

**UniqueID:** 202103

271742

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**Title:** [Kaffir Folklore \(Xhosa\)](#)

**Published:** 1886

**Internet Archive:** [Always Available](#)

**Description:** The insulting term "kaffir" was first used for the Xhosa people and then came to be a term of disrespect for any Black person in South Africa. See [Wiktionary](#) for more information.

Here are [Theal's notes](#) on this story.

THERE was once a great famine in a certain country, and the people were obliged to eat wild plants to keep themselves alive. Their principal food during this time was nongwes (*Hypoxis*, p. 385, "Harvey's Gen. S. A. Plants"), which they dug out of the ground.

There was living at that place a man called Kenkebe, and one day his wife said to him, "My husband, go to my father and ask him to give us some corn."

The man said Yes, I will go."

So he rose up early in the morning, and went on till he arrived at his father-in-law's village, where he was received with every mark of kindness. A very large ox was killed for his entertainment. It was so large that it was six days before it was all eaten. His father-in-law asked of him the news.

He said: "There is no news to tell to friends. All the news is this, that at my home there is not a grain to be eaten. Famine is over our heads. Will you give us some corn, for we are dying?"

His father-in-law gave him seven bags (i.e. skins of animals dressed entire) full of millet, and his wife's sisters went with him to carry them. When they came to a valley close by his home, he told his sisters-in-law that they could now go back to their father.

They said: "How will you manage to carry all those bags alone?"

He replied: "I shall be able to carry them all now, because we are not far from my home."

So those girls went back to their father.

Then he carried the bags one by one, and hid them in a cave under a great rock that was there. Afterwards he took some of the millet and ground it. When it was ground very fine he made it into cakes just like nongwes. Then he dug some real nongwes out of the ground, and went home to his wife.

He said to her: "There is a great famine at your father's also. I found the people there eating themselves."

He told his wife to make a fire. Then he pretended to cut a piece of meat out of his thigh, and said: "So are they doing at your father's village. Now, my wife, let us do the same."

His wife cut a piece from her leg and roasted it. The piece that Kenkebe put on the fire was some that he had brought home with him.

Then Kenkebe's little boy said: "Why does my father's meat smell nice in roasting, and my mother's meat does not smell nice?"

Kenkebe answered: "It is because it is taken from the leg of a man."

After this he gave his wife some nongwes to roast. He took for himself some of those he had made of corn.

The little boy said: "Why do my father's nongwes smell nice in roasting and my mother's do not smell nice?"

Kenkebe said: "It is because they were dug by a man."

After eating, he went outside, but he had dropped one of his nongwes by the fire. When he went out the boy found the nongwe. He broke it in two and gave half to his mother.

He said: "There is a difference between our nongwes and those of father's."

His mother said: "Yes, my child, this one is made of corn."

The next morning, just at the first beginning of dawn, Kenkebe got up and went away with a pot in his hand. The boy was awake, and saw his father go out. So he called to his mother, and said: "Mother, mother, wake, my father is going away with the pot in his hand."

So she got up, and they followed after Kenkebe. They saw him go to the cave where he took some corn out of one of the bags and began to grind it. Then they went on top of the rock, and rolled a big stone over.

When Kenkebe saw the stone coming he ran away, but it followed close behind him. He ran down the valley, the stone kept running too. He jumped into a deep hole in the river, down went the stone too. He ran up the hill, up went the stone also. He ran over the plain, but whenever he turned to look, the stone was there just behind him, So it continued all that day. At night he reached his own house, and then the stone stopped. His wife had already come home, and had brought with her one of the bags of corn.

Kenkebe came in crying.

His wife said to him: "Why do you cry as if you were a child?"

He said: "Because I am very tired and very hungry."

She said: "Where are your clothes and your bag?"

He replied I was crossing a river, and I fell down. The stream carried away my mantle, and my bag, and my kerries, and everything that was mine."

Then his wife gave him his mantle, which she had picked tip when he was running away, and she said to him: "You are foolish to do such things. There is no food for you tonight."

The next morning Kenkebe rose early and went out to hunt with his two dogs. The name of the one was Tumtumse, and the name of the other was Mbambozozele. He found an eland with a young calf, which he drove to his place. He cut an ear off the calf and roasted it in the fire. It was fat, and he liked it so much that he cut the other ear off and cooked it also. Then he wished to kill the calf, but he said to himself: "If I kill this calf I shall not be able to get milk from the eland."

So he called his two dogs, and said to the one: "Tumtumse, my dog, if I kill this calf, will you imitate it and suck the eland for me?"

The dog said: "No, I will bark like a dog."

Kenkebe said: "Get out of my sight and never come near me again you ugly, useless animal."

He said to the other Mbambozozele, my dog, if I kill this calf, will you imitate it and suck the eland for me?"

The dog said: "I will do so."

Then he killed the calf and ate it. He took the skin and put it upon Mbambozozele, so that the eland thought it was her calf that sucked before Kenkebe milked her. But one day the dog was sucking too long, and Kenkebe wanted him to leave off. He tried to drink just a few drops more, when his master got angry and struck him with a stick. Thereupon the dog began to howl, and the eland saw how she had been deceived. At once she ran after Kenkebe and tried to stick him with her horns. He ran one way and the eland ran after him, then he ran another way, and still the eland chased him.

His wife came out and saw him running. She cried out to him: "jump up quickly on the big stone." He did so, and the eland ran with such fury against that stone that it broke its head and fell down dead.

They then cut the eland up and wanted to cook it, but there was no fire. Kenkebe said to his son: "Go to the village of the cannibals that is on that hill over the valley, and ask for some fire; but do not take any meat with you, lest they should smell it."

The boy went, but he hid a piece of meat and took it with him. When he got to the first house he asked for fire, but they sent him to the next. At the next they sent him farther, and so he had to go to the house that was farthest away. An old woman lived there. The boy gave her a little piece of meat, and said: "Do not cook it till I am far away with the fire."

But as soon as the boy was gone, she put it on the coals. The smell came to the noses of the cannibals, and they ran to the place and swallowed the old woman, and the meat, and the fire, and even the ashes.

Then they ran after the boy. When he came near his own house, he cried out: "Hide yourselves, you that are at home."

His father said: "My son is saying, we must gather wood that will make coals."

His mother said: "No, he is saying we must hide ourselves."

The boy cried again: "Hide yourselves."

Then his mother hid herself in a bush: an old woman that was there covered herself with ashes, and Kenkebe climbed up into, a tree, with the breast of the eland in his hand. The boy slipped into a hole that was by the side of the path.

The cannibals came to the place. First they ate the eland. Then one of them said: "Search under the ashes."

There they found the old woman, and they ate her. Then they said: "Search in the tree."

There they found Kenkebe. He cried very much, but they would not spare him. They ate him and the breast of the eland. Then the wise one said: "Look in the bush."

They looked there and found the wife of Kenkebe. They said: "We will eat her another time," and so they took her home with them. They did not look for the boy.

The woman made a plan to escape. She made beer for the cannibals, and they all came to drink. They sat together in a big house, and drank very much beer. Then she said: "Can I go out?"

They said: "You can go, but come back quickly."

She said: "Shall I close the entrance?"

They said: "Close it."

Then she took fire and put it on the house and all those cannibals were burnt to death. So the woman escaped, and afterwards lived happily with her son.