Sotho-Tswana mythic animals: Stratagem for environmental conservation[1]

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Abstract

This article argues that pre-colonial indigenous knowledge placed restrictions on the use of certain animals and perceived them as sacred. This policy was often successful as several species of wildlife are to be found "in many black African areas" today. Communities with chiefs worked together to ensure preservation of sacred animals. Such sacred animals had mythological connotations attached to them – with the purpose of preservation of such fauna. The article deals with the mythic animals among the indigenous Sotho-Tswana group of South Africa and expounds their roles and how they were perceived by the community under study throughout history in a dynamic manner. The article proposes the defiance of some colonial-time interpretations of mythic animals as "superstitious" and "a belief in magic". It contends that journeying back to the colonial and apartheid era by retelling, reinterpreting and redefining mythic animals showing the history in a changing historical manner will be a step towards a dynamic study of socio-environmental history of sacred animals. The approach of the article is multi-disciplinary drawing from religion, environment, history, linguistics, philosophy, psychology and Africanist genre to show that, mythic animalistic history is not a closed official document as received in the frontier but is dynamic.

Keywords: Mythic animals; Environment; Conservation; Indigenous knowledge, Humanness, Scientific, Sotho-Tswana.

Introduction

South African history has pivoted itself around the premise of power struggles against the indigenous people by the colonisers. The same power struggle permeated the field of knowledge, whereby indigenous knowledge

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was not accredited and western or scientific ways of knowing dominated the arena of what constitutes official knowledge. Western epistemology has been accepted as the benchmark of knowledge, relegating indigenous knowledge as unscientific and the "other". This marginalisation was done to subjugate indigenous people of South Africa ensuring that their ways of knowing are pushed to the periphery while those of colonisers are positioned in the centre. In order to reinforce control over indigenous people of South Africa, apartheid ideologues strengthened those divisions and separations during the twentieth century by trusting in the findings of European human and social sciences interpretations.[2] This resulted in a tendency of separating indigenous knowledge and western knowledge – which most recent scholars vehemently dispute on the basis that, there are no simple or global benchmarks that can be utilised to separate the two epistemologies.[3] Hence Agrawal argues that indigenous knowledge "is scientific not because there is anything self-obviously true about it, but because it conforms to the procedures whereby science is reproduced and some statements are termed knowledge",[4] illustrating that much research, rewriting and reconstructions in historical studies focusing on indigenous knowledge has to continually occur using Agrawal views of scientificity of indigenous ways of knowing and its significance in knowledge formation globally. The same challenge has been posed by the new democratic government of South Africa for the leaders of the Science Councils to investigate how indigenous knowledge can assist in knowledge-generation in areas such as science councils and higher education institutions.

This plea brings to the fore the importance of acknowledging all knowledges as important in contributing to global economic, social, political and environmental sustenance signifying that universally, all knowledge is an inheritance and resource for humanity to subsist harmoniously with one another and the surrounding environment. It is an important challenge to western science's historical pompousness of relegating the "other" as inferior, while on its own it failed and still fails to resolve many global disasters such as: environmental degradation, escalating diseases and moral decline. Hence Odora Hoppers argues that the fact that an Italian, Galileo came up with the basis of nature to be mathematical and as a result his theory formed part

2 D Chidester, *Savage systems: Colonialism and comparative religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 215.

3 R Ellen et al, *Indigenous environmental knowledge and its transformations: Critical anthropological perspectives* (Armsterdam, Harwood, 2000), pp. 1-6.

4 A Agrawal, "Indigenous knowledge and the politics of classification", *International Social Science Journal*, 54(173), 2002, p. 293.

of what constitutes science, does not mean that we should narrowly equate science as western because Galileo was from the west. Inferring that Galileo's views were conceivable only because of his interaction within the globalised world – being made possible to some extent by the economic, social and intellectual advancement within and outside Europe at the time.[5]

This then sheds light on the fact that, research on indigenous knowledge has to be done from within its own culture and studied not as a tabula rasa but as dynamic and important in its own accord. It is a challenge that this article grapples with that, analysing indigenous knowledge that emerged out of the Enlightenment legacy and vicious history of colonization and subjugation of black Africans. The article focuses on the theme "mythic animals" to show that some history received from colonisers imagined obscure and contestable explanations of indigenous knowledge as irrational, magical, and superstitious.[6] More recent contributions from scholars such as Van Damme and Neluvhalani, Dei and Hoppers, among others, have all attested to the important place of indigenous knowledge in bringing progress and environmental preservation.[7] These scholars have obstinately focused their writings about indigenous knowledge constructively, and cautioned against easy dismissals of the worth and utility of indigenous knowledge. Such scholars are trying to defy, correct and reinterpret the received knowledge from the colonial and apartheid period. This shift in the writings about indigenous knowledge is to be applauded as it is derived from the frontier of denials and misrepresentations of indigenous knowledge and what it denotes.

This article emanates as a response to the challenges posed by the recent scholars mentioned by analysing indigenous ways of knowing by drawing it from the informal arena to the formal sector of knowledge so it coexists with other ways of knowing. The emphasis in this article is on the theme; "mythic animals" and their roles for the Sotho-Tswana of South Africa in ensuring sustainable development economically, socially and environmentally. Hence in this article the word "systems" is not used in relation to indigenous

5 CA Odora Hoppers, "Indigenous knowledge systems: A profound challenge to human development in the twenty-first century", CA Odora Hoppers (ed.), *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: Towards a conceptual and methodological framework* (Claremont, South Africa, New Africa Books, 2002), p. 27.

6 D Chidester, *Savage systems…;* E Casalis, *The Basutos, twenty-three years in South Africa* (Cape Town, C Struik, 1965), pp. 156-157.

7 LSM van Damme & EF Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge in environmental education processes: perspectives on a growing research arena", *Environmental Education Research,* 10(3), August 2010, pp. 353-370; GJS Dei, "Re thinking the role of indigenous knowledges in the academy", *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 2000, 4(2), pp. 111-132; O Hoppers, "Indigenous knowledge systems and academic institution in South Africa", *Perspectives in Education,* 19(1), 2001, pp. 73-84.

knowledge as Van Damme and Neluvhani have argued "the word system does not only reify indigenous knowledge, but it also reduce indigenous knowledge to a treasure box of some clever ideas that have been excavated from a rare source (indigenous communities)".[8] From literature survey no research about emotions and symbolism about the relationship between the ideology of "humanness", environment and "mythic animals" in a changing historical context has been undertaken. Mythic animals form an important knowledge making process among the indigenous people of South Africa especially in terms of environmental conservation and identity construction. They need to be unearthed and studied historically because such a study cannot find its way until it can relate to its past in a dynamic narrative form. The article insinuates an innovative kind of history for the academic study of mythic animals by decolonising indigenous mythologies and "opposing to contrast it to western knowledge as two distinctly different ways of knowing".[9]

The research method employed in this article is a qualitative, naturalistic approach which is phenomenological, because it allows the researcher to produce rich information and to understand community beliefs from within and not judge their beliefs or practices[10] – which Ryba argues, is not possible with scientific endeavors.[11] The strengths of the method include its ability to classify and group widely divergent data in such a way that an overall view can be obtained of the group's beliefs and historical experiences with mythic animals.[12] Tosh mentions a major limitation of oral history when he states that, "it is naïve to suppose that the testimony represents a pure distillation of past experience, for in an interview each party is affected by the other".[13] So this methodology is used in conjunction with archival and other secondary sources in order to fill the gaps created by interviewees' forgetting and the myths created by their nostalgia. The research based on previous experience, employs open-ended interviews because, in the current researcher's experience, many interviewees prefer open discussions to a prescribed format and thus

8 LSM van Damme & EF Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge in environmental education processes…", *Environmental Education Research,* 10(3), August 2010, pp. 353-370.

9 R O'Donoghue, & E Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge and the school curriculum: A review of developing methods and methodological perspectives", E Janse van Rensburg (eds.), *EEASA: Monograph: Environmental education ethics and action in Southern Africa* (Pretoria, EEASA/HSRC, 2002), pp. 121-134.

10 E Husserl, L Cohen et.al, *Research methods in education* (London & New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis group, 2011), p. 18.

11 T Ryba, *The essence of phenomenology and its meaning for scientific study of religion* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), p. 34; L Cohen et. al, *Research methods…*, p. 20

12 T Ryba, *The essence of phenomenology…*, p. 240.

13 J Tosh, *The pursuit of History: Aims, methods & new directions in the study of modern history* (London and New York, Longman, 1991), p. 213.

much information is attained via this process. But, as Philip Abrams and others observe, such close encounters have some limitations because: "they make the voices louder and does not make their meaning clearer. To that end we must turn back from 'their' meanings to our own and to the things we know about them, which they did not know, or say, about themselves".[14]

Interviews were conducted in Ga-Rankuwa in June 2004 and in March and April 2014 mainly among the Sotho-Tswana. The sample was constituted of 17 men and women over the age of 25. The number chosen was determined by the availability of interviewees. The criteria used in choosing interviewees, was that it had to be people who belong to the Sotho-Tswana group and had knowledge about mythic animals and their roles. Data was collected and analysed using close reading techniques and weighed in terms of the archival research, which proved vital in contextualising and bridging logical gaps.

Myth and mythic animals

Mythic animals form an important component of indigenous people of South Africa's worldview. They are found in folk stories, poems, idioms, proverbs, praise names, and songs. Myths were used to promote environmentalism and identity constructions. Waardenburg argues that through myths "world and life can be seen in their real nature. Profound truth is communicated in the form of a story", and that "in myths what is authentic is not the details of the story itself but the deeper meanings which become present to both teller and listener only in the act of telling".[15] It implies that what is chiefly communicated through mythologies is the meaning of life and how people can engage in that cosmos through the use of stories, rituals, actions and gestures. More so expounding that only through such communication can those involved in telling and listening understand the gist of the stories. Hence Mason, argues that:[16]

> [one]…[m]ight perceive myth to be not a mere untruth but a story rooted in a place where one has been in the past and that one has to reach urgently in the present and that someone at a crucial point on the way says does not exist.

14 J Tosh, *The pursuit of History*…, p. 214.

15 J Waardenburg, "Symbolic aspects of myth", AM Olson (ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality* (University of Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 53.

16 H Mason, "Myth as an 'ambush of reality'", AM Olson (ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality* (Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 15-19.

> It is a story, like most, of facts familiar to oneself but to which, until something happens to make returning to them impossible in the familiar way one gives almost no thought. Furthermore it is in a foreign world beyond them that one discovers the possibility of an entirely gratuitous and perplexing challenge to one's assumption about their reality.

There has been much disagreement over the authenticity of myth in terms of historicity, with historians and anthropologists such as Raglan[17] arguing that myths are simply untrue historically. Arguments such as these obscure what is perhaps the central aim of myth in all societies: being a teaching tool for past, present and future generations. This means that myth has history in itself and gives people a sense of identity and direction.[18] Ray supports this by contending that: "African mythology contains a good deal of what we would call history. Indeed, in African oral tradition 'myth' and 'history' generally overlap and shade into one another".[19] Mason takes this further by arguing that the history in myths is illustrated in the way it "brings us across such artificial distances as time and space, and translating us from ourselves to them".[20] Myths tend to die if they do not play a role in supplying people with answers concerning questions such as those pertaining to the meaning of life. Waardenburg argues that myths take time to disappear if they have religious dimensions because religion is a powerful tool used by people to understand the meaning of life.[21] This is also the case in relation to mythic animals as they are used on a day to day basis as a means of constructing identity and preservation of the environment.

Despite the colonial and apartheid discriminatory attitude towards the Sotho-Tswana belief in sacred animals, they kept their knowledge of their sacrosanct animals as they "hold an African in awe of unseen powers, and cast their halo around the sanctity of tribal morality".[22] In this article the analysis of the Sotho-Tswana perception of mythic animals moves away from the notion of indigenous knowledge as a generalised institutionalised knowledge which is entrenched in people's lives to a continually ever-changing meaning-making progression of one within his/her milieu. This is an interchange from "genesis

17 G Schrempp, "Introduction", G Schrempp & W Hansen (eds.), *Myth: A new symposium* (Bloomington & Indiana Polis, Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 3.

18 E Wiesel, "Myth and History", AM Olson (ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality* (University of Notre Dame & London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 20-30.

19 B Ray, *African religions, symbol, ritual and community* (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1976), p. 24.

20 H Mason, "Myth and History", AM Olson (ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality...*, p. 16.

21 J Waardenburg, "Symbolic aspects of myth", AM Olson (ed.), *Myth, symbol and reality...*, p. 41.

22 WC Willoughby, "Notes on the totemism of the Becwana", *Addresses and papers read at joint meeting of the British and South African Associations for the Advancement of Science 3*, 1909, pp. 263-293.

amnesia" which Van Damme and Neluvhalani describe as "a naïve illusion that things have always been the way they are, which leads to eternalizing and naturalizing relations which are, in actual fact, products of history".[23] This article tries to show that indigenous people did not only internalise their belief in mythic animals but proactively engaged in making their history.

History of mythic animals

Literature surveyed for the purpose of this research depicts a dearth in written work based on the history and importance of animal symbols among indigenous people of South Africa. Written sources say that before the 1840s information on sacred animals among the Sotho-Tswana was not evident because colonial officials saw indigenous people lacking a belief process and referred to them as "savages without a religion".[24] Subsequently, from the 1840s European writers portrayed mythic animals in their reports – as belief that forms the basis of the religion of the Sotho-Tswana but credited the belief to that of ancient Egypt. Chidester describes the work of Samuel Rolland that occurred around the same period, where he depicted mythic animals as important among the Sotho-Tswana and how they were linked to the original emergence of humanity from a mash of reeds and each indigenous group was given an animal as a symbol of god-protector.[25] This illustrates that the history of mythic animals was used as an ideological tool to dominate indigenous people.

In the pre-colonial period mythic animals occupied an important environmental,[26] social and political role of conserving the biosphere, unifying clans and elevating people in the social stratum. Chidester mentions that "in praise names, sacred animals configured power relations of alliance and hierarchy. If animal titles could elevate, however, they could also subordinate".[27] The label dog *dintsa tsa kgosi* meaning chief's dogs, for instance, was used as a sign of integration and subservience when applied

23 LSM van Damme & EF Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge in environmental education process…", *Environmental Education Research,* 10(3), August 2010, p. 357.

24 JM Orpen, *History of the Basutus of South Africa* (Mazedon, Lesotho, Mazedon Book Center, 1979), p. 24.

25 D Chidester, *Savage systems…*, p. 200.

26 J Kunnie, "The future of our world: Indigenous people's, indigenous philosophies, and the preservation of mother earth", JM Reid (ed.), *Religion and global culture: New terrain in the study of religion and the work of Charles H. Long* (USA, Lexington Books, 2003), p. 138.

27 D Chidester, *Savage systems …*, p. 214.

to chief's subjects. Moreover a dog was also used to refer to equals and close friends. But, with regard to enemies it served as a sign of marginalization and defamation.

With closer contact with Europeans animal emblems were seen as "superstition" while the Boers perceived themselves as the chosen people with authentic beliefs.[28] In the words of Eiselen it was because the black Africans were "irrational and their mentality was infused with magic and superstition" that they were consequently viewed as inferior.[29] The Sotho-Tswana were then also seen as worshiping such sacred animals – some form of totemism. This was another measure of disregarding the existence of a belief system that was not acceptable in accordance with western standards. Whereas the British on the other hand had problems with Transvaal's Boers and saw them as similar to indigenous people, because they severely ill-treated the Sotho-Tswana and were not progressive and were termed as "almost purely animal".[30] Such ideological wars between the British and Boers made matters worse for the indigenous people because they faced ideological disregard from both groups.

The ideological war of disregard of the Sotho-Tswana belief in mythic animals is explicitly highlighted by the war the Boers waged against the Bagananoa under chief Malaboch in 1894 and captured their animal emblem, a crocodile and put it in a museum in the Transvaal.[31] This was a sign of defeat as the Boers saw the animal as a god for the Bagananoa, implying that the Boers even in the late 19th century recognised that animals had sacred importance for indigenous people. Chidester mentions that even though the carved crocodile symbol was captured and Bagananoa never disbanded their honour to such a mythic animal they reconstructed another similar animal symbol as resistance to defeat and subjugation. Around this period animal labels such as dogs were then used as a sign of resistance against subjugation to refer to colonisers and to unite indigenous people as "tribes" hence the use "bana bathari entsho" (children of the same clan).[32] This indicates that mythic animals changed to adapt to the status quo of the time. But, what is maintained in this lingua of animal labelling is that among the indigenous people of South Africa they play an important role in humanizing and dehumanising a person throughout

28 D Chidester, *Savage systems …*, p. 173.
29 WM Eiselen & I Schapera. "Religious beliefs and practices", I Schapera, *The Bantu-speaking tribes of South Africa* (London, George Routledge, 1937), pp. 247-270.
30 HL Tangye, *In new South Africa: Travels in the Transvaal and Rhodesia* (London, Norace Cox, 1896), pp. 54-55.
31 D Chidester, *Savage systems…*, p. 176.
32 GM Setiloane, *African theology: An introduction* (Johannesburg, Braamfontein, Skotaville Publishers, 1985), p. 8.

history. For example, a missionary, Sonntag explained that he worked among the Batswana around 1894 and as they became comfortable with him they gave him a praise name – ape. He said in Europe that is demeaning but from the context of the Batswana it meant sacredness referring to the chief's "coat of arms". In this South African context Sonntag said, he felt he was accepted as one of the community and the labelling sounded heavenly to him.[33]

The Sotho-Tswana in the northern region were hit hard by denials of their knowledge process because their areas were highly contested by the Boers and British well into the 1890s. These denials of sacred animals as knowledge process of the Sotho-Tswana was a strategy used by colonialists to subjugate and dispossess them of their land. By the beginning of the twentieth century acceptance of sacred animals materialised and was regarded by colonialists as a form of "savage" or "primitive" religion or "totemists".[34] For example, in this era Europeans of the calibre of Roberts started to accept sacred animals as representing a particular black African group such as the Sotho-Tswana.[35] During this epoch segregation was rife and whites wanted to enforce ethnic divisions of black Africans so as to rule them better. They then enforced such beliefs to ensure separate development of black Africans. Hence the report of the War Office in 1905 promulgated that "totemism as tribal system needed to be restored for effective native administration because it enforced tribal separation which was beneficial for white domination in South Africa".[36] In addition the reason for accepting mythic animals thereafter in the 1900s was because of the reserves systems allocated for indigenous people which provided whites with cheap labour.[37] This notion concurs with the views of Adora Hoppers on colonisation which entailed ideological prejudices and that "ideological discourse went hand in hand with repression".[38] The politics of sacred animals changed dramatically as whites were gaining more political power in Africa in the second decade of the 20th century. During this era animal emblems that used to describe different black African groups were now used to degrade, discriminate and subjugate black Africans. For example an ape that Sonntag saw as praise to him was now used to define a black

33 C Sonntag, *My friend Maleboch: Chief of the Blue Mountains (An eyewitness account of the Maleboch War 1894)* (Pretoria, Sigma Press, 1983), pp. 8-9.

34 D Chidester, *Savage systems* …, p. 178.

35 N Roberts, The Bagananoa or Ma-Laboch: Their early history, customs, and creed", *South African Journal of Science,* 13, 1915, pp. 256 & 241.

36 Great Britain War Office, *The native tribes of the Transvaal, prepared for the general staff, War Office, 1905* (London, Majesty's Stationery Office, 1905), pp. 121, 125.

37 K Shillington, *The colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870-1900* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p. 188.

38 CA Odora Hoppers, "Indigenous knowledge systems…", CA Odora Hoppers (ed.), *Indigenous knowledge*…, p. 25.

African as an inferior being. As Winter has attested an ape analogy signified the integration and suppression of Africans in a new political economy of segregation and apartheid.[39]

The end of apartheid presented challenges of liberation from colonial interpretations and introduced a highly contested and correction arena of the past. The emergence of post-colonial interpretations called for animal symbols to permeate the discourse of environmentalism, politics, history and religion in South Africa. In addition the belief in sacred animals has constantly undergone modifications in terms of how the Sotho-Tswana make meaning even though scant work has been done in this area.[40] Hence Chidester maintains that "myth is not a story with canonical closure. Rather than being subject to timeless repetition, a myth is opened and reopened by interpretation".[41] It infers that, mythical animals for the Sotho-Tswana must be understood as a way of life that helps them to adapt and cooperate with surrounding communities. The history as revealed above shows that mythic animals must not only be understood as a repetition of their original meaning but as a dynamic work in progress. This is because different knowledges to which the Sotho-Tswana became accustomed continually influence each other and indigenous knowledge as part of the "hybridity" of knowledge's is also impacted in the process.[42]

Indigenous people and their heritage - Fauna

The Sotho-Tswana believed that *Modimo* (God) gave them animals as their heritage to preserve for the benefit of their own and future generations. Hence Kunnie argues that "indigenous peoples are the original biodiversity teachers of our world" because of their traditional conservation ethics that precluded killing certain animals.[43] The indigenous people used animals in many ways.

39 JA Winter, "The mental and moral capabilities of the natives, especially of Sekukuniland (Eastern Transvaal)", *South African Journal of Science,* 11, 1914, p. 371.

40 See the work of D Chidester, *Savage systems* …, pp. 173-218, MC Kgari-Masondo, "A socio-environmental analysis of land alienation and resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa, circa 1961 to 1977", *Journal for Contemporary History,* 38(2), 2013, pp. 21-45 and MC Kgari-Masondo, "'A superstitious respect for the soil?': Environmental history, social identity and land ownership – a case study of forced removals from Lady Selborne and their ramifications, c.1905 to 1977" (PhD, US, 2008), pp. 92-93 & 113; AF Hean & NC Mokhehle, "Some Basuto beliefs about wild life", *African Wild Life,* l (1-4), 1947, p. 69.

41 D Chidester, *Savage Systems*…, p. 261.

42 GJS Dei, "Re thinking the role of indigenous knowledges …", *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 2000, 4(2), p. 113.

43 J Kunnie, "The future of our world… ", JM Reid, *Religion and global culture*…, p. 138.

Animals were very important to the Sotho-Tswana as they provided food, material and herbs.[44] Leopard were specifically killed to clothe kings and chiefs, and ostriches were used for umbrellas.[45] Blankets were made from kudu, gemsbok and domestic goats, and cloaks were made from birds.[46] Some animals were used medicinally, for example jackals' bladders and snake skins were combined with herbs to combat bewitchment and snake's poison was used to heal someone bitten by a snake.[47] Specific fauna such as the lizards and chameleons were seen as used by the ancestors to deliver messages to people about death.[48]

The Sotho-Tswana attached great economic and symbolic value to their livestock. There has been debate over the ownership of cattle before the arrival of European settlers. Huffman disputes their presence but Wilmsen maintains that the Khoi-San owned cattle before any Bantu-speaking peoples arrived in South Africa.[49] They used cattle as currency, for example only cattle were used for bride wealth,[50] and transport. Horses were also used as transport,[51] because they were easy to maintain.

Western influences diluted the importance of the fauna in the Sotho-Tswana culture but, animals continued to be seen as heritage[52] in the form of identity formation and environmental conservation. Timberlake also describes wildlife as part of Africa's heritage.[53] However there were instances where people damaged the environment, for example Ellenberger reports that Chief Moshweshwe told Dr A Smith in 1836 that some of the Basotho people migrated from Ntsuanatsatsi because there was poverty caused by a scarcity of game.[54] Nonetheless they continued to follow their belief in sacred animals and preserved them.

44 WJ Burchell, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa* (London, Batchworth Press, 1953), p. 392.
45 WJ Burchell, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa...*, p. 403.
46 WJ Burchell, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa...*, p. 416.
47 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern* (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 249.
48 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, A Mosetle (entrepreneur, Ga-Rankuwa), 22 March 2014, F Tsimane (senior Accountant, North West Province Government), 21 March 2014.
49 AB Smith, "Southern African pastoralists", JO Vogel, *Encyclopaedia of pre-colonial Africa: Archaeology, History, languages, cultures and environment* (London New Dehli, Altamira Press, 1997), p. 210.
50 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, I Mvula (domestic worker, Johannesburg), 22 March 2014.
51 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, T Papo (lecturer, Pretoria University), 22 March 2014.
52 AF Hean & NC Mokhehle, "Some Basuto beliefs…", *African Wild Life,* 1-4, 1947, p. 69.
53 L Timberlake, *Africa in crisis: The causes, the curses of environmental bankruptcy* (London, Earthscan, 1985), p. 140.
54 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern* (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 18.

Role of mythic animals

Mythic animals deal primarily with the origin of people and certain social and ritual institutions that account for real-life situations and explain the basic conditions of human life as perceived by their authors. They humanise people by giving them identity and animalise humanity by drawing them back to their roots; their history of origin-environment. Moreover they also have the role of instilling values such as respect and responsibility for the environment.

Mythic animals as pointers to history

Mythic animals point to the way people originated historically on earth. For example the southern Sotho group believe that the first people emerged from the 'the hole in the ground'.[55] The myth states that men, women, children and animals emerged together from the hole. The Batswana locate the hole at Ga-Ditshweni (the Place of the Baboons) in Bophuthatswana, at Ga-Loowe in Botswana and near Orangeville in the eastern Orange Free State.[56] Some claim that there is evidence of humanity's origin in such places because there are footprints of people, animals and a one-legged person in the rocks. The large one-legged footprint, according to the Sotho-Tswana, was that of Loowe, the agent of *Modimo*. They still believe that Loowe took the animals and people out of the hole to the surface before returning underground to live with *Modimo* and the ancestors. Setiloane places great importance in the mythical "hole" location in the east and argues that the Sotho-Tswana are of one nation, hence the saying "bana bathari entsho".[57] To illustrate the belief in the myth even to date the dead are buried as if they are equipped for their journey back to their origin "hole", and food, seeds, utensils, clothes and blankets will be put in the grave and eulogies would include greetings and requests to the ancestors and *Modimo*. The Sotho-Tswana would normally say "remember us where you are going! Ask ancestors to bring blessings and protection".[58] "Them" even includes animals as they are part of the community of the dead. Such sayings indicate a belief that in some way the dead including animals

55 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...*, p. 7.
56 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...*, pp. 7-8.
57 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...*, p. 8.
58 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, M Kekana (entrepreneur, Soshanguve), 21 March 2014.

have control and power over living beings.[59] This myth was widely held in the 1970s[60] even today as the interviewees exclaimed,[61] especially among those practicing African traditional religion. The importance of the myth is that it teaches people their history and how they originated from the earth. It also has significance in enforcing communal unity with animals because it states that people and animals emerged from the ground simultaneously.

These myths vary, for instance the southern Sotho group believe that the first people together with their animals emerged from the "bed of reeds".[62] They declared that the site of humanity's origin was Ntsoana Tsatsi, a hill in the eastern Orange Free State. Ellenberger and Abbouset around 1836 confirmed that the Basotho legends identified a cave surrounded by marshes and reeds from which they believe themselves to have emerged.[63] Other Sotho-Tswana groups consequently adhered to the myth by performing rituals to mark the coming of every new life into the world; such as the birth of a child, which was celebrated by cloistering both mother and child for ten days or more in an isolated room where only old women and pre-pubescent girls were permitted. The reed is placed next to the room or hut to symbolise the emergence of the first people on earth. The myth is evident even to date among the northern Sotho and Batswana who treat the new mother as taboo until the child's hair is cut after some months. Setiloane cites examples of Batswana households as late as the 1970s practicing the rituals of celebration when a baby is born.

Mythic animals and identity

Mythic animals "defined a system of allegiance, cutting across chiefdoms, that bound people together under the sign of a common object of communal

59 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...,* p. 7.

60 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...,* pp. 6-7.

61 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, I Mvula, 22 March 2014, F Tsimane, 22 March 2014, A Mosetle, 22 March 2014, Maphalare (housewife), 21 March 2014, M Kekana, 21 March 2014, R Maponya (entrepreneur, Johannesburg), 21 March 2014, M Lobelo (teacher, Mafikeng), 20 March 2014, H Ntsoko (entrepreneur, Mabopane), 22 March 2014, N Pheha (police officer, Pretoria), 21 March 2014, M Sebaatseba (housewife), 22 March 2014, W Kgari (retired), 21 March 2014, P Mathekga (entrepreneur, Ga-Rankuwa), 21 March 2014, T Papo,10 April 2014, P Tshweni (priest, Soshanguve), 15 April 2014.

62 The myth of origin from the "reeds" as held by the Sotho-Tswana is similar to the Nguni group but most could not locate the actual place as the southern Sotho's did. Members of the amaZulu still celebrate the myth by organizing *uhlanga* (reeds) dance once a year where women and men will carry reeds parading and dancing. Such a celebration is a symbol of commemorating their Zulu culture and origin. Cited in GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...*, p. 6; AT Bryant, *The Zulu people* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1949), p. 27.

63 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern…,* p. 18.

reverence, honor, and praise"[64] to a particular animal. This raises the question: When does a person separate from animals become *motho* (a person) or less human? Most interviewees subscribe to the notion that a person becomes 'less human' when he or she is barely aware of his/her humanness, or when others in the community regard him or her as not fully human.[65] According to an interviewee, H Ntsoko, "a moSotho or moTswana who does not have an animal totem is not human enough because they do not have a history of their genealogy". This suggests that totems and identity go hand in hand, and give people a sense of dignity *(seriti)*. *Seriti* may be described as an "aura or a force behind every human being that depicts people's perception about his or her identity or personality".[66] A person gains power through *seriti* that affects everything with whom a person comes in contact. This accounts for the perceived interconnectedness between humans, the land, animals, plants and environment as a whole; because, as with humans, plants, animals and the land also have *seriti*.[67] A person becomes more dignified because of the way he/she participates with others and the totem animals. Hence the Comaroffs argue that:[68]

> Personhood was everywhere seen to be an intrinsically social construction. This in two senses: first, nobody existed or could be known except in relation with reference to, even as part of, a wide array of significant others, and, second, the identity of each and every one was forged, cumulatively, by an infinite, ongoing series of practical activities.

It is important to note here that the Basotho cherish the spirit of inclusion through surnames *(seboko*) (plural *liboko)* which is referred to as praise. For example, interviewees explained that if people share the same surname they would unite with them because they are family. According to Rolland sacred animals as symbols can be traced back to the myth of the origin of humanity from *Molimo* through a marsh covered with reeds.[69] He argued that each black African group was given a different animal as an insignia which would be for it a deity guardian. It is believed that the spirit of ancestors can appear through such animals hence people were prohibited from killing or eating their totems. The animal is called *seano (*plural *diano)* to designate a

64 D Chidester, *Savage systems*…, p. 176.
65 GM Setiloane, *African Theology.*., p. 40; MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, N Pheha, 21 March 2014.
66 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...*, p. 13.
67 GM Setiloane, *African Theology: An introduction...,* p. 15.
68 J & J Comaroff, "On personhood: An anthropological perspective from Africa", *Social Identities,* 7(2), 2001, p. 268.
69 D Chidester, *Savage systems*…, p. 200.

sacred animal under which a particular person falls. For example: *Bataung* sacred animal is a lion, *Bakwena* a crocodile,[70] *Bahurutse* and *Batshweneng* a baboon, *Bakgatla* a monkey,[71] *Barolong* a kudu,[72] *Basiea* a cat, *Batlhaping a* fish, *Bangwakeetsi* and *Batloung* an elephant.[73] Two interviewees, Tsimane and Malebo argued that being disrespectful to an animal totem renders a person less human: "selo". This corroborates the Comaroffs' argument that "contemporary Tswana personhood is not referred to as a state of being but to a state of becoming. No living self is static".[74]

The above shows that identity is a complex phenomenon with mythological, psychological, sociological, political and historical dimensions. Identity refers to how an individual views him/herself and how others view that individual. Identity is a basic component of human social relations – to each other and the environment. Identity can be constructed from below in search of the self, for honor, for the idea of sameness or for material reasons such as increase of power, career opportunities and other privileges.[75] During the apartheid era black Africans changed their surnames so as to be identified as coloureds and receive second class treatment in a racist South Africa but they would still maintain their *seboko*.

But identity construction can also be from above, mainly by people in power in order to stay in power or to secure and conserve their privilege.[76] This is clearly put by Mengara when he argues that, in justifying colonisation, whites declared that "the inhabitants of Africa had to be expropriated of their own identity and constructed in the western mind as objects of devastation, ignorance and primitivism that needed to be saved by the West".[77] Hence colonialists refused Africans identity and saw totems as superstitious and heathen. By vilifying the Sotho-Tswana in the process the white settlers were elevating themselves to the superior strata of society. Interviewees saw communal unity and the animal kingdom as vital in ensuring the progress

70 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, R Kgari (domestic worker), 25 June 2004.
71 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, A Mosetle, 22 March 2014.
72 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, F Tsimane, 22 March 2014.
73 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, R Maponya, 21 March 2014; M Kekana, 21 March 2014.
74 J & J Comaroff, "On personhood…", *Social Identities,* 7(2), 2001, p. 271.
75 S Horstmeier & S Cornelissen, "The social and political construction of identities in the New South Africa: An analysis of Western Cape Province", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(1), 2002, p. 62.
76 S Horstmeier & S Cornelissen, "The social and political construction of identities…", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(1), 2002, p. 63.
77 DM Mengara, "White eyes, dark reflections", DM Mengara, *Images of South Africa stereotypes and realities* (Eritrea, Africa World Press, 2001), p. 3.

of history and life, because through a community an individual acquires empowerment.[78] Unity between the community, animal kingdom and the individual allows an individual to share life with others and the environment[79] hence the sacredness of *liboko*. A person without a surname or animal totem is ascribed as less human and is relegated to things (*dilo)*.[80] This is expatiated in the classification of people and animals in Sesotho and Setswana. People and mythic animals in Sesotho-Tswana fall under *Mo–Ba*, person–people (*motho – batho*), while they are classified as *Le – Ma; thief - thieves (legodu - magodu)* if deemed less than human. Mythic animals are humanised *Mokwena-bakwena*.

Humanity is conferred by the power of speech. Ellenberger argues the Sotho-Tswana word *moth*o indicates "the power of speech, a speaking being distinct from monkeys or baboons, which have something like human shape, but cannot speak". For humanity a pre-vocal baby is called *ngoana* but is termed *mothoano* after speech is learned.[81] The belief is embedded in contemporary Sotho-Tswana culture via language. Mythic animals are seen as possessing that power of speech through dreams and symbolism as they are ancestors. For example an interviewee, P Tshweni stated that if one belongs to the *Bakwena* clan even if a father disappears the identity of the child will be known. She claimed that the crocodile will be used by ancestors as a messenger in the dreams of a child to communicate messages of blessings and protection. People would know the real Sotho-Tswana group to which a child belongs through the continued appearance of the totem to a said child. As Shooter observed, "ancestral spirits are believed to revisit the earth and appear to their descendants in the form of certain serpents".[82]

Mythic animals and people's blessings

Animals that are chosen for communication with the ancestors are regarded as sacred. Livestock such as goats, cattle, and chickens are normally used for rituals.[83] For such livestock to be rendered sacred for rituals; words are said

78 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, T Papo, 10 April 2014, P Tshweni, 15 April 2014 and M Lobelo, 20 March 2014.

79 A Shutte, *Ubuntu: An ethic for a new South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2001), p. 8.

80 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, V Maphalare, 21 March 2014, I Mvula, 22 March 2014, M Sebaatseba, 22 March 2014 and M Lobelo, 20 March 2014.

81 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern...,* p. xxi.

82 J Shooter, *The kaffirs of Natal and the Zulu country* (London, E Stanford, 1857), pp. 162, 211.

83 M Wilson, "The Sotho, Venda and Tsonga", M Wilson & L Thompson, *A history of South Africa to 1870* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1982), p. 142.

over them and they are sometimes given concoctions or African beer.[84] Bones of ritualistic animals are normally burnt and a part of the flesh is burnt as an offering to ancestors.[85] Such livestock are socially upheld as cleansing animals for the misbehaviour of the living. They reinstate morality in the homestead; when the blood is shed it is believed they avert the ancestors' wrath.

As with the ritual fauna; animal emblems were used as a stamp of protecting and thanks giving of people's material possessions. In Chidester's words, weapons, cattle, shields, skin cloaks and households implements were marked to ensure that they are secured.[86] It infers that the totem acts as a safety measure upon the material possession of a clan. Today stamps and other marking systems are used. However there are those who would use a totem picture or sculpture for security of their properties. Equally, to safeguard any blessing oaths were taken using the animal emblems to show appreciation to the ancestors. By using the emblem it implies that, an ancestor will continue to guard the blessings given to an individual because they acknowledged the ancestors and also made thanks giving by praising the dead through the animal emblem. An interviewee, P Tshweni mentioned that "to keep her car protected from thieves and accidents he has a picture of a baboon as it is his ancestor and guardian angel".[87]

To prevent miscarriages of blessings the Sotho-Tswana would avoid killing their totem because they believe it will inhibit blessings from the ancestors. Hence John Barrow a traveller from Europe in the 1800s explained that the observance of the animal emblems was a way of avoiding fury of the ancestors.[88] Rain is an important resource for the Sotho-Tswana and communal misbehaviour such as the killing of such a totem is believed to lead to scarcity of rain. To reverse the fury the mythic animal has to be appeased.[89] A report in 1905 by the War Office staff entailed that, indigenous people of South Africa believed that dead relatives and friends regularly visited them in the form of animals to deliver messages.[90] Such ancestors could appear as a sacred animal of the person's clan – crocodile, lion, baboon, etc. implying

84 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, R Maponya, 21 March 2014 and M Kekana, 21 March 2014, M Lobelo, 20 March 2014,P Tshweni, 15 April 2014 and M Sebaatseba, 22 March 2014.

85 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, I Mvula, 22 March 2014 and H Ntsoko, 22 March 2014.

86 D Chidester, *Savage systems…*, p. 200.

87 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interview, P Tshweni, 27 March 2014.

88 J Barrow, *An account of travels into the interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798, 2nd ed.* (London, T Cadell and W Davis, 1806).

89 D Chidester, *Savage systems…,* p. 201.

90 Great Britain War Office, *The native tribes of the Transvaal…*, pp. 121, 125.

that before receiving a blessing people were warned by their ancestors and as a result communities had to constantly revere their mythic animals as they were seen as messengers of hope and blessings.

Mythic animals and environmental conservation

The Sotho-Tswana relationship with the environment was embedded in their way of life, *mokgwa wa go etsa dilo* ("the way we do things"), as "the Tswana people have a long tradition of nature conservation. The customs and taboos, which promoted the preservation of indigenous fauna …, were not based on modern conservation principles but they certainly contributed very much to the fact that in many tribal areas several species of wild game … are still to be found".[91] Indigenous people have many traditions of environmental conservation[92] that are not based on modern conservation principles.[93] Timberlake considers the challenge of conservation to be "the saving of the vast amount of human knowledge of African wild life possessed by people of Africa".[94] The concept of environmental conservation is called *Goboloka tlhago* (Sotho-Tswana), which means to preserve, care, sustain and respect nature. *Tlhago* (to emerge) implies everything that has been created by God such as the soil, mountains, trees, stones and people. This means whether a person is in the urban, slums or rural areas, *tlhago* is still in their midst and has to be preserved. Animals are regarded as part of *tlhago* as they emerged with people from the "hole in the ground".

The Sotho-Tswana enforced conservation of animals through the ethic of respect: *go hlompa* by means of respecting and avoiding certain sacred people, places, objects and animals.[95] Some animals were accorded with great respect and used as totems, which is an environmental didactic device that teaches people to look after animals and avoid abusing or depleting them. Unauthorised large-scale hunting rendered the offender liable to cattle

91 Anon., *The Republic of Bophuthatswana* (South Africa, Johannesburg, Van Rensburg Publications (Pty) Ltd, 1977), p. 183.

92 AF Hean and NC Mokhehle, "Some Basuto beliefs…" *African Wild Life,* 1-4, 1947, p. 69; Anon., *The Republic of Bophuthatswana…*, p. 183.

93 Anon., *The Republic of Bophuthatswana…*, p. 183.

94 L Timberlake, *Africa in crisis…*, p. 135.

95 H Kuckertz, "Ukuhlonipha as idiom of moral reasoning in Mpondo", P McAllister, *Culture and the common place,* p. 312.

confiscation.[96] Depletion of fur animals was prevented by prohibiting their hunting during summer when they were breeding.[97] Respect for adults was another strategy used to curb large-scale killing of animals, as boys were not allowed to eat their prey unless they offered portions to elderly people. Certain reptiles and insects were also conserved through taboos and traditional rules. For instance, a grasshopper with bright red under-wings was believed to bear messages from the ancestors, often of imminent fire.[98]

These conservationist and preservationist tendencies do not preclude pragmatic decisions but do mean that indigenous people (on the whole) wilfully waste, despoil or exhaust their environment. Of course some negative impact on the environment was inevitable, and we cannot romanticise pre-colonial South Africa as an untouched utopia because the environment was a scene of daily conflict as people struggled for survival against nature. Pre-colonial populations were small which minimised environmental damage. For example, there were 10 000 to 15 000 people at Dithakong in 1801 while there were 13 000 to 16 000 people at Kaditshweni in 1820.[99] Written descriptions of the fauna found by early callers at the Cape and accounts left by travellers to the interior attest to light pre-colonial environmental impact[100] and elucidate that some of the measures used for curbing fauna depletion worked and is still effective through the use of totems and mythic animals.

Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge as has been shown in this article using the theme of 'mythic animals' as an example has been entangled in ideological wars of disregard by colonialists and pushed to the periphery as irrational and superstitious. In this regard western ways of knowing were upheld while the 'other' knowledges were marginalised and perceived as unscientific. This ostracism was done to subdue indigenous people of South Africa ensuring that their ways of knowing are pushed to the unofficial knowledge arena while those of colonisers are positioned in the core or the centre. In order to

96 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern...*, p. 271.
97 Anon., *The Republic of Bophuthatswana…,* p. 183.
98 AF Hean & NC Mokhehle,"Some Basuto beliefs…", *African Wild Life,* l (1-4), 1947, p. 69.
99 M Wilson, "The Sotho, Venda and Tsonga", M Wilson & L Thompson, *A history of South Africa...*, p. 153.
100 R Raven-Hart, *Before van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa from 1488 to 1652* (Cape Town, Struik, 1967), p. 123.

reinforce control over indigenous people of South Africa, apartheid ideologues underpinned those tendencies of divisions and partings of western from indigenous knowledge during the twentieth century by trusting the findings of European human and social sciences discriminatory interpretations. However, the end of apartheid brought rewriting and reinterpretation of the received colonial writings about indigenous knowledge. Most such scholars employed post-colonial interpretation in their writings about indigenous knowledge and embraced western and indigenous knowledge as pivotal in their own accord and argue that they cannot be separated.[101] Such recent writings are key in illustrating the significance of all knowledge as heritage, dynamic and complex and that in subduing the other as in the case of indigenous people as inferior condones ideological prejudices. Hence Agrawal's views are pivotal in the conservation of indigenous knowledge in knowledge making for the reason that it "is scientific not because there is anything self-obviously true about it, but because it conforms to the procedures whereby science is reproduced and some statements are termed knowledge".[102] Subsequently, this is a call for more work to be done following Agrawal and the examples posed in this research of revising and reconstructing historical writings on indigenous knowledge and people displaying its significance in knowledge formation globally.

Mythic animals, as part of the knowledge process of the indigenous people as has been displayed in this article, have undergone the process of ideological wars of disregard throughout history in the hands of colonialists. For the indigenous people as has been illustrated by the interviewees, mythic animals explicate their identity, history, blessings and helps in the conservation of the environment – an inheritance to the living.[103] Totems warranted the interconnectedness of the Sotho-Tswana community and simply allowed each individual to become a unique centre of shared life inferring that; the individual is thus ensured of "fulfilment" and the establishment of "viable environment" that affirms humanness.[104]

101 R Ellen et al, *Indigenous environmental knowledge and its transformations...,* pp. 2, 6.

102 A Agrawal, "Indigenous knowledge…", *International Social Science Journal*, 54(173), 2002, p. 293.

103 MC Kgari-Masondo (Personal Collection), interviews, I Mvula, 22 March 2014, F Tsimane, 22 March 2014, A Mosetle, 22 March 2014, Maphalare, 21 March 2014, M Kekana, 21 March 2014, R Maponya, 21 March 2014, M Lobelo, 20 March 2014, H Ntsoko, 22 March 2014, N Pheha, 21 March 2014, M Sebaatseba, 22 March 2014, W Kgari, 21 March 2014, P Mathekga, 21 March 2014, T Papo, 10 April 2014, P Tshweni, 15 April 2014.

104 Anon., *The Republic of Bophuthatswana…*, p. 183; F Khan, "Black environmental experience as a facet of current South Africa environmental perceptions" (Department of Environmental and Geographic Science, University of Cape Town, 1992), p. 5.

The disregarding of indigenous knowledge through colonisation resulted in a negative impact in the historical formation of indigenous people as has been shown in this article about the Sotho-Tswana and their belief in mythic animals. It is only now, during the new post- apartheid dispensation that they are trying to rekindle their indigenous knowledge.[105] This can be attainable because for the Sotho-Tswana "a person is constantly a work-in-progress, not a state of being but a state of becoming".[106] It indicates that, the Sotho-Tswana definition of a person through mythic animals was disrupted and arrested through the colonial period by undermining their belief in mythic fauna. However fieldwork undertaken for the purpose of this article indicates that the Sotho-Tswana have agency as they fought and tried to manoeuvre and adapt through such historical politics of ideological repression. Hence Peterson argues that, "not only are ideas of humanness and of nature wrapped up with each other, but they also shape ethical systems and practices".[107] Attesting to Van Damme and Neluvhani's views that "indigenous knowledge process involves far more than simply 'extracting' available knowledge from available sources"[108] because as with any other knowledge it is dynamic and is affected by historical developments showing that indigenous knowledge is manifold and draws on personal experience and historical stories of the community and cannot be contained in one specific source.

Thus, indigenous knowledge as has been shown in this article using sacred animals, can never be a story that is closed from further interpretation. It requires "to be opened and reopened"[109] unearthing it using appropriate scientific research tools such as phenomenology. It is hypothesised that researching indigenous themes in such a manner will be a step towards journeying forward and backwards in reinterpreting, retelling and redefining indigenous knowledge received from history. This is a breakaway from reifying indigenous knowledge but: "seeing indigenous ways of knowing as being located in peoples and their environments, by recognising the living dynamism inherent in indigenous ways of knowing and the rights of people to make informed decisions in response to changing context and circumstance".[110] As

105 FD Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto ancient and modern...*, p. xxi.

106 J & J Comaroff, "On personhood…", *Social Identities,* 7(2), 2001, pp. 269, 271.

107 A Peterson, *Being human: Ethics, environment and our place in the world* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001), p. 1.

108 LSM van Damme & EF Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge in environmental education processes…", *Environmental Education Research,* 10(3) , August 2010, p. 366.

109 D Chidester, *Savage systems…,* p. 261.

110 LSM van Damme & EF Neluvhalani, "Indigenous knowledge in environmental education processes…", *Environmental Education Research,* 10(3), August 2010, p. 364.

a way forward this article suggests – is to go backwards in history through the historically situated discourses and practices of analysis that have constituted the colonial and apartheid era discourses and reinterpret, retell and redefine mythologies as dynamic and not static. Through conceivably going backwards in history mythologies can be researched as historical and some more new information might emerge in the study of mythologies and socio-environmental history.