Understanding the Rural-Urban Dichotomy in Mositi Torontle's *The Victims* and Unity Dow's *Far and Beyon'*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how place is represented in two Botswana novels, *Far and Beyon'* by Unity Dow and *The Victims* by Mositi Torontle. Conventional notions of rural as the "authentic" experience that is threatened by moral breakdown in modern towns do not fit the experiences that these two novels describe. Instead, place reveals attitudes that influence identity formation, and it does so by foregrounding the importance of human relationships. Thus, the important point is to restore and maintain a person's sense of belonging to a family and extended community, regardless of whether those communities are rural or urban. Breakdown threatens people when they do not know to whom they belong, regardless of where they live.

> *The major category of inspiration for Welty deriving from 'place' is the family. For Welty the family symbolizes an order rooted in an ethic, which is especially defined in the twentieth century by economic factors associated with place, the history of place, and that place in time.*
>
> (Chronaki 38)

> *African philosophy, like that of any other place, is earned through reflection on the concepts made available in the place that creates an identity . . . it is more useful to think about the questions that can arise when we consider the place we are in.*
>
> (Janz 10)

INTRODUCTION

The two quotations above may seem odd to use to open a discussion of "place" in two local novels from Botswana. However, they both address issues central to the discussion: first, that place inspires how we consider human relationships, and second, that place reveals concepts that create identity. *The Victims* by Mositi Torontle and *Far and Beyon'* by Unity Dow use place in similar ways: to reveal important facets of human relationships in Botswana.

Conventional Western notions of "rural" and "urban" rely on definitions based on activities that occur in a place; thus an urban place is characterized by industrial, trade, and administrative activities, while rural is characterized by more agricultural ones. However, these definitions do not match precisely settlement patterns here in Botswana, where historically there have not been the same distinctions between administrative, industrial, trade, and agricultural activities that occur in various other places.

The novels that will be discussed here present a fairly clear urban-rural dichotomy, but in order to understand the novels, it is also important to understand that the urban-rural distinction does not make sense in the Western understanding of place. The distinction is important, but only as defined by a person's relationships to others. Popular understanding of rural as somehow identified with what is "authentic" and modern towns with ideas that threaten the fabric of a "true" or "original" society do not apply to these novels in familiar ways. There are Botswana novels in which the "pure" rural ethic (what may be referred to as tradition or custom) is in danger of being corrupted and eroded by the foreign (Western) values of the modern town, novels that lament the breakdown of tradition, but Unity Dow in *Far and Beyon'* and Mositi Torontle in *The Victims* do not offer such a conventional assessment of the migration of people from their villages to the towns. These two novels more clearly make the point that the place in itself is important only insofar as it tells us about human relationships, the most important aspect of human life. What matters is restoring and maintaining people's sense of *to whom* they belong, rather than *where*. Thus the quotations at the beginning of this paper, although they refer to other disciplines and contexts, offer a way to look at how place is understood in these two novels set in Botswana.

BACKGROUND: URBAN AND RURAL "PLACE" IN BOTSWANA

Botswana settlements[1] historically were not permanent: people moved around to take advantage of sources of water. Sotho-Tswana settlements in general have tended to be very big and have often included agricultural areas, so that the familiar Western distinction between urban as a built-up place of commerce and trade and rural as agricultural area with a dispersed population does not fit definitions of place in Botswana. Although settled areas in Botswana have tended to be very large, they have not been exclusively or even necessarily centers of administration or trade, certainly not in the modern Western sense.

Thus, urban and rural as places defined by activity is less, or even not at all, characteristic of Botswana. Rather, a place is characterized according to how it reflects common identity. In a traditional village set-up, people live according to kinship ties, in web-like neighborhoods of relationship. Homes (*malwapa*, sing.

lolwapa) are clusters of dwellings where more immediate members of an extended family live. Nearby live less immediate members of the extended family. Such settlements, in which people live according to their relationships, are referred to traditionally as villages. Villages are again different from towns, which are a more modern phenomenon. The larger village community is defined by the clan, ward, and finally *morafe* (plural *merafe*). Each family is headed by a father, each clan by a senior male, wards by headmen, and *merafe* by chiefs. Thus, the physical organization reflects the relational organization, with the closest relatives living in closest proximity. A further characteristic of these settlements is the location of a *kgotla* (pl. *dikgotla*), where decisions affecting the entire group are made. *Dikgotla* can exist even in the smallest family dwelling, and can also be quite large, accommodating thousands of people from an entire *morafe*. The *kgotla* therefore also defines the group (family, ward, etc.). It is the symbolic heart of the group (and larger community); it is also an administrative center that shapes and reinforces group identity through the decisions made there.

The concept of town is one that has developed since the arrival of missionaries and colonial powers. But again, this concept has changed over time. Originally Botswana, as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, was perceived by the British as part of a railway corridor that connected South Africa with Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and places further north. Colonial administrative centers, taking over some, but not always the most important, tasks of the *kgotla,* developed around stops on the railway line, which runs along the eastern corridor of Botswana between the borders with South Africa and Zimbabwe. The major settlements—towns—that existed around the time of independence are Lobatse (at the southern border), Francistown (at the northeast border), and Gaborone (the capital).[2] These towns did not fit settlement patterns of Botswana villages. They were transportation, trade, and administrative centers, activities that did not define a traditional Tswana village, and thus were more like Western towns. People lived according to no fixed set of relationships, or did not live in them at all, simply commuting there for trade, employment, travel, etc. In this sense, they are artificial settlements, not organic ones that evolve to reflect a way of life. Currently, Botswana is considered to have six towns: Gaborone, the capital; Francistown, the northern commercial center; Lobatse, the location of the national abattoir; and Selebi-Phikwe, Orapa, and Jwaneng, postindependence mining centers. Francistown and Lobatse are the only towns that existed before independence in 1966, and they are the northern and southern endpoints of the railway line in Botswana.

Urban, then, in Botswana refers to those places where people do not live according to any kinship pattern, where they do not live with their families and clans, and where they do not know their neighbors. Ask someone in Botswana where s/he is from, and most likely the answer will not be Francistown, Gaborone, or Lobatse, even if that person lives there or was born there. A similar phenomenon exists in South Africa, where the families of migrant laborers who for a long time have lived in, for example, Johannesburg still identify themselves as citizens of Botswana, Malawi, or Zimbabwe, despite the fact that they were born in South Africa while their parents worked there, and have never returned to their "homes" abroad.

Here, too, the concept of "home" is telling. Gaborone, Johannesburg, South Africa: none of these places are home (for Batswana, the people of Botswana) precisely because the extended family does not have a history of inhabiting those places. The lands (*masimo,* where staple crops are grown) and cattle posts (*moraka,* where family cattle-wealth is tended) cannot be reached from such places; they can only be reached from the village, where decisions about when fields are to be plowed, how cattle are to be distributed and to whom, and other such matters pertaining to the family and community are settled. Someone who lives in a place like Gaborone or Johannesburg or elsewhere in South Africa risks becoming alienated and losing his/her identity as a member of a particular family and community. Such people are disconnected and are often considered lost to their families.

Simply put, therefore, a place in Botswana is defined by whether you know those around you, and as a result of considerable stable interaction among village people, the rural experience remains largely entrenched and manifests itself in the relationships people have with each other and through the code of conduct in operation within these relationships. Thus Tlokweng, although a peri-urban part of Gaborone, is still very much a rural area. By contrast, Phakalane, a recent suburban development quite a bit further from Gaborone than Tlokweng, is an urban extension of Gaborone, despite its more "rural" location.

In *The Victims* and *Far and Beyon',* social analysis relies to some degree on this understanding of place. The writers explore, through situations of incest and HIV/AIDS, how the rural mindset of Batswana is adapting in the face of changes occurring in the social organization of human beings, which are in turn revealed by place. For both writers, the urbanization of Botswana exposes the disruption of kinship relations but is not the cause of the disruption. Strength to face the challenges of a rapidly changing world comes from the relationships with those to whom the protagonists are closest—their families. Weakness and breakdown, by contrast, threaten people when they do not know to whom they belong, regardless of where they live.[3] In *Far and Beyon',* for example, the protagonist never leaves home; the entire novel takes place in the village where all the relatives are—problems arise because family members lose sight of who they are and allow their relationships to unravel. In both *Far and Beyon'* and *The Victims,* problems are solved in particular ways, through traditional relationship structures that survive in the face of modern life and the unfamiliar stresses that it brings. Thus, both novels are modern in the sense that they deal with "modern" problems, but they rely very much on a "rural" relationship structure.

Botswana literature does, of course, contain examples of novels that describe the perils of city life and narrate the downfall of someone from a village who is seduced by that life, of the "Jim goes to Joburg" sort. Two novels by Andrew Sesinyi, *Love on the Rocks* and *Carjack,* rely on this narrative model to explain certain aspects of the story. In *Love on the Rocks,* Pule leaves his village to study in Gaborone, and has a difficult time adjusting, difficulties that are a direct result of Gaborone and the materialist ethic that it is seen to represent. In *Carjack,* Brutus slips into a life of crime, again as a result of what Sesinyi sees as the rampant materialism of Gaborone.

Neither do *Far and Beyon'* and *The Victims* offer an easy analysis of place in terms of, for example, colonial and postcolonial notions of dislocation, that is, being out of place, either by simply being in the wrong place, such as in the capital of the former colonial power, or as an aspect of identity, through linguistic, cultural, or other conflict. There are, to be sure, characters who do typify this kind of dislocation. In *The Victims*, most obviously, Dineo's father has abandoned his family to find work in Johannesburg. In *Far and Beyon'*, Mosa's Uncle Rich returns for visits, but he is clearly suffering from the effects of his migrant life (he is addicted to marijuana, for example). More familiar understandings of dislocation are, to be sure, available to readers in Botswana: Sesinyi's novels celebrate traditional life by contrasting it with the seductively evil ways of life in Gaborone, where all his novels are set, without offering much description of the uncorrupted villages that his characters come from. Dow and Torontle, by contrast, set their characters and the action of their stories in the places where people are comfortable, fixed, and located. Neither Dow nor Torontle incorporates the "modern = bad" perspective that so often accompanies the notion of dislocation. Both writers, particularly as they examine the problems of women in their societies, advocate for the advantages of modern life. But those advantages, they reason, must come from an understanding of the importance of knowing who you are. The traditional importance of the link between place and relationship matters most to Dow and Torontle; they seem to ignore the link between place and activity as not significant enough to affect how people deal with their situations.

THE VICTIMS AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR RELATIVES

The Victims, by Mositi Torontle, is one of the earliest novels in English by a Motswana woman to look at the effect of change on Botswana society. It examines the conventional understanding of rural as "authentic" and urban as warped and artificial. In *The Victims*, Dineo is a young schoolgirl whose father long ago disappeared in Johannesburg, where he went to work in the mines. Dineo studies very hard, but when she meets Tom, a photojournalist, she becomes pregnant and is forced to leave school. Tom disappears, and Dineo eventually returns to school. Torontle's novel includes descriptions of agriculture that most Western readers would associate with a more rural ethic: "The rich river bank soil graciously nourished the plants. Dineo fell in love with the damp garden soil and everything in it. With her own hands she tendered the plants with great love and care. Apart from the classroom and their humble home, the garden became her favourite place" (14). Later in the novel, when she is traveling with Tom, she hides from him in a mophane forest and must explain the rules of calling to someone in such a forest: "The spirits of the *mophane* trees are too friendly. They like human company. If they hear one's name they can keep on calling you into the deeper forest until one gets completely lost and never returns home. Therefore, one is to use 'ouuwu' only in the mophane forest" (64). In such descriptions, for example, the land is loved and loves back, figuring out ways to keep human company within it. What is important to note here is the fact that human relationships are central even to the wild, bush areas and forests. Human beings define wild versus civilized.

However, Torontle does not present a straightforward pastoral fantasy. Dineo's family members clearly suffer from the problems of poverty and migrant labor. The husband and father has left to find work in the mines of Johannesburg in South Africa; he has only returned home on a few occasions, since Francistown (and his home village near there) is well over one thousand kilometers from Johannesburg. Each time, he has brought food, but he has also left Dineo's mother pregnant. His good intentions to support his family with the relatively high earnings of the mines are weakened by the stresses connected with migrant labor: it is difficult to maintain regular, normal relationships when people see their families only once or at most twice a year. This pattern is familiar from the time when much of Botswana's male population was in South Africa at the mines, and it is a pattern that today is reproduced when adult family members work in town (e.g., Gaborone or Francistown) while their families live elsewhere in the villages. Dineo hardly remembers her father, and her mother has not seen much of the money he went to Johannesburg to earn. In fact, he has set up house with another woman in one of the townships, and they have two sons.

Dineo's mother understands the importance of education for her daughter, and works hard growing vegetables on her small square of land in order to earn the money to send her daughter to school: "Any man can make you pregnant and desert you. Forget about them until you are in a position of strength, that is, when you are educated enough to stand on your own if need be" (123). Female self-reliance is a valuable characteristic and does not necessarily undermine the rural ethic. Dineo should only be able to stand on her own "if need be," implying that a "complete" family includes a father or husband. Dineo's mother supports her in a classically rural way: the novel makes clear the magnitude of the sacrifice that the entire, single-parent, female-headed household makes so that Dineo may have a better future than her mother's.

Thus far, the novel represents rural poverty. Dineo's mother is not a prosperous farmer; she clearly struggles to support her children. Her struggle is represented as both worthy and successful: Dineo works very hard to succeed, and she does indeed do very well in school. However, at an agricultural fair, where she is displaying her school produce, she also meets Tom, a young photographer from Johannesburg living in Francistown, and they fall in love. In what at first seems like a predictable scenario, the naïve rural girl Dineo becomes pregnant and the street-wise urban man Tom disappears. Dineo is thrown out of school, and she and her mother must work very hard to earn the money to send her to a school that will accept her in spite of her "shame"[4] and will make it possible for her not to repeat her mother's story.

On the surface, this story seems to follow a very recognizable, standard pattern of rural equals good, urban equals bad. As long as Dineo remains with her mother in the rural area, she seems safe. As soon as she goes to the town, she falls victim to the charms of an apparently fast-talking city-slicker. However, by examining the details, it becomes clear that the problems do not arise because the town is an evil place; rather, the problems arise because of social and economic forces that prevent people from knowing who their family members are.

In *The Victims*, Torontle explores the problem that the political dominance of South Africa created for places like Botswana. The South African mines recruited men from nearly all the poorer neighboring countries, and men who took those jobs were allowed neither to bring their families with them nor to visit them very frequently. Consequently, the social fabric of Botswana society suffered from the absence of important family members, and families "back home" often did not know how or even if their relatives were living in those far-away places.[5] Because Dineo's father is driven by the economic relationship between Botswana and South Africa to find work in South Africa, Dineo does not know her father's other family, and so cannot know that Tom is her half-brother. Similarly, Tom cannot know about his relatives living in Botswana. The place Francistown, the "urban" center of the north, is not the reason for Dineo's problems. The *reason* is social; Francistown is merely the location where the problems are revealed to the reader. They could just as easily have been revealed to us in the village, since no one in the village knows who Tom is, either. On the contrary, in Francistown, Dineo is able to find true love, someone who respects her, adores her even, and supports her own work:

> There was a small desk in a far corner of the sitting room where Dineo did all her work. Tom ensured that she worked by setting two tests for her daily. Dineo's wish to impress Tom was a positive force; she worked harder than she had ever done in her life. Usually she got everything right, but if there was something she missed, they would sit down and discuss it thoroughly. Dineo was doing far better under Tom's supervision than she would have done at school.
>
> In addition, they [sic] were good times too. They did not always stay home in the evenings. They went to places like Marang, Tati Hotel restaurant, Cine 2000, the Wagon, the Cave, Impala, and the Grand Hotel. Gradually, Dineo was introduced to Tom's major interest; the sky world and its changes. They would sit in Boikhutso park and watch the twinkling stars or follow a group of moving stars. (97)[6]

Ironically, Tom and Dineo suit one another very well. Tom respects and fosters Dineo's desire for education, helping her study and providing a quiet place in his flat for her to work. His character subverts conventional expectations of the untrustworthy city-slicker who corrupts innocent young schoolgirls. He wants Dineo to succeed and understands that his relationship with her is also a distraction from other equally important matters. On the journey back to school, they stop for a picnic, and Tom interrogates Dineo:

> "What are you going to do with the love you have for me?" asked Tom as they had their lunch.
>
> "I will use it for its purpose, that is to love you."
>
> "What will you do to let me know that you really love me?" continued Tom.
>
> Dineo thought for some seconds. "I will honour the one and only request you made to me, that is study hard and aim for excellence."
>
> "That's my girl," said Tom smiling happily. (100)

Tom leaves Dineo and Botswana not because he cannot deal with a pregnancy (which in any case he never finds out about), but because he has been sent to Moscow by Umkhonto we Sizwe for training in the protracted struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. It is significant that Dineo and Tom meet in Francistown, where neither her mother nor his father can see them and thus warn them about their true relationship. The problem arises not from the conflict between the moral farm and the immoral town, since Dineo's and Tom's relationship is not immoral in a way that either of them is *aware* of. The problem is not with the locations themselves, but with the ignorance about kinship that comes with the social instability engendered in South Africa, which shakes up both urban and rural Botswana because it shatters the ways that people traditionally know each other—two families in different countries share a father but do not know it because of the problems created by the migrant labor system—destabilization and breakdown of family structures, family members living scattered all over the region. Dineo and Tom can love in Francistown because they do not know each other, not because Francistown is a den of sin. They care about each other, and ironically this love is only possible in the town where they do not know their true relationship.[7]

The irony of their situations and their locations is very painful and seems in some ways tragic and hopeless. One is reminded superficially of Oedipus, who tries to do right by his people but cannot escape his fate. Dineo and Tom are victims, too, but not of fate or even of physical, geographical urbanization. The city provides them with a place to love each other, and so carries no responsibility for their sin, since their sin is not defined by casual sex. They are victims of social processes that affect both urban and rural places. Torontle's tragic irony is not that Dineo falls victim to the city but that two people who love each other cannot do so *appropriately* because no one can tell them who they are. Knowing one another is crucial.

FAR AND BEYON': "MODERN" TRADITIONS

The importance of extended relationships and neighborliness within Botswana traditional society is based on Batswana's inherent belief that our lives, as human beings, are inextricably linked to our relationships, and *The Victims* explores the consequences of allowing those links to lapse—the circumstances of migrant labor give rise to the inability of Dineo and Tom to know their true kinship. The Setswana proverb *matlo go sha mabapi* (a burning house inevitably threatens the neighbor's as the next to catch fire) recognizes the connectedness of people's lives within the social and cultural context of Botswana.

The manifestations of the role of relationships between and among people within Botswana culture are commonly evident at times of, for example, sickness, death, and funerals. The values of caring, compassion, and love are expressed through extended relationships aimed at supporting each other through challenges and difficulties. Taking responsibility and accepting that we all need each other are values that are still upheld in Botswana society, but most clearly manifest in rural settings. The collective contribution of individuals is traditionally regarded as life-enhancing and life-sustaining. The Setswana proverb *setshwarwa ke ntsa pedi ga se thata* (anything that is attacked by two [or more] dogs is bound to be overpowered) further attests to the value of Botswana traditional society's united efforts in confronting challenges.

Unity Dow's *Far and Beyon'* gives voice to these values of unity and collective support. In rural Botswana, what happens to a neighbor is a call to members of the community to take action, pay attention to, and give support to the affected. Dow focuses on a rural perspective to remind the larger Botswana community of its responsibility, and the first chapter of *Far and Beyon'* sets this tone for the rest of the novel. *Far and Beyon'* opens with the funeral of the protagonist's brother. He is the second brother to die of AIDS, and Mosa uses the family's shared grief to turn her life around. She returns to school (after having been forced to leave because of pregnancy) and reconciles her mother Mara and her mother's best friend Lesedi. This is a story about family relations including extended family, friends, and to a certain extent the community, and it is set in the fictional Monamodi village in Botswana. The critical issue for the whole Monamodi village in this age of HIV/AIDS is, according to the author, the ability to develop a realistic sense of the strengths and limitations of its own culture. In this village diseases, death, and dying are not regarded as natural phenomena because the details of the causes are not immediately available to the characters' imagination. The way to cope is based on a rural ethic of relationships and shared suffering among community members. When Cecilia is dying of AIDS, for example, she has numerous visits from the community:

> Mosa was sitting . . . with two other women. They had come to see Cecilia, who had been moved out . . . for some air. Tears welled up as Mosa looked at this human being who was once so full of life. One of the women unable to hold back her tears stood up and left without a word. So much pain. . . . So little time to love the living as all emotions go into caring for the dying. (165)

The fact that the other two women are unnamed emphasizes not so much the anonymity of the individuals as it does the spiritual and the emotional attachment that members feel about each other. Because the deaths of individuals impact greatly on families and communities, in Monamodi village the role of the traditional diviner (doctor) is extremely important in unraveling, however wrongly, the mystery surrounding the causes of deaths such as those of Mara's sons. Beliefs in such things as witchcraft and the supernatural are very strong. Villagers, for example, use traditional modes of thought that exclude scientific facts, logic, and reason and instead embrace superstitious beliefs and faith.

While the urban perspective views AIDS as a virus, in the village it is a literal curse, and this rural perspective of AIDS influences the villagers' understanding of the way HIV/AIDS permeates the community, hence the suggestion that there has to be someone who bewitches victims. And inevitably, the diviner's accusing finger points at Mara's innocent friend: "I see a thin woman entering your home as if she belongs there, yet does not quite belong. She must be a relative or perhaps a friend" (30). Because of the element of mystery surrounding witchcraft, characters often do not know where solid reality begins and ends, and there is the potential for them to be unjustifiably fearful of friends and family (as in the case of Mara's best friend who was suspected of bewitching her). This fear creates an atmosphere of mistrust among village dwellers. Bringing people together, especially family members and friends, is crucial to life, not only rural life, but is not always possible in more urban settings, as Torontle demonstrates. Therefore any signs of family disintegration either through rejection, desertion, or death are usually viewed with suspicion. Since HIV/AIDS engenders mistrust and destroys unity among the village people, such threat to rural-ness is often fought collectively if unfairly. From the rural perspective, HIV/AIDS and dying are also a constant reminder that members of the community, through extended relationships, are not immune from destruction as an individual's irresponsible action can cause the destruction of the whole community.

But Dow through Mosa demonstrates the capacity of the imagination to mature and perceive issues of AIDS as well as those of gender differently. This readiness to look beyond the present and the capacity to confront the future judiciously is implied in the title of the novel itself, *Far and Beyon'*. Dow discusses the inevitable change of people's perceptions and ways of changing not only through the broad dimensions of Mara's family members and their interrelations with friends and the community but also through family interaction with town people. As seen earlier, the Botswana sense of towns is, among other things, defined by their close proximity to the railroad line. Unlike the village, which is identified as Monamodi village, the town in this story is unnamed, though its influence is suggested through symbols such as the bicycle, radio, Western formal school and its teachers, Western legal justice and its lawyers and judges. The town as a place is therefore less important than who represents the urban mind-set. With whom does the urban person identify? What gets transmitted to the rural way of life? What gets embraced by the rural community? Why is it acceptable or unacceptable? How is it accepted or rejected?

In various ways this novel uses Mosa as its main channel towards transformation in Monamodi village. She is the sane, objective, and protective rural voice; she is also the voice of modernity. It is important to note that Dow is very clearly on the side of modernity: tradition may be justified, but it is judged according to modern criteria. One of her major roles is to try to keep the relationships intact by promoting what she believes is a reasonable and acceptable rural way of life. Her role in maintaining such relationships relates to the balance she attempts to achieve between her mother's beliefs and actions and her brother's more modern ideas. Through her interactions with her brother, whom she urges to engage in traditional rituals such as head-shaving, and her urging of her mother to be more independent, she plays the role of both a transitional and a bridging figure. She is the bridge that helps her brother take a mental leap to the past, and she helps her mother cross over, however minimally, to modern thought. By encouraging her brother to understand their mother's perspective, she is in essence promoting rural-ness. Mosa's comment "But I live with mother and you don't" (105) shows the extent of her identification with her mother and also strengthens her argument as an insider. This acquaintance with the seemingly opposing rural and urban values reinforces her role in her attempt to persuade Stan to appreciate their mother's needs and values: "I think [last week's traditional hair-shaving ceremony] is fairly harmless. The razor cutting is no more painful than a needle at the hospital. Anyway we all already believed that we needed to get together and work together as a family. Mma wanted desperately to bring us together, hoping that the ceremony would do just that" (105).[3] Mosa's understanding of both the familiar and unfamiliar experiences affords her the opportunity to accept and expect change in ways that might not necessarily follow a very predictable pattern of rural-ness or village life, as indeed Monamodi village is not only slow-paced but also very slow to change.

Yet whispers of urban voices are often heard and even though often ridiculed inevitably bring some changes. Uncle Rich for example is an urban figure who (although partly a comic figure) and is portrayed as being well-versed in and aware of life outside the slow, predictable borders of the village. This change on a personal level results in changing the dimensions of relationships: authority is questioned; parents are not automatic role models; and actions, especially of men, are for the first time subject to questioning. This shift brings out insecurity in those who suddenly find themselves under the microscope (sexually abusive teachers) and boosts the confidence of those who have never had a voice before (abused girls). This education also allows Mosa to look at the HIV/AIDS pandemic differently because she does not hold the same beliefs as other older members of the community (beliefs the novel suggests are superstitions); she has a clarity of thought missing in those engaged in traditional modes of understanding.

The context of relationships is further based on traditional principles such as the unquestioning respect for elders, or the assumption that males are more intelligent than or have superior judgment to that of women. The understanding that there is a hierarchy according to age and sex dictates the conduct of all those involved; for example, Mara hands over her cows to her brother to look after despite the fact that he is irresponsible and cannot adequately care for his own property. Mara's thinking remains strongly immersed in traditional belief systems while Stan, her son, displays urban thought processes shown in his reluctance to shave his hair after his brothers' deaths. These rules of conduct also affect Mosa, especially when she is faced with a boyfriend who leaves her pregnant. As a result, "Mara was worried about [the children] and wanted to protect them. She was however feeling increasingly helpless. Without a husband to help she had to shoulder all the family problems alone" (6).

It should be noted that though rural-ness primarily suggests commitment to family relationships and extended relatives, relationships and interaction do not necessarily imply harmony, trust, and security. Mara's relationship with her friend Lesedi, for example, is very obviously seriously strained. But it takes Mosa's initiative and intervention to rebuild this friendship: "We have to work on mother to drop some of this negativity. We also have to get her to talk to Aunt Lesedi again" (106). The irony is that Mosa's own relationships with her boyfriend Pako, who rejected her after impregnating her, and with her brother Stan, who drifted away from her, are themselves dysfunctional and have left her vulnerable and lonely. But her ultimate decision to come to terms with her own vulnerability and loneliness through sharing her experiences with Stan brings her close to him as he "held his sister tight and promised her that he would always be there for her. They both cried and cried. For their two dead brothers. For their lonely mother. For themselves. For love and for lack of love. . . . They cried for the sad episodes in their lives that had allowed them to drift apart" (107–08). The whole process of these characters' change of position from estrangement to commitment demonstrates not only the strength but also the essence of what defines traditional relationships in a rural setting.

CONCLUSION

In two different but related ways, *The Victims* and *Far and Beyon'* reconsider the familiar opposition of tradition and modernity. In doing so, both writers turn to human relationships in order to understand what is happening to Botswana society. They do not present the complex changes taking place in Botswana as represented by an either-or choice: the old versus the new ways, the city versus the village, etc. In the Botswana society of these two novels, all choice is defined by a multifaceted life that is, ultimately, determined by the bonds between human beings. The protagonists, in fact all characters, cannot "blame" their circumstances on where they are, but rather they must look "back" to the traditional ways in which human relationships and societies have been understood. Going forward with their lives means going back into their shared bonds with others, and those bonds exist whether one moves to the town to study with a boyfriend who makes her pregnant, as does Dineo, or remains in the village to struggle with "new" problems of disease, gender prejudice, and sexual abuse, as does Mosa. In the end, the rural-urban dichotomy is only a matter of place, not a matter of substance.

NOTES

1. For more information about settlement patterns in Botswana, see Hitchcock and Smith.

2. Gaberones (now Gaborone), although not a traditional settlement, was chosen as the capital of independent Botswana over other more established places in part because of its favorable access to water. At the time of independence, Gaberones was a very small colonial administrative township.

3. A famous text that draws on this aspect of Botswana society is Alexander McCall Smith's *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency,* in which the protagonist Mma Ramotswe practices her detecting based on knowing people; in other words, her work ethic is more rural than urban, despite the setting of Gaborone, a clearly urban area.

4. Until very recently, schoolgirls who became pregnant were not allowed to remain in school in Botswana, but unlike in other countries in the region, they were encouraged to resume their studies in a different school where they would not be stigmatized by the shame of being school-girl mothers.

5. However, it is too simple to see mine labor as only an instrument of oppression. Some families used the earnings from mine labor to improve their social position (e.g., Obed Ramotswe in Alexander McCall Smith's *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*). Also, Batswana generally reserved mine labor for themselves; people from subordinate groups (e.g., Basarwa) stayed with the cattle.

6. Tom also reveres the landscape (or the sky-scape), as does Dineo, even if his Johannesburg upbringing has hindered his understanding of it.

7. See also, for example, Bessie Head, *The Cardinals.* In this novel, Head explores the breakdown of family ties and family knowledge that is imposed by the apartheid system.

8. Again, although Mosa is sympathetic to tradition, she is more a modern figure. Her comment that the head-shaving ceremony is "fairly harmless" suggests that she does not really believe that it has any meaning other than a modern psychological one.

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