</sup>

## MEMORY, REMEMBERING AND NAMING

Moffat’s account of the attitude of Batswana towards missionaries creates an image in the memory of those who read his letters, books and memoirs of them being savages who lacked a sense of right and wrong. He states:

Now I will tell you what kind of people the Bechuanas were, and a few of the things which the missionaries had to put up with. And, first, you cannot think how dirty they were. The Bechuana children were never washed; the grown-up people were never washed; they never cleaned their houses; and their cooking vessels were never cleaned, unless the dogs took the liberty of doing it with their tongues. They thought it very foolish in the missionaries to wear clothes.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Wendland, E.R. 2008. *Contextual frames of reference in translation: A course book for Bible translators and teachers*. (Manchester and Kinderhook NY: St Jerome Publishing), 68.

15 cf. Moffat, R. 1842a. *Missionary labours and scenes in southern Africa*. London: J Snow, 294.

16 Ibid, 294.

17 Moffat, R. 1842b. *Mr Moffat and the Bechuanas of South Africa* (New York: Carlton and Porter), 11.

Memory as a tool of remembering was a significant part of Batswana. Mothoagae has argued persuasively elsewhere that Batswana had rich oral history of the Batswana people, with their cosmology, morality, indigenous knowledge system, rituals, drama, sayings and memo scripts being deeply embedded in memory.<sup>18</sup>

The same can be said about those who were the travellers, adventurers and missionaries. For them memory was also represented in written thoughts. Moffat, through memory, names and ‘others’ Batswana in the following manner:

We call them Becwana, and we call their language Secwana; and these terms are now in common use among the people. But they say they learnt these names from us, and have merely adopted the white man’s terminology. But however that may be, the word is now in general use, and is definite enough for all ordinary purposes.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the use of memory in naming and ‘othering’ by the missionaries and their fellow patriots, constructed racial markers in various ways.

Firstly, Batswana are named as Becwana. This process of naming, firstly, further categorises Batswana as ‘new people’. This is followed by the language they speak, namely Setswana. Secondly, they are further ‘othered’ on the basis of their physical appearance, precisely because, in the eyes of the European, Batswana did not seem to fit any of the existing European racial categories of the ‘other’ such as West African ‘Negro’, South-eastern ‘Kaffer’, or South-western ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Bushman’. Thirdly, ‘they are not, like the eastern Kaffers, invariably black; some being of a bronze colour, and others of nearly as light a brown as the Hottentot’. Or, as observed by Lichtenstein, ‘their colour is more brown than black, about halfway between the shiny blackness of the Negroes and the dullish yellow brown of the Hottentots’.<sup>20</sup> Naming and categorising implies that one does not have a name and has to be ‘othered’ in order to fall within a particular category, determined by those in the zone of being. It is worth noting that there is also a clear categorisation, which is an indication of an exercise of power by the missionaries, travellers, and the traders. Such an exercise of power will later intersect onto a black person, thus rendering him/her as an object of study, a body to be destructed and with no soul.

In the introduction of his book, Schapera (1951)<sup>21</sup> points to how memory was used to record a series of events by Moffat. He states:

18 Mothoagae, I.D. ‘Setswana proverbs within the institution of *lenyalo* [marriage]: A critical engagement with the *bosadi* [womanhood] approach,’ *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(1), Art. #1403:1

19 Mothoagae, I.D. 2014a. ‘An exercise of power as epistemic racism and privilege: The subversion of Tswana identity,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 16(1-2): 13.

20 Cf. Mothoagae, I.D. 2014a. An exercise of power as epistemic racism and privilege: The subversion of Tswana identity”. *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 16(1-2): 14.

21 Schapera, I, 1951. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: Being the journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffat 1820-1828*.



As a missionary working in the field, Moffat was required to keep a journal and send it periodically to the director of the L.M.S. He did not particularly relish the task, for which, indeed, he seems to have had little aptitude; and from about the middle of 1826 he apparently noted down the events of each day only when he was on a journey, and away from the Mission station. He refrained from using his own original drafts, sending the Directors, whenever the opportunity occurred, transcripts that sometimes omitted certain details, but that sometimes also included new matter evidently added at the time of copying.<sup>22</sup>

The question then follows: If Moffat was required to record events, why did he choose to omit or to add information? We would contend and argue that memory as a tool for remembering, transforms into a tool that constructs. The above citation illustrates that as a tool for remembering, memory represents information and ‘facts’ but at the point that it acquires the form for constructing things, memory acquires the ability to construct and make pronouncement about bodies, their nature, and how they can be treated.

Another example of how memory is used for remembering, describing and passing on information as ‘factual’, is the Mantatees<sup>23</sup> battle. The narrative as recorded by Robert and Mary presents the story in two ways, firstly as the savage aspect of Africans living in South Africa, secondly as a divine intervention towards the conversion of Batlhaping to Western Christian civilisation.

## SELECTIVE MEMORY AND MANIPULATION OF DIFFERENCE: (RE)MEMBERING THE MANTATEES BATTLE AND BATLHAPING

The characters in the story of the battle with Mantatees are: Robert Moffat, Hamilton, paramount kgosi Mothibi, Griquas, Batlhaping and the invaders Mantatees. The location of the battle is Dithakong. The source of the battle, according to the narrative is not known, as we will show later in this section. According to the memoir of Robert Moffat, as recorded by Wilder (1997), the invasion of Mantatee becomes a turning point towards the ‘conversion’ of Batlhaping. According to the story a serious native war known as the Mantatee invasion took place in the latter part of the year 1823. The account describes them in the following manner:

These Mantatees were a lawless people of a mixed blood, who went forth to plunder, and burn, and murder of their own ungoverned wills, when and where it best suited them.<sup>24</sup>

22 Schapera, I, 1951. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, xiii-xiv.

23 The Mantatees battle, according to Moffat, took place in 1823. Moffat describes the battle in his memoirs, journals, letters and his works. He provides in this material some form of historical content. Such content, though, ought to be received with caution.

24 Wilder, M.L. 1887. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat, missionary to South Africa 1871-1870* (New York: Fleming H, Revell Company), 36.

What one notices from the citation above<sup>25</sup> is that there seems to be no knowledge of the origin of Mantatees; in other words who are they, where do they come from and what causes them to engage in this battle – is it because of famine, or other factors. The only description given according to the information in the story by the narrator is that they are a lawless people, of mixed blood and they murdered people for the fun of it. It is at this point that Mr Moffat becomes alarmed and takes action.<sup>26</sup> According to the narrative, Mr Moffat travels to find more information about Mantatees. Upon his arrival at the neighbouring towns, he finds that Mantatees have already passed and they were on their way to Kuruman.<sup>27</sup> In haste he returned home to Kuruman, fearing that Mantatees would have arrived, destroyed, and murdered everyone in that place.<sup>28</sup> Moffat arrived before Mantatee and managed to inform the Batlhaping of Kuruman of the sad news.

According to Moffat's notes the people flocked for advice and directions. In haste, Moffat was put at the head of the affairs by the united voices of all the stations. According to the narrator 'it was a responsible position, but assumed in God's strength and on behalf of all he held dear'.<sup>29</sup> Moffat, according to the story, proceeded in the following manner: firstly, to strengthen the soldiers at Kuruman through the help of the Griqua town. This step, as stated by Wilder, benefited Moffat. This is because at the time of the arrival of the Griqua, Mantatees were less than 40 miles from the place. Secondly, the aim was to keep Mantatees at a distance away from the homes. Thirdly, it was to negotiate peace with them first. As the story continues, the end result was that there was no peace settlement but war broke out the following day. The Mantatees had poisoned arrows, while Moffat's group had guns. Of course, according to the story, Moffat was not in the fight but encouraged and helped the wounded from the attacks of straggling enemies.<sup>30</sup>

After a long battle, according to the narrative, Batswana won, while the Mantatees retreated and troubled no more; Moffat's victorious army gathered together and returned.

It is at this juncture that the narrative changes and the events of the battle are understood as an act of God. The following statement indicates such a supposition:

Out of this cloud, dark as it seemed, came much that was favorable to the cause of Christ. In the eyes of the natives the missionaries appeared different men. Noble, unselfish men, who instead of forsaking them, as they might have done, and fleeing for their own safety,

25 Furthermore, as the story continues the Batlhaping heard rumours for months about the coming of the Mantatee until a number of refugees came looking for protection. The facts about where these refugees came from, how many they were, including whether there were women and children in the group, are not mentioned in the story.

26 Wilder, M.L. 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 36.

27 Wilder, 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 36.

28 Wilder, 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 37.

29 Wilder, 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 37.

30 Wilder, 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 37.

remained with, and saved them and theirs; for, to the cool energy, the generous courage, and prompt action of Mr Moffat, seconded by that of Mr Hamilton, did they acknowledge their deliverance from the hands of the cruel and powerful Mantatees, and though they did not then yield to the missionaries' God, they gave to the missionaries their affection, respect and confidence; all entering wedges for the cause, those men came among them to advance. Had the people been idolaters, it is said, such was their gratitude, they might have tried to deify Mr. Moffat.<sup>31</sup>

It is proper at this point to turn to the letter written by Mary Moffat to her family. In this letter, Mary Moffat relates the same story to her family. The rainmaking ritual by a Moroka and Mantatees battle are closely linked in order to suggest that both of these 'events' were necessary for the conversion of Batlhaping or rather for civilisation to take place. The letter begins in the following manner:

At the beginning of September Mary Moffat writes to her parents from Griqua Town: My dear Robert left me on the 6th ultimo... [he] is gone to make another effort at the language before we go... Last year we had the pleasure of informing you of the downfall of rainmaking superstition, and now another obstacle is broken through; indeed they now seem to fear denying Robert anything. He writes that he has broached the subject of removing the station, and thinks he will succeed. If we get to that place it will soon pay the expense, and save the Society many thousands of dollars, and will also be a sort of magazine for provisions for infant stations in the interior. We cannot but think that a new era is dawning on the history of this unhappy, wretched country, and that the late awful events will be overruled for the spread of the glorious gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Madise in his article (2002) raises concerns regarding the accuracy of the story. He states:

The story of Dithakong offers more questions than answers and the more we ask questions the more we move away from the answers. The shock of the Difeqane on the Southern Batswana is something which needs to be carefully looked at. When the London Missionary Society made inroads among the Batswana there, it was only two to three years after Moffat had settled among them and this could not have given Moffat a clear geography of that area.<sup>33</sup>

What Madise is pointing out is that the missionaries were first and foremost men on a Western Christian civilisation mission. They were also products of an imperialistic culture, and their transcriptions inevitably reflected these factors. In other words, they used memory to write and describe what suited them and omitted what they wanted without any concern of misrepresenting the reality. The various versions on the Mantatees battle raise serious concerns, as we have alluded in the previous

31 Wilder, 1997. *Missionary annals: Memoir of Robert Moffat*, 38.

32 Moffat, J. 1885. *The lives of Robert and Mary Moffat: With portraits and maps* (New York: Armstrong & Son), 116.

33 Mokhele, M. 2002. "Difequane/Mfecane: The Battle of Dithakong: An anti-clockwise migration of the mission expansion to the southern Batswana," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, XXVIII(1): 283.

paragraph. Furthermore, we will discuss in the next section how the process of translating the Bible into Setswana relied immensely on memory, particularly how the English language becomes infused into Setswana and how Setswana is expressed in the form of other European dialects such as Welsh.

The process presents itself most accessibly in letters, reports and published works recounting the journey to the mission-field. But there is also a discernible Tswana commentary on these events, spoken less in the narrative voice than in the symbolism of gesture, action and reaction, and in the expressive manipulation of language. The interplay, of course, was between two parties of incommensurate power; this being reflected in the fact that the evangelists were acutely aware of their capacity to ‘make’ history. To be sure, their impact lay as much in their representation of the process as in the activities of its participants. To those who cared to listen, they told a story of an Africa slowly awakening to white initiative. Yet the natives were no less historical actors, even though their actions might have lain in the shadow of European self-representation. They were soon casting the missionary in a script of their own making. The meeting was thus an encounter as much poetic as pragmatic. Based on exchange and misconception, it set the terms for the long process of colonisation that was to follow.

## TRANSLATION AS A TOOL OF NAMING AND OTHERING

Translation was a part of their conversion attempts, and for colonists it was a part of political and economic strategy. The process of acquiring a language requires one to listen and learn. In other words, the one learning the language has to first and foremost appreciate the speakers of the language. However, we see the direct opposite particularly in the writings of the missionaries. As Schapera (1951) refers to Moffat’s lack of appreciation of Batswana people, he states:

Considering the opportunities he had, he tells us remarkably little about the culture of the people among whom he lived and worked. A few brief remarks on rainmaking and other “superstitions”, metal work, medical practices, and the status of serfs, these constitute virtually all that he thought it worth to record...he was apparently interested in the BaTlhaping, not as people with lives of their own but merely as souls to be saved.<sup>34</sup>

It can be argued that the use of memory as a tool for remembering, transforms the translator into a tool that constructs. In Moffat’s voluminous book, *Missionary labours and scenes in southern Africa*, which could be described as a ‘Text of Terror,’ the interpreters are described in quite a disparaging fashion:

[A] missionary who commences giving direct instruction to the natives, though far from being competent in the language, is proceeding on a safer ground than if he were employing an

34 Schapera, I. 1951. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, xxv-xxvi.

interpreter, who is not proficient in both languages, and who has not a tolerable understanding of the doctrines of the gospel. Trusting an ignorant and unqualified interpreter [came] with consequences [that are] not ludicrous but dangerous to the very objects which lie nearest to the missionaries' heart...The interpreter, who cannot himself read and who understands very partially what he is translating will, as I have afterward heard, introduce...into some passages simple sublimity of the Holy Writ, just because some word in the sentence had a similar sound. Thus the passage, "The salvation of the souls is a great and important subject," [becomes] "The salvation of the soul is a very great sack," must sound strange indeed!<sup>35</sup>

His lack of appreciation of the rich oral history of the Batswana people, their cosmology, morality, indigenous knowledge system, rituals, drama, sayings and memo scripts which are deeply embedded in memory, is not surprising. This is because as a missionary he regarded himself as an educator and civiliser amongst the native Africans.

For the missionaries, as we will show in the next section dealing with the debates found in *Makoho a becwana* around the standardisation of Setswana, Batswana have no authority in determining how Setswana is to be written; this is based on the concept of organisational frames. That is, the psychological conceptualisations regarding the Bible, translation and methodology. Based on the notion that memory is always selective and it can be distorted, it is without doubt partial, even at times falsified.

One of the essential elements of memory is that nothing idiosyncratically human, be it personal and collective identities, languages, social and material traditions, or religions, can exist apart from the gift of memory. In other words, through memory one chooses to forget, as a strategy of voluntary amnesia, cruelly and systematic.<sup>36</sup> This form of amnesia is expressed in Moffat's own ignorance, as one who also could not speak both languages (Dutch and Setswana) fluently and one who was equally vulnerable to translation blunders, yet he quickly reverts to self-forgiving and tolerance, arguing that a gross mistranslation is forgiven on the basis of good character!

Since Robert Moffat was not a good linguist, even though through the use of memory he undermined the indigenous knowledge system of Batswana, he soon realised that his recollection and knowledge of Dutch was limited. Furthermore, it would not contribute to the successful evangelisation of Bathlaping. Moffat before long comprehended that he would have to learn their language if he hoped to achieve his evangelical mission, which included preaching in the vernacular and translating for their benefit the Scriptures and other religious material. He states:

35 Moffat, R. 1842a. *Missionary labours and scenes*, 294.

36 Booth, J. 1999. 'Communities of memory: On identity, memory, and debt', *The American Political Science Review* 93(2): 254.

The reducing of an oral language to writing being so important to the missionary, he ought to have every encouragement afforded him, and be supplied with the means necessary for the attainment of such an object...<sup>37</sup>

This he felt could only be done by isolating himself from his family and the mission station and living amongst Setswana-speaking people for as long as was necessary to become fluent in the language. He achieved this goal in 1827 when he lived among the *Barolong* for several months while studying Setswana. The self-teaching of a foreign language by Moffat, we would argue, indicates how memory becomes a discursive practice. He states:

I find the more I become acquainted with the language, the greater difficulties rise in view: the great want of small words, chiefly, of the conjunctive, the great length of some, the aspirate guttural in others, and particularly the immense difficulty of translating theological ideas. Kingdoms, crowns, thrones, and sceptres, are unknown here. Difficulties would be easier encountered were a suitable interpreter to be had, which is not to be found. The one I now have I believe the best yet known, but still the difficulty of acquiring the real meaning of a word is incredible. I have collected a great number of words and committed most of them to memory, but I feel the want to practice to make them familiar. I have come to a conclusion to take a journey into the interior, in the course of the journey having nothing but Bootchuanas with me. I entertain a strong hope that by the time I return I shall be able to converse with considerable freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Northcott tells us that Moffat...halted his wagon on the open veld at *Tswaing* (the modern *Morokweng*), some 90 miles north-west of *Vryburg*, and there started his eight weeks of listening, talking and writing; while the flies pestered him, drank the very ink from his pen, and the genteel beggars lingering around.<sup>39</sup> Moffat states the following regarding the orthography of Setswana language:

As many words in the Sechuana language will necessarily occur in this and the following chapters, a few remarks on the orthography may be found useful to those who would wish to pronounce them correctly. The *a* is sounded like *a* in father; *e* like *e* in clemency; *è* with an accent, like *ai* in hail; *i* like *ee* in leek, or *ee* in see; *o* like *o* in hole; *u* like *u* in rule; the *y* is always used as a consonant. These vowels are long or short according to their position in the word. *Ch* represented in Bechuana books by the Italian *c*, is sounded like *ch* in chance; *g* is a soft guttural; *ph*, *th*, *kh*, are strong aspirates; *tl*, like the Welsh *ll*, preceded by a *t*; *ng*, which is represented in the written language by the Spanish *ñ*: has the ringing sound of *ng* in sing. This outline will enable any one to read the Sechuana language with tolerable correctness. It may be proper to remark here, that the national name of the people, is Bechuana, which is simply the plural of Mochuana, a single individual. Sechuana is an adjective, and is accordingly applied to designate anything belonging to the nation. *A u itse Sechuana?* Do you know

37 Moffat, 1842a. *Missionary labours and scenes*, 291.

38 Schapera, I. 1951. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 43-44.

39 Northcott, C.W. 1961. *Robert Moffat: Pioneer*, 117.

Sechuana? language being understood. From these words all the different names which have been given to that people, took their rise.<sup>40</sup>

According to As-Safi, as cited in Mothoagae (2014b),<sup>41</sup> translated text should at least ideally and theoretically be semantically accurate, grammatically correct, the style must be effective, and textually coherent as with the source text. It therefore can be argued that the project behind the Bible translation resides outside Batswana's interest. It follows then that it did not necessarily serve their interest. There is no doubt that Robert Moffat's Setswana was not perfect when he undertook the translation.

## 'YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT WHEN WE READ OUR BIBLE WE CHANGE THE LETTERS WITH OUR MOUTHS'<sup>42</sup>

The debates in *Letters to Mahoko a Becwana* 1883–1896, particularly on the standardisation of Setswana, are crucial in understanding how memory represents information and 'facts' but at the point that it acquires the form for constructing things, memory acquires the ability to construct and make pronouncement about bodies, their nature, and how they can be treated. For the sake of this article we will outline three letters.

In the 1857 Moffat Bible we find a clear indication of how memory epitomises knowledge and 'truth'. One notices throughout the Bible how knowledge and 'truth' about Setswana is constructed through misrepresentation of the language and the use of English for certain words. The Moffat Bible with its linguistic flaws was used by the missionaries across Bechuanaland. The intellectual Batswana on the other hand, questioned this unorthodox manner of writing Setswana as it did not represent the proper way of speaking Setswana. It is for this reason that *Sebotseng Loatile* in his letter to the editor of *Mahoko a Becwana*, 1890, uses indigenous knowledge system and memory to subvert the constructed Setswana, which was non-representational and improperly written.

Between January and June 1883, various letters were written by Batswana to the editor of the newspaper debating the question of what is the proper way of writing Setswana, including the type of dialect to be used, considering that there are different dialects within Batswana. It is at this point that we can detect the dissatisfaction with how Setswana was written by the missionaries. The editor of the newspaper responded to the letters in an editorial titled 'The correct way to write'. He states:

40 Moffat, *Missionary labours and scenes*, 225.

41 Mothoagae, I.D. 2014b. 'The gendered God in Setswana Bible and the captivity of Modimo: Moffat and the translating of the Bible into Setswana', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, XL(2):152.

42 Mgadla, P.T. and Volz, S.C. 2006. (translators/compilers). *Words of Batswana: Letters to Mahoko a Becwana 1883-1896* (Cape Town: Paarl Print), 33.

We are happy to have letters that move the discussion of pronunciation and letters forward. We are pleased with such discussion, which can be very helpful. It now seems that the language of Setswana is complex as far as ways of writing are concerned... God willing, the missionaries will meet at Seoding [the Kuruman mission] next year in March. Should they be asked to try and settle the issue and decide the proper ways to write and publish?<sup>43</sup>

The question then is why would the missionaries decide on behalf of the people? Are these people not the ‘owners’ of the language?<sup>44</sup> They were also products of an imperialistic culture, and their transcriptions inevitably reflected these factors. It is for this reason that on 2 September 1889 the editor states the following regarding the outcome of the meeting:

In March this year, missionaries of the LMS who teach on the language of Setswana gathered in Kuruman. As they met, they took up the issue of the letters that are used for printing and writing. Many missionaries of other missions oppose some of the letters with which we have been writing. They reject them because they have never liked them. They reject the letter *d* and they reject the letter *w*. These missionaries like the old way of printing, the one that is still used today for the Bible and the Testament... So, these things were discussed, and it was agreed that those letters should not be changed, and that writing and printing should be done only with the old letters. Now *w* has been dropped so that it will be written “*bañoe*” [others] not “*boñwe*”, and it will be written “*rumela*” [greet] not “*dumela*”, and “*Morimo*” [God] not “*Modimo*”, and “*lilo tse di thata*” [difficult things] not “*dilo tse di thata*”.<sup>45</sup>

The decision by the missionaries points to how memory as a tool can be used within a text as a technology of power and a tool to domesticate and to ‘other’. Furthermore, they reinstall their colonial thought and trajectories within the subconscious of Batswana, thus creating a double consciousness. Batswana use sayings and memoirs as linguistic heritage to resist this domination by the missionaries. To achieve this, oral tradition becomes a point of reference, thus keeping the foreigner outside. In his letter to the editor dated December 1889 *Sekaelo Piti* captures the general concerns about the writing of Setswana by the missionaries in the following manner:

We have complained much about our language in the books, because they have not been representing true Setswana but rather Setswana and English; an English Setswana that is read as only a reminder of the real thing. For example, “go diha” to make has been written as “*go riha*”, “*didimala*” [be quiet] as “*ririmala*” or “*lilimala*” also “*Modimo*” [God] as “*Morimo*”, and “*legodimo*” [heaven], as “*legorimo*”. But when we saw hymn books in the year 1883, we were very happy because a missionary had arrived who speaks the language of our mothers and who speaks proper Setswana. He says, “*Yesu kwana ea Modimo*” Jesus lamb of God and

43 Mgadla, and Volz, 2006. *Words of Batswana*, 17.

44 Wendland, E.R. 2008. *Contextual frames of reference in translation: A course book for Bible translators and teachers*. (Manchester and Kinderhook, New York: St Jerome Publishing), 68.

45 Mgadla, and Volz, 2006. *Words of Batswana*, 27.



not “*Yesu koana*” or “*kuana*”. This missionary also printed a spelling book in the year 1885. He is the one who knows the true language of Setswana.<sup>46</sup>

In his letter to the editor on 3 January 1890, Sebotseng Loatile asserts memo scripts of Batswana in the following manner:

To the editor, .... I hear news about nations and the word of God. But about the letters that have been taken out, I am very concerned. I assumed that our Bible was printed as it is because the missionaries had not quite grasped our language. But now they understand our language and they speak it very well. So, I am surprised that they are removing core letters. Here, everyone who reads books is not happy about the removal of the letters that have been removed. You should know that when we read our Bible, we change the letters with our mouths...even though the Griqua and Korana are also able to read, they have printed for them in their own language.

It is evident from the two letters cited above that Batswana redefine themselves through the use of memory. It is probable that such an assertion of identity through *(re)membering* became a tool for resisting foreign invasion which did not take into consideration the way in which Batswana perceived Setswana language to be. To rebuke foreign domination introduced by the missionaries through improper use of Setswana language, Batswana infused the proper letters into the reading of the created text.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we defended two claims. First, that memory is a strong force in the accomplishment of translations and it enables the installation of traditions and cultural heritage of the translator. This indicates that particular national memorial context in which texts are produced, influence the very act of translation. Second, that debates around the standardisation of Setswana cannot of essence be addressed outside the understanding of how Batswana relied on the working memory as a tool to safeguard their linguistic heritage. Batswana, far from being complicitors to the passive acceptance of foreign cultural heritage, their resistance was displaced through reconstruction of Setswana language into its proper linguistic form. Therefore the challenge from linguists memorialised in letters to *Mahoko a Becwana* needs to be understood as a response to the otherness, first of the European past contained in the translated version of the Setswana Bible, as well as the otherness of the Batswana cultural and linguistic heritage produced through the translation itself. Any project serious about the influence of memory in the translation process of the Bible into Setswana, should take into consideration those historical events that call for remembering, such as the Mantatees battle. It is also crucial that resistance strategies of Batswana be reinserted into our analyses of the history of the missionary and the

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46 Mgadla and Volz, 2006. *Words of Batswana*, 31.

project of translations. In so doing we conclude that memory can help create new possibilities for achieving representational justice in the quest to problematise the standardisation of Setswana and to avoid circumventing other Setswana dialects. In addition, the working of memory in the translation of the 1857 English Bible into Setswana reveals a poignant reminder that Setswana, as represented in this text, cannot and should not be a benchmark of Setswana spoken in contemporary times. When we begin to read the translation of the 1857 English Bible into Setswana within the context of the historical project of colonialism and how national identities were constructed through memory, it becomes difficult to ignore the decolonial call to first recognise and then question the credo of power upon which the 1857 English-Setswana Bible rests. Therefore, delinking such a past requires a deliberate and conscious reinterpretation of the 1857 English-Setswana Bible to reflect the nuances of the language as it is spoken in contemporary times.

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