

**LEKGOWA**

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# LEKGOWA

*By Tony Harding*

The definition of the word lekgoa used in this book was first published by the author, based on his discussions with Professor Sekgothe Mokgoatsana, University of Limpopo, in an article, Lekgoa, Sunday Times, 1 July 2007. I later posted the definition on Wikipedia. Antjie Krog uses part of this definition in 'Begging to Be Black' to develop her argument about the boundaries between 'blackness' and 'whiteness.' This book offers a fuller contextualization and exposition of the word lekgowa, which also reflects its proper pronunciation.

## PREFACE

Tony Harding was born in the upper strata of liberal English-speaking white Capetonian society in the last century. He grew up in an era when members of his class were firmly, if a little desperately, trying to maintain their identity as colonials in a foreign country.

The author's journey into his own psyche, including the racial identities that he inherited from his social class and the pathologies of his family lineage, is narrated in *Lekgowa*. Within its pages, he details his own geographical journey, from Cape Town to KwaZulu-Natal, Ramatlabama and Jane Furse, finally settling in Johannesburg. His external journey was driven by our conscious and unconscious need for authenticity within a deeply divided society.

The text uses the tools of autobiography, genealogy and sociology to explore the mechanisms by which identity is constructed and maintained. A central presupposition of *Lekgowa* is that identity is never fixed, but is founded on cultural and national myths – and that these are open to deconstruction. As an ostensibly white, English-speaking member of the Anglican Church, Tony has discovered that his own identity is historically shaped by lies and obfuscations of his ancestry, and that he is not at all who he once thought he was. The uncovering of his true hybrid identity – and the search for an authentic South African identity – has been a courageous project, marked by a number of dramatic psychological experiences.

This is a text for South Africa in the twenty-first century, when the old racial identities have officially been declared invalid, leaving many people floundering between their inherited prejudices and their desire for change. As

*Lekgowa* demonstrates, changing prejudices, beliefs and identities is not as simple as it seems, but is imperative for reconciliation to come about in South African society.

*Lekgowa* sets up a dialogue with celebrated essayist Professor Njabulo S Ndebele's acclaimed exploration of South African identities, expressed in a feature article, 'Of Pretence and Protest', published by the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper in September 2009, as well as his other texts focussing on white English-speaking identity.

It stands alongside Antjie Krog's recent text, *Begging to be Black*, as a powerful contribution to the complex and fraught discourse about identity in the 'new' South Africa. At the same time, the text's intensely personal nature makes the challenges it poses to received ideas accessible and direct. It will certainly appeal to any adult, thinking member of South African society. It also has resonances for international audiences, since European societies provided the impetus for colonization as well as the original colonizers whose descendants are currently embroiled in political change and social transformation.

*Professor Deirdre Byrne is a senior member of the Department of English Studies, UNISA. She is the editor of Lekgowa in line with her abiding interest in minority studies.*

## **DEDICATION**

*Agee, Boledi!*

*To our children and their children.*

Pretence could be a coping mechanism in which one owns up to the fact that one is unable to respond confidently and appropriately to human relations conundrums of the kind that race, gender and class tensions can throw up from time to time. Resorting to pretence may not necessarily be an indication of hypocrisy, but rather a desire to buy time or a muted cry for help.

*(Professor Njabulo S Ndebele in 'Of Pretence and Protest')*

Is there any way I can to dodge the cursed conceit of the English that damns the vast majority of men?

*(Hugh MacDermitt, Scottish poet, 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', quoted in a personal tribute to Major General Orde Wingate by a former military colleague)*

## BIOGRAPHY

Tony Harding was born in Cape Town in 1957 and completed his schooling at Bishops, an elite learning establishment holding desperately onto the legacies of white English-speaking identity, in 1974.

He attended the University of Cape Town, deciding to study Sociology and Politics rather than Law, as preferred by his family, after which he became a conscript into the South African Defence Force between 1978 and 1981.

After intervention by his family, he was given an opportunity to be trained as a journalist on the liberal Rand *Daily Mail* and other South African newspapers between 1981 and 1983 and left journalism to avoid further military conscription.

He worked with rural youth organisations from 1983 to 1990 and then worked for various intermediary NGOs before joining the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in 1995 as a special advisor. He was assigned responsibility for managing land claim investigations in South Africa's four Northern provinces (Gauteng, North West, Northern and Mpumalanga), until he joined provincial government in 2000.

He was part of a specialist team, led by Durkje Gilfillan of the Legal Resources Centre, Johannesburg, which assisted the Gamawela community in the North-Eastern part of South Africa in its land battle with platinum mining giant, Angloplat, beginning in 2000.

Since completing a sabbatical and writing *Lekgowa*, he has been involved in promoting social entrepreneurship in rural areas and spends a considerable amount of time working

on the challenges of conflict between mining companies and rural communities, as well as enjoying watching his wife fulfil her dream of becoming a farmer. He describes his role, ironically, as that of a gentleman farmer.

# GLOSSARY

## OF FAMILY NAMES AND RELATIONSHIPS

If the nation's history was mainly a dream, why not begin to dream its future afresh, before it becomes a nightmare.

(Shlomo Sand in *The Invention of the Jewish People*)

Although the text takes the broad form of a memoir, it is written as a thematic narrative using autobiographical, genealogical and sociological techniques to explore the dynamic formation of an identity within different social contexts.

For this reason, I use terms such as maternal grandfather, paternal grandmother and so on, to set out family relationships. The names of particular individuals or organisations have been used only where these have been significant in the process of forming my identity and not as a social record.

I indicate, below, culturally appropriate ways to describe the corresponding ancestral sides of my wife's family, particularly as certain roles have considerable significance in kinship relations.

The members of my own household are:

My full name is Anthony Walter Harding.

My wife is Kunyamane Tiny Mankge.

Our son is Neo Tumisi Mankge.

Our daughter is Motsepula Palesa Harding.

\*\*\*\*\*

My mother was Rosemary Margaret Harding, deceased,  
born in Malta, 1919.

My maternal grandfather was Rear-Admiral Benjamin  
Wingate Barrow, deceased.

My maternal grandmother was Charlotte Constance Brooke  
Barrow, deceased.

My maternal aunts were Mary Barrow, Joan le May and  
Noel Robb, all deceased.

My mother's brother was Lieutenant Richard George  
Brooke Barrow, deceased.

My maternal grandfather's cousin was Major-General Orde  
Wingate, deceased.

\*\*\*\*\*

My father was Wallace Harper Harding, deceased.

My paternal grandfather was Walter Harding, deceased.

My paternal grandmother was Lillian Harper Harding,  
deceased.

My paternal uncle was Lesley Harding, deceased.

\*\*\*\*\*

My sister is Caroline Rosemary Maclachlan.

My brother is Christopher Richard Harding.

My niece is Kate Maclachlan.

My nephew is James Maclachlan.

\*\*\*\*\*

My wife's father was Kgoshi Maruping Isaac Mankge,  
deceased, known as *Tate* (father).

My wife's mother is Kothibe Sophy Makobe Mankge, known  
as *Mmangoane* (aunt).

My wife's paternal uncle (*rangoane*) is Mabutswe Lazarus Mankge.

My wife's paternal aunt (*rakgadi*) is Legope Mashilangoako.

My wife's great-grandfather (*rakgolokhukhu*) was Kgoshi Mapale Mankge, deceased.

My wife's great-grandmother (*makgolokhukhu*) was Gabolekane Mankge, deceased, the last rainmaker in the Gamawela community.



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