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A depiction of Maphalla's message in his poems: The case of Ke ikopela tokoloho and Mahlo a ka tutuboloha

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In this article, we argue that KPD Maphalla's poems were very influential in portraying protest to different forms of social oppression and exclusion in South Africa and Africa at large. Therefore, as a writer who was subjected to racial segregation during the apartheid regime, he positioned himself as a social poet concerned about the sociopolitical situation of Africans in Africa. The article illustrates how Maphalla's use of tone and attitude towards racial discrimination has shown his ability to choose style in articulating a clear sociopolitical protest. This strategy has helped to make his readers aware of the social anomalies of his time, while condemning moral degeneration of that era. Therefore, this article provides an analysis of two poems from his book entitled Kgapha tsa ka: *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* (My eyes open) and *Ke ikopela tokoholo* (I am asking for freedom), to understand the influence of the selected poems that are constructed in the form of protest. A historical-biographical criticism framework was employed in this case study to unravel the sociopolitical influence of his work towards the fight for freedom in South Africa. It is a qualitative explorative study, which uses purposive sampling to show how he portrays the theme of protest in his poems. Content analysis was used to analyse data guided by interpretivist paradigm.

Contribution: This article fills a knowledge gap in Sesotho analysis. The article further contributes by highlighting Maphalla's stance toward overcoming prejudice against black people. The article confirms that Maphalla, through his poetry, has played an important role in acting as a spokesperson for black people, and their freedom in South Africa.

Keywords: social oppression; sociopolitical protest; KPD Maphalla; postcolonial struggle; African poetry; critical discourse analysis.

Introduction

Maphalla is one of the prolific writers in Sesotho and has written several books, ranging from poems, novels and plays. Makhubela (1997) expounds that Maphalla is a prominent South Sotho who has published many poetry books. Lechesa (2021) postulates that Maphalla was a staunch political activist who worked hard to fight the past white oppressive regime in his own way, and in his books, he depicts the life of an ordinary black people under an oppressive regime. Maphalla has authored numerous books including *Tahleho* (drama), *Tshiu tseo* (novel), *Kabelwamanong* (novel), *Botsang lebitla* (novel), *Tsielala* (poetry), *Mahohodi* (poetry), *Dikano* (poetry), *Pinyane* (poetry), *Ditema* (poetry), *Fuba sa ka* (poetry), *Kgapha tsa ka* (poetry), *Seitebatso* (poetry), *Sentebale* (poetry), *Mohlomong hosane* (short stories) and *Bashemane ba Dibatoalong* (novel). Padi (1999) asserts that Maphalla published 16 poetry books, 2 short story books, 2 dramas and 6 novels, at the time of her research study. According to a media release statement by the Free State Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2022), Maphalla's accolades include winning the Orator of the Year award as a student at Tshiya College of Education (1976), Thomas Mofolo Floating Trophy and Radio Sesotho Astera. Maphalla produced numerous literary works that have been the subject of master's and doctoral research dissertations at universities. This legendary wordsmith is also a recipient of an honorary doctoral degree from the University of the Free State. Maphalla was also bestowed an Order of Ikhamanga Award for Literature in 2021 following his passing by the state president of the Republic of South Africa, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa.

This article analysed two of his poems from a book entitled *Kgapha tsa ka: Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* and *Ke ikopela tokoloho*. From the two selected poems, the article investigated the extent of the theme of protest. It is worth stressing that protest in this context is not only confined to racial segregation but also comprises other forms of oppression such as the lack of freedom of speech,

mother tongue non-recognition and exclusion. Makhubela (1993) points out that as a child, Maphalla was bullied, and hence he protests all forms of ill treatment. Makhubela (1993) further articulates that:

> [*T*]he inferior position to which he has been relegated since an early age as well as the unfamiliar and uncalled for ill-treatment is protested in the poem *Ke ikopela tokoloho* (I am asking for freedom). (p. 5)

Cornwell (1979) expounds that:

> [*T*]he belief that art cannot do the work of a petrol bomb or a pamphlet in a political struggle is credal to orthodox Western aesthetics, and yet the critic is apt to feel uncomfortable about wielding this orthodoxy in the face of the unique exigencies of the South African situation. (p. 16)

We put forth the conviction that, despite expressing experiences or ideas in concentrated styles, poems are also influential in starting a discourse around different forms of social oppression and exclusion in South Africa and Africa at large. In our view, Maphalla as a writer who experienced racial segregation under the apartheid regime, his literary orientation is concerned with the sociopolitical conditions of South Africa. Moreover, we view Maphalla as a consul of black people. Seema (2023:85) argues that Maphalla in his literary projects 'wrote about Africans and South African human rights during the apartheid regime'. Moleleki (1988:122) argues that Maphalla's poetry is a livewire that carries the tradition that was usually done by *diro*ki (oral bards). In his poems, Maphalla articulates the voices of the people and portrays black intellectual protest in Sesotho genre (Moleleki 1988). Seema (2023:85) notes, 'His creative writing reflects an African worldview because his poetry is like a mirror that Africans can hold up to look at themselves'. We argue that, through his poems, Africans can know themselves as the events relate to them as they the poems trace their history (Seema 2023). According to Moleleki (1988), Maphalla's poetry constitutes protest that disapproves against the discrimination of black people by the apartheid government. Furthermore, Moleleki (1988) elucidates that protest should not only be confined to political arena but also be viewed as disapproval of all forms of manifestations that torment people's well-being. The next section discusses poetry as a political agenda.

Sociology of poetry in Africa

The voices in African poetry, according to Soyinka, encapsulate history and reality (Adetuyi & Adeniran 2018). Poetry is a sociological reality. Hill (2006:66) asserts that poetry 'has an institutional location within society, plays an important part in everyday social interaction, and promises very real results as a site for conceiving and explicating alternative social constellations'. Thus, a poem can be seen as a counterattacking instrument against despotism to curtail the power of whoever has such bad behaviour in mind (Adetuyi & Adeniran 2018). African literary author's creative projects such as poetry encompass varying themes, some of which have been encouraged by author's individual suffering, societal suffering, abandonment, marginalisation and mistreatment. Adigum (2019) indicates that besides composing literary projects on self-absorbed hegemonies or imposed doctrines, African literary writers have responded to African sociopolitical issues and have extensively written to right the general and regional-specific wrongs plaguing Africans. In the southern region of Africa, Maphalla also made an invaluable contribution by using his literary abilities to comment on the injustices experienced by him and his people under apartheid regime.

During the plight of apartheid rule, civilians experienced unimaginable tragedies, which led to painful violation of human rights against Africans in South Africa. Saba et al. (2019) postulate that under apartheid era, sanctions were imposed based on racial segregation, thereby excluding black South Africans from participating in political and economic activities. During the apartheid era, a series of unjust laws based on racial discrimination and Afrikaner's supremacy were enacted, resulting in inhumane practices upon the black majority in the country (Saba et al. 2019). Despite the apartheid government's policies and practices, literary writers condemned these social ills in their creative projects. Maphalla's literary projects provide criticism on sociopolitical affairs. This criticism may have been motivated by the view that poets have a social responsibility (Moleleki 1988). Considering the above, scholars have argued that African writers have used their literary work to reflect on and criticise sociohistorical experiences of the African people (Megbowon & Uwah 2020). There is a prevailing dissent view that South African writers including other African writers have authored literary projects that address issues pertaining to cultural nationalism and irrationalities brought about by colonialism and its products such as apartheid, in the case of South Africa. However, black South African writers such as Ezekiel Mphahlele, Wally Serote, Mbulelo Mzamane and Njabulo Ndebele have used their literary projects to revolt against the abnormalities of social order during apartheid.

Protestation in South Africa

Protestation is an inescapable reality in South Africa. The right to protest is guaranteed in the South African constitution of 1996. Rodrigues (2010) narrates that South Africa has been dubbed the protest capital of the world and hence not a new phenomenon. South Africa experienced several monumental protests which define defiance against the government and its practices. In 1960, black South Africans in Sharpeville engaged in a peaceful protest to demonstrate against passing laws (Maylam 2010). In the midst of protestation, the mood turned 'ugly' and police fired shots at protesters. Of course, there are other protests that precede this one, such as the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906 and many others. Friedman (2013) argues that the wave of protest in South Africa stretches back to the 1970s. African students in 1976 took to the streets to demonstrate their displeasure at the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in township schools. Recent protests in South Africa have been encouraged by unequal and segregated distribution

of land in both rural and urban areas, the demand for housing, poor service delivery, top-down and authoritarian approaches, evictions and forced removals, police brutality and overcrowding in schools, among other factors (Benjamin 2013; Davids 2012). Some anomalies that factor in protest have been carried over from predemocratic regimes. Modern-day protests especially among the student body in South Africa include protest university fees, student accommodation, academic exclusion and more. Protestation as a phenomenon is also explicitly demonstrated in literary projects such as poetry, drama and novels. For the purpose of this study, protest literature may be defined according to Akingbe (2012:1) 'as a sub-category of literature in which the works espouse protest explicitly, either as a major theme, a recurring motif, an overarching metaphor, or as a structuring device.' Protest poetry as a division of protest literature expresses certain irregularities alerting readers to such unacceptable situations so that a state of disquietude that leads to some kind of reform can be aroused (Ntuli 1984 in Tsambo 1999). It is our view that aspects of Maphalla's literary work mirror disquieting events in society with a hope for transformation. Generally, protest literature is particularly written for change. Therefore, this form of literature is not only focused on the rejection of a government or its practices. Selepe (1993) opines that protest literature is political because it has to do with the validation of a culture, which has been politically suppressed. Selepe (1993) indicates that political policies in South Africa had unlimited power to decide where Africans may or may not live, what education they may or may not receive, where they may or may not work and what remuneration they may or may not earn. This situation encouraged revolt in different forms among African civilians and African writers. African writers have had to deal with the onslaught of Western imperialism which dominated Africa politically and looked at everything that is African as less than, or inferior to, the Western (Selepe 1993).

Under the apartheid regime, which is the period under which Maphalla produced a significant number of literary projects, censorship was highly prevalent. African writers writing either in indigenous languages or English were systematically censored, especially when their literary projects address issues that seek to change the status quo. Therefore, writers needed to find strategies to comment on matters that they were barred from commenting on. Despite the imposition of such constraining laws where writers were censored, a significant amount of protest writing was produced (Tsambo 1999). Writers such as Maphalla were successful in finding ways to define African people's pain and suffering to his readers. In so doing, he attempted to protest political inequality, marginalisation, disposition, landlessness, selfhood and exploitation. In their protest through their literary compositions, writers reflected not only their position but the position of society as well. Their writing invoked awareness and consciousness about societal struggles experienced by the community or the nation. Writers' protest in apartheid took the form of political protest, sociocultural protest or religious protest among many African writers. This form of protest transcends apartheid. It is imperative for this article to briefly pronounce on these forms so that Maphalla's message could be placed in either one of the forms of protest. It is also important to note that literary works produced under apartheid cannot only be limited to protest because they had undertones to covertly communicate a message of consciousness. This aspect is manifested by Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like* wherein Biko expounds that black South Africans needed to break the chains of servitude to realise true freedom. Under apartheid, racial classification was very important. This classification was even instrumental in determining the type of discourses that black South Africans can engage. Therefore, writers needed to find alternative ways of communicating their ideas in such a manner that they would pass censorship.

In South Africa, the application of apartheid policies fuelled a lot of criticism from writers. In the context of the above, we argue that most of the African writers were compelled to protest violence in South African social setting. Their protests were based on discrimination and predicated upon a philosophy of political repression and a denial of human rights to African people (Adelokun 2022). Writers such as Maphalla have contributed to social protest category as well. Tsambo (1999) postulates that sociocultural protest expresses views on how to escape cultural practices, which prevent people from experiencing normal social life. The recurring theme in which this form of protest manifests itself on the grounds of traditionalism versus modernity and vice versa. African ways of life have constantly conflicted with modern ways. In some literary texts in South Africa, criticism has been placed on the lack of morality in how the youth conducts themselves.

It is also important to highlight that some literary texts portray religious protests as they seek to reject any indoctrination that undermines people's belief system. Here in Africa, Christianity and African spirituality have been in constant confrontation. Tsambo (1999) alludes that in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, religious protest stems from the imposition of Christianity on the indigenous people while their traditional ancestral beliefs and deity are suppressed. In recent times, religious figures within the Christian value system have protested several practices that are deemed 'profane' such as same-sex marriages, sex before marriage, the use of condoms, abortion and others.

Previous studies

This section discusses related literature on Maphalla's literary work and some research studies analysing poems written in other African languages.

People in Africa, especially of African descent in South Africa during apartheid, were censored from speaking against the government. Despite this censorship, which was also evident in production companies, literary writers continued to find ways to construct protest texts. Moleleki (1988) demonstrates that Maphalla's literary work was partly influenced by his displeasure with how politics affected indigenous South Africans. Thus, Canonici (1998) opines that in South Africa:

> [*T*]he dominant feelings under apartheid were concerned with the rape of the land and its people by foreign invaders, intent on robbing the people off their property, their culture, their way of life. (p. 57)

Canonici (1998) further expounds that during apartheid, authors found ways of expressing their anger at the restrictions imposed by a foreign power on their freedoms, especially freedom of movement, religion and education.

The notion of protest is also well captured in the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Panton (1948) who was an anti-apartheid activist. Thematically, this novel protests social structures and institutionalised hatred as advocated by apartheid policies and the despair of a country because of civilians' frustrations with the manner in which things are done in their country. The author cries for South Africa, for its people, for the dismantling of shackles of hatred and for prosperity.

Manyaka's (2000) study highlights issues surrounding the ill treatment of one another, unfair discrimination and the history of the struggle in Thobega's poems. 'The poet objects to the injustices, repression and discrimination practised by those who wield power' (Manyaka 2000:262). Thus, his poetry establishes a link between himself as a poet and those he feels he is representing, thereby becoming a source of inspiration to his people or those who are suffering. According to Manyaka (2000), Thobega's poems send messages of dissatisfaction and anger on social ills such as teenage pregnancy, rape, violence and oppression. The present article finds Manyaka's study important as it informs on the theme of protest in the selected Setswana poems. Like Maphalla, the poems that were analysed in Manyaka's study portray protest of discrimination of black people. However, the current article is different from Manyaka's study because it focuses on Sesotho poems, while Manyaka's study was on Setswana poems. The analysis of the poems was guided by knowledge from both oral tradition and Western acculturation to the interpretation of Sesotho poetry. The article sought to trace Maphalla's life in two (randomly) selected poems.

A recent study by Chaphole (2023) on self-writing as a literary site in KPD Maphalla's poems brings forth yet another important aspect of KPD Maphalla's poems. The study had a closer look at autobiography and how the author invents himself as the narrator. According to Chaphole (2023), the poet as the narrator talks about the events that have happened in their own lives. Borrowing Chaphole's (2023) words, from the two selected poems under examination, we find Maphalla telling the story about himself, lamenting and crying about the freedom that he desires and wishing that his eyes could open and see the events taking place around him. Chaphole's (2023) study is informative to the current as it looks Maphalla's work from an autobiographical point of view. Therefore, he explains that Maphalla's work is self-referential because:

> [*A*]utobiography as a literary genre signifies a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author's own life story, or a substantial part of it, seeking to reconstruct their personal development in a given historical, social and cultural framework. (Chaphole 2023:69)

We find the study relevant in that it informs us about the importance of autobiographical texts and their value as literature pieces (Chaphole 2023). However, the study did not investigate the use of protest in Maphalla's self-referential poems, which is the focus of the current article.

From the above discussions, it can be concluded that oppression, discrimination and segregation experienced by black people in South Africa have been a topic of interest for black poets. They voiced out their views and plead for freedom through poetry. They became a voice in resisting the oppression and protest the unjust laws as well as view their thirst for freedom. The current article, therefore, seeks to evaluate Maphalla's message of protest, the use of poetry as activism in his poems and how he expresses his own experiences of discrimination in the two selected poems. The section that follows features the article aims.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this article was to answer three questions, which also formed the basis of the objectives.

- What themes have the two selected poems communicated?
- What politics of protests are portrayed in the two selected poems?
- How does Maphalla's biography reflect in the selected poems?

To answer the three questions, the article aimed to:

- determine the themes in Maphalla's selected poems
- investigate the politics of protests portrayed by the two selected poems
- analyse the correlation between the poems and Maphalla's life.

Theoretical framework

This article draws on the historical-biographical criticism approach to unravel Maphalla's lamentations about historical events, which are reflected in his work. It is therefore fundamental for us to know about the sociohistorical, sociopolitical and socioeconomical contexts under which Maphalla devised his poems to unambiguously depict the message conveyed in his literary work. Purba (2018) indicates that this approach seeks to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural and intellectual contexts that produced it – a context that necessarily includes the author's biography. Biographical data are used to analyse the literary work through the lens of the author's lived experiences. Maphalla is exceptional in holding on to the hopes and vision of what freedom entails. This framework is deemed relevant as Maphalla narrates his life story and aspirations

and further laments about 'shared cultural experience of oppression of the black man in South Africa' (Levumo 1982:76). Maphalla expresses the oppressed people's experiences in such a vivid poetic colour, cries for freedom to be recognised and his language to be accepted, for him to be allowed access to rightful position as a human being and his words leap out with intensity, evoking deep emotions from the reader. Therefore, the poems reflect the historical situation of the apartheid South Africa. In the current article, the poet exposes the deprivation, humiliation and violence of black people in South Africa. The poet laments about his own wishes. In one poem, he claims he wants freedom, while in the other, he is commanding his eyes to open. Maphalla addresses social issues and makes the society aware of racial discrimination raised in the two poems. These issues have a great significance, as they are drawn from Maphalla's personal experiences as a black person in South Africa. He expresses his wishes as a black oppressed person, considering external circumstances with his own internal thoughts and feelings (Abrahams 1982). Tsambo (1999:12) adds that poetry is a means through which the writer expresses his general attitude towards life as well as provides an account of the world in the circumstances of its time.

Methodology

The article adopts a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is described as a methodology that describes data in words and 'can be used to make meaning of a specific phenomenon' (Merriam 2009:15). What can be drawn from Merriam's (2009) view is that a qualitative approach explores, describes and contextualises a phenomenon in a natural setting, where people are in frequent contact with the phenomena that is being investigated. According to Khetoa and Mokala (2022), qualitative research is concerned with understanding how the world is constructed. A descriptive research design was therefore employed. It provides a comprehensive summary of events experienced by certain groups of people or individuals (Lambert & Lambert 2012). In this article, the researchers identified poems for analysis under the assumption that the information or the writer's contention is richly portrayed. Herein the researchers looked at Maphalla's literary or poetic texts as rich sources which can be used to gain a deeper understanding of his message and how he sought to invoke sociopolitical consciousness among his readers. The researchers' aim is to find out the themes that are communicated in Maphalla's poems and to analyse the correlation between his poems and his life. Two poems *Ke ikopela tokoloho* (I am asking for freedom) and *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* (My eyes open) were purposely selected for analysis in line with the aims of the article (Mokala, Khetoa & Matee 2023). The two poems were chosen because they convey a plethora of information regarding the subject under study. Another reason for purposely selecting these two poems is that, the poems are representative of the authors' writing as our view is that they 'provide unique and rich information' (Etikan et al. 2016:4). Our justification is also that we do not intend to generalise the results, hence the choice of these two poems. The following section is data presentation and its analysis.

Data presentation and discussions

This section discusses the themes that are picked up in the (selected) poems. Firstly, we give a synopsis of the life lived by Maphalla. Maphalla grew up in a system where people of colour played a subservient role in society, whose existence is for the service of Europeans. He learned from his encounters with white people that he was regarded as nothing other than a helper 'boy'. It is through this interaction that he soon learns about hegemonic relations which affects him undesirably. Through his poem 'Ke ikopela tokoloho', Maphalla conceals his protest for racial domination. Maphalla is a devoted Christian who had learned that man was created in the image of God. Therefore, all people ought to be treated with dignity and be provided unrestricted freedom. While pleading for freedom, Maphalla is also conscious of the disparity that is brought about by classism. In 'Mahlo a ka tutuboloha', the injustices of his time cannot go unnoticed. The discriminatory practices that were levelled against black people were too much to ignore. Maphalla notes that things will eventually change. He expresses that 'Le ketola diqhoku ho sa hobelwa', indicating that this narrative cannot persist forever.

In analysing the poems, the article first focused on the titles of the poems. The analysis was further guided by the explorative research methodology chosen and the theoretical framework. The first poem is *Ke ikopela tokoloho* (I am requesting freedom). This poem's title indicates that the author longs for freedom. To the author, freedom will change his unbearable life conditions as he seems to be in a difficult and dark place. This confirms Manyaka's (2000:261) assertion that 'poets were concerned about the sociopolitical conditions of black people'. The author believes that freedom will give him peace of mind and be an answer to most of his problems. This is the type of a poem:

> [*W*]hich is both assertive and informative in so far as the South African reality is concerned. Its tone implicitly defies the system and is indicative of the people's steadfastness and courage which, despite hard labour and exploitation, have not been dampened. (Mashinge 1996:24–25)

To analyse Maphalla's message in the predetermined poems, the researchers focused on the independent elements of these poems to interpret their meaning and establish the poet's underlying message.

First poem: Ke ikopela tokoloho

Humble request

Ke kopa ke rotse katiba-	I beg with my hat off
Ke mpa ke kopa kananelo-	I only need acceptance
Ho tswa mona ditlamong-	To be freed from these chains

Tokoloho ya puo le diketso-	Freedom of speech and actions
Ya mmele, pelo le moya-	body, mind and soul
Ke kopa tokoloho ya maikutlo-	I ask for the freedom of speech
Eo ke tswetsweng le yona-	The one I was born with
Ke kopa kgotso ka kwano-	I seek for peace this side

In this poem, Maphalla portrays a deem picture of an individual whose freedom has been taken away. This individual has been stripped off his dignity of thinking for himself as he is censored and feels imprisoned. He yearns for the peace he was born with. This depicts a narrative about African people's marginalisation in their land, where they were pushed into silence. Adopting Adebola's (2014) view, as a social poet, Maphalla is raising his concerns, thus showing his emotions and values. Social poets write about people's problems. Therefore, the poem reveals that Maphalla mildly puts on a protest for political imperialism that constrains Africans from freedom of speech and movement. Therefore, he advocates for change in his society (Adebola 2014). In the lines quoted earlier, Maphalla seems to be directly addressing the perpetrator and indicating that he is not even fighting, but humbly tabling his request and begging for it to be considered. He indicates that he is fighting for freedom of speech (*ke kopa tokoloho ya maikutlo*) and for his own language to be recognised (*tokoloho ya puo le diketse*). He, therefore, acts as an activist confronting social structures and provides a depth understanding of the embodied experiences (Faulkner 2014). Maphalla's view is based on the historical background of African languages which were undermined; as a result, he is voicing out a request for his language to be recognised. He is asking for freedom of speech which he indicates is his birth right. This poem is a device used to restore the dignity of the black people and their culture (Tsambo 1999). From the reference given in these lines, it is understandable that Maphalla is writing and expressing his thoughts of dissatisfaction as viewed by Tsambo (1999). Adopting Mashinge's (1996) view, Maphalla employs dry humour as well as satire to bring out circumstances to state his wishes. From the quoted lines, we find it very strange that someone who desperately wishes to be free would humble himself by even taking his hat off. There is a popular Basotho proverb that goes '*ho rolela motho kgaebana*', meaning to take off one's hat which means respecting another person. We must highlight that this does not literally mean taking off the hat, but it is a cultural metaphor to indicate respect for another person. The central implication of this proverb does not only rely on positive connotation but also ridicule negative behaviour. The determiner of its implication is the context in which it is used.

In the above lines, there is a figure of speech: oxymoron. It is a device of combining in one sentence contradictory ideas. At first sight, the resulting statement seems irrational, but on closer examination, readers find that this artifice heightens the effect or expresses a truth in a subtle manner. This means that the person forcefully wants the freedom that he was born with, the freedom that was taken from him by force. Furthermore, Maphalla is found to be sarcastic as it is appalling that one would take his hat off to his own oppressor. We do not believe this is a sign of respect as he is lamenting for his freedom. Conversely, Maphalla may be a man of peace because even the harsh situations could not change his peaceful demeanour. The extract that is presented hereunder expands on Maphalla's wishes. Hereunder, Maphalla cements his wishes by being thorough about his desires. Despite his thoroughness, he is covertly conscientising his readers about things that indigenous people have been dispossessed of.

What he is not asking for

In this section, the focus is mainly on things that he does not find more important than his freedom.

Ha ke kope lefatshe-	I am not asking for the land
Ho busa le marena-	To rule with kings
Ha ke kope borena-	I am not asking for royalty
Ho bokella sethabathaba-	To collect tribute
Ha ke kope dikgau-	I am not asking for awards
Kapa tsona ditlokola-	or even releases
Ha ke kope ka dikgoka-	I am not asking with violence
Nna ha ke tseke kgauta-	I am not fighting for gold

Maphalla indicates that he is not asking for gold, tribute or awards. The only thing that is of interest to him is freedom. This is supported by Makhubela (1999:9) who states that 'Maphalla moans for freedom, that is, to be freed from bondage and able to express himself freely without restrictions'. While Maphalla postulates in this poem that he does not seek to assume power or rule, he is exceptionally declaring to his readership that these are the things that have been violently taken from them. The authenticity of kingship has been undermined by colonial rule and its religion. People have been displaced from their land to make way for gold excavations and some have been massacred to write tales of historic dominance over indigenous people of Africa. Here, Maphalla conscientises his readers about all these injustices and abnormalities under colonial or apartheid regimes. According to Manyaka (2000),

> The oppressed masses have been taught to cheat so as to evade the pains and hardships of oppression. For people to survive in such horrifying conditions, they had to be cunning, clever, and intelligent…. (p. 262)

Conditions he wants to achieve

In yearning for freedom, he talks about what freedom is for him.

Le nna ke tshwane le wena-	I also want to be like you
Le nna ke tsebe ho thaba-	So that I can also be happy
Nna kgale ke sokola-	I have struggled for too long
Nke ke rure sa serurubele-	So that I float like a butterfly
Ke sese sa ditlhapi matamong-	And wiggle as fish in dams
Ho mpe ho fielwe leeme-	So that inequality can be swept away
Ho phephethwe le dithetso-	Do away with all lies and deceit
Ke mpe ke kgabe ka yona-	So that I can pride myself in freedom

In the above quoted lines, Maphalla seems to be talking directly to the oppressors that he wants to be like them. He outlines his wishes as his longing for happiness and dealing away with his life struggles. Furthermore, he is asking for freedom to fly freely like a butterfly and to swim free like fish in dams with no one disturbing his peace. He wants to deal away with inequality, deceit and lies as he wants peace to reign in their land. Reference here is made to God, who made heaven and earth and is the Father of all nations (*Rabohle*). 'The above is indicative of the anguish suffered by many blacks for daring to antagonize legislated racism' (Mashinge 1996:19). This is the essence of freedom and being free from all forms of oppression, including economic oppression in line with the Treaty of Vereeniging (1902), which informs some of the systemic apartheid laws. Oppression means people are subjected to laws that are not considering their human rights. Manyaka (2000) defines oppression as,

> [A] situation in the lives of societies where people are subjected to hard laws and are ruled in a hard and oppressive manner. People within societies are not given a platform to express their views because of oppressive laws which prohibit everyone from saying anything against those in power, because those who criticize their leaders will be harassed. (p. 262)

We can conclude that oppression dehumanises the oppressed and strips them off their freedom of speech.

In the second poem, the title is *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* (My eyes open). For him, it is like his eyes are closed. He feels like he is blind and all he wishes is for his eyes to open. He is talking directly to his eyes as if they are failing him; therefore, he is commanding them to be open and alert.

Mahlo a ka tutuboloha-	My eyes open up
O lekole tsela lefifing le letsho-	Explore the path in this darkness
Fatshe lena ha se la difofu-	This world is not for the blind
Le kgantsha sekgukgu, ho tswedipana-	This world prides itself with secrets and hidden agenda
Mahlo a ka tutuboloha-	My eyes open up
O tadime qaka tsa bophelo botjha-	Review life's hardships anew
Tsa kajeno ha se tsa maobane-	Today's hardships are not yesterday's hardships
Tsweketsweke ba lefatshe bohlwa	Life's problems are making life difficult,
mekwalaba	
Mahlo a ka tutuboloha-	My eyes open up
O lekole ditshita ho se leeme-	Interrogate life's difficulties without bias
Fatshe lena le tletse mamena-	This world is infested with impurity
Kgatamping tsa lona ho wetse dikgalala-	This world has consumed heroes
Fatshe lena le a nanyetsa-	This world catches people unaware
Le nanarela dinatla di qhanollotse-	It snatches on the mighty unexpectedly
Le ketola diqhoku ho sa hobelwa-	Even the mighty fall while still rejoicing
Medidietsane e sa utlwahala sebakeng	Ululations heard all over

South Africans, unlike citizens of other African countries, had to confront the injustices that were brought upon mankind by a system of injustice, racial discrimination and separate development. Africans in South Africa experienced political oppression and marginalisation under apartheid laws. In this poem, Maphalla assumes a position of bringing consciousness to himself that apartheid system of government is more brutal than expected. In the opening line, Maphalla posits that *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha*, which translates to 'My eyes should be opened up' wherein he is suggesting that his eyes should be opened to the injustices and the oppression of his people. Herein, he is pleading to his audience to be conscious about the plight of the oppressed by the oppressor. In the first stanza, he is discouraging blind loyalty to the oppressor seeing that the oppressor unduly benefits from the silence of the oppressed.

Maphalla encourages his readers to assess the havoc as experienced by Africans and what it has resulted in. He argues that great African leaders have been undermined physically and psychologically under the reigning system of government. He indicates that many lives have been compromised without provocation from the oppressed. People's killings are unjustified, and that this reality has compromised people's mental health so much that people live with anxiety and experience mirages of gun shots. He clearly articulates his thoughts as an indication that he is not ignorant of what Africans are experiencing, but he is aware of their hardships. This poem is an effort towards conscientising Maphalla's readers about poignant issues of social injustices such as racial disparity, oppression, racism, structural inequality, genocide and marginalisation.

Mahlo a ka tutuboloha is a poem that seeks to alert its readers about the situation in the country, thereby trying to suggest a particular attitude or posture against the status quo towards indigenous Africans. Our conviction is that the poem is retrospectively referring to a sheer cemetery. This is based on the view he makes use of first person (I). Therefore, Maphalla does not isolate himself from the situation. Maphalla finds it disquieting that so much injustice is explicitly enacted upon indigenous people or black South Africans and yet nothing is said or done to challenge it. He says 'kgatamping tsa lona ho wetse dikgalala (this world has consumed heroes), to allude to the fallen heroes during the struggle'.

Conclusion

This article's focus was to analyse Maphalla's message in his poems. Maphalla, a literary writer who was affected by the

conditions of the era under which he was born, must have had the urge and conviction to revolt against the government system that treated his countrymen as second citizens in the country of their own. In this article, researchers argued that KPD Maphalla's poems have portrayed different forms of protest including social oppression and the exclusion of black people in their ancestral land. The researchers are convinced that *Ke ikopela tokoloho* (I am asking for freedom) and *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* (My eyes open) provide perfect examples of protest poetry, where the author conscientises his readers (Africans in particular) about the political injustices and violence expressed upon humankind. *Ke ikopela tokoloho* and *Mahlo a ka tutuboloha* indicate a continuation of an effort to speak against oppressive practices. Maphalla pleads to have his sight so that he could see the oppression and discrimination that characterise his country. Subsequently, after his sight's restoration, having seen all the mayhem colonialism has done to his country of birth, he cries out asking for freedom. He has witnessed the imprisonment of his countrymen and women in their country of birth, and he has observed his countrymen and women being violated within the prescriptions of apartheid rule. This observed reality drives Maphalla to seek freedom. Maphalla's message in these two poems has been expressed unambiguously. He is telling his readers that African people have been stripped off their dignity, subjecting them into inhuman practices as African leaders are also violated unjustly. His primary objective was to lend his oppressors his eyes so that they too could see what he sees. This way the readers will receive the message about the reality of black man hardships in their ancestral land.

The two poems manifest the idea that African literary writers such as Maphalla were not just observers under colonialism, but used literature as a political strategy against oppressive systems and the subjugation of Africans. Therefore, Maphalla's message in the two poems is centred on exposing the injustices experienced by Africans and pleading for unrestrained freedom in his ancestral land. He argues that it is quite discerning for a visitor to overcome the land owner and take over to rule them.

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Authors' contributions

N.T.M. conceived the original idea and wrote the manuscript, S.G.K. contributed to the conceptualisation of the article, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data, and both authors critically revised, edited and approved the submission of the article.

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