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" 'I dress in this fashion': transformations in sotho dress and women's lives in a Sekhukhuneland village, South Africa"

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Deborah James

Consciousness, and its "colonisation", has recently attracted some attention in the study of southern African society (JL and J Comaroff 1989; Bozzoli 1991). Although not expressed in quite the same terms, the processes by which such colonisation has been withstood have preoccupied scholars in southern Africa for somewhat longer (P and I Mayer 1971; Alverson 1978, McAllister 1980, 1991). While other writers have examined overt acts of resistance, anthropologists have concerned themselves with subtler means of defying domination, often through the reassertion of apparently traditional cultural forms, with effects sometimes perceptible no more widely than within local communities themselves.

Recent studies in this vein examine rural people's portrayal, through local knowledge, of their colonisation and their incorporation as an industrial proletariat within the capitalist world. This knowledge is seen as both enabling people to conceptualise their own history as dominated but resilient subjects (JL and J Comaroff 1987:193) and, in parallel, as facilitating the ongoing construction of group or individual identities by such people (Ferguson 1992; Thomas 1992). The production of this local knowledge often involves the invoking of tradition (Coplan 1987, 1991), and often counterposes this with images of modernity, resulting in sets of opposed dualities: town/country, townsman/peasant, Christian/non-Christian, setswana/segoa (JL and J Comaroff 1987; Roseberry 1989; P and I Mayer 1971).

Criticisms have been levelled at this writing. Spiegel, for example, disparages "dualist approaches" for the inappropriateness of their search "for persistences of a pre-industrial world view in the ways in which people order and perceive their contemporary relationships" (1990:46). But the emerging contrast between, for example, setswana and segoa, was not "a confrontation between a primordial folk tradition and the modern world" (JL and J Comaroff 1987:194-5). Rather, Tswana tradition came to be formulated largely through its complementary opposition to "the ways of the European". Indeed, the very images of a pre-industrial or pre-capitalist world which feed into the making of such dualities are products of people's encounter with the relationships and realities of the industrial or capitalist one (Roseberry 1989:144, 201-3, passim).

An encounter of this kind has given rise, in northern Sotho speaking communities of the northern Transvaal from which men migrate to work on the Witwatersrand, to a complementary opposition between sesotho (sotho ways) and its opposite sekgowa (white ways). Sesotho exists in dynamic interrelation with its opposite sekgowa. It is situational, lacks distinct boundaries, and has undergone substantive changes over the last few generations. The clothing of sesotho, with which I am primarily concerned in this paper, has progressively incorporated elements from the clothing of sekgowa as well as from that of neighbouring groups. The incorporation of these new elements has coincided with points of change in the life-cycle, and was especially pronounced at the historical moment when significant numbers of children began attending school. Throughout this process of assimilating exotic or imported elements, however, sesotho has retained, or sharpened, the distinctiveness of its contrast with sekgowa.²

Although sesotho is not consistently identified with a particular group of people who subscribe to its tenets, it is sometimes thought of in association with distinct social categories. In some contexts it is used to describe the ways of those belonging to the social category baditšhaba (non-Christians, those who remained loyal to the chiefs) where sekgowa correlates with the category majekane (those who converted to Lutheranism).³ In others it is women that are thought of in association with sesotho while men appear to align with sekgowa. In yet other contexts these categorical oppositions of religion and gender which are dramatised by the sesotho/sekgowa opposition dissolve in the face of the particular domestic circumstances of specific men and women. The boundary between even these apparently highly distinct social categories is, then, fugitive and vague in practice.

But one context in which sesotho is very clearly identified with women is that of village-based musical performance, with clothing as one of the clearest visible markers of this identification. Here, the term sesotho qualifies an overarching genre - mmino wa sesotho (sotho dance/song)⁴, of which the most popular expression is the style known as kiba, performed in urban areas by migrant men and women, but in rural areas only by groups of stay-at-home wives or sisters.

The singing/dancing group whose members' experience forms the subject of this paper is Dithabaneng (those from the place of the mountain) from Nchabeleng village in Sekhukhune, the heartland of the former Pedi polity.⁵ It was first constituted as a group in 1976, after its members had seen and been inspired by the new kiba style.⁶ But many of them, and their mothers and grandmothers before them, had performed a series of earlier styles together before this group was formed.

Group members are linked by close ties of kinship, co-operation and neighbourhood. They do not, however, normally regard each other as equals. Even those as closely related as sisters are distinguished by their individual marriages, their differing levels of income, and their differing orientations to sesotho. They constitute an undifferentiated group only in the act of singing together, using a range of performative devices thought of as characteristically sotho. It is the dance and the dress which forms the group.

One of these unifying motifs is the invocation of "the lion" (tau). By virtue of marriage if not of birth, all the women in the group - like most of the people in the village - "sing/dance the lion" (bina tau).⁷ The invocation "lions" is used by singers on occasions of heightened significance, or to assert some sense of overarching and symbolic local-political unity when performing in front of people from other villages or places. Apart from the rhythmic co-ordination of voice and action, a further expression of group cohesion and uniformity is the clothing worn when singing. The entire performance, including song/dance (mmino) and clothing (diaparo) is characterised as sotho.

In this paper, the details of sotho dress will be shown to have changed substantially over about three generations. In parallel with innovations in the content of women's sotho dress, the means whereby girls acquire the clothes of adulthood have also changed, with older generations of women having been given money to buy them by fathers, brothers or husbands, where their daughters spent short spells as farmworkers to earn the money themselves. These stints of independence were followed, for women remaining single as for those who married, by a return to the sphere of motherhood, household work and farming. In contrast, the earlier and more consistent involvement of boys in the worlds of school and work have meant that their clothing, once they become adults, is invariably that of sekgowa.

But, while sotho clothing is worn by some singers every day, others, often due to the influence of their husbands, have made a move to the clothing of sekgowa, saving sotho clothes for performance only. The opposition between male and female orientations and behaviours, as expressed in the outward and visible sign of clothing, is thus not consistently experienced or invoked. Indeed, in the context of particular women's domestic living circumstances with particular men, sotho dress may be absent altogether. It is on the occasion of musical performance, as is shown in the second part of the paper, that sesotho is stressed through singing, dance, dress, and the consumption of sorghum beer. Through these means, performance provides for a dramatisation, partly through parody, of an cohesive female identity, phrased in terms of identification with customary ways, in opposition to men.

"I dress in this fashion"

It appears from ethnographic accounts on the Pedi of Sekhukhuneland that one of the important uses of clothing was in distinguishing between pre-initiates and initiates. At initiation, boys and girls were grouped separately into regiments of age-mates (mephato) (see fig. 1). In the approximately four-yearly cycle of initiation the formation of girls' regiments took place well after that of boys: the names of regiments in this cyclical succession derived in both cases from the names of the chief's sons who led the boys on each occasion (Monnig 1967:120; Pitje 1950:58). For people of both sexes, their membership of these regiments provided an important point of reference in later life: it linked them in perpetuity to a group of age-mates, and gave them a chronological reference-point, as I will show further on. But initiation also served to mark off boys from girls and immature children from mature pre-adults, partly through its teaching about the behaviour appropriate to an adult lifestyle. And dress was one of the ways in which this demarcation was signalled.

	Male	Female
Pre-initiates	<u>Lekgeswa</u> skin loin-cloth Hair shaven close to head	<u>Lebole</u> short string apron in front around loins <u>Ntepana</u> triangular skin apron to cover buttocks <u>Semabejane</u> short cotton blouse just covering the breasts <u>Leetse</u> Hair fashioned in long strings treated with fat and graphite
Initiates	New loin-skins Hair reshaven	<u>Lebole</u> short string apron in front around loins <u>Ntepa</u> long back apron of married women <u>Semabejane</u> short cotton blouse just covering the breasts <u>Tlopo</u> hairstyle of marriageable and married women

Figure 1: Pedi clothing demarcating life-cycle stages (Monnig 1967:107,123,128)

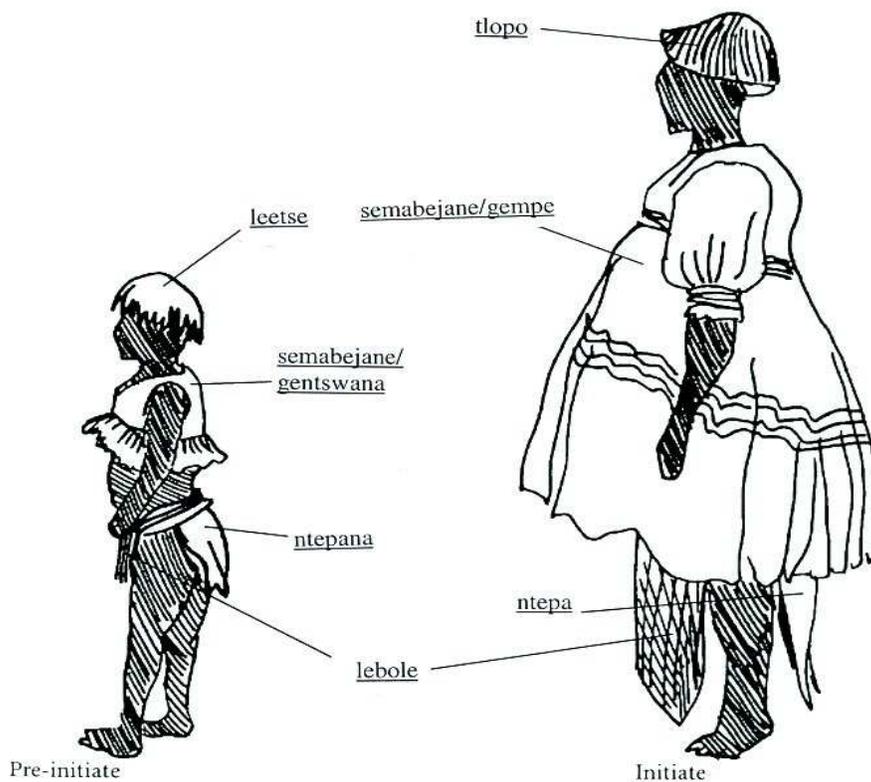


Figure 2: Female sotho dress of Pedi, showing semabejane or gempe in its pre-initiate and initiate form (Tyrell 1968:67; Monnig 1967:107, 123, 128)

In a classically static ethnographic account of life in Sekhukhuneland, Monnig discusses this role of clothing in demarcating the different phases of the lifecycle from one another, and in providing for a gradually deepening distinction between the sexes. But his account gives no sense of the flexibility or the variation of sesotho. He outlines the clothing worn by people in the first two major phases of life (summarised in Table 2), but then comments that:

in practice, most [initiated] girls nowadays wear long, gaily-coloured cloths from their loins down to their feet, covering the traditional clothing, while very few women wear the traditional hair-style, usually covering their heads with a head-cloth instead (1967:128)

He also indicates that the short blouse worn by initiated and by older uninitiated girls (semabejane), "was introduced by missionaries, but has been adopted by all the Pedi, Christians

and non-Christians alike" (ibid.).

This account, like many of its kind, sets up an idealised version of the traditional life-cycle with its accompanying clothing. If people adopt some Western clothes, they are seen as treading a one-way path from tradition to modernity. In fact, the semiotics of dress, and its social concomitants, are more complex.

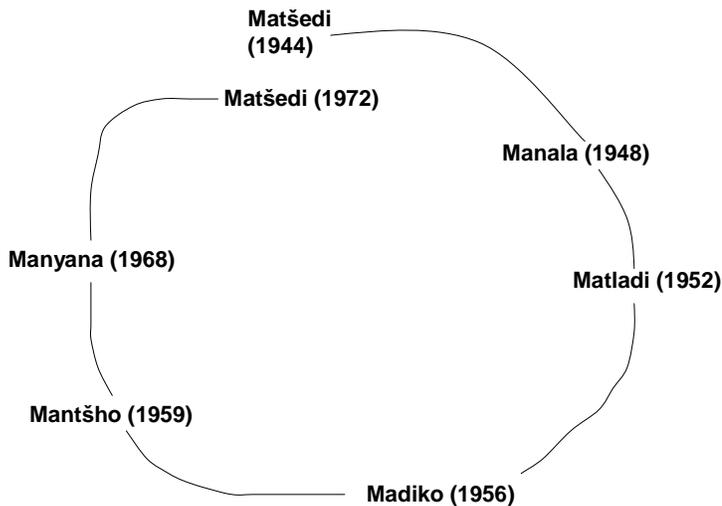
The short smocked cotton garment Monnig calls semabejane, and referred to by Dithabaneng women as gempe for initiates (from the Afrikaans hemp - shirt) or gentswana for non-initiates (little shirt), is a good example of this complexity. By the mid 1950s these garments, although certainly deriving in style and material from European influence, were items of clothing indicating a thoroughly sotho orientation.⁸ An orientation towards the paired opposite, sekgowa, was shown by wearing clothes known as roko (dress; pl.diroko) or khiba (pinafore; pl.dikhiba). In the village, still cleft by a deep social and geographical divide between Christians and non-Christians, it was mostly the former who wore the clothes of sekgowa, while the latter wore sotho clothing.⁹ In this instance, then, adherence to one or other polarity of the sesotho/sekgowa duality was associated with membership of definable social categories.

But sotho dress,¹⁰ like its opposite, was to undergo continual transformation. Although the sotho smocked shirt (gempe) and its accompanying string or leather apron (lebole) are still worn by returning initiates, in other contexts these garments have been supplanted by a new version of sotho dress. This has three main identifying features: a length of cloth (lešela or tuku; from the Afrikaans doek) wrapped around the waist; a headscarf consisting of a large piece of fabric (šeše); and bangles (maseka). If these elements are present, the fourth element - a commercially-made vest, "skipper" (short-sleeved cotton knit shirt) or overall does not detract from the whole ensemble, but indeed becomes a part of it. This ensemble of clothes appears in various versions. For the performance of kiba, it is characterised by the use of striking colours and of materials thought to be particularly attractive. But in an everyday context, the materials used are often drab, and sometimes old and tattered.¹¹

It can be seen then that certain types of clothing deriving from mission influence, and named with words deriving from sekgowa, were nevertheless included within the definition of sesotho, and strongly contrasted with sekgowa, throughout. The sesotho/sekgowa contrast thus coexists with an image of change within the category of sesotho.

If, for these villagers, opposed polarities such as sesotho/sekgowa do enable a conceptualisation

of historical change as the Comaroffs claim (1987:193), the actual mechanism through which change occurs, and through which these categories are continuously replenished with new elements, is though life-cycle rituals, particularly initiation. The experience of successively initiated initiation regiments orients these conceptions of change (Molepo 1984:16-28). Apart from ordering men and women into age-groupings, enabling a rough calculation of age for people who do not precisely know their date of birth, the cyclical succession of regiments provides conceptual hooks which allow for a perception of history in the absence of the linear time-plans of literacy.



The life-cycle stages which furnished an ethnographer like Monnig with his static view thus allows for a more dynamic perception of society's changes, since each regiment has a different experience of these stages.

The transformation of clothing, and of the sotho lifestyle, was prompted partly by a variety of what might crudely be called "culture contacts", including - for an older generation - the presence of trading stores, visits to husbands in town, and - for a younger generation, and far more influential - the proliferation of schools in the area after the 1950s. The means for purchasing the clothes defined as necessary to consecutive stages of the life-cycle had to be provided by wages earned beyond the domestic domain. For the older generation of women - the present grandmothers in Dithabaneng - this money was procured by men: by fathers and brothers in the case of initiates, and by husbands for their wives. A younger generation -

Dithabaneng's present older mothers - followed the example of boys in leaving home to earn their own money on farms around the time of initiation. But in contrast to boys who then went off to work in contract labour in the urban areas, these girls, having earned enough money to buy the clothes appropriate to their new status of initiates, then returned to the domestic sphere to raise children and keep house. Here, they came again to depend on male earnings for clothing and other basic necessities, or in some cases were forced to subsist without these earnings.

For the village-dwellers of Dithabaneng, then, the acquisition of clothing for different phases of life has necessitated links connecting them within their rural families to places of employment in white South Africa (makgoweng: the place of the whites). Although it became commonplace for women of an intermediate generation to make brief forays into employment at white farms (mabaleng : the place of the plains), these connecting links have mostly been made through fathers, brothers and husbands.

Men's earnings, women's clothes

For the oldest of the group's singers, like Mmakgolo wa Pine Khulwane¹² who was born around 1930 and initiated around 1944 in Matšedi regiment, the money for the purchase of the clothes necessary to a proper sotho woman's lifestyle was earned by fathers, brothers and husbands in contract employment. Worn by a married woman, these clothes served as outward and visible signs of her husband's wealth. The more material used in the extensive smocking of these, and the more garments worn one over the other, the richer the provider was seen to be.¹³ The clothes were thus worn with pride on both a woman's own and on her husband's behalf.

The lyrics of songs sung both by Dithabaneng and by older and now inactive singers reflect the dependence of this generation of women, and indeed of subsequent ones, on the earnings of men. In the song Lebowa, women sing:

Lebowa la kgomo le motho	Lebowa of cattle and people
Pula-medupe yana Mohlakeng	Stormy rain.
Lebona ge ke te kapere	Seeing me half-naked
Ke tšhonne ke hloboletse	I have no clothes to put on
Ke setse ka dibesete	Except a vest
Ke lebowa le kgomo le motho	It's Lebowa of cattle and people
Pula ya mamehlaka e yetla	A stormy rain is coming
Nke be ke na le kgaetsedi	I wish I had a brother
A nthekele onoroko	Who would buy me a petticoat.
Re supa gore gare sa sila	We no longer grind our meal. ¹⁴

The song can be understood, in one sense, as referring to the current performance context. In this sense, a member of the group is bewailing her lack of finery adequate to a good performance spectacle.¹⁵ But the historical theme of dependence on male earnings for clothing, and of deprivation without these, can also be clearly heard. A similar theme occurs in the song Marashiya in which a woman again bemoans her husband's inability to provide her with dance regalia:

Ke reng ka hlaela pheta ye botse I don't have a shiny necklace

This line evoked the comment:

"when other men have gone to town to work, he is always here at home not working, so I won't be able to dance as I have nothing to put on".¹⁶

The dissatisfaction expressed here about men who have failed to provide new clothing might seem to indicate a greater desire for the fruits of an absent husband's labours than for his companionship in the household. Rather than being reflective of a callous desire for material gain, however, this theme coexists with others to suggest an ambiguity about one of the central paradoxes of migrancy in southern Africa - the fact that spouses have been forced to live apart in order to ensure the well-being of their families (cf Murray 1981:102).¹⁷ Siblings as well as spouses were separated in this way, as is shown in the song Setimela (steam train), which bewails the absence of a brother who has left for the city and never returned (lekgolwa):

Setimela wa Mmamarwale	Train of Mmamarwale
Nthshwanyama	Black carrier
Setimela nkabe se rwale buti	Train should carry my brother
bokgolwa	from <u>bokgolwa</u> (the state of being a migrant who never returns)
Buti e sa le a eya bokgolwa	My brother home from <u>bokgolwa</u>
Ngwana-mme o tla nwa ese ka mmona	My mother's child would die without me seeing him

Songs thus express sadness, not only about lazy men who have no employment, but also about those whose employment takes them away forever. On the other hand, the absence of a man who is working to send his wife money for clothes and basic necessities, makes room for her to have affairs with other men who are present in the area, and it may be precisely those clothes bought by a woman's husband which she wears to make her look attractive to these other lovers.¹⁸

Wene o se nago lešira
Makolone a tlogo feta
Wene o se nago lešira
O wa hlaka
Makolone a tlo go feta

You who have no headscarf
Those from the Cape will pass you by
You who have no headscarf
You will suffer
Those from the Cape will pass you by

Those "from the Cape" to whom this song refers were men who came to the bus depot in nearby Apel as drivers of railway busses, and who would spend the night with local women. As single men who went home only once a year and who "saved all their money in a tin", they were seen as rich and therefore as desirable lovers.¹⁹

For the present grandmothers of Dithabaneng, sources of contact with sekgowa were fairly limited. Since all were from the place of those of the nation (baditšhabeng), none took any interest in church nor went to school. They dressed in sotho smocked shirts (gempe). Although this was a missionary innovation, the garment had by the 1940s and 1950s already long been regarded as part of sotho apparel, and was definitely not a part of the dress of Christians.

These women paid visits to their husbands in town, but these were sporadic and of short duration. Sometimes the visits were made not only for the sake of general companionship but also for the specific purpose of falling pregnant.

When visiting town, the people these women met were not so much the white bearers of sekgowa as its black adherents from other parts of South Africa: an encounter for the most part equally alienating. For Mmakgolo wa Pine, the speech of the Christian Xhosa people she met while visiting her husband, around 1957, in Springs where he worked as a compound policeman, sounded so incomprehensible that she thought they were asking her to fetch water when in fact they were praying. But more alienating still was her experience when she left her daughter with them for some hours while running an errand and returned to find that they had taken off the child's skin garments and clothed her in a dress (roko).

They took my child, undressed her and gave her a new style of dressing. I didn't like it, and as I didn't know what was going on,, my husband found me crying. He asked me what the matter was and I told him that these people want to capture (thopa) my child. They took away all that skin clothing and gave her a dress and had her hair cut. My husband told one old man about this, and he came and explained that they did this because they wanted the child to look like theirs and not to be different. Even if the children didn't understand each other, they should look the same. Upon realising that I was against this, the old man called the others after a few days to come and apologise for the mistake they had made.²⁰

In this rather dramatic narrative, the use of the word go thopa, normally used to denote the taking of captives in war, illustrates the strength of Mmakgolo wa Pine's fears that her daughter would be taken from her and from the nurturing bosom of sesotho, and lost to the world of sekgowa as represented by these Xhosa-speaking Christians.

At the time of the visit, around 1957, Mmakgolo wa Pine and other married women of her regiment Matsedi were still wearing the sotho smocked shirts and elaborately-combed and greased hairstyles of Monnig's account. Certainly, the photo in Mmakgolo wa Pine's passbook, issued at around the same time, confirms that this was so. Cognisance should be taken, however, of the fact that already at this time the most sotho of clothes were being reserved for occasions of greatest auspiciousness, and having one's photograph taken was one of these. Although she greased her hair for the photo, Mmakgolo wa Pine was by this time putting on a headscarf (šeše) for everyday wear.

Women's earnings, women's clothes

There were a number of things demarcating the experience of this older female regiment from those following it. One of these was that its members, while firmly believing that brothers and prospective husbands should go off to work on farms to prove their manhood, never worked on farms themselves, whereas most of the women from subsequent regiments did spend a period doing so.

For a number of male regiments, consisting of boys born from around the mid 1920s onwards, farm work was an expected part of the life-cycle,²¹ and was seen almost as a second initiation which proved a youth's adult male status and showed, especially to a prospective wife, his wage-earning potential:

To show that you will work in future, you will first run away from home to the farms. This showed that you were a man, and you would work for yourself.²²

But a more immediate consideration for boys themselves was the necessity to buy clothes.²³ This was also to be the main reason why girls in their turn began running away from home to work on farms. Those born around 1940 and initiated in Matladi regiment around 1954 were among the first to do this. A possible reason why they had not done so earlier, apart from the greater restrictions placed on girls generally, is that the arduous journey on foot from Sekhukhuneland to white farming centres such as Marble Hall and Roedtan was seen as more

easily undertaken by boys. By the time girls began to undertake this journey, they did so in the trucks sent by farmers right into the reserve areas to recruit labour.

For a variety of reasons, parents were mostly not in favour of their daughters' working on farms, so most of the girls who did so departed from their homes with stealth and subterfuge:

We didn't ask for permission from our parents, we ran away whilst they were away at their fields ... At times when they were around, you would just put your clothes and blankets over the wall of the yard without them seeing you.

If you asked for permission, wouldn't they allow you?

They would not allow us.

Were your parents and others upset about this?

In fact when we got on the truck, little boys would do so as well, but when the truck pulled off, they got off and we would ask them to tell our parents that we had left.²⁴

Mmagopine Khulwane tells a similar story:

From my home, I met my father on the way ... He asked me where I was going and I lied, saying I'm going to fetch water. It was when I was next to the truck that I showed him the blanket and said, I'm going to the farms. My father told my mother about this.²⁵

But the reluctance of parents to let their daughters leave was in fact not always uniform: sometimes fathers were most strongly disapproving while mothers were more ready to give permission, being unable to suggest any other means by which their daughters might acquire the clothes they wanted:

Sometimes, if you find your mother is at home, you say, I'm going to the farms: "well, go, and buy yourself some clothes"²⁶

For girls as for boys, then, the main spur to this phase of mild defiance against parents was the need for clothes appropriate to the status of an initiate. Mmagoshower Debeila emphasised the necessity of this, since "we would be thought naked if we continued to wear skins and greased hair".²⁷ She emphasised that it was not her family's shortage of money which drove her to work at this stage, but rather the fact that she had seen older friends returning from work with clothes and was influenced by this, and by her co-initiates, to go. The departure for farms of

Nchabeleng's adolescent girls, then, was similar to the phase spent working as domestics by young girls from Phokeng (Bozzoli 1991): occurring at a phase of life when these women had not yet taken on broader familial responsibility, it was seen not as providing a contribution to general family finances but as facilitating the purchase of a specific set of goods for the girl herself.²⁸

A contract lasted three months, and at the end of the first of these a daughter like Mmagoshower brought her wages - a total of R18 in around 1960 - back to her mother, who then used them to buy the vests and waist-cloths she needed. By the time a girl went off on her second three-month stint as a farm labourer, after a break of about a month, her parents no longer protested at her departure. And for most, the third or fourth contract was the last, since it was at around this time that most of them prepared for marriage - "we were being courted" as Mmagojunius Ramaila put it - and for building a home in the village.

While it is true, then, that running away to the place of the Boers (go tšhaba maburung) signified in some sense a rebellion by groups of age-mates against control by the older generation, it is also true that the challenge to parental authority which this practice represented was soon co-opted and transformed as its perpetrators in turn became stay-at-home women who took charge of the domestic domain and of the values and practices of sesotho.²⁹

It must also be noted that the set of mores and practices rebelled against were based not on a monolithic and cohesive ideology, but on one deeply divided along gender lines. By the time the members of Mantšho were undergoing initiation in around 1964, girls were rebelling not simply against the arduous duties defined as appropriate to them within the domestically-defined boundaries of sesotho - childcare, fetching water, weeding and chasing the birds away from the crops, and helping to repair the house - but also against the emergent modern definition of a girl's role as scholar. Parents were frequently divided over which behaviour was most appropriate to a girl, and in some cases this division separated mothers as proponents of the conservative, domestic version of sesotho from fathers who, although not necessarily wishing to convert to Christianity, were keen to encourage their daughters to complete at least the primary levels of education and hence to engage in the world of sekgowa and civilisation (tłhabologo). This was so in the case of Mmagopine:

My mother said that I should leave school and stay at home. ... If a girl could write a letter to her husband, that was just enough. ... She said that I should repair the wall with mud and do weeding in the fields. So I ran away to the farms.

So you were running away from duties at home?

I also didn't like going to school. I knew that after stopping school for a week when my mother told me to do so, my father would order me back to school again. So I realised that if I ran away to the farms, I would spend three months there and during this time, the teachers would take me off the school registers, knowing that I had gone to the farms.³⁰

For this girl, her flight to the farms in order to escape conflicting sets of pressures from both parents nevertheless led her inexorably back home and back into the values and ways of sesotho when she returned to her mother's house to bear children and to become involved in domestic duties as a mother.

School, clothes, and women's life-cycle

From around the 1960s it was school - whether attended or fled from - which was seen by people as playing a central role in transforming the attitudes, ways of dressing, and ways of behaving of men and women, and of older and younger people alike.

Mmakgolo wa Pine gives an account of this process. Having wept at the efforts of Christian Xhosa to dress her daughter in the clothes of sekgowa in 1957, she and her contemporaries were, a decade later, to welcome the new dressing style seen as emanating from school. They came to feel that the necklaces, bangles and many-layered smocked shirts (gempe) of earlier sotho clothing had been heavy and uncomfortable. When their daughters were encouraged by teachers to wash out the grease and graphite of their pre-initiates' hairstyles, they eventually followed suite by washing out the grease of the married women's equivalent. Not wanting to be thought naked, however, they replaced this hairstyle with a small headscarf (setlanyana), "then I saw those wearing a bigger one, and copied them", until eventually the bulky headscarf of contemporary wear (šeše) became the norm.

The change in head-dress is an example demonstrating the full complexity of the transforming of sotho dress. A generation of non-Christian women whose resistance to the idea of school for their daughters was so strong that they actively encouraged them - in many cases successfully - to leave, nevertheless embraced some of the new stylistic trappings seen to accompany the activity of scholarship. Their incorporation of these trappings appears on the surface to have had something of the character of an acceptance of mission or colonial ideology.³¹ From the point of view of the wearers, however, it represented on the one hand a wish to replace one kind

of haircovering with another, and thus to continue to express the respect required of a woman by her in-laws and by men in general, but on the other it signified a moving beyond the discomfort and restrictiveness of statically-defined rural dress and a pleasure in the attractiveness of rapidly-changing styles.³²

Although this liberation from unnecessarily restrictive ways was rejoiced in, there is a sense of ambivalence about some of the changes for which school was seen as responsible. The proverb used by Mmakgolo wa Pine to describe the older generation's imitation of their children in adopting new ways shows that this process was not viewed entirely in a positive light.

A cow will fall into a donga as it tries to follow its calf. This is the same with people. If your child is burning, you will go into the fire to fetch it out.³³

School was seen by women of an older generation not only as having provided for changes in clothing styles, but also as having introduced transformations in behaviour - and indeed in the sotho life-cycle - which are viewed in a much more unambiguously negative light. Mmakgolo wa Pine offered the "pencil" and the ability to write as a monocausal explanation for the ability of youth nowadays to evade parental authority, and for the associated decline in sexual morals:

a boy may come and study with your daughter. They boy will take a pencil and write something for the girl to read. And if you as a parent suspect something and sit around with them to keep an eye on them, that wouldn't help. Because after the boy has written her something on the paper, she would also take her pencil and reply to him. All this happens in your presence, and when they do this, you will think that they are studying and that your daughter will pass at the end of the year because she has a friend who is helping her to study.³⁴

But instead of engaging in diligent scholarship, what the couple would be doing, said Mmakgolo wa Pine, was taking advantage of the mother's inability to read in order to plan a clandestine liaison which would eventually lead to the pregnancy of the girl.

For some people, school and literacy appear as jointly responsible for widening the generation gap between themselves and their children, and bring with them a range of related ills. According to such a view, it is because girls no longer mix with other girls but rather form friendships with boys in class that girls began to fall pregnant at a younger age. This has caused the age at which children are initiated to decrease (from mid adolescence to the age of six or eight years). Previously, when re be re na la malao (we had laws), a girl would leave for the farms, return without yet having become pregnant, and become initiated thereafter. But now

children must undergo this ritual earlier, as "we do not want to take a mother or father to be initiated". In this account, the virtual disappearance of the phase of childhood prior to initiation - bothumasha for girls, bošoboro for boys - is seen as having come about because of education.

Schooling thus had a range of significances: it allowed for an incorporation of new elements into the sotho lifestyle, but it also introduced lawlessness and indiscipline, seen as contrary to the principles of sesotho, or indeed to any code of morality. From yet another perspective, schooling appeared as a harbinger of sekgowa. People's different orientations towards schooling were influenced by a range of factors. One was religious orientation - to Mmagomotala Mofele, who considers herself one of the nation or a non-Christian (moditšhaba), to go to school was foolishness: "as we grew up we only knew that those going to school were children of Christians (majekane)" while the latter in turn would mock them, saying "they're afraid of civilisation (ba tšhaba tlhabologo)".³⁵ Another factor was age: often older children did not attend school, or attended only for a few years, where their younger siblings acquired a fuller education as the necessity for this became more generally accepted. Place in the order of siblings also played a part, since parents were sometimes able to send younger children to school once their older siblings had grown up and were contributing to the household finances. It was also sometimes the case that parents opposed to schooling for an older child had become accustomed to the idea when their younger children reached schoolgoing age. A further factor was individual motivation. Mmagoviolet Phakwago, a member of Matladi regiment, was so keen to be a scholar that her mother was persuaded to release her from the care of her younger siblings to attend school on every alternate day, in contrast to her younger sister who preferred to avoid school altogether by running away to the farms.

But it was gender which was perhaps the most important factor in influencing which children were sent to school and which were not, before a time when it became accepted that all children should attend school as far as possible. According to the keen scholar referred to above, when she was a child and people "did not yet know the importance of education", mothers thought it a waste to take a girl to school rather than having her come to help in the fields.³⁶ The perceived differential needs for education were expressed thus by another woman:

A girl will always be at home, but a boy needs to go to school so that he will be able to find employment. If he finds that he does not know even a single "A", he will have to come back and stay at home.

So with a girl there is no problem [if she leaves school]?

No, there is no problem with a girl because a man will come and marry her and

she will get support from him. Now, with a boy, who will support him?³⁷

It was therefore expected that boys would be more particularly exposed to sekgowa, first at school itself, and then through the careers which took them off to the farms and then to work at centres of industrial employment. This is reflected in the clothes worn by boys and men. Although Monnig's rather sketchy account of the differentiation of the male life-cycle by clothing describes initiated boys as dressing in "a new loin skin", informants in Dithabaneng and elsewhere explained, in contrast, that from around the time of initiation - corresponding roughly with a boy's first trip to the farms for an older generation, or from the time of his first starting school for a younger one - he ceased wearing a loinskin and began instead to put on trousers and shirts. There was in some cases an intermediate phase in which short trousers were worn during school hours to be replaced with skins for the rest of the day.³⁸ But in general, in contrast to girls whose clothing throughout the life-cycle, although gradually acquiring new elements, was continually redefined as sotho, their brothers and cousins experienced a swift and decisive move from the sotho clothing of childhood to the clothing of sekgowa which defined their adolescence and adulthood.

A similar differentiation of male and female clothing among reserve-dwellers is noted by Jean Comaroff in the case of the Tshidi Tswana:

... male hair and clothing styles have been more closely regulated by the idioms of discipline and production than have those of females, reflecting the greater engagement of men in the world of industrial capitalist production (Turner n.d.(a)). Women, on the other hand, remain closely associated with the domestic sphere (1985:224-5).

In Nchabeleng as I mentioned earlier, the divide between the ways of sesotho and those of sekgowa was often thought of as aligning with that between two social groupings which, certainly for the first half of the 20th century, were regarded as quite distinct: non-Christians (baditšhaba) and Christians (majekane). But from the evidence presented here it can be seen how even within the social category baditšhaba, and indeed even within a single family in that category, there are a number of further differentiating factors - age, place in the order of siblings, personal motivation, but especially gender - which align some members closer to one and some closer to the other side of the sesotho/sekgowa divide. To summarise: because the present members of Dithabaneng have since childhood been identified more closely with home and with the domestic than their brothers; have worked beyond the village only in rural employment and then only for short periods while their brothers have spent years as labourers on the mines or in the city; and have had little or no exposure to schooling but always less than the male

members of their families; it is easy to see how these women have had their role in the domestic domain identified closely with the idea of sesotho.

Women, married and unmarried

I earlier suggested that Dithabaneng's older members, as younger women, were dependent on male kin or affines to buy them the clothes necessary to the life of a proper sotho woman. As young married women, their adornment in heavy cotton smocking was an important means by which their husbands could display their wealth, derived both rurally and from contract employment. For the young women of later regiments, although their brief move into farm employment allowed them some independence and provided for the purchase of their own cloth, their return home was, ideally, a move towards economic dependence on a husband similar to that experienced by members of previous regiments. Indeed, it was the fact of "being courted" and of preparing for marriage which made further stints of farm labour inappropriate, since it was thought that a married woman should not work for money (bereka).

For members of these younger regiments, however, this ideal did not always correspond with reality. Almost half of Dithabaneng's members in this age-group, who became marriageable from about 1960 onwards, are now living their adult lives as unmarried mothers within their parents' or mothers' households, and are dependent on the earnings of a brother or an uncle or on a mother's pension. For the other half of this generation the return from farm work did result in marriage: to a cousin, in most cases.³⁹

Those members who are married and receiving regular remittances are dependent on their husbands for the purchase of clothes among many other things. Such dependency also carries with it the obligation to listen to a husband's dictates about what to wear. Few husbands have much interest in influencing their wives' wish to wear the everyday contemporary sotho dress described earlier. But since husbands, even non-Christian ones, are often oriented more towards sekgowa than sesotho, wives' dependency on them sometimes entails a move towards a way of dressing, and of behaving, more in line with this orientation.

Such a change in style occurs, for some women, only on particular occasions. Mmagoshower Debeila for example was married in a conventional western wedding dress, as a photograph on her wall testifies, and she wears dresses (diroko) when she spends some time staying in the location adjoining Premier Mine in order to visit her husband at his place of work.

For others, like Mmagoviolet Phakwago, the keen scholar mentioned earlier, her husband's preferences overlaying certain tendencies in her own background have effected her transformation from a girl wearing sotho dress along with female siblings and cousins to a woman dressed in the clothes of sekgowa. In both her own and her husband's family backgrounds there was a complex mixture of mission and anti-mission influences, and a series of physical movements between sections of the village designated as Christian and non-Christian respectively. The couple has spent periods in a Reef township, living in a house which they managed to acquire for the family: they thus enjoy a lifestyle in strong contrast to the more typical experience of some of Mmagoviolet's friends and relatives, in which a husband lives in compounded accommodation and makes weekend visits home, or is occasionally visited by his wife at his place of work.

What the story of Mmagoviolet and her husband shows is that membership of social categories such as Christian or non-Christian, and affiliation to accompanying styles such as those of sekgowa or sesotho, was neither static nor historically preordained. Within the life process of one family, different members could be oriented in a variety of ways, or the same members oriented differently over a period of years, with respect to these major social and conceptual divides.

Despite the ease of movement between these clearly-distinguished and mutually exclusive categories, the history of this family still displays the basic pattern in which women and the domestic domain belong to sesotho while men are seen to connect them to and even pull them towards sekgowa. Mmagoviolet, although she wore dresses as her husband wanted her to, and went to town to be with and to keep house for him there, was far happier when she could return home where she had the help and support of her mother-in-law and the companionship of her female neighbours. In this sense, the sotho style and sotho music of Dithabaneng's performance expresses a ideal of female cohesiveness to which group members aspire, even if they achieve it only momentarily.

In the following section I explore the way in which, for Mmagoviolet as for her less "modern" sisters, cousins and co-singers, the occasions of Dithabaneng's performance use the idiom of equality, subsistence agriculture and female sotho identity to express this sense of cohesive female companionship and bonding, and to offset the economic factors which in material terms differentiate these women married to different men, or unmarried, from each other.

Women, performance, and the crops of sesotho

For a period after Dithabaneng was formed in order to sing the new kiba style of music, there was a wide range of performance contexts in which the group was involved. It took part in a number of local competitions, and was very much in demand to perform at weddings for a fee of around "twenty pounds" (R40). More recently, however, their popularity has waned and live performance has been replaced at weddings by taped music played on a hired hi-fi system. The range of possible performances has thus shrunk to one main type: "parties" held at the homes of individual members. These are ostensibly for enjoyment and pleasure alone, but in fact like many other such "parties" in this reserve area they entail an aspect of phasa (ancestral propitiation).

A party at Mmagojane's

The preliminaries and preparations for the party, to be held at the house of Mmagojane Kgalema, one of the group's "police", began in late July 1991. In an initial discussion between Mmagojane and her fellow group members on the one hand, and her husband on the other, he was informed that the group had designated her the host for the next of these parties, and in which he expressed his surprise that this was the case and his reluctance to provide the food that he imagined would be required. He was assured that he would not be held liable for all costs, but would be asked to provide only a goat to be slaughtered and a tin of mealie meal. After some further protestations and expressions of dissatisfaction at not having been informed of this earlier, he finally agreed. The next stage was for each member of the group to contribute a tin of sorghum from her year's crop, which was then made into beer by the hostess and some of her fellow-members. Indeed, it was said that August was the best month for such a party, since it came in the time between harvesting and planting when there was still some sorghum left for making beer.

On the night before the party the goat was slaughtered, leaving time for the meat to be cooked in black pots over a fire on the following day.

During the party itself, the sexes remained separate. The women of Dithabaneng performed in the open space in front of the yard, observed mostly by children and other women who stood or sat on the ground in a circle around the dancers.

During breaks in the performance, singers and audience drank home-made sorghum beer from calabashes. Mmagojane's husband and other men who were home from town sat on chairs under a tree some distance away from the performers, and drank bottled beer out of glasses. Men and women, in these separate areas, had their food served to them by the women of the house.

Occasionally one of the "police" would approach the men in their separate circle and involve him in a mini-drama of mock arrest, with one of the "police" making as if to handcuff him, asking aggressively for his pass, and eventually fining him some money before agreeing to let him go.

At the very end of the party, the skin of the goat which had been slaughtered was spread on the back of the woman whom, the group had agreed, should host the next party. At the previous such event, held during December 1990 at the house of the other "policeman", Mmagolina Sebei, a similar laying on of the skin had signified that this present party would be held at Mmagojane's house: "we felt that, after one police, the other police should do the same thing". Proposed future celebrations will be held at the homes of the leader and of her deputy, since it is thought that office-holders in the group should host these events.

To understand the significance of the different foodstuffs served at this party, it is necessary to examine the practice of - and the decline in - agriculture in the village and in the broader area of the reserve in which it is situated. All Dithabaneng's married women acquired arable land from their in-laws when setting up house, and even its unmarried members work in the fields of their own parents. As in reserve areas throughout southern Africa, the significant factor influencing agricultural output is not, however, the availability of land but rather the availability of cash.⁴⁰ The high cost of hiring traction make it impossible to grow any food without an input from wages earned in urban employment. For married Dithabaneng women this comes from their husbands, while for those unmarried some money is paid out of a mother's pension or by a brother. In economic terms, then, the greater amount of money available for ploughing to married women receiving regular and fairly good remittances certainly ensures a higher return on this investment: where Mathabathe Mokwale paid R50 to plough a section of her fields and reaped only one bag of sorghum worth R60, Raisibe Sebei paid R180 to plough a larger area and reaped five bags worth about R300 in total.

Even for those households with a more secure access to male wages, however, their fields are, and are regarded as, a supplementary rather than a primary source of food. This again is a common theme in studies of southern African reserve areas: indeed, in a more global view, it is the decline of these reserves which is seen as having caused their wholesale dependence on the sale of labour to the industrial centres of the Republic. In this area specifically, the factor of unremitting drought has been a further major impediment to agriculture: people who a few years ago reaped a reasonable harvest have found the returns on whatever cash they do invest in ploughing declining year after year. For some, the combination of a shortage of cash with the uncertainty of any return have made them plough smaller sections of their fields in each successive year.

Another factor which in this agriculturally poor area of Lebowa has led to the sense that field produce is supplementary rather than primary is the fact that the land here, while able to be used for growing sorghum, is or has become incapable of sustaining the crop which has come to be regarded as a staple - maize or mealies. This food must be bought directly with money remitted by men, without the intervention of female agricultural activity to make it available.

A song sung by young women during the 1950s shows clearly how, at that stage when sorghum was still a food eaten widely in the village as a whole, maize was becoming associated with migrant men, who both supplied it and demanded to be fed it:

Mararankodi, taba tša le sego	Mararankodi, news of laughter
Moratiwa o tlile bošego ka tsoga	My lover came at night, at the time of
kangwedi ka kगतla lehea	moonlight, and I woke to grind maize
Mmamoratiwa o tlile bošego rrago-	My lover, the father of my child came in the night, I
ngwanaka ka kगतla lehea	woke to grind maize
Ga a je mabele, ga a je leotša	He doesn't eat sorghum, he doesn't eat millet
Ke kगतla lehea	I grind maize.

This rejection of earlier subsistence crops in favour of bought maize has since become commonplace. The sorghum which is still grown in varying amounts, having been assigned this marginal role, remains within women's sphere of control, and is used for two main purposes: as seed for the next harvest, and to make beer. Although this sorghum beer provides a small income to unmarried women in some poorer households such as Mmagomotala Mofele, the increasing rejection by men of sorghum beer in favour of the bottled variety makes such an income negligible in comparison with that earned, for example, by Mmagoshower from the sale of commercial brands at her informal bar.⁴¹

The main use of the beer made by Dithabaneng women from the sorghum they grow, then, is for the ritual and ceremonial purposes associated with sesotho. The fact that all members - despite fairly wide disparities in income deriving ultimately from differences in access to male earnings - can contribute some sorghum towards the beer which is to be drunk at a performance and then consume the resulting brew together, stresses the links binding them together as equal participants and as kinswomen, and deemphasises the economic differentiations which divide them and which link some to the ways of sekgowa through their links to particular wage-earning men.

Another aspect of the group's performance which dramatises the sisterly communality of women and the division - even antagonism - between them and men is that of the "police" play-act. Although "police" are not the only dramatis personae in kiba - Dithabaneng and other groups have a range of characters, including baboons and monkeys, dingaka (diviners), and doctors and nurses - the "police" act has most impact since it involves members of the audience and even those outside the circle of onlookers. Its strong amusement value also derives from the fact that it involves transvestite dressing, and in this respect it is the reverse of some equally amusing pageants in male kiba groups in which men dress as women and engage in exaggeratedly female behaviour, including kissing and mock love-making. Here, the aspect of male behaviour and dress which is latched onto is that of intimidating uniformed authority.

There is an element of genuine crowd control in the function of these figures: in men's kiba, for example, "police" do not dress in uniform, but are known merely for their use of a whip to keep extraneous people and onlookers from moving into the circle of dancers. For women's police, although they are thought of as having a similar controlling function, the limits on their authority, based partly on limited strength, have increased the play-acting component of their role:

Some men force their way through because we are women. When arrested, they will refuse to pay and just because we are women, we leave them.⁴²

Mostly, then, women arrest unsuspecting men whom they suspect will comply with their demands for a fine rather than genuine troublemakers:

Do they arrest men only?

Yes, they don't arrest women.

Do they arrest those men who have done something wrong?

Its a play (papadi), they just arrest them even if they haven't done anything wrong.⁴³

Sometimes an element of secrecy is necessary so that the "police" can conceal her intentions from one of her innocent victims:

As men are drinking there, we will go and arrest them. We will approach them as if we are dancing. ... You can't arrest them in a group because, if you arrest one, the others will try to run away. ... I will take him away and tell him, "Why did you come to the dancing without your jacket, it is against the law?" He will take out some money, and then he is released. Whether he pays five cents or ten cents, there is no problem.⁴⁴

But sometimes an arrested man might pay as much as R1. The fines are collected together, and counted up at the end of the day:

after eating, just before we go home, someone would tell us how much we have raised: "Lions, your money is so much".⁴⁵

In these dramatic interludes, a range of elements are compressed, including an obvious component of social commentary and satire about the arbitrariness and frequency of police

intervention in black people's lives within broader South African society. But an equally important aspect - albeit of symbolic rather than material significance - is that of concerted female action to wrest from returnee migrants an amount of money which can be put into the dancers' collective fund and "eaten" at a future party.

On a practical level, it would have been impossible to hold a party - despite the contributions in sorghum and female labour - without the pressure exerted by the collectivity of singers on Mmagojane's husband to donate from his sphere of male-owned assets the substantial contribution of a goat to be slaughtered. In similar vein, but in the domain of play, women police assuming the trappings of an authority normally denied them, make inroads into a source of wealth within the possession of men - cash - and incorporate this under their collective control within the domain of sotho performance, dress, and celebration.

Women, the domestic domain, and sesotho

Dithabaneng's stay-at-home wives and sisters are, then, associated with sesotho more strongly than are the men on whom they depend for a living. This association, while often invisible or minimal in non-performative contexts, is foregrounded and dramatised especially through the use of mmino wa sesotho (sotho song/dance). To appreciate why this association should exist at all, we must look at the connections between the domestic domain and sesotho, and at how the assigning of women to the former often entails their cloaking in the guise of the latter.

The role of women in providing for the continuity or reproduction of the household or domestic sphere is a common theme, in studies both of capitalism in the first world and of its intrusion into third-world contexts. There is some ambiguity as to whether this role should be seen as a sign of subordination and oppression, or as a source of social power, or perhaps as a mixture of both.

In some European peasant societies, for example, the domestic arena appears as a source of great influence to the women who occupy prime positions within it, where their menfolk, marginalised from power in the wider socio-political arena and denied any significant role in the family, are virtually without any influence at all (Rogers 1975, Gilmore 1980). In the case of southern African societies, there is a similar ambiguity about the assigning of women to the domestic sphere. It has been argued that the central dynamic of the precapitalist agricultural societies of the region arose from their ability to control women's productive and reproductive capacities within the homestead unit (Guy 1990). Later, the control of these capacities in turn

lay at the basis of these societies' giving up of labour to the industrial centres of South Africa, while at the same time allowing them to escape full proletarianisation (Bozzoli 1983:151). Indeed, according to one viewpoint, South African capitalism depended upon and even purposefully enforced the conservation of families in the reserves as systems of support and reciprocity, in order to be able to exploit the labour-power of their male members (Wolpe 1972:108).

Some women were to escape from this realm of enforced and custom-bound domesticity, often under the rubric of alternative definitions of the domestic provided by Christianity or colonial ideology (Delius 1983, Comaroff 1985:150, Bozzoli 1991:15,59-60). But those who remained as rural wives dependent on the earnings of male relatives continued to be seen as somehow responsible for the continuity of the household and the domestic domain. The ambiguity about the role of such women centres around whether this work has been assigned to them as unwitting dupes of the combined forces of precolonial patriarchal ideology and capitalism, or whether they have thereby derived some power previously denied them by actively retaining and augmenting their part in sustaining household and village life as partly autonomous domains.

A rephrasing of this issue in local terms reveals that women's "keeping house" amounts to doing the "work of custom" (Murray 1981:150). In the absence of migrant men from Lesotho, it was mainly women who, although subordinate and conceived of as inferior, played a major role in maintaining "the ideas and practices which are recognized as 'proper Sesotho'", and in using these to help "reproduce social relations, between the living and the dead, between men and women, and between the generations" (*ibid.*:149).

The claim that women have become responsible for the "work of custom" is not one that derives only from the absence due to migrancy of males to do this work. In South Africa it has its genesis as well in other dislocations of the public socio-political domain which have been wrought by the apartheid regime. In an area north-west of Sekhukhune Hofmeyr shows how the genre of oral historical narrative, previously the domain of men and performed mainly in the central kgoro of a village, was unable to survive the destruction of this public space which occurred with the forced relocations of Betterment planning. Traditions of female storytelling, situated in the household all along, did in contrast transplant successfully (1994).

In Sekhukhune, as in Lesotho, what materialist approaches represent as women's role in reproduction translates in folk terms as women's role in enacting and behaving in the ways of sesotho. As with the more material tasks of reproduction, there is an ambiguity concerning the

status with which this role is endowed. On the one hand, some of the most sotho of the things that a woman does - such as sitting on the floor while men sit on chairs - are thought of as part of the respect she should normally show to her husband and parents-in-law in particular, but also to men in general. In such a case, the upkeep of sesotho performed by a woman on behalf of others is synonymous with deference, and may appear as demeaning. On the other hand, sotho performance as described above empowers women: even those as dependent on their husbands and brothers as the village singers of Dithabaneng. In song and dance, they dramatise their unity as women and their mock antagonism to men.

Conclusion

Clothing, together with the total musical performance of which it often forms a part, is one of the most striking and visible markers of a sotho identity. In its differentiating of pre-initiates from initiates, men from women, and Christians from traditionalists, this clothing performs much the same signifying role as the Swazi dress discussed by Kuper in her seminal article (1973).

But neither the statuses thus distinguished nor the dress used to demarcate them are static and unchanging. Even in cases where sotho clothing delineates the membership of distinct groups, as in its frequent association with "those of the nation" or non-Christians (baditshaba), other contexts prompt alternative uses and alignments, such as its link with women in contrast to the link of western clothing with men. Sotho clothing does not, then, indicate a rigid adherence to the ways of the precolonial or primordial past any more than the clothing of sekgowa indicates a singleminded orientation towards modernity. Both are shifting markers rather than describing the permanent orientations of bounded groups of people; they are used as templates to order experience in a variety of different settings.

Like the social identities, the clothes used to designate them are also undergoing continual change. Even those women regarding themselves as most strongly bound by custom and convention have found an appeal in the rapid succession of changing styles. The variations of fashion, albeit generated from beyond the local arena, have lent themselves to a more effective expression of local identities (Heath 1992) rather than supplanting this expression with a slavish devotion to fashion as an end in itself as in Kuper's account of the use of western dress by the middle classes of Swaziland (1973:365).

If both the clothing which signifies and the statuses signified are both undergoing

transformation, there is a message which is nevertheless enunciated quite unambiguously in all of this. In women's performance contexts, sotho dress serves as an idiom of womanly equality and solidarity. As in the religious rituals described by Heath (1992:26), dress underscores female sameness, and reiterates that all women in the dance group are equally able to contribute to, and benefit from, the celebration, even if the circumstances of their everyday lives serve to stratify them.

In this case, as in others, women wear elaborate, distinctive and allegedly "traditional" clothing in contrast to the standardised western dress of men (Comaroff 1985:224-5; Hendrikson 1994; Schapera 1949). This makes a complex statement: it speaks on the one hand of the deference with which women in the domestic domain should behave towards male agnates and affines, while on the other it signals the authority of women's role as custodians of custom.

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Matšedi (1944)
Matšedi (1972)

Manala (1948)

Manyana (1968)

Matladi (1952)

Mantšho (1959)

Madiko (1956)

Footnotes

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² Where Sotho denotes a language or a set of musical or other features which have been attributed to a group of people by analysts, it is spelt with a capital and is not italicized. But where, as the noun sesotho or as the adjective sotho, it denotes a state of being, a way of life, or a set of qualities which informants themselves have enunciated or commented upon, it is italicized and spelt without a capital. See JL and J Comaroff (1989) for a similar usage.

³ Substantial rifts were established, or newly conceptualised, within rural northern Transvaal communities around the pivotal feature of Christianity. The resulting social categories were differently named depending on the stance of the namer. Those proud to have affiliated themselves to the Christian way called themselves bakriste (Christians) and termed their opposites baheitene (heathens). Those aligning themselves with the chiefs called themselves baditšhaba (those of the nation) in opposition to the derogatorily named majakane or majekane (Christians). The geographical divide in many rural communities is named in similar vein: setšhabeng is the place of those of the nation, and majekaneng is the place of the Christians. The paired terms majakane/baditšhaba and bakriste/baheitene, while orienting themselves by reference to a common dividing line, thus imply opposing moral views of the division.

⁴ Migrant singers, performing in an urban context, often refer to the same genre as mmino wa setšo (music of origin, or traditional music).

⁵ Sekhukhune was paramount chief of the Pedi when the polity was defeated by the British in 1878. His name was given to the reserve area which was allocated to his subjects in the wake of their defeat: Sekhukhuneland. The area, since augmented by the addition of "Trust" farms purchased from white owners by a government board established for the purpose, has subsequently become the magisterial district called Sekhukhune. Sekhukhune or GaSekhukhune is the local appellation, which does not recognise the limits of this magisterial district, but extends its boundaries to all those parts of the northern Sotho homeland of Lebowa which are south of Pietersburg, and even to much of the white farming area beyond.

⁶ This style is most commonly known by its rural practitioners as mpepetloane or lebowa, but its spread throughout the northern Transvaal countryside was part of the broader development of the migrant style of music, formerly exclusively male, known as kiba. See James (1994) for an account of the development of this style.

⁷ This sense of a unifying connection to a symbolic animal has been translated as "totemism" and as involving membership of a "fairly loose association of agnatic kin" (Monnig 1967:234). But Kuper argues that these were not kinship groups or clans (1982:46-8), and according to

Hoernle "there is no special native term" for such a grouping (1937:91-2)

⁸ One version of the garment is called sesothwana (little sesotho). Hilda Kuper talks of a similar differentiation between Swazi and western clothing, with "contrasted systems of clothing symbolising contrasting cultures" (1973:355-6). but it appears that these distinct cultures were not within Swazi society.

⁹ Members of Dithabaneng, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, 20/7/91, Nchabeleng; dates calculated according to when members of particular regiments were initiated.

¹⁰ lit. sesotho of wearing (sesotho sa go apara). This is distinguished from sesotho of speaking (sesotho sa go bolela) and from various other forms of sesotho.

¹¹ In similar vein, Hilda Kuper mentions that when new, western or trade-derived items were added to Swazi clothing, these were "peripheral ... accretions to, not rejections of, Swazi-style dress" (1973:355).

¹² Rural women singers address each other as "the mother of so-and-so" or "the grandmother of so-and-so", rather than by the names given to them at birth or at initiation. Thus, Makgolo wa Pine translates as "Pine's grandmother", Mmagopine as "Pine's mother", Mmagoviolet as "Violet's mother", and so on.

¹³ Mmagomathumasha Madibane, recorded discussion with DJ and Anna Madihlaba, Sephaku, 25/1/89.

¹⁴ Mathabathe Mokwale, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

¹⁵ Members of Dithabaneng, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 14/7/91; for more detail on the reinterpretation of lyrics as referring to the context of dance itself, see James (1994).

¹⁶ Mmakgolo wa Pine Khulwane, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 28/7/91.

¹⁷ Vail and White document a similar ambiguity by Tumbuka wives about labour migration, similarly expressed in terms of the clothes it can provide or the lack of clothes if a migrant neglects his duties to his far-off family (1991:258-9).

¹⁸ In the Molepo district further north, when male migrants began to use privately-owned taxis rather than busses to return home, these became known as mmethisa [wa mathari] (those which cause young married women to be beaten), since these brought husbands home at unexpected times and enabled them to walk in on their wives' illicit affairs (Molepo 1983:77).

¹⁹ Song and comment recorded in writing during discussion with members of Dithabaneng, Nchabeleng, 28/7/91.

²⁰ Mmakgolo wa Pine Khulwane, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng,

19/7/91.

²¹ Lucas Sefoka, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, Johannesburg, 27/2/90; Molepo (1984:16); evidence presented to the Native Economic Commission. Delius (1989:595-6) claims that even traditionalist communities in Sekhukhune were changing their attitudes to education and beginning to send their sons to school from around the 1930s, and that a number of "tribal schools" were established in the 1940s. But judging from life-histories of migrant men from Sekhukhune, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that schooling for boys gained acceptance so widely, for non-Christians as much as for Christians, that it eclipsed or supplanted the period of work on the farms, or displaced this into the school holidays.

²² Mmagojane Kgalema, during recorded discussion with members of Dithabaneng, Nchabeleng, 19/7/91.

²³ This reason given by men for first leaving home to work is reflected by a number of other accounts from the Transvaal: Niehaus (nd), Molepo (1984:16), Native Economic Commission, evidence of Neethling p31, 50; Gilbertson p50; Mareli p333; Fuller p412.

²⁴ Ramogholo Diphofa, recorded discussion with PM, Mphanama, 20/12/90.

²⁵ Members of Dithabaneng, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 19/7/91.

²⁶ Mmagojane Kgalema, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

²⁷ Mmagoshower Debeila, discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 16/7/91.

²⁸ In the case of Phokeng, the girls worked for money to buy their trousseaux.

²⁹ Rebelliousness followed by later conformity is of course a common theme of studies on youth: see for example Bozzoli's description of how in the successful peasant economy of Phokeng it was boys who had the greatest desire to escape the strictures of society's patriarchal controls, but were later to gain more rewards than women out of "accepting the system" - eventual independence and access to land (1991:81).

³⁰ Mmagopine Khulwane and Mmagojane Kgalema, in recorded discussion with members of Dithabaneng, Nchabeleng, 19/7/91.

³¹ Comaroff suggests that "headscarves are widely worn by black women in South Africa and express the canons of mission modesty, which overlaid the elaborate code of hairdressing" (1985:224).

³² Members of Dithabaneng, recorded discussion, Nchabeleng, 20/7/91.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Members of Dithabaneng, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 20/7/91.

³⁵ Mmagomotala Mofele, discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 17/7/91.

³⁶ Mmagoviolet Phakwago, recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Nchabeleng, 17/7/91.

³⁷ Mmagojane Kgalema, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

³⁸ Salome and Andronica Machaba, discussion with DJ, Johannesburg, 19/10/91.

³⁹ Murray has indicated that most rural families undergo diverse temporal processes of change which may take them through several apparently discrete "types" within a single generation (1981:100-7, 155). In his study, for example, many women after a period of virilocal residence as a wife in the absence of a husband might experience marital dissolution, work for some time as a migrant, and later return to rear children in a matrifocal household (ibid.:155).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Murray (1981:76-85), James (1987:76-8). As in the Lesotho villages studied by Murray, landholders in Sekhukhuneland who have no money for ploughing frequently let out their land for sharecropping by people who have cash or own tractors (P Delius, personal communication).

⁴¹ See Colson and Scudder (1988) for an account of the declining ability of women to produce an income from home-brew as men began to favour bottled beer. In Sekhukhune, the refectation of sorghum brew in favour of the bottled variety was fuelled, as well, by fears that women might bewitch men by concealing some poisonous substance in their home-brew (Sam Nchabeleng, personal communication).

⁴² Mathabathe Mokwale, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

⁴³ Raisibe Sebei, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

⁴⁴ Mmagojane Kgalema, recorded discussion with PM, Nchabeleng, 29/12/90.

⁴⁵ Ibid.