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Bagagešu / those of my home : migrancy, gender and ethnicity in the Northern Province, South Africa

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Bagagešu/those of my home: migrancy, gender and ethnicity in the Northern Province, South Africa, American Ethnologist 26 (1):69-89.

Abstract: The efforts of southern African women migrant workers to gain control of resources in the linked spheres of urban workplace and rural base have rarely been characterised - by anthropologists or local communities - as ethnic in nature. This suggests the truth of the African proverb that "women have no tribe". Puzzlingly, though, women are seen in other contexts as quintessentially traditional. I discuss this paradox, referring to the mobilisation of a sotho identity centred on the ideas of "family" and "home" by groups of northern Transvaal migrant women performers. Both ideas are expressed and symbolised in emotive terms which make them appear intrinsic or primordial in nature but both on closer examination emerge as complex combinations of ascription and achievement. In conclusion, I show how women migrants' claim to be sotho gives them a right to a voice in the public arena which derives in part from the propinquity with male migrants' ethnic identity, but how it also speaks of a new and autonomous identity which selects and interweaves elements from the shifting terrains of sotho man- and woman-hood.

Keywords: performance, ethnicity, labour migration, home, family, gender.

Ethnicity has been an area in which scholars from - and of - southern Africa have shown a belated but keen interest. Beginning in the late 1980s, this interest has sharpened in the 1990s to become a major concern in the region, with Vail's 1989 collection and his comprehensive introduction as something of a watershed. More recently still, the holding of two major South African-based conferences on the topic during the 1990s suggests that it has become a virtual obsession.[1]

This delay may have been the result of a lack of exposure - occasioned in part by the academic boycott of the apartheid years - to the broader scholarly world's fascination with the topic during the 1970s. But a more likely explanation both of southern Africanists' earlier lack of interest in and of their recent preoccupation with ethnicity lies in the influence of events in the broader socio-political arena. The prevalence of papers on the origins and current machinations of Zulu nationalism at both of the conferences mentioned above suggests that the divisive cultural politics of Natal have had more than a little to do with scholars' recent interest. Similarly linked to political priorities and concerns was the virtual ignoring of the topic - at least by English-speaking scholars - during the period from the late 1950s to the 1970s. Since apartheid was founded on the basis of ethnic differences reified by the state, scholars opposed to this policy were reluctant to lend weight to the notion that such differences were experienced as real by the social actors of their study. The investigation of ethnicity was also inhibited by an overriding preoccupation with processes of class formation, paralleled or inspired by the rise of the

independent trade union movement in South Africa. The assumption that culture and consciousness were broadly commensurate with, or determined by, class membership (Bozzoli and Delius 1990:28-9) left little room for the investigation of workers' ideologies of primordial distinctiveness.

The lack of interest in ethnicity has been particularly noticeable in the discipline of anthropology: a field of study whose practitioners might have been expected to pursue the topic with most enthusiasm. At a time when students of urbanisation on the Zambian Copperbelt and in West and East Africa were conducting detailed studies on migrants' use of their situationally-defined "tribal" backgrounds as a basis on which to organise themselves in town,[2] anthropologists in South Africa, with one or two exceptions, remained oblivious to this phenomenon. Apart from the work of a couple of writers conducting research within the context of the mining industry (McNamara 1978, 1980, 1985; Pearson 1978), the best-known exception was the work of Philip and Iona Mayer on Red and School Xhosa of East London (1971). In a variation on the ethnic theme, they showed how the social boundaries demarcating two sub-groups within a single ethnic unity could be as strong as that between ethnic groups. The work was criticised on the basis that its enquiry into subjectively-experienced cultural differences seemed to represent a tacit encouragement of divisions within the fledgling labour movement, and also because its portrayal of migrants as either complying with traditionalism or imitating white ways failed to contextualise these behaviours within the broader sweep of social and economic changes in the region (Magubane 1971, 1973). Although Philip Mayer was later to respond by showing that Red and School migrant styles constituted different "resistance ideologies" with their origins in a specific historical context of missionisation, conquest and land loss (1980), the criticisms levelled at the original book perhaps provide a clue as to why other local anthropologists were predisposed against investigating ethnic associations. They were probably aware - albeit subliminally - of the disturbing similarities between the cultural specificities stressed by their own forebears and the concept of ethnic uniqueness which has been used to justify the depredations of apartheid (Gordon and Spiegel 1993:86-8).

These exceptions aside, it was to be, not anthropologists, but social historians working in the late 1970s and 1980s who would investigate how processes of proletarianisation, far from subsuming pre-existing divisive and culturally-specific identities, operated to create and give substance to these (Guy and Thabane 1987; Delius 1989, 1990; see Bonner et al 1993:11-14). Thus it was finally recognised by southern African scholars, a full twenty years or more after Mitchell's *Kalela Dance* (1956), that workers' stressing of tribal or "home" allegiance was neither an anachronistic hangover from their rural origins, nor a quiescent accepting of ethnic identities

engineered by the apartheid state, but a newly-constituted way of interacting with other people within the world of work and the city.

These developments set the stage for ethnicity to be seen by historians and anthropologists alike, not as a threat to worker consciousness, but as one of the means through which this consciousness has been mediated, experienced, and expressed. In addition to providing workers in the region with assistance in getting work, arranging accommodation and funeral transport, saving money, finding companionship in town, and articulating their grievances (Clegg 1982; Delius 1989; Molepo 1983), ethnicity is now recognised as having enabled male migrants' consolidation of their rural assets (Vail 1989:14; Delius 1993:150-2), and as having facilitated the emergence of a strongly-developed sense of history and identity (Erlmann 1992; Coplan 1987, 1994).

While it is thus now accepted by southern African scholars that the resource-controlling and identity-making efforts of male migrants often assume an ethnic form, the parallel efforts of women workers have rarely been characterised as ethnic in nature. In relation to the male migrants who group together on the grounds of a shared home or who participate in regional associations, women have appeared both in the southern and in the broader African literature either as desiring their freedom from such groupings and ideologies, or as firmly dominated by the men who initiate or mastermind these.

Where female migration has been relatively uncurbed, it has been seen as providing an opportunity for total escape from the strictures of patriarchal rural society. This was so in South Africa prior to the extending of influx control to women (Bozzoli 1983; Walker 1991:188, passim), and also in towns in West and East Africa and on the Copperbelt (Little 1972; Cheater 1986:159; Parpart 1991; Parkin 1975). In such situations, women migrants' desire to be free from all strictures has been presented in almost exaggerated form, using the metaphor of unbridled sexual freedom to express concerns about male loss of control in other spheres (Brydon 1987:171-2). Indeed, a primary focus of male migrant organisation has been the imperative to regulate or curb the activities - especially sexual ones - of their countrywomen in town, or to ensure that whatever conjugal relations they do engage in are at least restricted to members of the homeboy community (Parkin 1969:165; Bonner 1990:241, 247-50). This exaggerated emphasis on female unconstraint has led to a belief - firmly held if largely inaccurate (Brydon ibid.:176; Izzard 1985:271) - that migrant women prefer eschewing male migrant associations to joining them.

But in situations where the existence of male migrancy has depended, in contrast, upon the existence of a more-or-less viable rural economic base and on the stable presence of men's wives to manage the rural economy, male migrant organisations are often represented as having the primary aim of keeping such women in their rural place. Indeed, the strength of ethnicity as a focus of association among male migrants in southern Africa is to be explained, according to Vail, in terms of its promise for enabling control not only over land, but also over women (1989:14). And long periods of male absence from home may even, paradoxically, augment the strength of a primordialist-sounding ethnic ideology (Gay 1980:52). This perspective, like the one previously discussed, tacitly excludes women as the possible initiators of ethnic ideologies, or as the members of migrant groupings. If women are the objects of control through these ideologies or by these associations, they are deemed unlikely also to be active subjects initiating or perpetuating them.

The invisibility of women as ethnic subjects can be seen, not only in the observations of those who analyze ethnicity, but also, in some cases, in the language of those who are active participants in it. The southern African Tswana proverb which asserts that "women have no tribe" (Vail 1989:15) suggests that women's role in creating or endorsing ethnic identities may have gone as unnoticed within the communities who use such proverbs as it has by those who document and analyze them.

Cases have been recorded, of course, in which women are strongly aligned with the ways or customs of particular groups. But in a curious return to a primordialist position which has long been refined or refuted - or which perhaps never really existed (Banks 1996:185) - in more male-oriented studies of ethnicity, writers analysing the behaviour of such women have seen them as acting in defence of a threatened way of life and as resisting "the destruction of their culture" (Etienne and Leacock 1980:21). In situations where rural women wear traditional or customary clothing while their menfolk put on western clothes, for example, this appeared to reflect the fact that women, not yet incorporated into the work force, have remained within the domestic sphere and have thus been free to retain their own ways (Comaroff 1985:224-5; Schapera 1949). Indeed, women are frequently portrayed as the repositories of custom: as custodians of identity on behalf of, or in the face of its loss by, men (Murray 1981:150, Hendrikson 1994). Thus, while the claiming of an ethnic identity by men has been acknowledged to be a dual process in which essentialist or primordialist labels are yoked together with situationally-defined goals and priorities which change in relation to the contemporary context (Vail 1989:6; Lentz 1994:59, 87; Sharp 1996), the claiming of a similar identity by women appeared, where it was discussed at all, as a wholehearted, unmediated and unreflexive affiliation to a culture of origin.[3]

Seen in very general terms, the observations above embody a paradox. On the one hand, if "a woman has no tribe" as the Tswana proverb states, this indicates that her interventions in the process of identity-making have gone unnoticed as much within local communities as in the pages of scholarship. The proverb thus draws attention to female subordination: a theme which is further substantiated if one looks at the case of inter-ethnic marriage. When a woman marries a man outside her own "group" she can acquire a new or an additional identity but her loyalties are thought to be mediated by her unwillingness completely to "sever relations to [her] parental kin" (Lentz 1994:84). It also highlights her role as rearer of children: under conditions of patriliny her natal identity should be effaced by her husband's identity when she bears and raises children and confers this assumed identity upon them.

On the other hand, it is women who truly have "a tribe", in that it is they who have remained within the domestic domain, who have conserved original customs, and who appear to be the bearers of real identity. In an inter-ethnic context, the implication that women are the "natural" bearers of ethnic or tribal status can be clearly seen where women out of wedlock bear children fathered by men from other groups, and where the children will - through descent as well as through upbringing - be assumed automatically to acquire the identity of the mother (see Wilmsen 1993).

The present paper explores some of the implications of this paradox in a discussion of migrant women from South Africa's Northern Province and their experience of sotho identity. It focuses on two aspects of this identity in particular. Both are expressed in the emotive terms of family and home which make them appear intrinsic or primordial in nature, but both emerge, on closer examination, as complex combinations of ascription and achievement. In a discussion of ethnicity's genesis in family relationships, I show that a woman's sotho identity is, on the one hand, intrinsic in that it is considered to be based on the ties of kinship which bind her to her natal family. But this identity is not, on the other hand, automatic, since it rests largely on the correct observance of the filial duties and obligations which are attendant upon a woman's full membership in such a family. In then considering the question of a common home, I demonstrate how a woman's sotho identity is said to be founded on the sharing of a single geographical place of origin or "home" (gae) with other women, to whom she refers and whom she addresses as "those of my home" (bagagešu), but show that this common territory is striven after rather than being automatically present.

Women and kiba

The women in question are from the far Northern Province (previously the northern Transvaal, part of which was designated as the apartheid homeland Lebowa). They have founded a series of migrant associations, starting alongside male associations but later developing partial or complete independence of these, and explicitly ethnic in focus since they centre on the performance of "sotho music" (mmino wa sesotho) - also referred to as "traditional music" (mmino wa setšo, lit. "music of origin") - and specifically of a genre called kiba (from the verb "to stamp").

The male form of the kiba genre, like equivalent performance genres originating in other regions (Coplan 1994; Clegg 1981), was firmly rooted in rural styles but has evolved during nearly a century of rural-urban migration. Its metal pipes (dinaka), end-blown in hocket style by each individual dancer to produce a series of dance-melodies in the characteristic northern Sotho six-note scale, are replacements for the reed-pipes of earlier years. Milk can and oildrum bases have taken the place of the earlier wooden ones in the ensemble of drums which are used to produce the regular patterns accompanying each group dance or to devise complex polyrhythms which match the solo dancers' energetic improvisations. The original dance attire of a beaded skirt-like loin-cloth (thetwana) has given way to a combination of white lounge shirts and boxer shorts worn together with the genuine Scottish kilts which dancers adopted after having seen them worn by Scottish regiments during the war.

Women's song and dance, although no less syncretic, has in contrast to the almost century-long development of its male version been acknowledged comparatively recently as part of the inclusive category of kiba. Only since the late 1970s have its rural roots been dislodged sufficiently to allow its transplanting as a fully-fledged migrant genre (James 1994). Women singers' clothing, flamboyantly colourful although uniform, consists of layers of cloths tied around the waist (dituku or mašela); the Victorian-style cotton smocks with copious gathers and elaborate embroidery (nyebelese or hempe) which were originally introduced by the missionaries but have since become a mark of a traditionalist rather than Christian orientation; heads adorned with baseball caps or swathed in headscarves dotted with gaudy costume jewelry; and beaded bands adorning waists, necks and arms. Women's kiba shares the same six-note scale and makes use of the same set of drums and drumming cadences as men's, and has an equivalent female song for each rhythm in the male repertoire, but remains distinct from its male equivalent in style of dancing and in opportunities for lyrical improvisation. Its dances, performed by women separately to and alternately with men's, are less energetic than men's although equally complex in rhythm. But what women lack in imaginativeness of rhythmic improvisation is made up for in

the possibilities for composing new lyrics, since the songs (dikoša) of the genre are sung rather than played on pipes. In contrast to the "submerged" themes referring to heroic battles and chiefly exploits in the 19th century which are understood to be attached to men's pipe-tunes, women's songs are heard and thus merit being recomposed and improvised upon in ways which comment upon more contemporary themes.

Although men's and women's migrant performance have since the 1970s been regarded by their protagonists as versions of the same genre, this definition obscures significant social discontinuities. Not only the initial impressions of a researcher-outsider like me, but also the ongoing perceptions of some members of kiba's regular township audiences in the Witwatersrand townships of Alexandra and Tembisa,[4] have been shaped by the claims of a performance group such as Maaparankwe (those of the royal leopard-skin clothing) to represent the home area of Sekhukhune. The area was the original seat of, and takes its name from, the 19th-century Pedi polity which formerly held sway in the Northern Province. The defeat of Pedi warriors by British troops in the late nineteenth century, the confining of many Pedi to the "native reserve" area named after their defeated chief Sekhukhune and his forebears, and a subsequent series of fiercely-resisted attempts by the colonial and later the apartheid state to interfere with governance and land use in the territory, made it a focus of and a symbol for popular resistance in the region (Delius 1989, 1990). Onlookers who are stirred today by the resonant praises (direto) of former chiefs which are shouted out before men's dances, or who observe in men's bricolage of cattlehorns-and-feather headdresses with Scottish kilts a combined reference to earlier Pedi warrior pride with the regimented militarism of later Pedi participation with the Allies in World War II, have no reason to suspect that the group's female partners represent a somewhat different area and social constituency.

In order to appreciate the significance of the contrast between these male performers and their female partners, it is necessary to understand something of the regional and socio-political setting. When, in accordance with apartheid policy, a homeland was created for all speakers of the northern Sotho language - known as seSotho sa leboa (seSotho of the north) but also, often, as sePedi due to the former political predominance of this group in the region - one of the major objectives was to create a single "northern Sotho" territory out of a series of previously disparate and geographically non-contiguous areas. Albeit stragglingly, the homeland was to combine within one territory the "native reserves"[5] not only of Sekhukhuneland, seat of the former Pedi paramountcy, but also of a series of smaller ruling families (dikgoro) which had held sway further north: Moletši, Matlala, Malebogo, and others (see map). The resulting administrative unit of Lebowa neither came close to enfolding all its intended citizens, since many of these lived

in towns and cities or stayed as labourers on white farms, nor excluded all those deemed ethnically or linguistically inappropriate, since there remained groups of people speaking other languages, or speaking several languages equally well, living adjacent to or in the midst of more mainstream seSotho-speaking communities. It also took no account of a local classificatory schema, dividing Sekhukhune in the south-east from the smaller northern reserves together comprising Leboa (the north), which had gradually been reinforced during the early years of labour migration through its use as a method of conceptual mapping and as a basis for competition between boxing or musical teams based in and representing the different areas (Delius 1989:588, 591; James 1993:51-9)

To place the performers of kiba within this regional schema: the male performers of a group like Maaparankwe are mostly traditionalists (baditshaba, lit. "those of the nation") from the Pedi heartland of Sekhukhune, who have been playing kiba since their childhood in the reserve and whose migrant trajectory has taken them and their distinctive pipe-dance from compounded mine labour through a series of less restrictive forms of employment and residence. Their female co-performers, in contrast, had been reared in a scatter of disparate places - some within but most outside the reserves - in the northern region of Leboa. Most had grown up in communities of bakriste (Christians) in which an adolescent musical culture of choir, concert and church songs was favoured. These women's initial explorations of kiba, some time after having arrived to work on the Witwatersrand, did not signify a straightforward continuity with past practice. For a very few it represented a revival of a pre-adolescent involvement in sotho culture, but most had seen such music performed only by their mothers or grandmothers or by the families of unrelated traditionalist neighbours (baditšhaba). In the ethnically diverse Northern Province, yet others had grown up speaking languages such as siNdebele or vhaVenda and performing styles of music more commonly associated with those languages.[6]

The contrast between Sekhukhune men and their female singing-partners from Leboa is further heightened by differences in marital status. While the male performers are all married, most with dependent wives and children living in the countryside who visit them occasionally although a very few have family members living with them in urban accommodation, their female partners are almost all single, divorced or widowed women who work as live-in domestic servants in Johannesburg suburbs to support their own children and/or members of their natal families based in the countryside.

The differing domestic circumstances of these particular male and female migrants are interwoven with their divergent regional origins and religious orientations. Men living in the

reserves, partly in the wake of a collapsed subsistence economy, had since early in the century been linked into ethnically-based monopolies within particular mines and service sectors (Delius 1989:582-3; Molepo 1984:28). Initiating a first trip to the Witwatersrand, for a young kiba player, was a step undertaken with support from relatives and/or members of his initiation regiment (mphato), as it had been for his father and grandfather before him.[7] Future female kiba players from Leboa, in contrast, had in many cases grown up while their families were rent or labour tenants on white- or black-owned farms outside of the reserve or homeland areas, living largely off the proceeds of agriculture or of farm labour. For these families, the belated move to one of the small northern reserves - undertaken as often for the sake of proximity to schools, shops and other features of civilization (tlhabologo) as because of apartheid's infamous forced removals - drew both male and female family members into their first-ever exposure to labour migration. The women who were to become singers of kiba departed for town in search of a job without ready made ethnic support groups.

It was only once arrived on the Witwatersrand, then, that Leboa women began to construct or become involved in broader social networks. While these were initially Christian and linked to associations of men from specific reserve areas in Leboa, women were later to form their own kiba groupings on the basis of the friendships they had made with other women from a more broadly-defined home area, as will be described below. There was a broad range of motivations behind women's relinquishing of the apparently supportive structures of Christianity, and in particular those of the specifically migrant-oriented Zionist Christian Church (ZCC), to which they had previously been linked. Among these was a dawning awareness of the pervasiveness of male control within churches such as the the ZCC and other established migrant associations and burial societies. This disaffection with church membership was expressed, in many cases, through the idiom of sudden possession by ancestral spirits who demanded women's abandoning of any form of Christian involvement and an immersion in traditional ways. Performing sotho traditional music (mmino wa sesotho/wa setšo), sometimes in tandem with new male partners who were carefully chosen, both satisfied the demands of these spirits and provided an opportunity to escape the restrictive male controls of conventional migrant associations.

Women's performance, then, while apparently harking back to a shared origin (setšo), spoke more of a commonality developed among friends in town than of a culture they had personally transported, intact, from the countryside.

Family ties

In laying claim to ethnic identity, common ties of kinship provide a powerful motif. Writers who strongly emphasise the situational quality of ethnic group membership tend to see it as one among a series of alternative and sometimes overlapping memberships which an individual might choose to invoke in different contexts (van Binsbergen 1994), of which family membership might be another. The idea that the various levels of membership might be thought to be intrinsically interconnected rather than optional and unrelated alternatives, and hence that entitlement to a particular ethnic identity might be thought to be linked to family membership and/or depend on kinship ideologies, is one which has not received adequate attention in South African writings despite its importance in Cohen's classic book (1969:209-9, passim).[8]

The case of women kiba singers from the Northern Province demonstrates that the construction of a broader sotho identity proceeds on the basis of positions assumed within narrower spheres, less inclusive in breadth and span. One of these, not to be explored in this paper, is the extended family which includes both living and deceased relatives and within which many kiba women, subsequent to their possession by ancestral spirits, have been acting as diviners and propitiators of the ancestors (James 1993:226-254). But most important for present purposes is the immediate natal family which each supports and in most cases heads. These kinship identities were not preordained, despite being expressed in the primordialist language of family and descent, but were rather achieved through the dutiful observance of filial duties.

Within these families, children had for the most part not been borne within conjugal relationships. Although some kiba singers had lived briefly as married women prior to widowhood or divorce and some even came to town to join their husbands, others had been single from the outset, and remained so. Unmarried and previously married alike were eventually united by their common experience as single women without male support: indeed it was this experience which drove most to become members of dance groups in the first place.

Rather than being based on the experience of dependent wifehood within their in-laws' families, then, migrant women's sotho identity was founded upon their experiences as wage-earners within the context of a natal family. Their having come to play this breadwinning role in the first place was due largely to their families' movement into the official homelands from their previous situations as farm tenants, inhabitants of African freehold land or dwellers in the small northern reserves. The disruptions of resettlement, whether resulting from apartheid policies or from families' wish to live closer to the benefits of shops, schools and churches, had heralded the relatively late entry to the migrant labour market of the fathers of many of these young women. Some were to prove unreliable as breadwinners, while others were simply to abscond altogether.

For those women who had lived in the white areas of South Africa in peasant farming or labour tenant families, their fathers' first move to town as workseekers, and their families' first dependence on a migrant wage, occurred only after moving into the homeland.[9] Flora Mohlomi's father began to work only after the family left its tenancy on a farm at GaKgopa and settled at Boyne in Molepo district in 1953. His first migrant contract then took him to Port Elizabeth, which made visits to his family costly and thus infrequent and his remittances correspondingly meagre. For the father of Salome and Andronica Machaba, the family's move from their rented acres at the African freehold farm of Makgodu, to GaKgare in the Malebogo district prompted his departure to look for work, but he never returned to his family:

> after he disappeared, that was the end of him. Even now we have forgotten what he looks like. Our children do not know him. They just hear us say "you have a grandfather".[10]

Some singers, especially those born late to older fathers, had already lost their fathers at the time of the move to the homelands. And others, like Helen Matjila, had fathers who even in the face of dire need by their families were unwilling to travel to towns to look for employment after leaving the farms.

In contrast to these farm-dwelling girls, their counterparts living in the small reserve areas of Leboa came from families which had relied on migrant wages for at least one generation. But this did not mean that male income providers were any more reliable. Mary Kapa, born in the Mašašane district of the homeland, lost her father to the city just as the Machabas did. The father of Phina Komape from the Moletši district died when she was a child, leaving her family unsupported. And in the case of Fransina Monyela, from Molepo, her father became ill and so was unable to earn a living. This absence of a paternal income was to play a definitive role in prompting women - reserve-dwellers and former farm-dwellers alike - to migrate and to view themselves as key figures in supporting first their mothers and siblings, and later their own and their siblings' children.

But the role of responsible daughter and breadwinner was not forced upon these women by the necessity of material support alone. There were cultural precedents in northern Transvaal communities which also played a part in creating women's twin sense of duty and preeminence within the family. Anthropologists documenting rural life among the Lovedu and Pedi have pointed to the central role played by a kgadi (eldest sister) in intercession with the ancestors

(Monnig 1967:56-7; EJ and JD Krige 1943:235): she became "the ritual head of a family, just as the eldest brother [became] the jural head" (Kuper 1982:60). Indeed, it was often in relation to her brother that a girl's or sister's importance in her natal family was phrased. The significance of her role viz-a-viz her brother was evident in the practice of the "cattle-linking" of these siblings through cross-cousin marriage. The bridewealth paid to a family for a girl's marriage would be used by one specific brother when he required cattle with which to pay bridewealth in turn, and this linking would give the sister particular ritual rights and duties over the house established by the brother through his marriage (ibid.)

Bonds between siblings, with these precedents in the northern Transvaal, have become increasingly important under present conditions of conjugal collapse in the rural areas of southern Africa more broadly. In situations where maritally-based households have become unviable, households have formed on the basis of the sibling bonds which are based more on willing reciprocity and less on formal obligations than conjugal ones (Niehaus 1994). Such broader reciprocity within the natal or agnatic family has ensured continued support for rurally-based women whose desertion by husbands or single status would otherwise have left them destitute, (Schapera and Roberts 1975:267; Murray 1981:110; Izzard 1985:268-9, 272-3). A sense of obligation originating between siblings often provides such women with monthly remittances from their brothers (James 1996), and may extend even to members of the descending generation, with a man in his role as malume (mother's brother) maintaining his sister's children and their children in turn. The wage-earning women of my study, however, although similarly bonded in co-operation and amity with male siblings, occupy a position of great structural similarity to them which sometimes results in competition, as will be seen below.

The families within which migrant women assume their key roles, like these roles themselves, cannot then be thought of as automatically provided by heredity even though they were formed around kinship. In them, individual agency mediated processes of social and geographical dislocation and aspects of customary practice. But how do these family relationships link to ethnic entitlement?

One way of phrasing the claim to be sotho is by referring to the conscientious performance of duties within the family. In affirming this identity, women invoke custom in two paradoxical ways: first to endorse the right of a sister, particularly an older sister, to exercise authority and undertake obligations within her family of birth as mentioned above: but second, almost contradictorily, to prove the fact that it is a brother's or son's responsibilities in the family which are paramount. It is in the domain where brotherly and sisterly roles overlap and have begun to

be seen as competing that what constitutes "proper sotho behaviour" is most fiercely contested.

"In sotho, the oldest child should support the younger ones" was Helen Matjila's explanation of her entry into migratory wage labour as a domestic servant. As a wage-earning *daughter*, she legitimates her role by invoking an oldest *son*'s obligation to act as custodian of family assets such as cattle, holding them in trust for his younger siblings (Monnig 1967:336-7; James 1988:39-40). The gender switch which her statement embodies is justified in the following terms: it is better for an older daughter than a son to assume these responsibilities, since her becoming a parent will bring her close to her parental family rather than distancing her from it as in the case of a son. A son who has children in a stable marital relationship will be presumed to work in order to send money home to his specific nuclear household. A wage-earning daughter who has children - whether born outside of a marital relationship or within a short-lasting one - will, as has been well-documented by other writers, leave them in the care of her mother with whom she will establish a system of mutual dependence with benefits for both parties (Coplan 1994:166; Izzard 1985:273-5; Preston-Whyte 1978:62-9). This reciprocity, both prompted by and further enabling intergenerational family continuity, ensures that her wage-earning capacities are not lost to her relatives. The discourse through which sotho identity is claimed here endorses the substitution of a daughter for a son while retaining notions of duty and proper behaviour intact.

A married brother may of course aid his sister in the burden of maintaining his natal family, particularly if he views his own role in terms of another sotho injunction: that a youngest son should look after his parents in exchange for taking up residence at their home (James 1988). The younger brother of Helen Matjila, for example, lessened the load she bore as sole breadwinner when he began work and undertook partial support for his parental family in addition to providing for his wife and children. From the point of view of a brother like this, his commitment to meeting the needs of wife and children above that of mother, sister, and sister's children may be expressed through a redefinition and a narrowing of the proper duties of a kgaetsedi (brother) and a malume (mother's brother):

> let's say [your sister] is old enough but not married, and on top of this she has got some children. You on the other hand have got some children and a wife, and in this situation you won't be able to manage both - your sister and her children together with your wife and your own children. Another thing is that my sister's child is not that much connected to me.[11]

The sloughing off of responsibilities by brothers/sons for their sisters, sisters' children, and parents, like the assuming of these responsibilities by sisters/daughters in their place, are much contested. Both processes involve a change in roles formerly separated along gender lines, but are nonetheless justified by claims to be abiding by sotho custom.

It was a combination of the prescriptions of custom and the disruptive experience of relocation which lay behind these daughters' positioning of themselves as breadwinners and key providers of support within the natal family. Although the wellsprings of this redefinition of "family" were in the countryside, it was to have its realisation in the experience of migratory labour, in an urban setting. It was in town that new ideas of "home" developed.

Bagagešu/Those of my home

> Home is where this music is sung ... we don't want to forget the tradition of our home people (setšo ga gagešu).
>
> Fransina Monyela

A common rural "home" has been observed to serve as a basis for urban-based groupings of "home-boys" or "home people" in much of the anthropological literature on migrant associations in Africa mentioned earlier, where it implied a fixity rather than a flexibility of the region on which such an association is based. Despite Little's remark that "the basis of common origin is often more imaginary than real" (1967:27), much of this literature has tended to take for granted the existence of a clearly-defined rural home or place of origin, which in turn provided a clear-cut basis for membership. But if the construction of home-boy networks is viewed as a strategy rather than as an automatic process, then "home" begins to appear as a flexible notion which allows migrant workers constantly "to reposition themselves in ways suited to the actual situation" (Erlmann 1992:608). The conceptualisation of "home" by northern Transvaal migrant women has involved creative representation by individual agents and many subtle shifts in meaning and emphasis.

For each of the women who joined an urban-based dance group, the idea of "home" (gae) and its accompanying "those of my home" (bagagešu) was conceived of in narrow terms during the first few years of working in town, and later expanded to accommodate a broader, more flexible and more situationally-invoked concept.[12] Some clues as to how this process occurred can be found in group members' retrospective reflections on the individual friendships which were cemented in the founding of singing groups, or which later brought them into such groups.

Home, in its initial and limited aspect, began with the narrow range of acquaintances, mostly from the same immediate home area and mostly male, to which each woman was introduced by the male kinsman or kinsmen who acted as her initial protectors when she arrived on the Witwatersrand to look for work (James 1993:81-4). Each of these small groupings of "home people" was conceptualised as representing one of the small reserve areas in the Leboa area north of Pietersburg - Moletši, Matlala, Malebogo, and others. As the woman established individual contacts with other women met in town, the criterion of a shared language became a crucial one in giving the idea of home a broader catchment area. One kiba singer pointed out that any chance acquaintance would qualify as mogagešu (a home person) if this person spoke northern Sotho.[13] For women whose sojourn on the Reef had been too short and too isolated to allow the learning of other languages, merely overhearing another woman speaking northern Sotho was sufficient to establish a sense of commonality. It was through Flora Mohlomi's and Grace Shokane's chance meeting in a shop, and discovery that they spoke a mutually intelligible language, that Flora was later introduced to the women's kiba to which Grace had belonged for some years.[14]

Although language provided both the means for making such encounters and an image of commonality in terms of which these could be explained, there were also other considerations which made home people, broadly-defined, more important than other casual acquaintances. As Julia Lelahana said, it would be in adversity, especially, that bagagešu could help her. If she became ill, for example, bagagešu would be more likely than any other person to ensure that she was taken back home. A similar need, to take the dead back home for a proper burial, had formed the basis of many of the northern Transvaal male migrant associations which were later joined by women (Delius 1989:589-9; James 1993:83). But Julia's statement indicates a later development in which groups of women, without mediation through men, began to commit themselves to the repatriation of ailing friends. They also began to involve themselves in the provision to their fellows of the kinds of practical and financial assistance well-documented in studies of migrant associations elsewhere: by using informal contacts to get jobs for friends with better pay and conditions of service, and by founding a range of rotating credit savings clubs (mehodišano: lit. "those which cause each other to save").

Sanctioned by these more broadly-defined notions of compatibility and shared rural base, women established the friendships which were to become the basis of kiba, or which were to introduce later-joining members to the group. But it was once these women had been thus attracted to the activities of kiba that their home-based identities, through the idiom of musical style, became

most encompassing.

The language of northern Sotho, despite regional variations, had provided a template for the modelling of relationships between people from diverse areas. This was so even for those who had not spoken it at home in childhood and whose knowledge of it had been restricted to occasional contacts with neighbours. But regional variations in rural female genres of dancing were seen as more pronounced, and were initially more divisive. These were not so much at issue for the majority of members who since early adolescence had eschewed rural sotho music in favour of church-oriented genres, and who had begun to perform "traditional music" only after arriving in town. But they were important for the few migrant women who had already been active performers of such music in the rural context. When Julia Lelahana joined women's kiba, she found only a few women who danced in the style of her home area, Moletši. It was these and no other women whom, at that stage, she characterised as bagagešu. Affronted by what she saw as the others' inability to dance well, she began to try to teach them her own regional style, but they asked her to wait, saying, "we will build each other". The ensuing process of reciprocal learning moulded the definitive way of performing which people nowadays have come to associate with the women of the kiba group Maaparankwe.[15]

The creation of a new home base transcending the boundaries of smaller regions transformed these women from strangers into bagagešu. This involved some change in the actual lyrics of songs, particularly in their references to the features of particular home areas, as some examples in the next section will demonstrate. But more important than the altering of explicit references to geographical landmarks were adjustments in performance, and the simultaneous broadening and standardising of music and dance style. Through this process, a diversity of styles, known in their rural contexts by a range of names - koša ya dikhuru (kneeling song), makgakgasa,[16] or collectively mmino wa sesotho (sotho music) - came to be subsumed within the broader overall category of mmino wa setšo (traditional music).

This process of stylistic homogenization has resulted, in some contexts, in an implied home even more encompassing than that which incorporates the diverse actual homes of a group's members. A complex interaction between urban and rural versions of the style has been involved. Fierce competition between groups in an urban context, and imitation by one group of features seen as excellent in another, has resulted in a highly-polished and somewhat homogenous urban style, for both men and women. This has in turn been transmitted to the countryside; either when a group plays at a member's rural home for a life-cycle ritual, or when it is hired to play by people from another - often very far-flung - village. The resulting sense of acquaintance with a broader

region is based not only on a pattern of frequent and frequently reciprocated visits by performers from one local area to audiences in a variety of others. It is also forged through the blurring of specific area-based sub-styles to form a broader and more widely-accessible genre.[17]

Home: splits and realignments

It was not only the initial formation of women's kiba groups and the broadening of their style of singing which involved the ongoing re-elaboration of a common home base. Their fissions from and fusions with other groups also entailed a redefinition of distinct and/or unifying geographical origins. While this process of realignment reflected the making and breaking of individual friendships between women, it was also a measure of female performers' shifting dependence on their male counterparts. Splits between men's and women's groups embodied conflict over the deployment of performance resources - instruments, audience, style of singing, payments for public appearances - and often led women singers to terminate these partnerships, later to enter into new ones on terms of their own choosing. Although the representing of a home area through urban performance certainly entailed some changes of name and of symbolic repertoire for men (James 1993:58-9), for women the rearrangements of group membership and the continual reconceptualisation of home were more fundamental. It was through these processes that groups of female migrant performers from a scatter of areas in Leboa ended up in partnership with groups of men representing its dichotomously opposed area Sekhukhune.

Ditšhweu tša Malebogo (the bright ones of Malebogo) was a group whose members decided to separate from their original male partners and from some women newly associated with these partners and thereafter to stay unaligned. They had first performed as female members of the Alexandra township-based men's group representing Matlala district, but had left after a dispute concerning the use of drums. Their existence as an independent group was made possible on a practical level by the women's acquisition of their own drums and of a separate storage space for these,[18] and by the fact that supporters and audiences were willing to commission and to support performances despite the lack of male partners. But the division was characterised as one between people of incompatible home areas and customs:

> "Matlala men chased us away. They said we are many and they don't know where some of us come from. They wanted only women from Matlala".

Another member accounted for the split in terms of style of dress:

> "The people from Matlala don't dress like us. We did not agree about the manner we dress".

A further comment similarly stressed the importance of differences in culture of origin:

"we realised that Matlala women were discriminating against us because they did not want us to sing our own songs, so we decided to split".[19]

The extensive reference to different cultures of origin in this description of group fission displays a notion of home more imaginatively invoked than based on geographical affiliations: the group which separated from men's Matlala to become Ditšhweu tša Malebogo in fact retained two women from Matlala area, left behind in the Matlala group one from Malebogo who was "troublesome", and eventually incorporated a range of others from homes far beyond the borders of the Malebogo reserve which had given the new group its name. Although two or three of the group's founder members were from villages in Malebogo, the definition of Malebogo as home base proved wide enough to include people from other reserves, and of Tswana, Venda, and Ndebele origins.

Phina Komape is one of the group's siNdebele speakers. Her rural home is in the Mašašane area, in the siNdebele-speaking section of Komape village. But her version of the song Sekhekhe sa go nwa bjalwa (a drunkard who drinks beer) refers in its concluding verses to a more broadly-defined northern area:

Sekhekhe sa go nwa bjalwa	A drunkard who drinks beer
Ke a le bona le sobetse	I see it is sunset
Ba ipshina ka go re sega	They enjoy laughing at us
Le a re bona re tagilwe	You see us, we are drunk
Legodimong re tla no ya	Heaven is where we will go
Legodimong go bo kgaule.	Heaven, the place of forgiveness of sins.
Mathiri ge la kgobokgane le sang go nwa bjalwa	Young women, when you are together, stop drinking beer.
Nkwenya ya lena ke mang?	Who is your leader?
Nkwenya ke Maleaka.	Your leader is Maleaka.
Le a re bona re tagilwe	You see us, we are drunk
Felegetšang Mmanotwane sa go nwa bjalwa	Go with Mmanotwane, the one who drinks beer
Ke bana ba Mamotswiri	They are Mamotswiri's children
Kgane ga go na Masogana a go nwa bjalwa?	Are there no young men who drink beer?
Dirang ka pela le tloge	Hurry up so that we may leave
Se apa bošula o etla	Bad people are coming
Le a le bona le sobetše	You see the sun has set
Banna ba bangwe ba a betha ge se nwele bjalwa	Some men beat their drunkard wives
Dirang ka pela le tloge	Hurry up so that we may leave
Blouberg Makgameng	Blouberg Makgameng

Ditšhweu tša Malebogo	The bright ones of Malebogo
Lebelela Rita o bone.	Look and see Rita Mountain.

She has personalised the lyrics of an existing song by adding references to her group and its leader, and to the area to which it claims allegiance. She weaves together allusions to a variety of geographically disparate landmarks: the Blouberg, the range of mountains within the Malebogo area from which the group takes its name, and Rita, the large mountain north-east of Pietersburg which serves as a symbol of the whole of leboa.[20]

Another such member is Joanna Maleaka, the group leader referred to in the song above, who comes from the Kgothama area in the former homeland of Venda. While she subscribes to the idea that she and the other members of her group are all bound together by their sharing of a common rural base, the praises she recites express both her admiration of Malebogo and its clear contrasts with her own "real" home in the former Venda homeland.

Re bina koša kua Alex	We dance in Alex(andra)
Kosa re a bitša Ditshweu tša Malebogo	Our group is called the bright ones of Malebogo
Malebogo ga se bodulo	Malebogo is not a place for settling
Go dula dikokoto	It is a place for heroes
Go dula banna ba mosadi	It is a place for the children of a woman
Iiuu! Ke motswetla, ga ke iphihle	Iiuu! I am a Venda, I don't despise myself
Ke tswa GaRamapulana	I am from Ga-Ramapulana
Go na kua ga bo Mphephu.	At Mphephu's place.

The "place for settling" refers to her own birthplace, in a recently-settled area where the implementation of the apartheid government's plans for agricultural improvement led to massive relocations of people into dilaineng (lit. "the place of lines"; the grid plan imposed by government officials). She contrasts it with Malebogo, a longer-inhabited reserve area in which people's antipathy to this planning led to its abandonment by the authorities. The lyrics serve both to highlight the heroism of Malebogo, the chosen rural reference-point of the group to which she belongs, and to announce her dogged defence of her own birthplace.[21]

Other women's groups, after experiencing similar rifts, elected to become partners with men on terms of their own choosing. The women who now sing as part of Maaparankwe are an example. They, too, began their careers as urban singers in alliance with the men of Matlala. Their displeasure with the unreliability of, and especially with the sexual demands made by,

these men led them to their departure from this group and their spending some time unattached to male performers. But their sense of physical vulnerability, especially when travelling to the countryside or to unknown urban locations to perform, drove them to seek out a partnership with the men's group SK Alex, composed of male migrants from Sekhukhuneland resident in Alexandra township. They subsequently ended this alliance in favour of a new one with the Tembisa-based Maaparankwe, in the interests of more harmonious relationships, greater professionalism and higher standards of performance. Aligned with SK Alex and later with Maaparankwe, these women's identity became that of representatives of the Sekhukhune region.

Although women see these two consecutive partnerships as having given them certain benefits as performers - protection in the townships, jointly organized transport, a performance space, an audience - their involvement with male kiba dancers is more than merely a partnership instrumentally entered-into. Their independence and autonomy as a group of female performers does not detract from their deep involvement, together with Maaparankwe men, in the ongoing recreation of a home and of a heroic past which is inextricably linked with it. This has been accomplished both through performance itself, and through the creative manipulation of the social contexts in which performance takes place.

A demonstration of the performance aspect is women's reinterpretation of the militaristic monti dance through its female version basadi ba baeng (visiting women), in which they interleave their own allusions to the competitiveness of contemporary dance contests with men's more overt references to heroic exploits in the nineteenth century and in the two World Wars. Women's transformation of monti from a triumphal military dance into a statement of fierce but respectful rivalry is signalled by the raised right hands in which men once bore weapons but in which women now carry flashlights or bottles of soft drink. The message of the women's dance, while drawing potency from the more unadultered militarism of the men's version, combines the imperative to conquer a host group through competitive dance with polite acceptance of its hospitality, in the context of the perpetual urban-rural visiting which characterises these migrants' world (James 1994).

It is not only in performance but also through the creative manoeuvring of performance contexts that the group constitutes itself as a sotho moral community which transcends gender divisions to enfold both men and women. The group's activities in this respect centre on three main themes: a zealous maintaining of good relationships between group members both within and across gender boundaries (this often involves ceremonies of reparation when a breach occurs), a strict code of reciprocity and a prohibition on profit in all the group's financial affairs, and an

insistence on equal treatment for men and women. Somewhat like setswana in the Comaroff's account (1987), sesotho becomes identified with humane values and in the process distinguished from the alienated world of city-dwellers. By enshrining an ethos of male/female equality at the centre of a moral code governing interpersonal relations, the group distances its members from the way men and women are thought of as usually relating in a present-day urban context, and hence places good - sotho - male-female relations firmly in the setting of home and of the past with which it is linked (James 1997). It is through these processes that the powerful rallying cry of the Pedi chiefship and its symbols have come to have meaning, not only for the men born in the area where this chiefship once held sway, but also for the women born far beyond it.

Ethnic women, ethnic men

Playing dutiful roles within a family and belonging to a common home are two of the means by which kiba women lay claim to membership of a broader sotho collectivity, but not in a way which speaks of primordial attachment to a "tribe". Rather than responding submissively to the ethnic rallying-cries of men or trying to escape from these, kiba women have, in a sense, tried to seize the ethnic high ground for themselves. By adopting and attempting to prove their equal or even superior entitlement to the idiom of sotho morality, they have claimed a status as autonomous family providers and "home people" within the predominantly male migrant world. But does the fact that they continue to model their family roles, dance groupings, and performance genre on those of migrant men suggest that there remains a degree of dependence in this ethnic project? Or would it be correct to say of their male-like behaviour, as Coplan has said of similar role-switching among migrant women performers from Lesotho, that "the contradiction of women appropriating the forms and usurping the expressive privileges of men is resolved ... by the Sesotho metonymical principle whereby individuals performing unaccustomed roles can be reclassified with the category of persons who ordinarily perform them (1994:179)"?

While it should be clear from my earlier account that migrant women's kiba performance is not completely interchangeable with the male genre, it has certainly achieved a status equal to it. It is held in far higher regard than its rural female equivalent (known more commonly by the same name as the former apartheid homeland of Lebowa (James 1996)). For the rurally-resident female performers of this genre, a commitment to being sotho and singing sotho music represents values which, although esteemed in some ways, are imprinted with a second-class ethnic status. Rural female sotho identity is the locus of family continuity, of birth-given identity, and associated values (all the positive senses in which women appear unreflexively to have "a tribe"), but the segregation from the male world both of these women's domestic sphere of

activity and of their performances suggests that the version of sotho which they express is marginal, and hierarchically inferior, to the male migrant sotho identity (which after all evolved, in part, precisely to control women as Vail suggests (1989:14-15; see also Moore 1994)).

Migrant women who sing kiba, in contrast, have used the legitimating precincts of male sotho identity to furnish a space within which they may publically comment within, and be heard by, a broader migrant and urban constituency. In calling themselves sotho, they have transcended the sphere of custom and domesticity and expressed their aspirations towards autonomy. In their lives as singers and workers they have combined a matronly respectability with a strident disregard for the strictures which normally curb female behaviour, and used the stanzas of traditional song to express their commitment to the advances and future promises of tlhabologo (civilization). Migrant women kiba performers, rather than metonymically or in reality switching gender roles and genres, have selected and interwoven elements from the shifting terrains of sotho man- and woman-hood to produce the basis for new identities.

But what does this account of a group of women from South Africa's Northern Province have to say about broader issues of ethnicity and nationalism: and specifically about the way these are playing out within the "rainbow nation" which politicians in South Africa's new government are attempting to bring into being? A vivid way of answering this question is to recall the moment when, on an afternoon in April 1994, kiba dancing was suddenly brought to the attention of millions of South Africans. Maaparankwe was one of a variety of musical acts showcased at the inauguration of President Mandela which was televised to the nation in a day-long broadcast. Kiba dancers had frequently been paid to perform at important occasions of state in the apartheid government's Lebowa homeland, and hence to represent this smaller (and ideologically tainted) sub-national unit. Kiba dancers had, just as often, been called into service by groupings such as the Federation of South African Women which were linked to the liberation movement. But the Mandela inauguration was the first occasion at which kiba was used to symbolise, not dichotomously opposed political adversaries, but a broader and arguably more truly "national" unit which transcended these oppositions.

Mandela, his government, and the ruling ANC (African National Congress) have not been noted for a frequent use of ethnic symbolism: a fact which some writers in the South African press have found puzzling, given the very successful, and visually dramatic, deployment of symbols such as royal leopardskin clothing, spears and fighting-sticks by the party's chief rival in Natal, the predominantly Zulu IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party). To make use of such symbols, however, would have been counter to the party's and the new government's professed ideology. This

favours the construction of a sense of shared nationhood on the basis of shared and universal civil/human rights over the options which some other countries have followed, such as identifying the nation with a single majority ethnic group or assembling a nation from a combination of widely diverse ethnic particularities (Eriksen 1994:550; Williams 1989:431-6; Simpson 1994:473-4). The new government's wariness of endorsing ethnic identities is perhaps understandable, given the way these were so rigidly enforced as a cornerstone of its predecessor's apartheid policies. Commentators have pointed out, nonetheless, that these ethnic identities possess or have acquired an existence independent of official policy, and have warned that they cannot simply be disregarded (Dubow 1994; Simpson 1994:468). It may have been in recognition of this fact that Maaparankwe was asked to play, alongside a great diversity of performance groups representing other "ethnic traditions", at the presidential inauguration. Giving airtime to a variety of musics was a way to mediate the tension between a nation-building project which makes a collage out of its constituent parts and one which attempts to efface these altogether.

But those who warn of - or heed - the dangers of building a nation without taking cognisance of ethnic identities are in danger of making a different mistake. They are ignoring a key reality which the case of the kiba women has illustrated: that ethnic identities are not preordained and that once in existence they are not immutable. Indeed, if these identities are forged through processes of rapid social change and the associated competition for resources, as the Copperbelt and broader African studies showed and as South African writers belatedly recognized, then one of the contexts in which they can be expected to continue changing, and even completely to transmute, is that of profound political change.[22]

To recognise the metamorphic quality of ethnic identities is to acknowledge that the value of being sotho may either intensify or deflate for migrant women as time goes by. Future continuities or changes in livelihood and location might favour either the sharpening or the falling-off of ethnic attachment.[23] The fact that their achievement of a status as respectable and autonomous wage-earners occurred under the rubric of sotho traditionalism runs counter to a popularly-held feminist position that only the elimination of customary practices and institutions is likely to assure gender equality of women with men within South Africa's new dispensation (Walker 1994). But if migrant women remain scattered in an urban context and vulnerable to the extreme vagaries of wage and residence which characterise the domestic employment of African women, their ethnic attachment may prove ever more important in guaranteeing group support, friendship, recreational pleasure and secure identity as well as providing the status - and safety in the dangerous township world - of connection to a male grouping. If though, as some recent

accounts suggest, migrant women's employability is likely to prove greater than men's under conditions of economic recession (Coplan 1995), and if they assure themselves and their dependents a better future through their capacity, while living in backyard suburban accommodation, to educate their children in formerly white schools which continue to offer an education markedly superior to that of schools in the former homelands, then the linking of their identity to that of sotho men may eventually prove redundant and fall away.

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1.. The 1992 conference Ethnicity, Society and Conflict held at University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and the 1993 conference on Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. Some of the proceeds of the latter were published in the Journal of Southern African Studies 20(3), 1994, in African Studies 53(2), and in P McAllister and E Wilmsen (eds) The politics of difference: ethnic promises in a world of power, Chicago, Chicago University Press.

2.. See for example Mitchell 1956, Harries-Jones 1969; Little 1967; Parkin 1969; Southall 1975a & b; Cohen 1969.

3.. An interesting South African exception is the case of a very clearly constructed ethnic identity, by Afrikaans-speaking working-class women (Butler 1994).

4.. The Witwatersrand (Afrikaans: ridge of white waters), recently renamed Gauteng (Sotho: place of gold) is one of the main gold-mining areas of South Africa, and stretches from Springs in the West, through Johannesburg, to Randfontein in the West.

5.. These native reserves were designated, by a series of Government Commissions from the late 19th century onwards, for occupation by Africans and especially by African chiefs and their subjects. They later became the territorial basis for ethnic homelands - such as Lebowa for the northern Sotho - which formed the cornerstone of the apartheid policy. Some of them were granted so-called independence during the 1970s: the "chief minister" of Lebowa refused independence and stated his countrymen's preference to remain a part of broader South Africa.

6.. SeTswana, seSotho sa borwa (southern Sotho) and seSotho sa leboa or sePedi (northern Sotho) are all cognate languages with common socio-linguistic roots, belonging to the linguistic family termed Sotho. The speakers of vhaVenda have close relationships to the northern Sotho, although conquest by a Shona-related people from north of the Limpopo makes matters linguistically more complex. The speakers of siNdebele, belonging to the Nguni linguistic family, moved from the east coast to settle in the areas now called Mpumalanga and the Northern Province in the late seventeenth century, well before the era of warfare and migration sometimes called the difaqane. For fuller information on the socio-linguistic relationships between the speakers of these various groups, see Krige (1937), van Warmelo (1952, 1974), Wilson (1982).

7.. Lucas Sefoka, recorded discussion with Deborah James (hereafter DJ) and Malete Thomas Nkadimeng (hereafter MTN), Johannesburg, 2/5/1990; Jan Seašane, recorded discussion with MTN, Tembisa, 24/3/91.

8.. But see Lentz: "ethnic ideologies invoke shared descent that is believed to result in common, deeply-rooted psychological and cultural characteristics. They liken new social networks beyond kinship to consanguinity, and thus construe them as primordial and morally compelling" (1994:65).

9.. This relatively late involvement in labour migrancy confirms a claim made in the report of the Surplus People Project that relocation, especially from African freehold land or "black spots" to settlements without agricultural land, often led to higher levels of migrancy within the population, and that relocated people newly entering the labour market often had to accept employment in the least skilled and worst-paid jobs, since they had not been involved in the gradual building up of urban networks known to those longer acquainted with migrant labour (Surplus People Project, Vol. I, 1983:26-7). For an account of similar contrast between longstanding networks built up by heartland migrants and the lack of such networks among recently-resettled labour tenants, see James (1987:183), Sansom (1970:71-4, 97-8).

10.. Salome and Andronica Machaba, recorded discussion with Deborah James (DJ) and Malete Thomas Nkadimeng (MTN), Johannesburg, 13/5/90.

11.. Prince Seroka, recorded discussion with MTN, Tembisa, 21/4/91.

12.. See Guy and Thabane (1987) for a similarly flexible concept among migrant members of the Marashea (Russian gang) from Lesotho.

13.. Flora Mohlomi, discussion with DJ and Philip Mnisi (PM), Johannesburg, 11/8/91; Julia Lelahana, discussion with DJ and PM, Johannesburg, 13/10/91.

14.. Flora Mohlomi, discussion with DJ and PM, 11/8/91.

15.. Julia Lelahana, discussion with DJ and PM, Johannesburg, 13/10/91.

16.. The name for this style of singing is said to be based on the sound made by leg-rattles during a dance.

17.. See James (1993:22-4) for an account of the use of this music to symbolise the "national" unity of Lebowa.

18.. Until the violence of early 1991, drums were normally kept in the Alexandra men's hostel during the week, and brought out on Sundays for practices: Ditšhweu got permission to keep their drums in a nearby house.

19.. Joanna Maleaka, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, 24/3/90; Salome and Andronica Machaba, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, 13/5/90; Rosina Msina, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, 21/4/90: all in Johannesburg.

20.. Phina Komape, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, Johannesburg, 31/5/90.

21.. Joanna Maleaka, recorded discussion with DJ and MTN, Johannesburg, 24/3/90; and recorded discussion with DJ and PM, Johannesburg, 5/10/91.

22.. The accuracy of such a prediction is borne out by some recent research which shows that processes of local-level political mobilisation in a South African township in the early 1990s and the accompanying violent confrontations have, as well as simply drawing upon existing ethnic alignments, shifted these or produced new ones (Lucas 1995).

23.. It would be incorrect to see either of these alternatives as subject to conscious and strategic choice. Women's membership of a sotho collectivity, although not a matter of primordial attachment, was not pursued for the material or strategic gain which an instrumentalist interpretation might impute. It proceeded rather through a step-by-step adjustment to shifts in life circumstances (see Bentley 1987).