

*SEKGAPA*: a culture-based study of a musical tradition  
of BaPedi women of Mailula, Mmamabolo district,  
Limpopo Province-South Africa.

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THE DISSERTATION IS ACCOMPANIED BY THE DVD EXTRACTS.  
TITLE: THE WOMEN AND THE CHILDREN OF MAILULA AND SEGOPYE  
VILLAGES

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*BoPedi ho a foka!*

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to provide a culture-based study of BaPedi women's Sekgapa Music.

The Preface presents the topic, the research environment and methodology, a review of the existing literature, fieldwork 'protocol' and a synopsis of the first recording events.

Chapter 1 provides a historical background to the music, whose origins remain largely unaccounted for; and an account of the researcher's personal 'journey' which brought him to his research project.

Chapter 2 concerns *Sekgapa* as a distinctive genre of women's music, reflecting their roles in BaPedi rural economy, and in their individual households, and community. There are also accounts of *Sekgapa* performance contexts and their social functions.

Chapter 3 looks at some requirements of *Sekgapa* performance style (including dancing dress and delivery of *Direto* Praises), something of the concepts underlying the musical action, and correlations between certain dance style variants and BaPedi totemic associations.

Chapter 4 contains description of the sound instruments-the drums and their contribution to the music and playing methods and technique, (with some musical examples to illustrate the text), and the construction of sound-making accessories (hand-and ankle-rattles).

Chapter 5 provides descriptions of the basic musical components of *Sekgapa*-its form, structure and style, instrumental polyrhythm, vocal homophony (with musical examples and content and meanings of song-texts, using 10 songs as representative examples.)

Chapter 6 provides reasons for the restricted scope of the musical analysis, and the use and function of *Sekgapa* performances for social education, directed at the youth. The research draws attention to the serious gap in African music research in South Africa, and in BaPedi musical culture generally. Andrew Tracey's urgent plea (1991) for the 'patronage' of African music and musicians work is recalled, because it is no less urgent today than it was fourteen years ago. Tracey's stance on the matter of the unequal 'arts patronage situation' existing between popular urban African music, which continues to enjoy government and media support, and cultural music in which musicians are denied this, is endorsed by the researcher, who reiterates the urgent need for African music conservation, through research and sustainable performance practice, before it is too late, and musical genres "stagnate" and disappear altogether.

This dissertation is accompanied by DVD film footage containing extracts from *Sekgapa* performances recorded in field work. These extracts are presented in sequence and are numbered for easy reference to the text of the dissertation.

## PREFACE

Most of the data in this dissertation comes from my fieldwork, extended and informal conversations with *Sekgapa* members and the people who support them, and other members of the community who were willing to talk to me and provide their own recollections and observations on my subject. My methodology is based on what John Blacking has defined as “a dialectical approach”, that is to say, “thinking and talking about music” (Blacking, 1990: 230). I was also a participant-observer, a person who knows the music and is able to perform its parts competently, but precluded from actual performances of this essentially women’s music.

Publications on BaPedi music are-with one or two exceptions-concerned with its social history and social contexts, and the significance of the performances and the lyrics. Deborah James is probably the principal author in the field today, and has several publications-papers, articles-and also a book to her credit. The latter was published in 1999 and focuses on BaPedi migrant women’s performance and identity in South Africa. Central to this book are the genres of men’s and women’s music, called *Dinaka* and *Koša* respectively. There is no technical, musicological data in the book nor is there mention of *Sekgapa*, which is my special interest. But James’ work remains a principal resource for my study, because it is rich in cultural historical evidence, and also material on contemporary urban social and musical life which provide the contexts for the music under study in this dissertation.

Yvonne Huskisson’s Ph. D. dissertation (1958) presents some necessary and useful data about the musicology of BaPedi music, identifying different categories, concepts and instruments and their usage. This material forms the basis for an entry on North Sotho (BaPedi) music in volume 2 of the South African Music Encyclopaedia, published in 1982 (Malan ed). *Sekgapa* as a women’s performance style is not mentioned in this publication, but it provides important historical, comparative, and referential material for my study. Kirby’s extensive work on the indigenous instruments of South Africa is equally important, in that it also offers historical and contextual, and also technical musical data, which is necessary for any cultural study (Kirby, 1934, 1965). Although John Blacking wrote extensively on Venda musical culture, his ethnomusicology has also been basic to this study, particularly in the material on Venda and BaPedi musical interchanges which it offers, among other things (Blacking, 1990: 230). Mönnig’s book on BaPedi society also makes no mention of *Sekgapa*, being concerned principally with anthropological and sociological matters, but it offers some

insights into the role of women in BaPedi subsistence economy, and also BaPedi totemic associations (Mönnig, 1967). I read quite widely for the preparation of this study, but I have named in the bibliography only those publications from which I have directly drawn information. Mention must be made of an MA thesis (by Sello Galane (2003) which is concerned with BaPedi *Kiba* performance discourse, and which draws on data collected in an area near to my particular area of fieldwork. There is invaluable information on how BaPedi think, feel and talk about their music, and an association is made between my topic-*Sekgapa*-and post-girls' initiation music, although never actually explained. Galane's attempts to analyse the structure of *Kiba* are unsuccessful because of the absence of musical structures and the technical language to talk about them. He also omits the interpretations of certain metaphorical phrases in performance discourse, and this prompted me to attempt this in my own study.

What has been extremely useful to my documentation is a publication by Nokaneng, [1976] entitled *Segagešo*. I became familiar with this book—as an important text-book during my schooldays. This is a booklet which is full of BaPedi cultural knowledge, about the world around them as they view it, and aspects of social life and religion, and expected standards of behaviour inculcated by custom. It contains an abundance of the kind of data which, to my knowledge, is not to be found in any single book today, and it has proved to be invaluable for my research and its documentation.

*Sekgapa*, as a special category of BaPedi women's music, has previously not been a topic for academic enquiry and this dissertation is an attempt to redress this situation. It contains a certain amount of musicological evidence; which links the genre to men's *Dinaka* music, and it throws light on an important kind of music-making in rural BaPedi communities, which is a symbol and an expression of the vital role occupied by BaPedi women today in maintaining cultural life, economic viability, and social and moral standards in their communities.

I grew up in a rural environment and in a family with a great appreciation for many kinds of music, including the cultural music that is still important in the rural communities. When I became involved in researching *Sekgapa*, and was asked to explain my choice of topic, I was at first unable to reply. But after some thought I realized that the choice was the logical outcome of my many years of experiencing *Sekgapa*, mainly as an observing participant, and my family's years of social interaction with members of the institution, and their respect and support for these BaPedi women who are the moral and economic strength of their families and communities.

Although this study uses a select number of performances as direct material, my actual experiences of the music cut across the years of childhood to adulthood. So I approach the topic as a person who is 'of the people', long used to the sounds and activities of the music and its usual performance places. Studying one's 'own music' (as I am doing) can be problematic. In my case, my gender and educational background might have put me at a distance from my informants, who are *Baditšhaba* (non-Christians), but this never happened. My main informants are *Sekgapa* members, (and their supporters include Christians), and they all welcomed my request to study their institution and music, and view it historically and culturally from their recollections and viewpoints.

When I began collecting my data, I decided to approach informants with a special knowledge of *Sekgapa* as a learner/researcher, and to engage them in conversations about their experiences and understanding of the tradition as a BaPedi social and musical event. I was going to avoid structured interviews because I think that they are too formal, even intimidating, and do not produce a true and deep understanding. As it turned out, this was the right approach and it encouraged my informants to speak openly and to enjoy the whole experience. I also feel that understanding is much more important than explaining, when it comes to gathering data, because after all, my informants are giving me knowledge and so they are in a sense also assisting in the writing of this study.

To commence my research on the *Sekgapa* tradition I approached knowledgeable people from a specific village where the tradition is very active; these people are known to be specialists in their district about BaPedi cultural traditions and practices. This village is called Mailula, (ga - Mailula, loc.) and is in the district of Mmamabolo (ga-Mmamabolo loc.), and named after an earlier BaPedi ruler. The present ruler (whom we speak of as 'King') is King Robert Mmamabolo; who succeeded Queen Sophia Mmamabolo.

Every MoPedi King has *ntona*, who is a person close to the king and with the status and duties of a headman. This position is mostly filled by males, but Mrs Mmangwaka Mailula is one of the exceptions who were appointed *ntona*. She is a capable lady who oversees all the affairs of the village, which has 700 households. She is also a member of the *Sekgapa* group in her village of Mailula.

Other villages in Mmamabolo are: Tshware, Malahlela, Moropo, Potse, Kgatla, Masealama, Kgwara, Kgokong, Thune, Mongwaneng, Monywaneng, Komaneng, Thabakgone, Shilwane, Mamphaka, Badimong, Matshelapata and Moria (where the Zionist Christian Church is situated) and Mankweng (where the University of the North is situated). All these villages offer

allegiance to the current King Robert Mmamabolo. Kgatla, Mailula is the place in which I grew up, the place of my family home.

I began research there on the 13<sup>th</sup> (*lesome tharo*) *Dibatsela* (December) 2003. (See explanations and meanings of the month in SePedi refer to appendix on Page 82ff), when I attended a party to celebrate the retirement of my father's brother, Dean Mmamutele Mathews Thema. Among those present at this party was Bennett Bopape, a friend of mine from childhood. Since we had not seen each other for years, we spoke about what we were doing with our lives. When Bennett Bopape heard that I was preparing to research BaPedi music and specifically the *Sekgapa* tradition, he said he would like to introduce me to his mother, Mrs Pholena Bopape (*ngwana wa Ramohlola*, lit. the daughter of Ramohlola, a formal way of introducing a person), who is an acknowledged expert on BaPedi cultural customs.

She was also once a very active member of *Sekgapa* and although *letiel*a (elderly) she is still a regular performer, and contributes by moving around the group, and in a performance she contributes by *go hlab*a *mekgolokwane le go phepela* (ululating, dancing and whipping up excitement and exhilaration among the performers). *Mma* (mother) Bopape agreed to meet and talk with me on the 16<sup>th</sup> (*lesome tshela*) *Dibatsela* (December) 2003, and we fixed the meeting for the morning. At this retirement party I also met *Morena* (Mr) Matome Peter Modula, whom I knew to be a serious man, who has always been interested in music and plays some BaPedi instruments (*Dinaka* end-blown flutes, *lekope* jaw harp, and *dipela* auto-harp). On telling him about my proposed research project, and in getting to know about *mmino wa setšo*<sup>1</sup>, especially *Sekgapa*, he told me that his two wives know about the tradition, as did he himself. We agreed that I should go to his home on the 15<sup>th</sup> *lesome hlano* *Dibatsela* (December) 2003, where I would meet his wives, and discuss the research. His mention of his two wives having specific information on *Sekgapa* further stimulated my interest in the tradition, and some excitement at finally locating a potential source of valuable information and musical knowledge and expertise.

In the early afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup> (*lesome hlano*) *Dibatsela* (December). I went to *Morena* (Mr) Matome Peter Modula's house and was introduced to his two wives, *Mohumagadi* (Mrs) Elizabeth Mahlodi Modula, and *Mohumagadi* (Mrs) Helen Molobane Modula. They welcomed me warmly into their home, and after we were seated they immediately began to speak about *Sekgapa*, in which they both are regular participants. From the beginning they stressed the use of singing, dancing and drumming in the performance style, and also the wearing of special

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural music

dancing dress. I soon learned there and then that the Modula family is deeply rooted in BaPedi customs and cultural practices. The ritual slaughter of a goat for the ancestors is regularly observed, and the drums (*meropa*) which are essential for the women's dance songs, are actually kept in the Modula home. All of them are highly respected people and a music - loving family. In the course of our conversation the two women suggested they call together the *Sekgapa* members for a performance on the following day, which was a public holiday in South Africa, 16<sup>th</sup> (*lesome tshela*) *Dibatsela* (December), (family day), but permission from *ntona* was required to do so. She was approached by the two *Bahumagadi* (Mrs) Modula in the late afternoon on the same day of 15<sup>th</sup> (*lesome hlano*) *Dibatsela* (December), and gave her consent but said that the matter and her decision should be announced publicly, in the *kgorong*<sup>2</sup>.

Early on the following day 16<sup>th</sup> (*lesome tshela*) *Dibatsela* 2003, *Ka iri ya botshela mesong*<sup>3</sup>, *ntona* called the villages to the *kgorong* by blowing on *lepatata*, (kudu horn) and told people not be surprised if they heard sounds of music in their village. She then announced that the son of *Morena* (Mr) Matšhemo Henry Thema and *Mohumagadi* (Mrs) Sarah Mofati Thema, a research student, had asked to see and hear *Sekgapa* performances, and talk to all the people concerned, because he was researching and documenting BaPedi music; in this way, all the villagers knew that a musical event was going to take place that afternoon at the Modula home. Before I set out for the Modula home on the 16<sup>th</sup> (*lesome tshela*) *Dibatsela*, I made arrangements to buy a quantity of beer for the *Sekgapa* ladies, as a gesture of courtesy, and as a token of my appreciation for their willingness to participate in my research.

Traditional beer *bjala* has always been very important in BaPedi life. Their economic system was based on agriculture (hoe-culture), pastoralism and some hunting and gathering, with each family co-operating not only for their own benefit but also for the community. They used to grow a variety of crops (*dibjalo*), of which the most important was sorghum (*mabele*), followed by maize (*mahea, mafela*), and millet (*leotša. mabelebele*). The BaPedi economic subsistence system has undergone radical changes within the past seventy years or so but certain aspects of it have remained, and traditional beer is one of them. Although people can no longer produce their own sorghum crop, it is commercially available, and the beer brewed with it still has immense social, ritual, and ceremonial value for BaPedi. As a food, it was, and is the only one that was divided (*a roganya*) in the way that meat is, on certain ceremonial occasions.

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<sup>2</sup> An open air assembly for the villages and the venue for debates on problems besetting the community.

<sup>3</sup> 06h00, in the morning

It is essential for social gatherings, and wherever people get together to socialize, and especially to make music, beer is almost always available. Beer is also the principal medium for sacrifices and libations to the ancestors. Beer also was, and still is, important for a work party, (*letšema*), which was arranged for all kinds of communal work e.g. ploughing (done by men) and hoeing, and sowing crops (done by women). A quantity of beer was also offered as a tribute for a chief or king, and these customs persist today (Mönning 1967: 191). But nowadays people cannot grow enough sorghum to make large quantities of beer so they buy the cereal and then make the beer themselves, in their homes. The two *bahumagadi* (Mrs) Modula are acknowledged brewers of beer, which they also sell from home, as they do with cold drinks. Trade is especially busy on the weekends when people have leisure and gather to buy beer and meet and talk.

### **A SYNOPSIS OF SEKGAPA PERFORMANCE, DIBATSELA (DECEMBER) 2003**

When I arrived at the Modula home in the afternoon, I found a group of women sitting under a tree in the yard. They were drinking traditional beer, and also some cold drinks, which I had bought for them. They welcomed me and thanked me, and then gave me their individual names. Looking around at all the activity, I was in very high spirits because I was among such friendly and hospitable people, who were clearly as keen as I was about researching and documenting their musical traditions, and their excitement and enjoyment seemed to affect everyone present. I was especially struck by the colourful festive dress the women wore, which was largely a uniform: white T-shirts, with skirts made from lengths of cotton material, some of them light green in colour, others in blue or pink. After I had chatted a while with the women, the group's Principal Leader, (*malokwane 1*), directed them to go to *lapeng*<sup>4</sup> where the traditional *meropa* (pl. open conical drums) had been placed, exposed to the sun's rays so that they could be 'tuned'.

There were four drums: one large 'bass' drum called *kibo*, played by one woman in a standing position, and a slightly smaller 'alto' drum called *keedišo*, also played by one woman, who sits on a pinewood stool. The two smallest drums, called *dititimetšo* and yielding higher pitches, are played by a third woman, also seated on a stool. The *kibo* and *dititimetšo* players each use two lengths of hose pipe, some 70cm long, to play their drums. while the *keedišo* player uses her hands.

The women's performance was ushered in by *malokwane 1* who opened the proceedings with signals played on a side-blown trumpet, in this case a kudu horn, called *lepatata*. This is

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<sup>4</sup> the central courtyard in a BaPedi dwelling unit or home

literally a call to begin the music, and the dancers responded by forming a circle around the drummers, facing them and bending gracefully from the waist. At the same time the dancers, led by the elderly lady *letiela* who began to ululate, followed her, their sounds of joy adding momentum to their movement as they began moving in clockwise direction, taking their cue from their dance leader (*motšhediši*), who literally 'showed' them the steps and movements, and their variations in the course of the dance.

The song was called, *E rene koko* (Say! Knock-knock!). This dance song is in the nature of a 'warm - up' song, and is quite distinct from the formal dance-song routines of *Sekgapa*, which have special 'Entry' and 'Closing' songs for each routine.

At this stage of the proceedings Mr Modula, unable to restrain himself, got up and began to move along with the performers, upon which *letiela*, who had commenced the ululations, began to deliver praises, *sereto* (*pl direto*) interspersed with the joyful sounds. This particular *letiela* (*pl matiela*) is a veteran singer and dancer, who excelled in her younger days, and today in her senior years, is acknowledged and esteemed for her artistic abilities. This dance sequence concluded with some signals blown on the kudu horn, at which the dancers moved closer to the drummers and then bent forward from the waist, which marked the end of the song. It was at this stage in the proceeding that *malokwane 2* (male) made an appearance. His late arrival was due to urgent family matters which had needed his attention. He formally introduced himself as Samuel Monethu Ragophala. The next dance song that followed was the 'Entrance' song, which is also sung in several other social contexts-at weddings, birthday's celebrations and the unveiling of tombstones.

The song was entitled *E rene koko* (Say! knock-knock) and it functions as an 'opening' song in *Sekgapa* performances. (cf. Page, 61) The women again danced in a circle formation, but this time they moved anticlockwise. Their basic dance style comprised short-step movements of each foot in alternation, which prescribed a specific rhythm pattern that contrasted with the rhythm of the dancers' vocal patterns. As the women danced (*ba kgapha matsogo*) they moved their hand-held switches gracefully to and fro in a swaying fashion, which complimented the swaying and swinging of their skirts in the dance. In this particular dance, *motšhediši*<sup>5</sup> introduced several variant patterns in the dancing style, and so the other performers kept their eyes on her continually, to follow her cues. This dance-song concluded in the same fashion described for the previous song, and was then followed by another song introduced by the dance leader. This was entitled *Ke rena baeng* (We are visitors/guests). After this, a special

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<sup>5</sup> Dance leader

'closing song' was performed which musically and socially concluded this part of the *Sekgapa* event.

Any *Sekgapa* performance requires the performers to wear special dancing dress, and beads and dress ornaments, and to carry certain dancing 'props'. My informants on this subject of dance regalia were: *Mohumagadi* (Mrs) Mmaleho Makgoba, *ngwana* Ramollo (the daughter of Ramollo), and *Morena* (Mr) Matome Modula's two wives *Bahumagadi* (Mmes) Mahlodi Modula and Molobane Modula.

On *Hlakola* (April) 2, 2004, I went to the home of *Mohumagadi* (Mrs) Mmaleho Makgoba, in Segopye, Mehlakong village, Mmamabolo district. We had a long and informal conversation about *Sekgapa* dancing dress, and I was permitted to film the entire conversation. I was able to do this while continuing to participate at the same time, but in a way that did not annoy or intimidate my informant, who was so generous of her time on the subject. She was wearing the customary dancing dress and holding two emblems, being an axe and a short spear in each hand respectively. As we spoke, I would point to different articles I wanted her to talk about.

Throughout my years of research I have been a registered postgraduate student of the University of Cape Town, and, until this year I was also giving some practical tuition in African music performance. This meant that I carried out fieldwork mainly in the long summer vacations, although I returned to my home in Limpopo in the mid-year, and sometimes also in mid-term, when the circumstances demanded. Working from a distance was not as problematic as one might have expected it to be. My home language is SePedi, and I can sing all the *Sekgapa* songs I documented (and others I did not) and I can make, tune and play the drums and their specific rhythm patterns. Any troublesome aspect of local language was remedied by phones to various people ready and willing to assist me, and of course I had the resources offered me at the University as well. In this dissertation I have noted the rhythm patterns of the different BaPedi drums which are basic to *Sekgapa* performances. These rhythms are restricted in terms of numbers and pattern, and are also used in other genres of BaPedi music, including the men's *Dinaka* music. As far as the vocal melodies of *Sekgapa* are concerned, I did not provide transcriptions of these because (i) I am still sharpening my aural perception and transcribing abilities, and do not feel competent to tackle this aspect as yet; and more important, (2) I would require a greater sampling of song melodies than I have at present, before I can come to any conclusions about BaPedi patterns of melody and harmony. This would take me beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, since my informants consider me to be competent in performing their song melodies and drum rhythms, and also in the style

of praising (*direto*), I feel that I have sufficient material to make a useful and valid cultural music study. A final visit to my home area was recently made in mid-year when I was again able to cross-check previous data and also obtain clarification on certain points. During the past two years I have used some of the musical material in my own compositions and arrangements of BaPedi cultural music and modern settings of it, for the musical group which I have established, which goes by the name of Kgaladi Thema Ensemble. Although we focus much on BaPedi music, we do present other cultural music and neo-cultural forms as well. But given the substantial amount of analytical literature on Nguni music, I have to say that much needs to be done in the domain of our BaPedi music, which has been getting attention from music sociologists, as far as the music and social history and functions is concerned, but with little or no attention to the actual music itself. It is my hope that this dissertation contributes, even in a small way to this big gap in our African musicological studies

## CHAPTER ONE:

### BAPEDI AND THEIR CULTURAL MUSIC

BaPedi people of South Africa are part of the large Bantu language family categorized as the Northern Sotho, who have been grouped by anthropological classifiers into three main cultural divisions:

1. the Southern Sotho who are concentrated in and around the kingdom of Lesotho, (with a percentage of males being migrant workers in South Africa);
2. The Western Sotho or Tswana who reside in Botswana, and in the North-West Province and Northern Cape Province of South Africa;
3. The Northern Sotho, who inhabit various parts of Limpopo Province, and also part of Mpumalanga, and who speak a common language, Sepedi, with regional modifications. For example: *lehonu*, *naase*, and *bommotlha*<sup>6</sup>.

Because of their geographical location, the Southern Sotho are easily identified linguistically, whereas there has been much cross-cultural interaction between the Western and Northern Sotho, which has impacted on their languages. Linguistically BaPedi comprise twenty-five different dialect groups (Huskisson 1982: 372), but the official Sepedi used today and taught in schools has "been reduced to a single proto-language characterized by a specific class-system which divides the nouns into a number of classes" (Mönnig 1967: v). Since the publication of Mönnig's earlier survey of BaPedi in 1967, the Sepedi language has undergone some changes in orthography, and the one in present use is used in this study.

Anthropologist Hammond-Tooke (1981: xii) has commented on the "... 'Conservatism' of the North Sotho as compared with the Tswana" in his important and extensive study of Sotho/Kgaga cosmology. Within the Northern group the best known are BaPedi, the Koni and Phalaborwa, and the first two are the best documented anthropologically. In contrast to the Southern Sotho, BaPedi historical origins are obscure, although oral traditions recall events up to about 150 years ago, especially important population movements, wars and political events, and also the

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<sup>6</sup> All mean 'today' in Sepedi dialects.

names of BaPedi kings (rulers), which go back to between 15-17 generations (Mönnig 1967; Hammond-Tooke (ed) 1974; West 1979; Delius 1983). According to the published literature, BaPedi arrived in what is now Limpopo Province by at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century (West 1979: 137) and established an empire which contained also the Sotho who were already living there. This was consolidated by successive BaPedi rulers and grew as more Sotho people came under BaPedi. Thulare reigned at the height of BaPedi supremacy, and is still recalled as a great ruler. He died in 1824, and shortly thereafter in 1826, BaPedi power collapsed under the onslaught of Ndebele warriors led by uMzilikazi. The years that followed were bleak and with much suffering for BaPedi, but Thulare's eldest son, Sekwati, who survived the Ndebele attack and fled northwards, to live in exile for some years, returned to his former country-BoPedi-(as it was then known) and established his BaPedi rulership. He withstood Zulu and Swazi attacks and subsequently established diplomatic ties with Mpande, the Zulu king (West *ibid*). But conflict again emerged in 1837, with Afrikaner-Boer encroachment into BaPedi territory, but a treaty Sekwati signed with the colonizers held for a time until 1876, when war broke out. BaPedi defeat was eventually inflicted not by the Boers but by a British military force. This force also comprised Swazi warriors, and it routed Sekwati and his army.

After a term of imprisonment and exile, Sekwati returned and regained his BaPedi paramountcy despite opposition from Mampuru, son of a previous BaPedi regent who had opposed Sekwati's succession as BaPedi king.

Into this dispute came European government intervention, which was becoming stronger in the region, and which eventually proclaimed that there should be only one paramountcy for the whole area. Despite the effects of massive socio-economic and political changes, BaPedi retain a strong sense of pride in their cultural heritage, which is celebrated in many kinds of cultural functions and which remains a vital part of Bapedi national life and identity.

As John Blacking observed:

We cannot see a culture; we can only infer it from regularities in the form and distribution of things that we observe. Every musical performance is a patterned event in a system of social interaction whose meaning cannot be understood or analyzed from other events in the system (Blacking, 1990: 227).

*Sekgapa* has been a musical 'emblem' of BaPedi women for several generations. It is performed by married and unmarried women who are also transmitting this kind of

music to young children and adolescents. Musically *Sekgapa* has strong ties with other genres of BaPedi music, notably men's *Dinaka* flute ensemble music and dance, and the women's *Koša*, being "versions respectively of a broader musical style or genre known as *Kiba*..." (James 1999: 2). I approach my topic as MoPedi, a cultural 'insider', and also as a practitioner of many other styles of BaPedi music, which I have experienced for most of my life, and which I came to study with the collaboration and assistance of a particular *Sekgapa* group in Mailula, and other interested and associated persons. In certain respects I am also an 'outsider', since I am male, and my home is in Kgatla, another village in Mmamabolo district, located some five kilometres from Mailula. The Kgatla people are predominantly *majakane*<sup>7</sup> while those in Mailula are mostly *Baditšhaba*<sup>8</sup>. The *Sekgapa* group central to this study goes by the name *Dikwena* (Crocodiles) after the totemic group *kwena* with which several *Sekgapa* members claim association. Kgatla is a village which *Dikwena* members regard as 'over there', implying 'the place of Christians' (*majakane*), in contradistinction to their home village of Mailula, which they refer to as 'over here, being 'the place of non-Christians' (*Baditšhabeng*).

*Baditšhaba* and *majakane* are two categories which came into existence as a result of culture contact, missionization and education among BaPedi. This happened after the arrival of the first missionaries to live and work among BaPedi in 1861, under the auspices of the Berlin Missionary Society (which was founded in Germany in 1824), and had a Lutheran theology (Delius 1983: 108). The first missionaries were Alexander Merensky and Albert Nachtigal, who arrived in the (then) Transvaal to work among the Swazi (1983: 117), but subsequently changed location to work among BaPedi. They established a mission at Khatlolu ('place of the elephant'), followed by two more stations in 1863 and 1864, at Phatamatsane (under missionary C Endemann) and at "Ratua" (under missionary Merensky). But BaPedi - missionary encounter had already happened before this, in the early 1830s, when members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society came to evangelize in the region (1983: 109). However, the missionaries were not the only people who brought Christianity among BaPedi; there was also their contact with Afrikaner-Boer society. Then too, through the migrant labour system to the (then) Cape Colony and Natal, which developed in the 1850s and 1860s, BaPedi migrants became acquainted with Christian beliefs and

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<sup>7</sup> Christians

<sup>8</sup> Non - Christians

ritual, and some of them formally converted to Christianity (1983: 110). When they returned to their BaPedi rural homes, they began to evangelize among their own people, and this laid the foundation for the spread of Christianity among BaPedi. Missionary activity among our people is one of the best-documented in the nineteenth century (ibid) and it is a history of encounters with the indigenous people, which were continually fraught by hostilities and eruptions of violence. In fact, by 1866, the three early mission stations had been abandoned as a result of conflict, but in spite of resistance from BaPedi leaders, missionary work and schooling continued and spread, with the mission stations becoming a focus for BaPedi migrant communities which gradually increased in numbers.

My maternal great-grandfather, Jonnas Rauwasa Mogašwa by name, was a convert to Christianity. This came about when an African Lutheran evangelist came to Kgatla village to preach to the people. My grandfather was greatly drawn to his message, but he wanted to learn more about it from the people active at the Mission's headquarters. So he travelled via Cape Town to Kimberley in the Northern Cape, and there he undertook formal biblical studies, and converted to Christianity. After completing his studies he returned to his home in Mmamabolo district, where he began work as an evangelist of the Lutheran church. He was able to obtain a stretch of land in Kgatla in perpetuity, where he established a church. Several other members of the community also purchased land for themselves in the area, one of them being my paternal great-grandfather with the patronymic Thema. These properties remain to this day in the ownership of their descendants. Each property had a dwelling unit, and lands for crop-planting and for stock-grazing. Today these properties tend to lie on the edges of villages and form 'boundaries' between them, and they are locally referred to as *polaseng*<sup>9</sup> (= *polasa*). My maternal grandmother, daughter of Rauwasa Mogašwa, married my paternal grandfather, Naphthali Mantane Thema, and at her father's request, the couple set up home in Kgatla village (According to BaPedi/North Sotho custom, a married couple is entitled to their own homestead, which is usually built among the homes of the husband's relatives. In this case the married couple agreed to make their home near the homestead of the bride's parents (Mönnig 1967: 208). My father, Mmatšhemo Henry Thema, was the last-born child of Naphthali Thema, and

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<sup>9</sup> The farm place

my mother is of Ndebele cultural origin, with strong associations with Sotho customs and practices. For most of his active life my father was a migrant worker, employed by a large scaffolding firm in Johannesburg. This employment meant that he was away from our Kgatla home for much of my childhood and youth, as were the husbands and adult male relatives of so many other women in the village, and district generally.

Consequently my siblings and I were raised in a rural environment and largely under the care and influence of a predominantly female extended family. We attended church and school locally, and subsequently I was sent to a boarding school of the Zionist Christian Church at Moria (Marobathota High School). In the following year I was sent to another school, Nkoshilo High School (not far from Marobathota High), as a day-scholar. Because of this situation my musical experiences growing up were very varied, comprising music transmitted in the church and school, and also the multimedia (notably the radio station).

Music generally was enthusiastically supported and enjoyed by my father as well. He loved to sing and had a good voice, as did one of his brothers, who was a male nurse by profession. But there was also a range of local customs comprising different forms of BaPedi cultural music which was being practiced regularly in the surrounding communities, and many of which were organized and even performed by women. *Sekgapa* music was very prominent in my musical experiences because my grandmother and mother, and other female relatives and their friends were/are all supportive of *Sekgapa* women's objectives and activities. Furthermore, I was attracted to *Sekgapa* performance practice not only because of the music, but also because of its participants. To me they were all like my mother and grandmother, people who are the socio-economic mainstay of our village communities, into which the migrant labour system as well as other economic and political factors, have brought much disorder. Most of the women have absentee husbands and male wage earners, and have to rely on their own resources in securing some form of income. They get together and involve themselves in activities that give them a sense of purpose as well as some financial income, but which also help to unify them, and so play a vital role in their own communities. But what these women do, even today, is nothing new. Women have always had a central position in BaPedi social organisation and domestic life, involving themselves in co-operative cultivation of food crops, and

common effort in clearing stretches of land, collecting wood, housebuilding and rearing children, and all these roles go back to sotho patterns of BaPedi life and custom, and they are being continued today in increasingly demanding conditions of social and moral disruption. This is why I have such enormous respect for BaPedi women: they support themselves and their families, and also provide mutual support for members and their families within their communities. An example of this is the way in which the women of Kgatla and from Mailula have formed a mutual 'self-help' group ('society') in order to assist members in times of great need, as for example, when there is a death in a family, and it faces considerable funeral and burial expenses. These women and some *Sekgapa* members in particular provide the financial and moral support for the bereaved family, and their social activities, which also involve music, help to recoup the money they paid out in benefits. Such 'societies' (as we call them) were in existence in my grandfather Thema's day. Membership tends to be generational, in that it continues from parents to children in the female line. My mother is a member of such a society that is most active today and it works with the locally established Mogašwa-Molosi Burial Society, founded in my great-grandfather's time and it is very prominent today. As far as *Sekgapa* members are concerned, since participation in these groups also tends to run in families, this ensures that they are also likely to be members of their own mutual aid group. It should be noted that participating members of *Sekgapa* groups are *badišhaba*, while their audiences and supporters include also some *majakane*, so the appreciation of their particular kind of music cuts across this social divide. But this 'divide' is not rigid, as James states, and the two categories "apply more to cultural practices than to people and social groups" (James 1999: 8). James also mentions the financial and material assistance provided by BaPedi women's *Kiba* group as members of *mehodisano* "rotating credit savings club" (1999: 60). Through this mutual aid association the 'society' can provide a needy family with staple household goods (non-perishable) and the like. *Sekgapa* groups act in the same way, and also through membership of a burial society.

*Sekgapa* songs and dances are of prime importance for promoting and airing women's issues, concerns and feelings. As an institution *Sekgapa* is responsible for conserving rural BaPedi women's corporate identity. But the actual music has a long history, and when people talk about *Sekgapa*, they do not as a rule give explanations about what a song says and means, in terms of what the performers are actually seen to be doing.

Nor do they speak of *Sekgapa* music styles and values as being 'traditional' and 'modern', because they always have been, and are still being perpetually needed, and they come from olden times and ways. This is implicit in the meaning of the term *sotho*, which BaPedi often use when speaking about their cultural customs and practices.

In her discussion of BaPedi classifications of these, and of which music has always been a vital part, James notes that the designation/category *mmino wa setšo*, denoting older BaPedi music, has been replaced with *mmino wa seso*, a category that is used today by promoters and presenters on Radio and television, and sometimes "interchanged" on occasion (1999: 6). James translates *wa Sesotho* as 'of *Sesotho*', and *wa setšo* as 'of origin; tradition' (ibid), and goes on to say:

What defines this category of 'traditional' things is, in part, its presumed links to a particular social constituency: a group of people which is thought of as concerning itself with things 'of origin' or 'of tradition'. Socially defined in this way, the significance of 'origin', however, broadens itself in certain contexts to incorporate members of other, opposed social categories, and even at times the whole of a projected or imagined nation (1999: 7).

I would agree to some extent with James, as far as suggesting broader meanings for *Sesotho* and *setšo*, but *sotho* has far deeper implications than the word suggests, and I also have a problem with labels like 'traditional music', which has a long history of usage and meaning, and labels like 'folk' and 'simple', and 'old', as opposed to 'art', 'complex' and 'modern' music.

According to ethnologist N J Van Warmelo (1955, 1974), the indigenous peoples of South Africa who spoke Sotho languages were called Basotho; this designation is an old word which has been shown to mean 'Black people' (1974: 59). But as the same scholar points out, the origins of the term *sotho*, and the reasons for its use, remain unknown. According to dictionary entries *sotho* means 'dark brown' (Kriel, Prinsloo and Sathekga 1997: 153), but when BaPedi refer to a person as *Mosotho*, the meaning of the root-*sotho* does not have such a one-dimensional reference. Rather, it is denotative of 'indigenous', and of considerable antiquity. A *MoPedi* person is also *Mosotho*, and his ancestors were the original dwellers of the land in which he now lives. The same root has implications of nationhood, as James has stated, and when we speak of it in relation to our customs and musical practices, we have in mind those which come from times long ago, before the coming of colonialism, missionaries and schooling. *Sotho-ness* binds all Sotho peoples together because of the many views and ideas that they have in common. They are of long-standing value, and they form what

may be regarded as the 'ground stock' of our culture. It is true that nowadays the designation *mmino wa setšo* is in widespread use, and I have chosen to translate it as 'cultural music', and when we perform this music, it continues to have references to long-standing sotho musical customs which shape the musical action. But since culture is dynamic and always inevitably undergoing changes, the performances of *mmino wa setšo* also express modern BaPedi issues and emotions that are central to life today. I feel that *setšo* has an additional sense of immediacy, and the musical behaviour, its actions and references are not rigidly sotho bound. The description 'traditional' meaning or implying presumably 'traditional', music' gives a false impression, and in fact I think is an empty label in this context. Kubik (1987) has argued about the usage of what he refers to as "the popular dichotomy of traditional versus modern"(1987:2), which has long been in use in the history of ethnomusicology from the late nineteenth century comparative musicology studies, and which were heavily influenced by evolutionist theories:

"...there is no such thing as 'traditional' music...as a rigid and watertight category opposed to 'modern' music" (ibid.)

He maintains that tradition is "that which is handed down", therefore it is acceptable to speak of 'musical traditions' as types and styles of music having continuity, but with "different life-spans" and "...somewhat stable and unstable at the same time" (1987: 2). *Sekgapa* may therefore be correctly regarded as a musical tradition rather than a 'traditional music', and it draws heavily on music that is of great age, as well as of more recent origin, and as such it may demonstrate patterns which may be 'old' in use, but which express new concepts. Even the Separatist churches among BaPedi have acknowledged the importance and significance of sotho-ness, and have developed their own kinds of what has been called 'syncretic' music which deliberately takes its inspiration from older cultural sources as well as certain Western European ones. Perhaps the best definition of the concept of Sesotho is that given by David Coplan in an article on the poetic songs of Basotho migrant men and women (1990: 252-263).

Referencing to Basotho culture, Coplan defines Sesotho as "...anything, ideational, behavioural, or material, that the Basotho regard purely of their own devising, unadulterated by 'external' influence" (1990: 252). Whereas the poetic songs (*Difela*) are a comparatively more recent song genre, but based on older oral practices, *Sekgapa* is a long-established practice of BaPedi. But like so many current practices

of African cultural music today, (including BaPedi *Kiba* and *Koša* of men and women respectively, which James (1999), has discussed in some detail), *Sekgapa* is also conserved as an important kind of music-making, but principally in the rural areas, and as "...a defense against the loss of ...cultural identity" (ibid). *Mmino wa setšo* is cultural music that is deeply symbolic for BaPedi generally, and it gives them an 'emotional grounding' because they are all people of the same ethnic origin. It is a music by which I have been and continue to be greatly moved. *Sekgapa* is a cultural music that is practiced in many villages, the larger ones having two or three such groups. In these communities the leaders have revived and emphasized the music and its relevance to custom in order to deal with social and moral problems. *Sekgapa* is also being taught to young girls, for these reasons, and the lead singer is always a woman who has vast knowledge and experience of the songs and dances and their drumming patterns. In spirit and general tempo the children's versions are faster and more energetic and lively. They sing in a higher pitch range, and they learn to execute the basic dance steps and movements and dramatic actions. But their performances are, of course, closely modelled on those of the adult *Sekgapa* versions in structure, content, and the wearing of proper dancing dress, and the use of dance props. However, certain changes tend to occur in places in accordance with the young peoples' experiences and abilities. For example, in the responding choruses to the lead singer's solo phrases (which undergo variation) the words are usually partly or completely replaced by vocables, and which through repetitions form a repeating rhythmic phrase-pattern. The delivery of *direto* (praises) is also done by an experienced *Sekgapa* performer, an aspect of this music genre that will be described later on in this study.

### **MMINO WA BAPEDI<sup>10</sup>**

One of the earliest descriptive accounts of BaPedi music comes from the German missionary, C Endemann, who wrote in 1874 that the music comprises choral dance song with:

Verses made up at will by the singer, the lines torn apart sometimes or repeated over and over again. Sometimes two accompanying choirs, one starting with a low note and the second with the higher note, the solo starting while the choirs continue. When the solo singer pauses the choirs go on singing, a sort of "intermezzo" (Huskisson 1982: 370)

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<sup>10</sup> The music of BaPedi

A serious study of BaPedi music was first made by Huskisson (1958). Over thirty years later the well known *Dinaka* flute and drum ensemble was the topic of a Paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Ethnomusicology symposium in 1993 at the University of Natal, the author being Deborah James.

The women's communal dance with drums under study here is still called *Sekgapa*, but it was reported by both Kirby and Huskisson as the name of two types of BaPedi musical bow, and which had cognates among some other cultural groups.

According to Kirby *sekgapa* was the name for (1) an unbraced gourd-resonated struck bow of BaPedi and the Tswana, with equivalent bows among the Zulu (*ugubhu*), Swazi (*ligubhu*), Xhosa (*uhadi*) and South Sotho (*thomo*)

However, Kirby then states that "...no one appears to have seen the (Pedi) variety while the witness to the Tswana cognate (Chapman 1854) never recorded its name". (Kirby 1934; 1965: 197).

(2) BaPedi bow type with the same vernacular name as a braced gourd - resonated struck bow, with cognates among the Venda (*dende*), Tsonga (*xitende*); Swazi (*makhweyane*) and Zulu (*umakhweyana*). It was unknown to the Tswana and Xhosa. (Kirby also reported *Sekgapa* for the Lobedu and cites E J Krige's information that among them the bow was played by unmarried men and widowers).

According to Kirby, BaPedi braced bow was

Played singly by old men, and *mašoboro* (sic) (uncircumcised youths). The old men sang songs about cattle, war or their chief, but they never sang about women, while the youth song themes were about love, cattle, and the like. However, women never play *Sekgapa*, and seldom handle it unless they are drunk!" (1934 (1965: 298).

One may ask. if BaPedi *sekgapa*<sup>11</sup> (instrument) was restricted to males, how did a women's dance genre acquire the same name, and is furthermore an important institution in BaPedi daily life today?

Huskisson describes *sekgapa* and other chordophones as 'solo' instruments which "used to be the prerogative of men" but are now played by boys (1982: 352). On p.357. Plate 6a shows a MoPedi man playing the braced gourd-resonated type. But the following Plate 6b shows a man playing a 'gourdless' instrument of this type. No other author has reported such an instrument. To confuse the issue further, Huskisson states that the term *sekgapa* among BaPedi applied to both braced and unbraced gourd

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<sup>11</sup> I used a small letter distinguish musical bow instrument

bows, but this is not substantiated by her or by anyone else, and like Kirby's unbraced BaPedi instrument, remains a mystery. What is certain however is the usage of a braced gourd bow among BaPedi, *sekgapa*. (A fellow student at the UCT is currently researching SePedi sound instrument traditions, and is reviving the *sekgapa* tradition; it seems that the instrument was indeed a prerogative of males, as Huskisson and Kirby reported). One must then ask again: how did this name come to denote an important musical tradition of women? As we will see, my research will try to throw some light on this matter. BaPedi music today has a great variety of musical practices, older and newer, and in most of them the emphasis is on communal performance, with singing, dancing and even drumming in many styles. The *Dinaka* flute ensembles of BaPedi men are well known and are virtually a BaPedi cultural marker, and active in both urban and rural areas. The subject of my study, *Segkapa*<sup>12</sup>; seems to be confined to the rural areas.

It remains to be seen, through investigation and fieldwork-whether or not it is an older tradition which inspired BaPedi women's version of *Kiba*. *Segkapa* performances today take place for various reasons, some of which have a long history among BaPedi. According to Galane, historically *Segkapa* was a post-initiation dance song of Bapedi girls which took place on the evening of the day before the girls left their place of seclusion, and returned to their homes, or on the morning of their return (Galane 2003: 10). The same author states that "*Segkapa* is a corollary of *kgopa*, [girl initiate]," a term that is used mainly in the districts of Dikgale and Moletši, and also in the Mphahlele communities (ibid.).

This statement suggests that *Segkapa* was indeed a public event and, by inference, the first public appearance of the girl initiates since they entered the school. However, none of my *Segkapa* informants were able to confirm this.

According to my informants *Segkapa* was customarily performed after weeding of the young growing crops had taken place. Important among crops were different kinds of circubits, notably two varieties of pumpkin (*marotse*), and three varieties of gourds (*maraka*, pl.) (ibid). Of these, one was grown as a vegetable, and therefore eaten, while the other two, although edible when young and tender, were allowed to grow and then left to dry out, and made into containers/ladles *digo*, or *magapa* (ibid.). *Magapa* is the plural form of *legapa*, which name denotes also the ladles-i.e. cuplike

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<sup>12</sup> I used the capital letter as cultural music

'spoons' with long handles used for dipping and for pouring out beer and other foodstuffs. My informants insist that the formal name of their song and dance genre is associated with the household utensil, which, because of its origin, economic importance and significance, is also symbolic of food, and sustenance. It is BaPedi women who are responsible for making this beverage.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE “SOCIAL-ECONOMIC”; AND MUSICAL CONNOTATIONS OF SEKGAPA WOMEN’S MUSIC

My *Sekgapa* informants are aged between twenty and sixty-plus years of age, and insist that *Sekgapa* is a tradition of women that is ‘very old’ in BaPedi culture. All of them said that they had been ‘born into *Sekgapa* practice’, that they grew up witnessing it frequently, and finally becoming regular participants themselves in the musical event.

Given this rather scanty information, I had a long struggle with issues about the history of *Sekgapa*, the meaning(s) and significance of its music, which accompanies texts that are sung, and are about BaPedi daily life and customs, and expected behavioural norms and social problems. My informants claim that *Sekgapa* is an old tradition that has never died out, and that its functions have not changed much, being very much connected with women’s issues in BaPedi communities. In thinking long about this, it gradually came to the front of my mind that (1) this very active music genre has the name of a very important crop plant; (2) the music is performed by women, who have always been of vital importance in the traditional subsistence economy of BaPedi; (3) the women carry aloft tools like axes and sometimes scythes, and other objects, when they dance and sing; (4) the textual contents of the songs reflect or comment on matters of social and economic importance to the community and society at large.

Although one may never obtain conclusive information about the early history of *Sekgapa*, I believe that some investigation into the traditional role of BaPedi women may turn up some interesting and plausible facts about this music and its historical cultural contexts, which in turn might offer explanations as to why the musical style has continued over a long period of time, and what it means today.

As stated earlier, in chapter 1: Page 10, the term *Sekgapa* appears in two main contexts in published literature on BaPedi music:

1. with references to BaPedi traditional life and custom, and activities and events in the seasonal cycle;
2. in a musical context, being the name of a musical instrument.

If one looks at the organization of BaPedi communal music in earlier times (Huskisson 1958, and 1982: 346ss), then one sees that this music was largely regulated by the seasonal cycle, and all the activities which were integral to daily life. Most of these activities were agricultural because it was through subsistence management and food production that each and every BaPedi household met its material needs, although co-operation of families was also expected for certain activities which benefited both the family and the community (Mönnig 1967: 143). BaPedi economy was based on agriculture and pastoralism and gathering edible foods, as well as a little hunting (which died out when game became scarce), and all this depended heavily on rainfall. In fact the cycle of activities did not begin until rain had fallen, and if it was late (and rain has always been unpredictable, and drought an everpresent threat), then the agriculture was held back accordingly. If rain did not come, certain rituals were enacted to counteract bad influences that might prevent the rain, and also to call up rain, and when it did fall, special rain songs were sung in thanksgiving (Huskisson 1982). Although men and women took part in the agricultural activities, women were the principal workers (Indeed they are still the mainstay of BaPedi households in the rural areas, today). Women formed *matšema*<sup>13</sup> for hoeing, which a chief or person of rank organized to work his fields.

Once a field was cleared of bush and the ground broken up (by men, and later with a plough), the women did most of the other agricultural work. They carried out continuous duties of hoeing, planting, weeding and reaping and later threshing. As noted by Mönnig (1967: 143):

"It is the great joy of women to work on their lands, and even the very old will go..." to enjoy looking at the growing of crop.

As far as tending livestock was concerned, men controlled all of it except the pigs, and fowls, which were fed and tended by women. (Cattle tending, milking and slaughtering have always been taboo for BaPedi women).

The reaping and storing of crops was also done by women, who then continued with the domestic duties. BaPedi women were therefore the main food providers in BaPedi households. And even today, in a cash economy, they continue to be the 'economic mainstay' of their households, supplementing the incomes of their migrant husbands.

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<sup>13</sup> Work parties.

Their vital role in their households is acknowledged and praised in two BaPedi proverbs which are expressed when a BaPedi woman dies: *Ka geno, mollo o timile*<sup>14</sup>, and *O wetšwe ke ntlo*<sup>15</sup> (Mönnig 1967: 145).

In all their tasks, women were also helped by their daughters, who did chores which were expected of them such as fetching water, tending younger siblings, grinding corn and the like.

Once the crops had been harvested, women would then begin brewing traditional beer, called *bjala* or (*bjalwa*, *malwa*=dialectic) in SePedi. Of all the foodstuffs prepared and eaten by BaPedi, *bjala* (made from sorghum) was and remains the most important, having high social, ritual/ceremonial and economic value.

Apart from being a basic food, beer was essential for ritual offerings to the ancestors (*go phasa badimo*), which was traditionally enacted through prayer (*go rapela*) and sacrifice with meat (*go phasa*). Such rituals were enacted in a family, for the lineage, and also on a tribal basis (1967: 589). The ancestor rituals depended on circumstances, but in all of them *bjala* was the medium of sacrifice, whereas additional offerings like meat were necessary in some but not all ancestor rituals: (1967: 61). For example: *Bjala bja thokgola* is the beer of pouring out a libation offered in sacrifice to the ancestors (*go phasa badimo*).

*Bjala bja pofelo* (the beer of tying up), which is for the-*pofelo* (*bofela*), ritual for treating infertility/barrenness. (1967: 98).

When a woman does not conceive, she is taken to the traditional healer for consultation. This-*pofelo* beer is brewed and is given to the traditional healer, who mixes certain medicines into it. This is then applied around the hips and lower torso of the patient, symbolically 'tying' her with this ritual beer (Nokanang 1976: 218, my English translation). Then there is a ritual for presenting a baby to its people, and also for opening it up for normal medical treatment. This ritual is called *Ngwana o ya go rragwe* (the baby goes to his/her father) and the beer is named after it. The ritual takes place a month after the birth. No medical treatment is allowed (one may not *kokota*, *ga a kokotwe* (hammer) until this *ngwana o ya go rragwe* ritual is enacted. Beer is brewed and presented to the same healer who-*bofela*<sup>16</sup> the mother.

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<sup>14</sup> The fire has died in the house.

<sup>15</sup> This home has fallen in.

<sup>16</sup> Tie, Heal.

After this the baby undergoes the usual *papatela* (lit. to smooth the baby's head) ritual (1967: 102). The baby's head is shaved, all hair being removed (if a girl,) or leaving a small central tuft on the front of the forehead (if a boy) (ibid.). This action "...prepares the child...to have the appearance and characteristics of the tribe" (ibid.). (1967: 61).

Beer was also essential for events celebrating stages in the life cycle, which were closely associated with the ancestors e.g.:

- The giving of name ceremony (*reela maina*) of children when they are also introduced to their paternal ancestors (1967:106-7).
- Phases in marriage customs, e.g the initial phase of 'feeling out' the prospective couple in the marriage negotiations *go hlotla madiba* (to test the fountains) (1967: 132).
- The transfer of brideswealth (*magadi*) (ibid);
- The wedding feast (*monyanya*) which friends and neighbours attended by silent invitation and which required large amounts of the traditional beer, which was also an incentive to attend such an event (1967: 135, 191).
- *Bjala bja ngwana/serethe sa ngwana* (beer for the baby/heel of the baby) is an important ritual and ceremonial for the families united by a marriage. Some six months after the bride has gone to live at her husband's home, she is taken back to her parents' home for *go tsholla bongwetši* (pouring out daughter-in-law) ritual. This is done when it is thought that the daughter in-law (the bride) needs to polish her home-making skills, which her-inlaws have thought inadequate.
- The *bjala bja thetho* ('beer of the apron') which is brewed when the daughter-in law returns to her husband's home (the 'apron' probably symbolic of the domestic skills which have been polished and improved). The family invite relatives and friends to come and enjoy beer and food for 'the baby' (Nokaneng ibid, my translation.).
- *Bjala bja phihlo* (the beer of hiding), which is not a ritual beer. It is beer that a woman will hide somewhere, and in a secret place. Should her husband come home after a long day's drinking with friends, he is likely to wake up the next day with a 'hangover', and this beer is then produced for him to drink. This

seems to be BaPedi version of 'hair of the dog' or 'regmaker' (Afrik.) which is believed to counteract the effects of a hangover.

- Then there is *bjala bja legatalletswele*, (the beer of the skull), which is made and shared with next-door neighbours. Before it is served, all the sediment is wrung out (*go hlotla*).
- *Bjala bja tšhima* another domestic beer (the beer of beans cooked with samp), which is made available when women get together and *setla* (stamp) beans (*tšhima*), and prepare samp for a particular occasion. While the women work, a *mokgopulsephopo* (calabash container) for the beer is passed around from time to time. Similarly, when women get together to grind sorghum (*go šila mabele*), they drink the prepared *bjala bja mašidi* (ground beer).
- *Bjala bja mampotša ke mang* (the beer that tells who I am), is a beer that is available for tasting by men, before they decide to buy more of it for themselves. This beer is also called *bjala bja hlogwana* (beer of the small head).
- Sorghum beer is supposed to have had enough time to ferment, but sometimes, when it is not quite ready, men may drink it if they wish. This beer is then called *bjala bla maphoroma* (beer that has been poured out).
- Beer was also essential as tribute (*sebege*), a term derived from verb-*bega*<sup>17</sup>. *Bjala bja sebege* is the beer that is taken to *mošate* (the chief's homestead) in a small clay pot (*moetana*), as tribute to the chief. If meat is to be offered as well, it is called *lehlakore*, the name for a special cut from a beast that is sent as tribute to the chief ("three leftside ribs near the shoulder, and three adjoining ribs") (1967: 288). This meat tribute comes exclusively from men, because only they can handle cattle. As noted by this author, meat and beer are "sacrificial elements", and when given as *sebege* to the chief, they "...specifically recognize the submission and dependence of the tribe to their chief as their religious leader..." (1967: 289). In this context one should also mention another form of tribute by BaPedi women to the chief; it is called *mabele a modutla* (grain that spills over), and like the meat tribute, is a token of thanks for the chief's good governance, and for plentiful rains and a good season. (ibid.) The chief, also called *kgoši* (King), is held to be "the father of

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<sup>17</sup> To report

his tribe, its executive head ...legislator, and supreme judge, supreme chief and ritual head" (1967: 253). It is wellknown and documented that each and every chief in BaPedi history had his own special composed praises (*direto*), in which also the history of the BaPedi people was told and remembered and this custom prevails to this day.

- *Bjala bja masohlo* (beer for chewing up) is sorghum beer that is given to the chief each year end, by way of thanking him for his service to his village and communities in his area.
- Of great importance is the beer brewed for rituals concerned with troubling ancestors. Ancestors have to be respected at all times, and honoured with offerings etc. and if a person starts to have serious misfortune, it is likely that he has displeased his ancestors in some way (this is usually diagnosed by a traditional healer). The only 'cure' is to make offerings to the ancestors and to restore harmony with them. This *bjala bja badimo* (beer of the ancestors) is taken *ga kga mašifa* (be hot) and *mahlotiša*, ('cleared', 'cleaned') as well as *mošwang wa putšanyane* (the contents of a young goat's stomach). The contents of a cow or ox's stomach may be used alternately. Blood from the animal (s) is also collected and all of this is taken to the graves of the troubled person's ancestors. The animal matter is put on the graves, and the troubled person and his relatives who are also present, must each drink a little beer, and spill the rest of it on the ground. The troubled person then has to *go botša* (tell, to relate) first by a prayer (*go rapela*), and then by delivering the *sereto* (praise) of the particular troubling ancestor, and thereafter telling him about all his troubles. (1967: 59). After this, more beer is poured on the grave, with praise, after which everyone goes home to eat and drink together. (ibid.)
- Sorghum beer is also made for the occasion on which a girl receives a gift of clothing from her boyfriend (*a tlelwa ke dipute*). *Bjala bja bikobo* (beer of clothes) is made for the enjoyment of all the family members and relatives and friends.
- *Malwa* (dialectic) a *dipoolo* is sorghum beer which is made when the customary mourning period for a deceased person is at an end. There is a phrase (in Sesotho), which says: *Mohu o a hlobošwa* (to cause to unclothe)

and this describes that event when people in mourning put aside their black clothes, and drink the beer that is made for this day.

- *Bjala bja mahlatswa maselo* (beer of washing the crops) is prepared for drinking after the crops have been treated ritually or weeded. Among staple food crops of the BaPedi were various kinds of legumes e.g. *monawa* (cow-peas), ground nuts or *njugo* beans (*ditloo marapo*) and also *mung* beans (*dihlodi*) which were introduced into BaPedi subsistence farming (1967: 155).
- When women got together to stamp beans (*tšhima*) for a ceremony, they shared a *mokgopu/sephoko* (calabash) of *bjala bja tšhima* among themselves, during and after the work.
- Beer was also essential for ceremonial events in BaPedi rites of passage. When an initiation session was 'opened', then *bjala bja mathibollo*<sup>18</sup> was made and drunk to mark the event, and also various phases in the initiation period.

There were regular times especially during the winter season, when uninitiated girls (*mathumaša*) and *makgarebe* (mature maidens) and also their mothers, prepared beer for social recreation, during which the girls performed special dance songs of their age-set. These dance songs were characterized by special dance steps and movements and actions, and also costume, and most memorable of them are *mararankodi*, *ntubu* and *makgakgasa*, which are dance songs that have been taken into the song repertoires of present-day *Sekgapa* women' groups. Work parties have always been organized for almost every kind of work involving many people, and hoeing parties have already been mentioned, earlier on. Another communal work involving beer brewing and drinking is the preparation of hides (karosses), which is done by men. They have to remove the hair from the animal skin, and then tan it (*kgohlelwa*) which means to convert a skin into leather by soaking it in some infusion, or expose the skin to the sun, and thereafter cure (*šogwa*) the skin. Each phase takes a few days and *bjala bja leišema* (beer of the work parties) is made to be drunk during these days.

Then too, when a fence of tree branches (*madiga*) has to be erected, or a stone wall has to be built, the same beer is made for all who take part in these tasks. BaPedi women also make a light beer from *meroko* (bran) called *mothagamane*, and which is

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<sup>18</sup> Beer made when initiation session open for Girls and boys

extracted from the beer they have in stock. Then too there is 'motogo', a non-intoxicating drink which is very nutritious as well, and made from fermented cereal bases (1967: 189). This is usually drunk between meals. A much favoured drink is that which is made from the fruits of the *morula* tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*, A. Rich. Hochst. Palmer, E and Pittman.N 1972: 1188 - 1189), which is an indigenous tree, but the fruits (*marula*) are available only in season. BaPedi eat the fruit when it is ripe, while the dried kernels are eaten as nuts, but *marula* beer is greatly liked and also drunk at social beer drinks.

At a beer drink, every guest drinks out of the same gourd-ladle; it is passed around the men and women, in order of seniority. Each person has a drink, but the last few drops in a ladle are poured onto the ground as thanks to the ancestors. Beer was and still is a daily food. In winter time large quantities of beer were available, and there was time for leisure and recreation. But during the height of the agricultural activities, beer was commonly drunk at night, or in the context of a work party, and at prescriptive ritual events.

*Bjala* has therefore always been very important in BaPedi cultural life, and is traditionally made from fermented sorghum or millet, and occasionally from mealies. Six varieties of sorghum were grown by BaPedi, the seed varying in colour from white, to yellow, to red and brown (1967: 155). It is women who make the beer, and they have always had a place on which to grind the grain: a grinding stone located just outside the homestead dwelling, and a much larger grinding stone (which every village had) and where women could gather and grind communally. This made the task much easier and more enjoyable, and allowed for gossiping and singing songs. A pestle and mortar is another means of pounding grain, especially mealies. and women like to do this communally, and usually involve their daughters as well. Such occasions are rich in *Koša* ('song') -being often topical, critical and even comic, in which the workers sing about affairs of their community, and about their own problems and views towards these (1967: 191).

The most popular and frequent contexts for beer today are events referred to in the singular, *tšhentšhi*<sup>19</sup> or *tšhantšhi*. This is a stokvel (Afrik.) or 'profitmaking club' where people put money into a communal money-pool or 'kitty', and where they get together and eat, drink and enjoy fellowship, and distribute the money where it is

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<sup>19</sup> Change

needed. The name comes from 'change' (Eng.) and alludes to the money that changes hands between the beer-makers and sellers and the consumers. Cultural scholar Nokaneng (1976: 213) explains the term appropriately as *mph eke go fe* (Give me, and I give you). The beer sold at a *tšhentšhi* is called after it-*bjala bja tšhentšhi*, and is sold and drunk on the spot. Performances of *Sekgapa* regularly take place at a *tšhentšhi* because most if not all women are 'club' members. Week-ends are the favourite times for the event because people have more time for leisure, beer and music-making. Apart from *Sekgapa* performances, other kinds of music may also be performed, such as *dinaka* flute ensemble music, and individual music-making to entertain the crowds with instruments like the *lekope*, and *dipela*.

The person who hosts a *tšhentšhi* (usually a woman) invites a *Sekgapa* team to the event because she knows that it will attract people and potential customers. There is a performance fee that is negotiated between the *tšhentšhi* hostess and the *Sekgapa* manager (*malokwane*). Once an agreement has been reached, the *Sekgapa* manager will return to her team with news of their forthcoming performance in the village. At this stage the performance fee fixed by the team manager and the *tšhentšhi* hostess might be reduced because the team will expect to receive free food and drink at the beer event. Monthly gatherings result in the regular collection of amounts of money, and this is always distributed among the *tšhentšhi* members who are in need of financial assistance. The needs of the various members are therefore met in rotation, and so *tšhentšhi* events are an important system of mutual aid in the communities.

There is no doubt that the cash economy and the availability of new kinds of food stuff have greatly influence BaPedi diet. One finds the modern staples of bread, sugar, coffee and tea, and cool drink concentrates in almost every rural household, and also canned meat and fish. But as pointed out by Mönnig (1967: 190): "...foods like these cannot be distributed and are often used as side dishes". He goes on to say:

These new foods have not influenced the manner of eating, and bread and canned meat are eaten as if they were like porridge, as a side dish, with the hands. These bought foods have, however, influenced the eating habits in one way. There is a general feeling that such food bought with money, obtained through individual earning, cannot be shared in the traditional manner, and there is a marked tendency among men to eat such food in the seclusion of their homes.

This was noted 38 years ago, but it still holds true today. The importance placed on social eating and drinking is also to be observed at large-scale social events, and on one occasion the hosts did not have enough plates and dishes for their many guests.

They could have borrowed from neighbours, or asked their guests to bring their own, but they did not do this. Far better and much more social was the use of a very big piece of corrugated iron, which was cleaned and then placed as a makeshift feasting table for the guests. The main foods of meat and dried porridge were heaped in large quantities in places on this 'table', so that it was available for all the guests to help themselves, as they wished.

Nowadays when a social event takes place for whatever reason, and to which many people may attend (often by silent consent, according to custom), and where beer is to be drunk, there is still the importance placed on *bjala*-traditional sorghum beer, and also the traditional sharing out of meat. If people cannot afford a beast, or even a sheep or goat, then they provide chickens as the most convenient and economic substitute. Beer drinking has always been a social action among BaPedi, being served in ladles or gourds. The term *Sekgapa* then is not just a musical label. In fact it goes deep and wide into BaPedi culture, and its implications, and its uses and functions are closely linked to the social and economic roles of BaPedi women.

*Sekgapa* is also performed nowadays at official festival events which are sponsored by corporate business, or the government. For example, there are regular competitive music and dance events for which the South African Broadcasting Corporation<sup>20</sup> finds sponsors, and on these occasions teams of cultural musicians representing different language and cultural groups assemble at a given venue and perform their different forms of cultural music. Several BaPedi *Sekgapa* teams will perform in competition at these events, with a great variety of African musical styles. Similarly, each year on Heritage day, September (*Phuphu*) 24<sup>th</sup>, performers representing all kind of African cultural music assemble in Limpopo Province in the Lebowakgomo showgrounds, and perform their respective musics, which are also cultural markers.

Of particular interest to me, and also one of the oldest known social/musical event in BaPedi culture is that which is called *Ngwana o wele* (lit. the baby fell). This social event has a long history among BaPedi, and it is also a custom which once functioned as a form of public censure or reproof. It is closely associated with women, and concerns their expected behaviour both within the family and lineage, and within the wider community. Women are the main participants at a *ngwana o wele* event, and it takes place after someone (a woman) has been seen to behave in an unacceptable

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<sup>20</sup> SABC

manner. (James 1999: 37-38) gives an account of such events which she calls "festivals of reparation", but they involve performances of men's *Dinaka* and *Kiba*.

As wives and mothers, women are expected to take due care of their children, to feed and clothe them, and for one or the other reason, they may be seen to neglect to do so adequately. A typical example of 'misconduct' was told to me:

A visit may take place among a group of women, who visit another woman's home, and then find that she has allowed her baby/toddler to go about the house with no clothes on. This is totally unacceptable to BaPedi generally, and a woman who allows this is guilty of gross neglect. She has to be reproved ('disciplined') in public, and this is conducted in a special way, with *ngwana o wele*.

Another example of 'disrespectful' behaviour that might bring on a *ngwana o wele* public apology is a careless or hurtful remark made by a woman in the presence of others. The customary response to this is for the offended person to ask for water, and when it is brought, she will not drink it, but pour it over the person who made the offensive remark, loudly saying *ngwana o wele!* as she does so. This signifies that the offensive woman has breached the code of conduct by being very disrespectful, and hurtful. The offended woman now has the right to demand a *Sekgapa* from her offender, who is compelled to arrange and finance such an event, to which she is expected to invite all the women of the village. The event will take place at her home.

Although the basis for a *ngwana o wele* event may be any kind of offence deemed hurtful, rude etc., the social event is an effective way of enabling the offender to repent her words and actions, and to try and regain the respect of her neighbours. The event is also one in which social ties are reinstated, and strengthened, and in which women can come together and fraternize on an equal footing once more.

Social relations among women in any community are all too often fraught with tensions, and all too easily friction and bad feelings can arise from seemingly innocuous behaviour (e.g. a joke in poor taste which hurts rather than amuses).

Furthermore, an offence may have even further complications. For example, an unclothed toddler in the house not only casts aspersions on the mother concerned, but also on the person after whom the toddler was named, and by extension, its family.

*Ngwana o wele* may be seen as an opportunity for reparation, by which someone who has behaved disrespectfully, publicly apologizes to the person she has slighted.

Although *ngwana o wele* events are no longer held with any great frequency, they are still of some importance in Mailula village, because they inculcate mutual respect

among women, and offer a release from social tension, and the availability of meat and beer, and music, all help to generate and restore general goodwill.

Once the date has been set for the event, the *Sekgapa* women begin preparations for it. They clean their beaded ornaments, and *diele, dintepa le maseka*<sup>21</sup> for the occasion, and they prepare traditional beer four days before the event. If the offense concerns an unclothed toddler, the hostess/offender will also buy gifts for that child. At this stage of the proceedings, the date of the coming event has to be reported to *ntona* (headman) who will then announce it publicly in the *kgoro*.

At the event the hostess (the offender) opens the proceedings by giving a public account of the incident behind the event. During her address the baby in the issue is seated on a chair, wearing some of the new clothes, and other presents will be added to these. Thereafter the hostess will publicly apologize to all those present for her unacceptable conduct. After this, and the showing of the toddler's presents, all the women assemble and prepare for a *Sekgapa* performance.

*Ngwana o wele* was once vigorously maintained in BaPedi communities, but nowadays it is observed infrequently, because it is no longer seen to be relevant to modern life styles. However, in the more conservative BaPedi communities, traditions still count, as I witnessed at the *ngwana o wele* ceremony I attended in Mailula.

*Sekgapa* womens' groups regularly arrange visits to other *Sekgapa* groups in different *se mmotwana*<sup>22</sup>, and this involves the collecting of money and the preparation of *hjala* tradition sorghum beer for the visit, and also the presentation of such to the other, visited group. The event is an all day affair with much music-making by the visitors, and also by the local *Sekgapa* group. Since all *Sekgapa* groups undertake such social musical visits, these offer each women's group the opportunity to defray the costs incurred in a previous visit. These musical events are social visits which strengthen ties of goodwill between the groups and their communities, and a means for socializing generally and exchanging news and gossip and the like.

One has to ask, then why is there no direct reference to *Sekgapa* as a social musical event in the earlier published literature on BaPedi culture and music? It is only in the most recent unpublished work of Sello Galane that one finds a direct reference to *Sekgapa* (cfr. 2003 ch 1: 37).

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<sup>21</sup> Dress, apron and bangles

<sup>22</sup> Small hill, meaning communities, which are commonly located along hillslopes.

The connection between this young girls' song genre, and the present *Sekgapa* whose participants cover a wide age span from 25-50+ years, was initially very difficult to find. The participants, are initiated girls in the earlier context, and mature women, which include also older and married women, in the current *Sekgapa*. After studying the *Sekgapa* songs, and discussing these with informants, I became convinced that the connection between the 'old' *Sekgapa* and this present one is a musical connection, and not a social, contextual one.

In a paper published in 1995, Deborah James discusses the history of the urban - based BaPedi women's version of *Kiba*, which she states is called *Koša* ('song'). She further states that this urban genre:

replaces the rural singing styles of women, and that, like the men's *Kiba* (which is the flute ensemble music called *Dinaka*), these are examples of old forms which have undergone change, and which are ...adapted to carry new messages (James 1995: 79).

James asserts that the urban women's style is based on the 'rural female style'

which was tied not only to gender but a specific part of the life cycle-a time before marriage and before the 'assumption of onerous responsibilities', and had the significance of a game" (loc.cit).

James never mentions the name *Sekgapa*, but it would seem that she links the urban BaPedi women's music to the rural music of initiated girls.

It is surprising that none of James' informants ever mentioned this term, *Sekgapa*, but one could argue that the term has alternate dialectic terms in other rural areas where BaPedi people live, and that they know it by these other names.

What has emerged from a study of the songs and their lyrical content, and also their melodies, and which is supported by information from *Sekgapa* participants, is that the current *Sekgapa* genre was and is a genre of mature women, but it also draws heavily on the music of other genres of BaPedi music.

This is not at all unusual, since the two most important items of BaPedi music, the men's *Dinaka*, and this women's *Sekgapa*, and also the urban-based *Koša*, all draw on the same melodies which are also used in other kinds of BaPedi music.

When BaPedi speak about performing an item of music, they say 'go *bina*', meaning to sing and dance a song, and this applies also to music that is produced with instruments such as *Dinaka*, which however, has a vocal-musical basis. As Galane puts it: "the vocal song of the women's groups, though classic..in..melodies and

harmonies...have their lyrics composed by the groups and some are taken from the repertoire of other contemporary groups" (2003: 36).

The use of common melodic and harmonic patterns within very different categories of music is something that has been quite well documented in ethnomusicological studies of African music. Not only are vocal songs adapted for instruments, but such vocal melodies are also 'sung' with larger instrumental ensembles, such as aerophone ensembles. In South Africa, flute ensembles are one of the oldest known and witnessed kind of music (Vasco da Gama witnessed Khoekhoe playing flutes near Mossel Bay in 1497), and such ensembles were found also among the Tswana, the Bushmen, the Ndebele, and the Venda and Pedi. (Today these genres continue only within these two last mentioned cultural groups). It has also been found that among the Venda, the melodic-harmonic theme of their *Tshikona* national dance, which is performed with at least 25 males playing end-blown flutes tuned to the Venda hepta scale (with two semitones), and using the techniques of hocket and parallelism, is also the melodic/harmonic 'deep structure' in so much other Venda vocal music, including children's songs and also beer songs. What is more, this same *Tshikona* national dance is sung in transformation in *Khulo*, in the great song of the Venda *Domba* premarital initiation school for girls (John Blacking 1990: 84-85). As Blacking cautioned however; in using *Tshikona* as a model to explain Venda rules of harmony and tonality, he was not saying that all other Venda music came from *Tshikona*, but that it most certainly underlies different kinds of Venda music (1990: 83).

From the ways in which BaPedi women speak about their songs and in relation to what is known of other BaPedi music, there are musical/thematic relationships among the genres, and a similarity of concepts underlying performance styles. (Galane has demonstrated some of this).

*Sekgapa* music employs the same set of drums and draws on the same rhythm patterns of *Dinaka*. The two genres also share in their song melodies, although each genre has its own special stock of songs. Although *Dinaka* is essentially instrumental music, it is not conceived as such, but like the women's vocal music, it is a 'song' that is also danced. One of the oldest known songs of *Dinaka* is called *monti* (having regimental implications), and this same song and its melody are sung (produced vocally) in *Sekgapa*, and provided with a new text. The genres also share components that are characteristic of what one may say of a 'BaPedi performance style' generally. Dancing and dance steps and movements, gestures, actions, choreography, and even

the incorporation of specialist forms of oral delivery like praising, are ingredients of BaPedi performance style which are features of several music genres and not just one. *Sekgapa* performance (like *Dinaka*) also takes one deep into BaPedi history and the kinship system, when one considers dance variations, being a vital part of performance style generally. In *Sekgapa* there is a dance leader, who introduces, variations, and these may be either abstract patterns or representational ones; the latter may also be associated with BaPedi totemism, and totemic groups. This is a particularly interesting aspect of BaPedi dance culture, and I am not aware that this association has been discussed substantially in previous studies, although there has been passing reference to BaPedi dance and totems, (James 1999: 28, 113-4; Hammond-Tooke 1981: 23-25).

## CHAPTER THREE:

### SOME BAPEDI MUSICAL CONCEPTS UNDERLYING *SEKGAPA* PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

BaPedi cultural music consists of many different types and styles of music, which is predominantly vocal, and referred to as 'song', and the most important music is communal in performance. Musical performance is commonly described in terms of *go bina* ('to sing'), but there is also the essential act of dancing and other related movement patterns which are integrated with the 'singing' (*-bina*) process. As has been reported for so many other subSaharan African music cultures, there is no separation between 'singing' and 'dancing' in BaPedi musical conceptualization, since the two always go together. When individuals play endblown flutes in ensemble, their combined hocket and parallel notes are produced along with specific dance steps and movements. So *Dinaka* is essentially a music that is produced through rhythmic techniques applied to the pitches of flutes, and to the movements of the flutes players. In the case of self-accompanied song, as when a person sings and plays with a lamellophone (*dipela*), or a musical bow (*sekgapa*) or an auto-harp (*dipela, harepa*), the 'solo' singing occurs in that the person sings for himself (*ipinelalikopelala*), but conceptually there is no true solo music. The person plays with his instrument, and also for others. The 'solo' performance needs an audience to appreciate it, to respond to it, recreate what they hear and even take part in the performance. The SePedi word *mmino*, which has been translated in the literature as 'music' has a wider musical meaning than that in the European sense of the word. *Mmino* implies acts of song and dance, and other kinds of action which, while not directly called 'singing' or 'dancing', or even directly musical in meaning, are also an essential part of the musical performance e.g. praising, the wearing of specific dance dress, and ornamentation, the use of dance props, and specific actions and gestures, and stances. BaPedi musical categories embrace virtually every aspect of social and religious life. Over time, certain musical styles became neglected because the events of which they were a part were discontinued, or else drastically shortened, (especially the case with the ritual music of youth initiation).

On the other hand, the songs of religious rituals like *Malopo* have continued to be practiced, and as far as the social and ceremonial music is concerned, the two main

genre of men's music (*Dinaka*) and women's music (*Sekgapa*), have remained active traditions, and have also been adapted and undergone transformations in the urban areas. These genres continue to draw on the melodies of BaPedi classical music and so helped to conserve the 'classical' techniques of BaPedi musical performance.

What has come to light from the existing studies of BaPedi music-which are limited and need serious attention today-is the extent to which the BaPedi communal musical forms have 'cross-fertilized' each other through melodic-thematic borrowing and adaptation.

Such processes have also been identified in other African musics, and it is not surprising since 'folk' musics the world over survived because of these processes, and some have even undergone revitalization, (recovery), and so helped to conserve the older classical forms, as meaningful music genres today. When BaPedi talk about their different kinds of 'song', they tend to use words and phrases which are not always easy for outsiders to understand, or to interpret cross-culturally, because they are usually drawn from aspects of daily life, and often contain metaphorical language. In his study of BaPedi performance discourse, which applies also to the discourse for the BaPedi women's equivalent music-*Koša*-(for which he asserts *Sekgapa* is one of several alternate names), Sello Galane provides an impressive amount of information on SePedi descriptions of music and dance behaviour (2003). He quotes SePedi sayings-idioms, but he does not provide literal translations for these; instead, he gives English interpretations. In my opinion this is a serious oversight, because it misses the significance inside the literal meanings of the idiomatic phrases. Since so much of it is used among my own informants of *Sekgapa*, I have chosen to focus on some of them, and to provide the literal translations as well as their (English) interpretations. (That is to say, what each phrase actually says, and what it means). I do this in order to highlight the BaPedi conceptualizations, and how appropriately and graphically they express BaPedi 'emic' directives and evaluations about the music and dance behaviour, and in relation to the topic, *Sekgapa*.

## **SEKGAPA CULTURAL DRESS**

*Sekgapa* women wear special dancing dress, but it is not only an outward sign of their group affiliation, it is also symbolic of their position in their communities as women who continue to respect and honour sotho custom, but who also embrace the challenges and the opportunities of modern life. Some reference was made to *Sekgapa*

dress uniform earlier in this study, but this needs further commentary. There are two distinctive dress styles, one reserved for 'every-day', local events, and which I call 'conventional' dress. The other is more formal attire that is worn for national and cultural celebrations, and also for competitive dance events. For 'conventional' dress, the standard garments are:

- (a) a white T-shirt;
- (b) a length of material worn as a wrap-around skirt, called *morina*, powder - blue or black, depending on the *Sekgapa* group's preference;
- (c) a length of white towelling worn on the head as a head-scarf. This is called *tuku*, (fr. Afrikaans 'doek', English 'cloth'), the name used by Deborah James informants for their wrap-around skirt, for which they have the alternate name *lešela* (James 1999: 116). Jame informants (women who perform *dikoša*), refered to their head-scarf as *šeše*, which was made from a 'piece of fabric'.

**Plate 1 : *Sekgapa* 'conventional' dress**



©Photo by Mmatšhemo Henry Thema

Plate 2 : *Sekgapa* formal/festive dress



©Photo: by Lekota Mokonyama

Some *Sekgapa* groups in Mmamabolo district have opted for wearing peaked caps instead of head-scarves, a type of headwear that is so widespread in South Africa and worn by all age groups. The canvas shoes ('takkies') worn on the feet are called *masantase* (fr, English 'Sandel'). Since a sandel consists essentially of a sole that is strapped to the foot, covering its lower surface only, the reference here may seem obscure, until one notes how the women treat thier footwear. It is relatively inexpensive, but can become ill-fitting through wear, and some *Sekgapa* women have taken to cutting holes in the uppers of the takkies, not only to allow the toes to rest unrestricted on the sole, but also to allow for ventilation, and the laces keeping the shoes securely in place. A striking colourful article worn by *Sekgapa* women is a broad beaded girdle that covers the body from just below the waistline and about the hips. It is fastened in the front with cords, and it has a polychrome design of beadwork, off-set with white beading. The garment has lengths of strung beads hanging from it at intervals, to which woollen balls are attached. These bounce and

shake in the dance, and add to the colourful display presented by the dancers. This beaded girdle is called *mašepetla*.

Various kinds of dress ornaments, called *maseka* generally, are worn on the upper and lower arms and about the ankles some with specific names, e.g:

*Motamo*-a silvery wire bracelet that is very shiny;

*Senamanyana*-a beaded bracelet which is often worn with the previously mentioned article;

*Difoto*-(s. *sefoto*), broad beaded bracelets which are worn on the wrist, or the forearm.

*Mephathakgo*-(fr. *Phathakga* = carrying something under the arm) is the name for two ropes of strung beads which are worn as bandoliers, criss-crossing on the upper torso.

Other kinds of beaded necklaces, collectively called *dipheta*, include *sekgatla*, made with large round beads (often in one colour); and *setilwane*, which are made with smaller beads and multicoloured.

Ankle-rattles (*mathotse*) have been described earlier on, having several small triangular containers made from plastic (obtainable from milk-bottles and the like), filled with small stones or objects, and attached to a length of cord. Dancers each wear a pair of *mathotse*, and as 'sound-making' accessories, they define the rhythm patterns prescribed to the polyrhythms created by the drumming patterns, in relation to the antiphonally structured vocal phrases.

In many dance routines the women carry *matšhoba* (switches, fly whisks), but these are made with fine strips of 'shredded' industrial maize-meal bags, which are attached to a short stick (handle). There are clearly modern derivatives of the switch used by diviners (*dingaka*), and made with *boditsi*<sup>23</sup>.

Although *matšhoba* are obviously contrived replicas of what are ritual objects, in the *Sekgapa* context they are symbolic in a different sense. In the 'opening' dances of their *Sekgapa* performances, the women enter the dancing area in line/row formation, and as they do so, they bend forward from the waist, and 'sweep' the ground before them with *matšhoba*. By doing so, the dancers are asking their audiences to 'clear the way' for them, that is to say, to welcome the *Sekgapa* group into their presence.

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<sup>23</sup> Horse's tail-hairs

## SEKGAPA FORMAL/FESTIVAL DRESS

This style of dress is perceived to be deeply 'Sesotho'; and therefore most appropriate for events of cultural and national importance.

A head-scarf is fashioned into a 'turban' style, and may be decorated with brooches or hatpins and similar objects. A tunic, resembling an elongated smock and with short sleeves, is worn over an ankle-length skirt, called *nepa*. The tunic, called *ele* is knee-length, and may have sleeves that are puffed and gathered at the shoulder, tapering to buttoned bands or cuffs. A narrow scarf made from a soft material is worn draped about the neck, the end hanging loosely against the upper torso. *Sekgapa* women see this formal dress as having great sotho significance, and as being eminently suited to the dignity and cultural pride that is displayed in *Sekgapa* performance.

## SEKGAPA DANCE FORMATION, STYLE AND PERFORMANCE

*Sekgapa* dances are circle dances, in that the women always start and end with a basic circle formation. The drummers (also women) are located either in the center of the circle, or else outside it and to one side of the performing group, depending on the dance, and the particular phase in the performance routine.

In any *Sekgapa* performance the intent is *go bina koša* ('to dance a song') in such a way so that perfect co-ordination is achieved vocally, harmonically and rhythmically. The spectacle itself has also to be pleasing to the audience. Standards of excellence are high, and *go a thupela* ('to be clean, neat, beautiful') is the aim, visually, aurally and orally. (Galane 2003: 161). Should anyone sing out of tune, or dance out of time or clumsily as if unfamiliar with the dance, or show poor concern for the rest of the group, she is said *go šaetša* ('to be negligent, blunder and be careless'), and therefore a 'spoiler' in the music. Galane's interpretations of 'consonance and dissonance' here, do not do justice to the real meaning of the phrase. *Go šaetša* applies to every aspect of the dance, including the general appearance of the performers in action. Dress costume is important, and it is not intended to be just a uniform stressing membership of a *Sekgapa* group, but rather it stresses the group's expectations of its place in their community, as a highly co-ordinated group of individuals.

Regarding dance styles, actions and gestures and the like, an important one is described in terms of *koša e tšwa sekgotong* (cf. Galane 2003: 70). *Sekgoto* is SePedi for 'rump' meaning the posterior and buttocks of an animal (Prinsloo rev. 1997: 144). The literal translation is very graphic: 'the song goes to the rump'. This partly describes the expected behaviour of the dancers, who must bend forward from the waist, and then rotate the lower torso with their backs to the audience (hence the reference to 'rump'). This happens when the women move anticlockwise around the drums, first in file, one behind the other, and then facing inwards towards the center of the circle (where the drums are), so that, when the dance comes to an end, the dancers have their backs to the audience.

One of the most interesting and even cryptic, phrases describing a dance style is *go šidilela*, for which interpretation Galane gives: "the lifting of the feet from the ground, while making intermittent accents of rhythm" (2003: 71). This description is not enough.

*Šidilela* (caus). Derives from the verb *go šidila/go šidulla* 'to iron, polish, scour, rub'), (Prinsloo rev. 1997: 151). Implicated in the idiomatic phrase is a sequence of movements in which the dancers literally 'tread' a measure of music. They execute measured steps to the singing and drumming, bringing each foot in contact with the dancing area, in alternation. In a domestic context, the same ('measured treading' is done when ironing and even when polishing or scouring a surface): it involves sequences of actions in which an object is brought into contact with a surface for a short span of time, sustained for that time on it, and then lifted up again, to repeat the whole process again over a different part of the surface.

The emphasis here is on regular, controlled, intermittent contact with a surface (i.e. the dance's feet onto the dance area) within a fixed period of time. Like the Venda, the Xhosa, and other African peoples whose music was studied emically (on the basis of the peoples language and concepts), the BaPedi do not have a technical musical vocabulary, but they talk about things musical using the language of everyday social life. Another very expressive phrase is *Go ba le dika*, which refers to that phase in a dance routine where the language and text of the song has to be enriched. This is where praising (*direto*) is to be done. The literal translation of the phrase is 'to come with signs, metaphors' which is highly descriptive of the performance behaviour expected at this stage of the proceedings. Then too, there is *go dira manka*, literally 'to do capers' (to caper-leap about in a sprightly manner, to skip or jump when

dancing'). The dancers have to be striking, attention-catching, so that they amuse the audience (cf. Galane 2003: 72). But this also applies to the drumming; the *keedišo* player and player of the smaller drum(s) are expected to demonstrate technical skill and improvisational ability.

A very vivid description is inside the phrase *re tieletša metse borare* (cf. Galane 2003: 72). The literal translation is 'digging around the villages of the father's ancestors'. This is said of the act of praising, which has to be delivered in all its aspects, with all due references to the genealogies of the BaPedi chief's family. An equally vivid description is *mello ya meropa*, (lit. 'the fires/roars of the drums'). This alludes to the drum rhythm patterns and their co-ordination in cross-rhythm (within the big *kiba* drum's metrical framework) and which have to be executed with gusto and accuracy, and also compellingly.

*Direto* (praises) are a form of specialized oral poetry that "is one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa" (Finnegan 1970: 11). *Go reta* (v.) is a style of speaking that is quite distinct from *go bina* (to sing/dance), and is a long-practiced tradition of BaPedi, and other African peoples in Southern Africa, among whom it is practiced as a living art form by specialists as well as non-specialists (Hansen 1981:237-8). Nguni praises are probably the best documented, with data coming from the eighteenth century onwards through the works of James Stuart (1868-1942), David Rycroft (1922-1997), and Jeff Opland and others. Opland has published on Xhosa praise poetry (1970, 1971, 1975, 1977b, 1983, 1990), and just recently this year (2005) his autobiographical study of David Yali-Manisi, (1926-1999) whom Opland regards as a true successor to the great Xhosa poet and praiser, Samuel Mqhayi (1875-1945), was published by the University of Natal Press. I have seen a number of transcribed versions of BaPedi praise in printed and published form, but I am not aware of any formal studies of the genre, which are comparable with those of the previously mentioned authors (to which one must add also, Ruth Finnegan who is referenced above). A number of authors have referred to BaPedi *direto*, but mainly in passing, or with a short explanation.

James has drawn greater attention to them in men's and women's *Kiba* performances and to the role of BaPedi women in praising (1999: 162-3). This is interesting because, in Nguni cultures the practice is strongly associated with males. While BaPedi males learn the art of praising first in the initiation school, where they are expected to be able to deliver self-praises it is BaPedi women who have made names

for themselves as praisers. I have personal experience of this in my own family and wider community. For instance, at a family funeral my father's sister (paternal aunt) would be expected to deliver the praises in honour of the deceased, the family and ancestors, and if she is unable to do this, the duty would fall to her younger sister.

*Direto* almost always occur in *Sekgapu* performances, usually just before a dance routine begins, and also between performances of the routine songs. If an important person is present, he/she is the receiver of the first, opening praises, and his/her praise-names and genealogies provide the framework for the praises. But the performance context is also very important, and the praiser usually makes references to it, and to its wider historical, social and political associations. In comparing what I know of the composing styles of BaPedi *direto*, with those of the Zulu and Xhosa *izibongo*, I found Opland's distinction between the latter to be very useful. According to Opland, the composing processes of the Xhosa praiser parallel the processes which have been described by Hansen for Xhosa song composition (1981: 243-4). She observed that Xhosa song composers draw from a stock of phrases associated with different song categories. These 'readymade' phrases are not just used but undergo changes and extensions through improvisations. Opland identified the same process in Xhosa Praises, which he calls 'the improvised line', and states that it is quite different from the Zulu praiser's preference for 'the memorized line', being a stock of fixed phrase material (including praise names and other components) on which the Zulu praiser draws (Opland 1999: 124). Memorization is therefore central to Zulu praising, which is based on a 'stock of historical and fixed praise material' (1990: 241). Opland makes the point that, while improvisation is not excluded from Zulu praising, it is far more restricted than it is in Xhosa praising.

*Direto* also allows for much improvisation, although the praiser must have a good knowledge of her subject's family history and locality. BaPedi women learn the praising style from their mothers and grandmothers, and in turn they pass their know-how on to their daughters. The content of any praises will depend on the subject, and the performance context. The actual delivery style consists of the dramatic declaiming of words in lines of fixed length, at a speed much faster than speaking. While these lines tend to descend gradually from the beginning to the end in Zulu and Xhosa praising, in BaPedi praising the tendency (in my research at least) is for the praiser to keep to a higher pitch level for most of the time, and to drop down suddenly in

intonation near the end of the declaimed line. As noted by Hansen (ibid), the language of Xhosa praising is 'often allusive and witty', and other authors have drawn attention to the 'love of word imagery' which BaPedi demonstrate in their songs (Huskisson 1982: 372). This applies also to BaPedi praising. When I experienced *Sekgapa* music on *Dibatsela* (December) 16<sup>th</sup> 2003, the performance opened with formal *direto* delivered by Ntona Mangwako Mailula and Mrs Rasekgokga *ngwana* Thema (the daughter of Thema) (See DVD Track 1 no. 06: 49-07: 23) and which were directed to myself as a representative of the Thema family from Kgatla. She began with ululations and did not use any notable gestures and actions, but in her choice of words she deliberately obscured the meanings of parts of her text, although these would be understood and appreciated by the local community (and of course myself). There is a transcription of her praises below (Figure 1 Page 41) with literal translations below each SePedi declaimed line. The Thema family are called the 'Elephant people of Bolepye. (The elephant is the totem of the Thema people). Bolepye is a place name, but the Thema family (who once lived there), is also named after it in the praise - poem. The family are also referred to metaphorically as 'hunter' in 'a game of skill', who are 'elephant people', and who 'eat the hoof', which means that they travel about, and spread their family accordingly. As such they are like 'a bullet along the path', and (by implication), wherever they go, they 'make a road through the [long] grass'. However, the Themas 'also eat pap (porridge) without relish'.

The references so far are to the Thema people, who became *majakane* some generations ago and have always supported and promoted education and progress. They have done this single-mindedly and resolutely, and have impacted on the people around them. But they have not cast away their respect for BaPedi cultural custom and tradition, and sotho values (This is also an allusion to my deep interest in *Sekgapa*, and which I see as worthy of study).

References to using a spoon (in place of the traditional cooking/stirring stick) underlie this allusion to the adoption of *sekgowa* (white) customs, but a false impression might be given by the references to 'going to the small house' and to 'human waste products sprout abundantly'. This betrays a wry sense of humour. What the poet is saying is that the Thema have always maintained their western orientation, but they have also been very productive to those around them, and in fact wherever they have lived and worked, they have spread and development and progress. So these words do not carry any offensive meaning.

## **BAPEDI TOTEMIC GROUPS AND THE MUSICAL CONNECTION**

There is a very old way to greet (*dumela*) someone, especially if that person is a stranger. One asks the stereotyped question: *O binang?*<sup>24</sup> to which the other person gives the expected answer: *Go bina* and then the name of the animal which is symbolic of the group with whom he claims to be related by blood. This relationship is a 'loose association', and it cannot be tracked through the study of family pedigree. Anthropologists have defined such 'presumed relationships' as 'totemic groups'. (The word totem comes from *atoteman* ('his relations'), a kinship concept of North American Indian (Algonquin/Ojibway), origin. (Webster's collegiate dictionary, A Merriam-Webster, 1948).

Every BaPedi person claims relationship with a 'totemic group', an element of BaPedi social structure that is characteristic of Sotho cultures generally. These groups 'are not descent groups in the same sense as are clans and lineages' (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 23), and membership is inherited from the father's side of the family, or from male relatives.

Because of the association of the groups with certain animals, this kind of grouping has been described as 'totemic', but there is no actual Sepedi word for such a grouping. Every MoPedi man has praise-name (*sereto*) and this is usually an animal name (*ibid.*) which indicates also his totemic group. Although one takes on a totemic name from the father's side, it seems that a totem can change, and in the published literature cases are cited of such changes. For example, it is reported that BaPedi Royal family totems changed several times, from *tholo* (kudu), to *kgabo* (monkey), to porcupine (*noko*) (H Junod 1924: 11; Mönnig 1967: 235), and these changes happened under certain conditions. A most common one was chieftom breakaway, and the new chieftom wanted to be 'distinct from the parent ...' (Mönnig *loc. cit.*).

The totem (animal) does not have any religious importance, and it is not given prayers or sacrifice (*ibid.*). But BaPedi call the totem animal *seano* (or *moano*), meaning 'object of veneration' (Mönnig 1967: 234), which means deep respect for the totem. Furthermore BaPedi also believe that the *seano* animal has a very strong *seriti* (a supernatural form of shadow or reflection (1967: 50-52), this quality is the totem animal but it is never active (1967: 235).

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<sup>24</sup> What do you dance?

A BaPedi totem group has little real purpose, apart from indicating that people are historically connected, and that 'ties cut across family'. But the group has social significance, and people with the same totem claim relationship by blood, and they are obliged to give each other help and hospitality whenever it is needed. Both Hammond-Tooke (1981: 23) and Mönnig (1967: 235-6) give examples of such situations including conditions of warfare, and going on a long journey. Totem animals also carried certain taboos, e.g. killing or eating it being forbidden. The use of a musical term in the customary greeting quoted above, is not random because, as noted by Junod (active among Sotho *Kgaga* people in the period 1899-1907), the phrase *go bina* denoted 'any danced' type. Junod was told by informants that when a person saw his totem animal he 'danced' it, that is, he honoured it 'from far' (usually with hand clapping) (cited by Hammond-Tooke 1981: 24). According to Mönnig, there was also a totemic dance which totemic groups observed in different ways. The last known occasion of a totemic dance was held 'during the last war' (i.e. World War 2, Mönnig 1967: 236), and the performers were BaPedi women, who danced around 'a wooden representation of the totem, which was placed on a raised platform, made of clay for the occasion' (ibid.). During Mönnig's fieldwork (in the 1960s), totems were apparently dying out, and 'rarely thought of' among BaPedi, but they liked to use it as a 'point of interest' in conversations, and they use the formal greeting to find out a person's family and place of origin.

Even today it is quite usual for a (MoPedi person) to greet another one with the *dumela*, or *thobela* for women and *morena* for men salutation, even when passing each other along the road. In *Sekgapa* performances one still finds traces of associations between totems and musical styles. The same may be said for *Dinaka* performances of men, according to some informants. Galane (2003: 85) does not make a direct connection between BaPedi totemic groups of wild-and domestic animals, and even insects, but he points out that these song and dances styles "...are used to refer metaphorically to people" (ibid).

What appears to be more common, according to Galane (and mentioned earlier) are the animal dances that are not linked to totems.

In *Dinaka* performances it is not uncommon to see *motšhediši* break into an 'animal' dance in which its gait and movements are emulated, but the reason may be related to individual experiences. If *motšhediši* has a great achievement in his life to celebrate,

he may choose to *go bina tlou* (elephant) because the size of this animal symbolizes the extent of the recent achievement. In historical times a hunter who killed a large or fierce animal would celebrate in a similar fashion in a *Dinaka* performance (This information comes from my informants and also my knowledge of such occasions).

James has raised the matter of BaPedi totemic groups in connection with a women's music group in Nchabeleng, in Sekhukhune district, who are called Dithabaneng, and who chose to perform their versions of the 'new' women's urban *Kiba* music. Although the women are unequal economically and socially, they acknowledge the same totem through birth or marriage. In performance context they "invoke" their totem as an expression of unity and solidarity (James 1999: 113-4). Totems are also invoked in praises (1999: 183), but apparently never in terms of actual dance styles. In *Sekgapa* performances in Mailula, the totem-animal-musical style connection does still exist to some extent, and a *motšhediši* may opt to 'dance the animal' for one or other reason, perhaps to celebrate the totem animal of *motšhediši*, or of the group. This is why the *Keedišo* player has to know the general song repertoire, and the individual totem-linked style as well.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Sekgapa* performance practice is the customary use of dance variations, which are a regular and expected feature of any performance. The variants are introduced by the dance leader, who 'shows the way' for the other dancers. It is common practice for the dance leader to select variant dance styles from a repertoire of these, and while some are abstract, others have actual animal names, some of which are totemic groups' names. A dance leader may opt to introduce such a dance style deliberately, because of its totem association, and its steps and movements may include representational ones which are intended to imitate the totem animal's gait or some other characteristic that it has. The totem dance has a characteristic rhythmical structure, and the *keedišo* drummer in particular has to know and execute all the drum rhythm (and variants) which identify the different totem dances. It is interesting to note that, although BaPedi totem dances have faded into history, aspects of it survive in *Sekgapa* and *Dinaka* dance behaviour as well as in daily social discourse. What is more, I have on many occasions experienced the totemic customary greeting with people, including those who recognize me, and address me by my totemic group name by way of polite and friendly conversation, when we pass each other along the road. (See Page 47 for the name of dances with animal/names, and of which several have totemic significance).

**Figure 1 : SERETO SA GA-THEMA (THE THEMA'S PRAISING)**

<i>Ke baga Thema,</i>	They are the Thema
<i>A kgwele a morei,</i>	Trapper with a hipbone,
<i>Tlou wa Bolepye,</i>	Elephant of Bolepye,
<i>Tlhako dia lewa;</i>	eaters of the hoof;
<i>Ma o kola a ditsela,</i>	the cleaners of the roads,
<i>Ke ba sekgatša sa moratha;</i>	they eat porridge without relish;
<i>Ke botho ba ba rego ge ba e ya ntle,</i>	when these people go outside, (to the small house,)
<i>Ba swara lehwana;</i>	they take hold of a small spoon;
<i>A thena bosepa Bolepye</i>	the human waste products in Bolepye,
<i>Bosepa bo a tlhoga.</i>	Human waste products are sprouting.
<i>Iwu! Iwu!</i>	(Sounds of ululating)
<i>Ke bo sedimole,</i>	You [Thema of the sacrificial animal] people [of Thema ancestors understood],
<i>sa bo mmatlou magoši a ga-Mmamabolo,</i>	and the she-elephant are the rulers of ga-Mmamabolo.
<i>Ba kgwatha ditedu ba ba makala.</i>	Suprisinglly, they lightly touched the beard [of those] who were astonished.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### THE SOUND INSTRUMENTS OF *SEKGAPA* AND THEIR MUSICAL ROLES

BaPedi drums, traditionally used for social and ceremonial music, were always conical and usually open at the base, and had a single skin head. They were made from a hollowed single block of wood from the *morula* tree. The drums have been described by Kirby, who also noted that they were made “in considerable variation in size” (1965: 30). But he did not report individual names for the different-sized drums, which are all generically called *meropa*<sup>25</sup> (s. *moropa*<sup>26</sup>).

Of special interest is Kirby’s account of the drums used at the homestead of a certain Chief Mohlaba whose people were “... mainly Tsonga... with an admixture of Sotho” (1965: 31-2). Kirby saw four drums in use, the largest called *gedzo*, the second largest *neguri*, and the two smaller drums called *tutumedjo* and *magodi* respectively. The largest drum-*gedzo*-was beaten with a long stick “shaped like a thin knobkierie” (knobbed stick), while the other drums were hand - beaten. The term for beating the largest drum was-*gediza* (sic). Given the similarity between two of the mentioned names with the names of two BaPedi drums in current use, it seems likely that these four drums were versions of the present *kibo*, *keedišo* (*gedzo*), and *ditiimetšo* drum used today. One might conclude that, despite the Tsonga-Sotho cultural environment, Kirby saw BaPedi drums or their cognates being used in the Chief’s homestead.

There are specimens of BaPedi *moropa* in the Kirby Collection house at UCT’s College of Music, and they demonstrate the typical shape and structure of the traditional drum: a conical resonator that is longer than it is wider, and at the lower end extends into a ‘neck’ or base, which has an opening. Kirby noted that the drums also had ‘one or two ears’ protruding from the resonator, with a hole through it into which a strip of skin or a riem was made from an animal hide (the kudu antelope, *Strepticeros capensis*), and it was always flayed and drawn over the drum resonator while wet. It was then pegged down into position by means of small wooden pegs that were driven into holes made just below the rim of the resonator. (See also Kirby, Plate 11A) which shows a *moropa* drum that was made in 1879, at the time of the

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<sup>25</sup> Two drums

<sup>26</sup> One drum

Sekhukhune Rebellion, and has had three drum heads in its history: the first placed in 1879 (of which there is no trace), the second in 1900, and the third in 1914 (both of which are apparent).

Nowadays the drum head is commonly made from oxhide, and industrial materials (such as metal, oil or petrol containers, and even milk cans) are used to make the resonators. Drumming has always been a specialized craft among BaPedi, and men have always been the makers of the instruments, which are played principally by women. But nowadays the traditional wooden *meropa* are rarely used, because those which exist are precious remnants belonging to the families of chiefs and headmen. It is more common to find *meropa* drums made from industrial materials, and they not only sound well but are more durable. Tuning the drum was done by the age-old way of exposing the drum skin to sunlight, or to a fire (ibid). The same procedure is followed today, and in urban areas it has been reported that electrical heaters have been used to heat the drum heads. When Kirby researched among BaPedi he noted that women were the main players of the drums, and they used two playing positions:

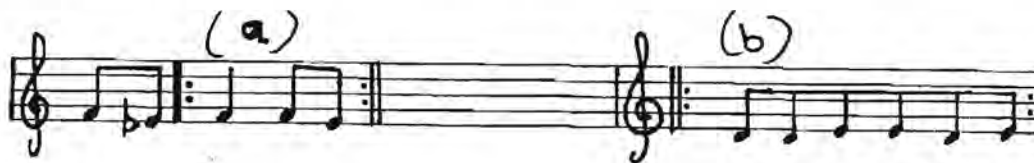
1. Holding the drum under the left arm (in the case of the small drums);
2. Placing the drum (larger one) on the ground with the drum head facing the player.

The playing action involved striking the skin with a "sharp staccato action", using the tips of the fingers, or one finger only, or with the palm, or heel of the hand (1965: 36). (See Plate 11b in Kirby which shows a BaPedi women sitting with knees to the right of the drum placed on the ground before her. It is being struck with the player's right hand, with the fingers slightly spread and the palm is in contact with the drum head).

There have always been individuals who are noted for their expertise in making drums, and of crucial importance in this is the proper preparation of the drum skin, and its tension. This is because the drumming patterns of BaPedi music have both 'sonic' and 'non-sonic' requirements which have to be met when making, and playing the drums. Basic stroke actions, and their placement on the drum skin, underlie BaPedi drumming. What a player does when drumming and how she does it, are all geared to the correct production of the sounds on the drum, and not only their rhythm patterns. (See later for a more detailed account of this, commencing on Page 48-49). This aspect of BaPedi drumming was noted by Kirby, when he described how drum pitch variation was achieved, by hand pressure, so that the drum patterns also had at

least two pitch levels inside them. Kirby referred to this as the ‘melodic use’ of the drums, which he heard “... at night near Schoornoord, in Sekukuniland (sic)”, and he provides two musical examples of drum pattern-motifs on p/31 (1965), each pattern involving two pitches approximately a whole tone apart.

**Figure 2: “Typical drum rhythms, exemplifying the ‘melodic’ use of *meropa*...”. From Kirby (1934), 1965: 30-1. (a) and (b) being examples of duple and triple rhythm patterns respectively**



Kirby presumably gauged the drum pitches with his set of tuning forks which he always took on his field trips, and it is interesting to note that his findings show two sets of tunings, and they are not identical. This suggests that the pitch alterations were intended to be a whole tone, which was what the player set out to do, although she may not have applied the same pressure on the skin, and always struck exactly the same spot on it, to execute the patterns. Kirby does not say more about this, but clearly pitch alteration by hand pressure and also by striking certain areas of the drum head, were what the player intended. This is what *meropa* players do today.

Yvonne Huskisson also described and discussed the *meropa* ‘drums’ (1982: 362), of which women were the principal players, and they used actions much like those described by Kirby. Huskisson singles out for special mention a larger size drum which she describes as “bowl-like”, which was played with a stick with a flattened end (ibid). Plate 9 in 1982: 363 shows a young woman playing such a drum, clearly a *moropa* type but bigger, and behind her are three women playing the conical drums, but holding them in positions which are identical with those observed and described by John Blacking, in several publications on Venda music, and used by young girls when playing their *mirumba* (s. *murumba*) drums for their recreational dance, *tshigombela*. These Venda drums are cognates of BaPedi *meropa*.

This practice is unknown to me and my informants, and I can only assume that the practice was a ‘borrowing’ and a customary practice among BaPedi in Huskisson’s time of research.

Huskisson also reports on German missionary K. Endemann's account of BaPedi women and drumming from 1874 (1982: 362), that the drums were built in sets corresponding to four voices, but Huskisson states that the tuning was not 'consciously' done, but that "...a subconscious pitch sense is satisfied" (ibid). Like Kirby, she does not provide the specific names of the drums, or elaborate on their musical roles as such, and BaPedi conceptualizations of these instruments, which underlie their uses and functions in the music. Although a more recent account of the drums has appeared (Galane 2003), in the context of *Dinaka* flute ensemble music, apart from the various names of the drums and some mention of their rhythm patterns, which are imparted by a system of word syllables (mnemonics), nothing is said about the significance of these mnemonics, which go far beyond indicating rhythm patterns.

#### **THE CURRENT USEGE OF BAPEDI MEROPA DRUMS WITH REFERENCE TO SEKGAPA CONTEXTS**

Today, in performances of *Sekgapa*, and other BaPedi social and ceremonial music, the drums are called by their specific names and not by the generic *moropa*. BaPedi still maintain that women are the official ('master') drummers. There are almost always four drums, which differ in size and which are played by three persons, one of them being responsible for the smallest drums (which also differ in size).

BaPedi place great importance on *maina a meropa ya BaPedi*<sup>27</sup>. The drums' names have variants which are common to different districts, and communities, which is not surprising, given the number of SePedi dialects spoken in BaPedi country. The largest drum is commonly known as *kibo*, with alternate names such as *sekgokolo*, and *koma* in certain communities.

*Kibo* is so called from a term deriving from verb *go kiba* (lit. 'to stamp, thud, and pound). My informants at Mailula in Mmamabolo district also used the verb in duplicate to speak about *kibo*, saying *go kiba kiba* (lit. 'to stamp, pound the feet (as when stamping in the dance). (*Kibo* is the common designation in this district, which was my research area). *Kibo* as an adjective denotes also 'bigness' greatness' both in size and in sound (as also of a deep voice, =male voice, as opposed to the 'small' voice of a female or child). This opposition has been well documented in African music studies. (See also Galane 2003: 23, who gives the meaning as 'manner of thundering' for *kibo*). This drum is struck with a length of thick hosepipe. An

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<sup>27</sup> The names of the BaPedi drums

alternate name, *sekgokolo*, means something 'round, and big', and is used in certain areas, such as Mphahlele, whereas *kibo* and *kiba* are found in wide use in Moletši area (ibid).

*Kibo*, the big bass drum, is used to define the music's metrical framework (much like the function of *thunga* hemispherical drum in Venda music), and is played with the drummer in a standing position, wielding the thick hosepipe beater. When the drummer wants to impart the required *kibo* pattern, she utters the symbles *khi khi khi* etc, imitating the deep resonating sounds of the *kibo* drum. Since the *kibo* patterns are metrical (comprising sequences of beats and no subdivisions thereof), the player must place the strokes in the proper place on the drum skin (usually in the center), so that the sound resonates fully and regularly through all the other parts. In *Sekgapa* the *kibo* player strikes the drum skin on the edge, with the hosepipe beater contacting the edge halfway along its length. The beater must first come into contact with the rim of the drum before it follows through to strike near the central area. But because the beater at the farther end is fairly pliable, its impact on the rim or edge of the drum skin, which is made with a strong downward movement, causes the hosepipe beater to come into contact with the drum skin near its center. It is as if the initial action propels the farther end of the beater onto the drum skin.

**Plate 3: KIBO/SEKGOKOLO DRUMS**



©Photo by: *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 3. A)



©Photo by: *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 3. B)

*Keedišo* is the second largest drum, and its names derive from the verb *go bontšha*<sup>28</sup>. Alternate names for the drum are *poisele* and *kgalapedi* (Galane 2003: 52). *Go bontšha* alludes to the close musical connection between the *keedišo* drummer, and the dancer(s). There are times in *Sekgapa* when ‘solo’ dancing takes place, and when any dancer may opt to perform in an individualistic manner. There may be several such occasions for this in as many dance styles, and a dance leader is expected to demonstrate her abilities, and to improvise, showing exceptional artistry and expertise. She may also present a dance style and lead off the other dancers who must then ‘follow’ her pattern. A selected dance style may also be representational, as when the dancer imitates the gait and stance of a particular animal; they may opt to dance in one of the following styles:

Peacock	<i>phikoko</i>
Phuti	<i>springbok</i>
Kgabo	<i>monkey</i>
Snake	<i>noga</i>
Crocodile	<i>Kwena</i>

The *keedišo* player must closely follow the dance steps and movements of the dance leader who has to introduce the variant dance styles and patterns, each having its distinctive rhythmic structure, and this, and its variants have to be reproduced by the *keedišo* drummer. So her knowledge, experience and expertise in the repertory of variations inside *Sekgapa* performances have to be extensive. The significance of improvisations in BaPedi music has been reported by Galane (2003: 72), who cites a BaPedi concept underlying “dance improvisations” and which is expressed as *go dira manka* (lit. to do capers). Variations are not just an essential structural trait; they are a crucial aspect of BaPedi musical performance generally, (as they are for most if not all African music). Galane makes the valid point that improvisations have to be executed in such a manner calculated to excite the audience as well as entertain/amuse them.

*Keedišo* is played with the hands and the player has a number of playing actions and their resultant strokes in her repertory, which she draws on to produce the drum rhythms correctly. These are imparted verbally with syllables *nke-ke-di* which represents three different pitch levels or “timbre units” (Kubik: 1990).

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<sup>28</sup> To show, imitate, or follow

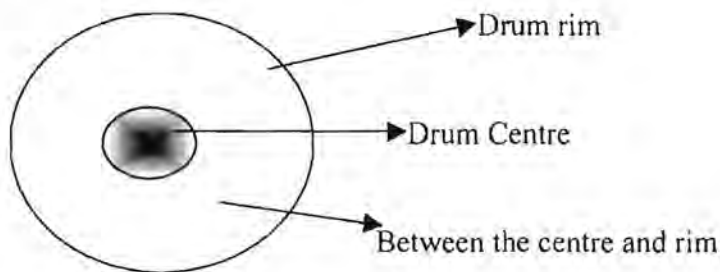
In the execution of the drum strokes, the position of the hands and the fingers, and where exactly they make contact with the drum skin, are of crucial importance. In fact, when talking about their drums and drumming techniques and prescriptive rhythms, my informants always stressed, in their demonstrations, and also verbally, the importance of the actual sound qualities of the pitches in a rhythm pattern.

In *keedišo* drumming, the sound syllable *-n* (syllabic) usually falls on a beat that is sounded so softly that it is rather muted. *Ke*-is slightly more accented and louder, while *di* -gets the strongest accent, and also carries the highest of the three pitch areas. Other African music researchers have described and discussed mnemonics in the context of learning and transmitting African music, because it is through them that standard rhythm patterns and their sound aspects are remembered. These authors have used descriptions like “nonsense syllables”, “oral notation” and “oral mnemonics” and even solfege, but in my opinion this system has been best described by Kenichio Tsukada as “the verbal representation of instrumental sounds” (1997: 349)/(This author has also discussed comparative systems in other, non-African cultures e.g. in Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Scotland). As he has shown, the verbal syllables do not just carry rhythm patterns but also their specific tone qualities/relative pitches which the individual drum strokes must produce. As Tsukada puts it so clearly, “...They [syllables] do not just help memorize patterns, but transmit knowledge...they are meaningful as sound symbols”. An example of a *keedišo* drum rhythm pattern is conveyed by the following syllables sequence: *Nke-ke-nke-ke, nke-ke-nke-kedi-nke-ke-nke-ke*.

**Figure 3: Basic *keedišo* drum rhythm pattern**

The figure displays four staves of musical notation. The first three staves are in treble clef and represent the right hand (R.H.) and left hand (L.H.) parts of the drumming pattern. The first staff has a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff has a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The third staff has a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The fourth staff is in bass clef and shows a rhythmic pattern with notes and rests, labeled 'kibo drum'.

**Figure 4: Playing areas**



*Keedišo* drumming involves the following hand position:

The player strikes the drum skin using both hands:

- with the flat hand (fingers in straight position);
- with the fingers splayed (slightly spread out);
- the front of the finger joints of the fourth and fifth fingers.
- the left-hand stroke is lighter than that of the right hand, in order to achieve dynamic contrast;
- the right hand stroke falls in the area between the center, and the edge (rim) of the drum skin, which also adds to a louder and contrasting sound.

In standard dance routines (which are not variations), the drumming is moderately loud and continuous, but when dance variations occur, the drumming becomes louder, and the *keedišo* player accordingly introduces variant rhythms which, together with all the combined drum patterns, create cross-rhythms in the music.

As far as drumming strokes are concerned, BaPedi women employ the basic strokes which are also in widespread use in other parts of Africa, namely:

- A 'free' stroke, in which the hand bounces off the drum skin immediately after impact. (A 'free' stroke may be made with the heel of the hand resting on the edge of the drum skin).
- A 'damped' or 'muted' stroke, in which the hand strikes the drum skin and then is held down on it for a short time or until the next stroke.
- A 'pressed' stroke: being a 'free' stroke with one hand (or the beater in the case of the *kibo* player), while the other hand depresses the drum skin.

The tone quality or timbre of any drum stroke will of course depend on (a) its force, and place on the drum skin, and (b) the presence or absence of pressing on the drum

skin. A sequence of drum strokes and sounds yields the “timbre units” and their sequence and rhythm which are associated with specific drum rhythm patterns.

**Plate 4: KEEDIŠO DRUMS**



©Photo by: *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 4. A)



©Photo by: *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 4. B)

*Dititimešo* and *dititinti* are the SePedi names for the two small drums in the BaPedi drum ensemble. They are nowadays made from a tromkan (Afrik. ‘milk can’) or the like, with a stretched skin secured over the opening by means of wooden pegs and (sometimes) with additional lengths of interlacing thongs for extra security. (See Plates 5A and 5B Page 52-53). In some communities one finds only one small drum in use, but two contrasting pitch levels and timbres are also produced from one and the same drum, by striking different areas on the drum skin—in the centre, and closer to the rim of the drum head.

In both of the above-mentioned drum names, the syllable *di* is a plural prefix, while *metšo* and *-nti* are noun suffixes. The monosyllables *ti*, *ti* are phonetically the same in both names, but they differ in their pitch levels, being approximately a whole tone apart, with the second tone having the higher (relative) pitch. In terms of the most common and convenient representation of the BaPedi anhemitonic penta scale:

**Figure 5 : BAPEDI PENTATONIC SCALE (DESCENDING...)**



the two pitches would be G and A respectively. BaPedi have a term which describes the difference between the two relative pitch levels which are present in all BaPedi drumming. It is *kgalapedi*, (mentioned earlier as an alternate name for *keedišo*), which Galane translates literally as 'two sounds' (Galane 2003: 74). Apart from their pitch differences, they also differ in their sound volume, the higher pitch carrying a heavier accent and therefore being louder.

The names of the two smaller drums also carry ideophonic syllables that are direct verbal representations of the drum sounds which must occur in the drums' respective rhythm patterns. When both drums are used (as a rule) to create the drum patterns, and since one drum is smaller than the other, its tones will be comparatively 'smaller' or higher than those produced on the larger of the two drums.

The drum sounds are represented respectively by the syllables *di ti ti me tšo*, and *di ti ti nti*, (lower and higher). Each carries its own pitch level, giving a total of low and high level pitches. Here is an example of a drum rhythm pattern produced on these two smaller drums, and showing their respective verbal syllables which designate their musical rhythm and timbres.

**Figure 6: Kibo drum with two small *dititimetšo* drums,**



Galane has drawn attention to the 'onomatopoeic sound' of *ti ti* associated with the small drums, which he says are used 'to cut time'. I am unclear about his meaning, but it may be that Galane is referring to subdivisions of the beat. Galane also notes that the larger of the two drums is tuned to the *phalola* endblown flute (*naka*) used in *Dinaka*, but suggests no relative pitch for it or for any of the other pipe tunings, and the BaPedi scale. According to the given representation of the BaPedi penta scale earlier on, *phalola* would be the octave above the key note or above (cfr fig. 4: 63).

When a performance is under way, the drums combine their individual rhythm patterns according to long-established musical procedures. When one listens to the overall sound of this music, one becomes aware of a total rhythmic structure that seems to come out 'on top' of all the other sounds of singing and sound-making accessories (such as leg rattles). It is the 'heard' result of a complex of drum rhythms, and it always has a melodic contour—a 'wavy intonation pattern' that suggests certain phrases in Sepedi which is a tonal language like so many African languages.

Plate 5: *DITITIMETŠO* DRUMS



©Photo: by Kgaladi Thema (Plate 5. A)

### DITITIMETŠO DRUMS



©Photo: by Kgaladi Thema (Plate 5. B)

### THE HORN OR SIDE-BLOWN TRUMPET (*LEPATATA*)

Huskisson (1982: 373) refers to this horn as *lepatata*<sup>29</sup> (also *phalaphala*, *patata*), and points out a significant aspect of the structure: the ribbing is rubbed away so that the outer surface is left very smooth, and the instrument is lighter than it would be without the rubbing. The embouchure is lateral, as are most horns in sub - Saharan Africa.

Such horns were used as signal horns to call people to gather, and were also taken into a battle. In certain dance events they were blown to excite the dancers, a function they retain in *Sekgapa* performances today. Huskisson mentions BaPedi 'tribal doctors' having horns to summon rain.

Generally speaking, all the indigenous people of South Africa (excluding the Khoe Khoe and San) had instruments made from animal horns. Kirby distinguished two main types: larger horns from large antelopes (sable, [*Hippotragis Niger*] and kudu [*Strepsiceros capensis*] (1965: 73), and small horns made from small antelope.

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<sup>29</sup> Kudu horn

BaPedi *lepatata/palapala* is cognate with the Venda *phalaphala* and was like it a 'social instrument', belonging to a home or family and not to an individual. (See Plate 26. A, 1 and 4). Of special interest is the horn in Plate A. 1, which was used by BaPedi when the Ndebele chief Umzilikazi invaded their territory circa 1830. Kirby has provided a detailed description of the instrument, its uses and functions, and the sounds produced on it. He observed that when the horn was blown "...the aim was to produce a powerful vibratory sound", and not a specific note, and signals often took the form of a rapid series of sounds. (1965: 78). According to Kirby the Tswana cognate was called *Lepapata*, which is the name in common use among BaPedi today.

In *Sekgapa* performances there is still the use of kudu horn *lepatata*. This instrument is owned and/or used by the manager of a group, *malokwane*. The instrument is not played as an essential part of any pattern, but its tuning i. e. the pitch it yields (commonly one, and/or its octave, is the keynote of the music. This is 'A' in the notated BaPedi scale, and is called *phalola* in SePedi terms, being the keynote of all *Dinaka*, and *Sekgapa* music.

*Phalola* also denotes the name of the "...set of *Dinaka* [endblown flutes]," and "...the keynote to all the *Dinaka*" (Galane 2003: 209). In *Sekgapa* performances witnessed by me, the manager used his instrument much like a signal horn, and as a means of cueing, i.e. for signalling that certain things, kinds of actions, have to be done at certain stages in a performance. To an outsider not familiar with the music, one might think that the side-blown trumpet is used freely, and according to the whims of the player at any given moment. But the trumpet also yields the keynote, and is always sounded intermittently before a performance commences, and the performers gather themselves together in order to usher in the music and dance. (See DVD track 3. no. 19: 41 accompanying this dissertation). In this way the drummers can test their tunings and the song leader and chorus can mentally adjust their voices to a common tonality before the dance song begins. *Phalaphala* is also part of the regalia of the manager, and he may opt to use his instrument for dramatic effect as well as for musical reasons. (See the pictures below on Page 55)

Plate 6: *LEPATATA* (kudu horn)



© Photo: by *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 6)

Plate 7 : *LEPATATA* (close up of mouth-piece)



© Photo: by *Kgaladi Thema* (Plate 7)

## BAPEDI IDIOPHONES USED AS SOUND-MAKING ACCERIES IN SEKGAPA PERFORMANCE

There are two types: a hand-held container rattle called *tšhela*, and strung ankle rattles called *mathotse*. *Tšhela* is a container rattle made from a dried gourd, and filled with small seeds or stones, and then mounted on a stick which serves as a handle. Such container rattles have a wide distribution in Southern Africa. The Tsonga had such an instrument, called *tsele* (Kirby 1934, 1965: 9) and was and still is used in *mancomane* (sic) exorcism rituals. The Venda form of this instrument is called *tšhela*, and is used in *malopo/malombo* exorcism rituals. (Blacking 1982; 1990; Ralushai 1985). But Kirby gave the name *mathotse* to BaPedi hand rattles, which does not agree with present usage. According to my informants, the name is *tšhela*, and it has always been used in ancestor-based rituals. The ankle rattles, called *mathotse*, would never have been used in ancestor rituals. *Sekgapa* women wear such ankle rattles (See Page, 32). These *mathotse* define the rhythms of dance steps and movements in *Sekgapa* performance. These *Sekgapa mathotse* are clearly ankle rattles, and as such they do not seem to have had a history among BaPedi, or else they were overlooked by researchers. However, as strung rattles there is evidence of the use of such rattles, but they were leg rattles. Huskisson reports them as being called *thlwathlwadi* (sic) (1982: 364, Plate 10) being an ideophonic name for strung cocoon rattles worn just below the knee (one per dancer). Kirby has described these rattles, made from long strings of cocoon moths, as *dichela* (sic) (Kirby, 1965: 4). He states that the cocoons were collected by girls, or else they traded for them with other people who had them. In making them, a small hole was made in each cocoon when it was still soft and pliable, and a small stone placed inside. Several cocoons were then fixed in pairs on a long cord or plaited fibre, with about 140 cocoons in all (1934; 1965: pl. 2). (Galane (2003: 63) mentions *dithlwathlwadi* (which has alternate names of *matšhokgo* and *musu/mesu* in other communities). The rattles were made of pods from the *musu/mesu* tree common to some parts of Limpopo, and filled with small particles of sand, left to dry, and then strung on a long cord. As shown in Huskisson (1982, Plate 10) there were usually two rows of strung pods worn on the lower leg. The evidence from both Kirby and Huskisson shows that these cocoon rattles were leg rattles, worn below the knee and tied around the calf. BaPedi *mathotse* are ankle rattles. Equivalent instruments would be the Zulu *amafohlwana*, or *amafowa*, and Mpondo *amahahlalazo*, and South Sotho *morothloane*. All have been described by Kirby

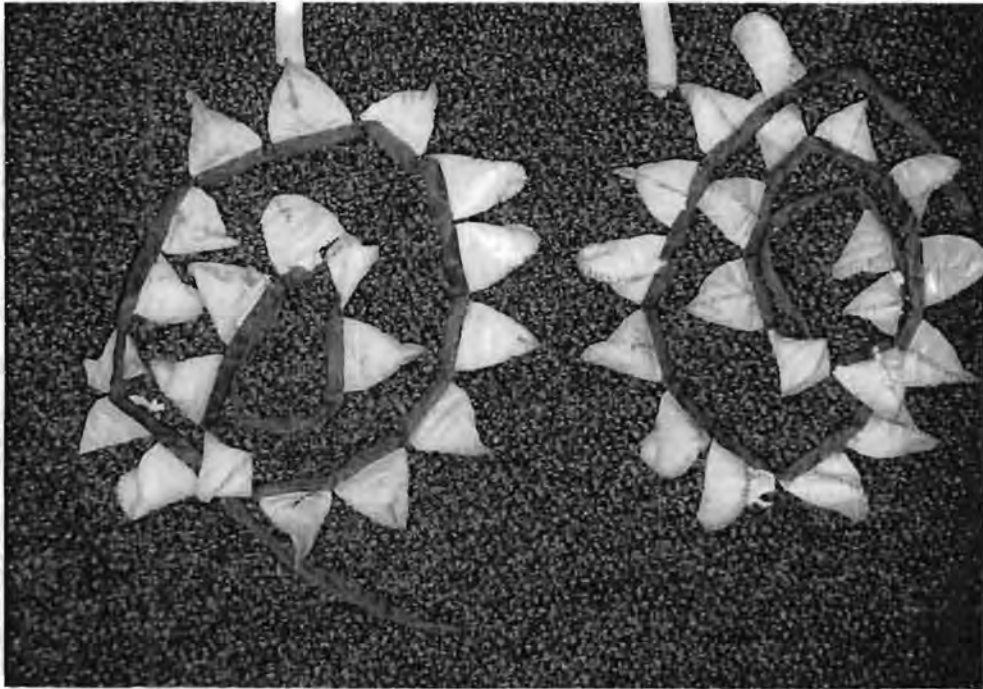
(1965: 6-7). Possibly the *Sekgapa* performers had the earlier ankle rattle prototype in mind when they fashioned their *mathotse* using more durable plastic. The idea of having several small containers on a harness of sorts is what the *mathotse* have in common with the earlier leg rattles, but otherwise they are proper ankle rattles and worn in pairs. Like *-tlhwatlhwadi*, and *-tšhela*, (and also *-tšhokgo*), these names are ideophonic, and when one speaks them one reproduces the characteristic sounds and timbres of the rattles.

**Plate 8: *DITŠHELA* (hand shakers)**



© Photo: by *kgaladi Thema*

Plate 9: *MATHOTSE* (ankle rattles)



© Photo: by *kgaladi Thema*

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### THE CONTENT AND MEANING OF *SEKGAPA* SONGS

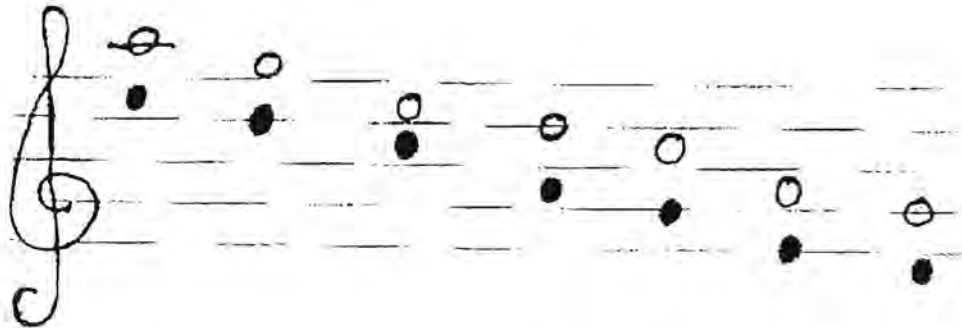
In *Sekgapa* music the performers have special musical roles which may also reflect their social roles. For example, *malokwane 1*, the elected manager or group leader, may act as the lead singer (Solo) or his/her deputy, *malokwane 2*, may do so. Otherwise this role is taken by an acknowledged lead singer, who is experienced and creative and who can introduce the songs and the variations on their basic themes. There is also an acknowledged dance leader, *motšhediši*, and she must have a complete knowledge of the drumming patterns as well as the dance styles associated with them. These include totem-related dance styles, and a good dance leader also knows all the vocal patterns as well, and can effectively direct the singers in the dance routines. There are also the drummers, three or two who are well acquainted with the basic drumming patterns and all the song and dance style which are related to *Sekgapa*. The structure or 'basic plan' of any song is antiphony, being alternations of Solo and Chorus phrases by the lead singer to which the Chorus responds (*akgola*) (Huskisson 1982: 362).

An entire song is built on this plan, and it undergoes elaboration in performance. Antiphony allows scope for variation and so it needs an expert and innovative lead singer who can vary the verbal and therefore the melodic content of his/her phrases. These tend to be more wordy than the Chorus phrases and must be done creatively. The Chorus phrases do not undergo variation melodically, although the words may be replaced by vocables, and there is commonly overlapping between the pair of phrases, achieved by changing the beginning-and ending-points of the lead singer's phrase so that it overlaps with the Chorus phrase. Song texts tend to be short, but they can also 'grow', in a performance, by repetitions of the phrase-pair at different pitch levels. In any song the singers sing parts appropriate for their voice range, and in the chorus responses harmonic combinations occur when the singers do this together.

This result in parallel intervals, resulting from the enrichment of the standard melodic phrase by individual singers they may also introduce their own phrases at certain points in the total pattern, but again this results in harmonic parallelism. According to my practical knowledge of *Sekgapa* songs, i.e. through active performance and not as

yet through systematic analysis, the harmonic combinations are done according to established procedures, and only certain tones in BaPedi pentatonic scale may accompany other notes in that scale. You cannot sing just any two notes together. The harmonic combinations occur through the selective use of the proper tones, what Blacking has described as “harmonically equivalent tones”, within “the” BaPedi pentatonic scale. The following Figure. 7 is a convenient notation of the scale,

**Figure 7 : SHOWING BAPEDI PENTATONIC SCALE (WHITE NOTES)<sup>30</sup>**



in a descending sequence because this is how the tonal sequences happen in *Sekgapa* melodies, which are overwhelmingly ‘falling’ melodies. Underneath the tones of the penta scale are their “harmonically equivalent tones”, and which singers draw on when harmonizing.

As stated earlier in chapter, notated pitches do not agree with the pitches of the western tempered scale, but are sufficiently close to justifying this notation.

The *Sekgapa* women of Mailula have a varied repertory of songs with standard phrases that are always sung, and which identify and even categorize the individual

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<sup>30</sup> Showing BaPedi pentatonic scale (white notes) from which derive the tone-rows of *Sekgapa* melodies, and the “harmonically equivalent” or “companion” tones (black notes) which are used in harmonization. The chordal structures which arise are fourth, and fifths and occasional third. The same chord structures arise in BaPedi *Dinaka* music, which is played with end-blown flutes which are tuned to the same scale. Blacking reported the same chordal structures for Venda youth dancers involving reed-pipe ensembles-Mutshaini, Givha, Visa and Tshikanganga (Blacking 1982: 470), and also for children’s songs set in the same pentatonic scale (1982: 460Ex. 77). See Hansen 1982: 34ff, for a discussion of “harmonic equivalence” in Xhosa music, in which the principle is applied in the hexatonic system of Xhosa music. The same principle operates in Venda heptatonic music.

songs according to content and purpose (function). Most of the songs go back to earlier historical times, and their texts are about “timeless moral values” as well as current issues, (Galane 2003: 76), and their themes and messages “have been used by almost all the *Kiba* communities of South Africa over time” (ibid).

There is for example, the so-called ‘Greeting song’ *E rene ko ko!*<sup>31</sup> which occurs in two basic versions, one being performed just before the commencement of a *Sekgapa* performance routine, and the other immediately after it. Both these Greeting song versions contain the standard ideophonic phrase-*ko ko/ko ko* -(knock-knock) but they differ in their textual content and meaning, in their specific melodies, and in their overall performance style and the music’s purpose. Greeting Song 1 recorded among Mailula *Sekgapa* members has the following text:

***E rene koko***

<i>E rene koko!</i>	Say knock-knock!
<i>A ge koko!</i>	Hey! Knock-knock!
<i>Ba bo mokgoise</i>	Of my friends
<i>Motho wa ditshaba!</i>	A man of the nation!
<i>A ge koko!</i>	Hey! Knock-knock!

DVD Track 3 no. 19: 41-21: 28.

This song is sung when the *Sekgapa* group presents itself to its public, at an event to which the group has been invited. The words address the public in a personal way, and the singers politely request permission to be allowed to present themselves and their music. There is no choreographed dancing in this performance, the emphasis being on the vocalization. The singers view this as a “warming up” song by which they sing themselves into the appropriate “voice” and spirit for the performance that is to follow.

In contrast to this “song-text-based” item (Galane 2003: 78), there is another Greeting song with the standard phrase *Ke rena baeng*<sup>32</sup>, which carries a different message. Through it the *Sekgapa* group announces what it has come to do-which is to participate in dancing, that may be competitive but which should be viewed in the spirit of friendly rivalry. This song is a full-fledged *Sekgapa* dance song complete

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<sup>31</sup> Say knock-knock!

<sup>32</sup> We are guests/ visitors.

with organized dancing and drumming, and the common text in Mailula village (and Mmamabolo district as well) is:

***Ke rena baeng***

*Ke rena baeng!*

We are the visitors/guests!

*Re kgopela go raloka le lena?*

Can you come and play with us?

DVD Track 4 no. 23: 16-24: 43

James cites the same song as part of the repertoire of men's and women's *Kiba* performances, the female version having the standard phrase *Basadi ba baeng* (Visiting women) (Jame 1999: 79), and notes that the songs stress:

That the host dancers-equivalent to a football 'home team'-should not feel threatened by the arrival of the visiting dance group since it has come in a spirit not of rivalry but of co-operation, not to set themselves apart but to be included in a broader unity" (ibid).

Galane has termed it a "Post-Greeting song" because it follows the "warm-up song" (Galane 2003: 80-81).

Huskisson (1982: 351) references a song with the standard *koko* phrase in the context of wedding celebrations. She states that "when quests enter the bride's home they sing: *A re ko ko, ko ko, re a ko ko ta re re bulang*" (When we knock, we knock, open for us!).

Like other *Sekgapa* music, and BaPedi vocal communal music generally, the songs are cyclic in form, within which Solo and Chorus phrases occur antiphonally, with or without overlapping of phrases. Improvisations (being variations on standard phrases) occur in Solo phrases, being drawn from a stock of variants, or else improvised 'on the spot', while the chorus remain as a rule unchanged, but are harmonically enriched by parallism. Both these greeting songs are therefore not one and the same song, in that they carry different meanings and purposes, although their actual melodies may be related tonally and harmonically. If a person of rank is present at a *Sekgapa* event, then he/she is given recognition in the Greeting song by a direct acknowledgement of his/her presence e.g. *Thobela kgoši*, a song greeting a king will be used (ibid).

The themes of *Sekgapa* songs address issues about social life and morality, and expected behavioural norms, and they may also rebuke someone who has acted in an unacceptable manner. Galane has identified *Kiba* songs in terms of "Lifestyle" songs, (about persons and their behaviour); "Polity song", (about political issues), and even songs pertaining to the responsibilities of all those people who have undergone

initiation, and also marriage, to their families and their communities, to the environment and ecology. There is also what he calls “special request songs” which usually carry messages relating to particular persons and issues, as well as farewell songs by which the music-makers take their leave of their audience (Galane 2003: 82-88). These themes are to be found in *Sekgapa* women’s songs and some examples are given here:

A farewell song, called *E rene salane*<sup>33</sup> The full text of this song is:

***E rene salane***

<i>E rene salane!</i>	Say! Good-bye!
<i>A ge salane</i>	hey! Good-bye!
<i>ba bo mokgotse</i>	My friends,
<i>motho wa batho!</i>	A person of the people!

DVD Track 5 no. 27: 30-28: 53

This song observes the protocol of *Sekgapa* groups in that it tells the people present that the *Sekgapa* musical event is going to end shortly, because it is now late in the afternoon, the sun is setting and the people have to return to their homes. The song is not sung to mark the end of the event, but warns of its forthcoming conclusion. According to my collected *Sekgapa* songs (a total of 50+) in my possession, there are a number of “Good-bye songs” in a *Sekgapa* group’s repertoire. When they perform they select from this quota what will be suitable for the occasion, and perform it, with the usual variations. I witnessed and filmed a *Sekgapa* performance involving young children under the song leadership of an adult woman, which featured their special “good-bye song” and which comes from the adults’ repertoire. This happened in Segopye village in Mmamabolo district. The song is called *Lediketše*<sup>34</sup> DVD Track 7, a phrase that is also standard in the text and in the repeating Chorus parts.

The words are as follows, and are sung in antiphony by lead singer and Chorus:

***Lediketše***

<i>A ge a re ye gae wowo!</i>	Hey! Let us go home!
<i>Lediketše,</i>	The sun has set,
<i>A re ye gae wowo!</i>	Hey! Let us go home!

<sup>33</sup> Say Good-bye.

<sup>34</sup> The sun has gone around i.e. has set.

The words warn that the performance is going to end shortly, but the song's original context was one involving women's domestic communal work, either hoeing, weeding, and even gathering food and firewood. These were all day occupations ending at sunset, but in this version the context has shifted, and words and music have a different social reference. The song performance is a polite indication by the performers to their audience/public that the music – making is coming to an end. The lyrics of *Sekgapa* songs cover a wide range of themes, and prominent among those which are taught to young children are songs pertaining to social and moral behaviour, which applies also to maintaining habits of cleanliness, neatness and good manner of dress. An example of such a “lifestyle” song is the following, which is entitled *O se ntshware nna wee!*<sup>35</sup>. The text comprises pairs of phrases sung antiphonally between Lead Singer and Chorus, and variations in the text, incurred by introducing a new subject or topic, may expand the text within a performance. (Variation points are marked with \* in the text below). Musically the Chorus phrases remain virtually unchanged.

***O se ntshware nna wee***

<i>O se ntshware nna wee!</i>	O! Do not touch me!
<i>O tlilo ntlotša matšhila</i>	You will make me...*
<i>O se ntshware ka Sekhipa!</i>	O! Do not touch my T-shirt!*
<i>O! Wee o tlilo ntlotša Matšhila</i>	You will make it filthy!
DVD Track 6 no. 15: 03-16: 55	

This song is about the importance of being neat and clean in appearance, and this applies to children and adults. For example, T-shirts are part of the conventional dancing dress of *Sekgapa* women, and they should always be white, spotless, and an asset to those who wear them. Garments with grubby edges and stains are just not acceptable. In its wider implications the song appeals to everyone, children and adults alike, to take pride in their appearance and in their general conduct.

Then there is a dance song which seeks to instil and also express pride in sotho customs, and in particular the status and role of BaPedi young women, on whom rests the stability and continuity of BaPedi family and household. The song is called

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<sup>35</sup> O! Do not touch me!

*Mathari*<sup>36</sup> and has a very short text, comprising antiphonal singing and repetitions of a single phrase:

***Mathari***

*Mathari ka dilepe woo!*

Young women are holding axes!

*O! A ge ka dilepe woo!*

O yes, indeed! They are holding axes!

Syllables like *Woo!* and *O!* and the like are non-lexical, and difficult to translate; they are interjective, being ‘thrown in’ so as “to reinforce the sentiments expressed in the line rather than having literal meaning” (Joseph 1987: 99). In this context I have translated *Woo!* And *O!* as, ‘O yes indeed!’ because the SePedi syllables here express great approval and admiration. The text refers to the axes which BaPedi women took with them to collect firewood and prepare it for household use. They always went on such forays in groups. Each woman had her own axe, with which to chop the wood. As providers of water and wood for heat and fire, and for washing, women have always been a source of power and without them households will collapse. The axe is a symbol of this power in the domestic arena, and some *Sekgapa* women like to hold a small wooden axe in one hand, which they brandish and move about as they dance, even emulating chopping actions. Although BaPedi women are dependent upon their menfolk for certain things, notably children, which gives them their “aspired – to status” in BaPedi society (James 1999: 102), women still wield considerable power in the domestic domain, in fact they ‘hold up’ family and community life, (symbolized in the axes held aloft). This is pride fully expressed in the *Sekgapa* song and young female children learn it and are reminded of women’s rightful and honoured place in BaPedi society (and by implication, the responsibilities it carries, even in these modern times).

*Mainama*<sup>37</sup> is another *Sekgapa* song whose text reflects another of the essential preoccupations of BaPedi women in the rural areas-communal hoeing.

The text is as follows:

***Mainama***

*Wa inama wee!*

You there! If you bend!

*Wa innamologa!*

You there! If you bend out!

*Mmagwe ke moloi!*

Your mother is a witch!

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<sup>36</sup> Young women

<sup>37</sup> If you bend

*Ke molo! wa bošego!*

She bewitches at night!

*Wa go lala a loya batho!*

She bewitches people!

My informants have described this kind of song as a 'motivational' song, which is taught to youngsters by their elders through *Sekgapa* performance practice. I recorded this song at Segopye village in Mmamabolo. For cultural outsiders the text is cryptic, although the accusation of witchcraft implies that the topic is a very serious one since witchcraft is a deed formerly punishable by death. For the local people who know the song, its words draw up a picture of a situation of communal hoeing, which was the original social context of such a song, in earlier times when co-operation among families and communities was so vital for agricultural work and food production. When hoeing, women stood in rows alongside each other and wielded their hoes in concerted action, bending forward with raised hoes, striking the earth with the hoe blades and resuming the former position to repeat the actions in sequence. Each phase of action had to flow smoothly into the next, each woman coordinating her movements to those of the group.

In such a situation, just one person stopping for a brief "rest" ('bending out of the line of workers') will disrupt the united action and spoil the work being done. The message warns of the dangers of being a 'spoilsport' and acting selfishly without consideration for others. This applies to lifestyle as well, as any unacceptable behaviour can have serious consequences for the offender and for the people around her/him. The unacceptability of this kind of behaviour without any regard for one's family and community is stressed in the accusations of witchcraft. Although the song imparts a more friendly warning to children, to be encouraging and responsible at all times, it also carries a warning that all bad actions have bad consequences. In the song, pressure is put on children to show that they be prepared to enter the world of adults with all the responsibilities it brings.

Another 'motivational' song carrying a moral message is one entitled *Le so, le so*<sup>38</sup>. The text consists of a single phrase that is then treated antiphonally in performance, and with repetitions.

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<sup>38</sup> Like this, like that.

### *Le so, le so*

*He le wee, ba e wa le so, le so!*

Hey [you] there! Falling down like this,  
like that!

#### DVD Track 7

There is a balanced alternation of lead singer and Chorus singing the same phrase and the initial phrase may or may not undergo variations according to the whims of the lead singer.

The song warns children not to play in dangerous places (understood) because they are likely to fall down and hurt themselves. *Le so le so* evokes a picture of someone who is stumbling to the right and left, and eventually falls down. This is emulated in some of the dance movements in which the singer pretends to trip over an object, stagger from one side to the other and then all but fall down. The interpretive meaning of the text is much wider. It warns children and adults alike to avoid associating with dissolute people, because their behaviour is contagious. *Le so le so* is a physical metaphor of a person who falls apart morally because of bad choices and unacceptable conduct she/he has made, thereby bringing her/his family and even community into disrepute.

The unacceptable behaviour of husbands is also targeted in *Sekgapa* song, and *O swanetše a bolawe!*<sup>39</sup> is a wellknown example. It is also found in the repertoires of other BaPedi women's groups e.g. women's *Kiba*, reported and briefly described by James (1999: 107). The text is short and telling:

### *O swanetše a bolawe*

*Mma, a bolawe ga a mošomo!*

Mother, he must be killed, the  
unemployed man!

*O swanetše a bolawe!*

He ought to be killed!

The song text recommends that drastic measures be taken against a man who is notoriously lazy, and does not support his family. His 'crime' of wilful unemployment is a very serious one, and the song does not set out to make him feel ashamed, but also 'scared' at the fate he is seen to deserve.

Political and topical issues are also commented on or conveyed in *Sekgapa* songs, and the following song is an example. It has a short text that is seemingly inconclusive, but may gather meaning in the course of a performance:

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<sup>39</sup> He ought to be killed!

### *Di a mmakatša*<sup>40</sup>

*Di a mmakatša!*

They surprised me!

*Di a mmakatša ditaba!*

The news surprised me!

*Basadi di a mmakatša!*

Women, they surprised me!

DVD Track 8

The text is about 'surprising news' which was received by a certain woman, who then imparted it to her neighbours (women), and it suggests certain gossip or rumours that centre on topics which interest women principally. But this is suggested and not stated directly.

This is an example of what Ruth Finnegan has called "ephemeral lyrics", (Finnegan 1970: 241), meaning that its literal meaning is short-lived, and it may shift according to the lead singer's choice. She may decide to reveal the 'news' in the course of the song performance, and so her role is crucial in such a song because she decides its content as well as its beginning and end. The "surprising news" is often about a political or topical issue, which can also be family or community-related. The song may even be a satirical/sarcastic comment and have a political function. African songs which are used to report on current affairs are well-documented in published literature on African oral traditions, (1970: 275) and this particular "surprise" song is an example. Sometimes the issue is never actually stated because the whole community knows what it is. It may involve a person in authority. By singing 'around' the subject without actually naming it/him/her, the singers may express and even influence public opinion but not in an insulting or injurious way.

The basic metres of *Sekgapa* dance songs are triple, with basic pulse grouping of ♩ x2 (form Number 12) and multiples thereof. The most common total metrical pattern is 24 x ♩. These metres are explicitly defined on *Kibo* drum while corresponding and variant rhythm patterns are played on *Keedišo*. The drummer uses up to three playing areas on the drum head and this lends different timbres to the drum sounds. The patterns played on the two smaller drums, and yielding tones approximately 200 cents apart, seem to 'fill out' the beats played on *Kibo*, so that to an outsider it sounds as if all the drums are playing the same rhythm that comes out "on top" of the music. But BaPedi perception is that each drum "produces more than their individual effect"

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<sup>40</sup> They surprised me (news)



In *Sekgapa* performances the dancers usually commence in a block formation, and then move on to a circular formation and dance anticlockwise around the drums. Different dance sequences and styles are introduced by *motšhediši*, and her actions are closely followed by the *keedišo* player so that she can closely follow the rhythmic patterns of the various dance style with certain recognizable traits-and these are selectively cued in by *motšhediši*. It is common to see the *keedišo* player sitting with her head at an angle, alert and watching every move of *motšhediši*, and the changes she introduces into the dance sequences. There is a very close relationship between the dance steps and the *keedišo* drum patterns, and it is complex and intriguing for researchers as well. However, while the dance rhythms and drum rhythms are closely connected, the vocal patterns go their own way or may not follow strictly the beats of the basic metre played on *kibo*. The musical organization is polyrhythmic and all the patterns are held together by *kibo*. But it should be noted that no cross rhythms occur within the vocal patterns, but only in their relationship to the other drum and dance patterns. Although a complete musical analysis of *Sekgapa*'s melodic-harmonic patterns has yet to be made, it is accurate to say that the use of more than one metre at a time is common to this music. Although a lead singer can make or mar a performance, any performance demands co-operation and co-ordination, especially since dancing and instruments are used. This is the main reason why rehearsals are so important for *Sekgapa* members, and failure to attend them regularly is 'punished' by a heavy fine and the disapproval of the group. The length of a song performance depends much upon social conditions and the purpose of the event. Entry songs are of a standard length but not as long as the dance songs proper, and the duration depends much on the habits and choices of the lead singer.

In her book on Introduction to Dance Literacy (1978: 9-10) Nadia Nahumck describes dance patterns generally as combining "physical shapes, rhythms, spatial paths, dynamics", all these being "a composite of dance elements" which can be "infinitely varied". She also notes that dance forms 'seem to belong to a culture ...' and have a basic vocabulary which can be learnt, and transmitted" (1978: 28). Within any culture there are many different dance forms and styles, and they all have their own 'basic vocabulary' and are distinct in certain ways from the other dance forms around them. *Sekgapa* is no exception to this general rule. When one observes a *Sekgapa* performance in all its dance routines, one sees and hears a colourful sight of music,

dancing and drumming. The performers wear special colourful dancing dress, and as they dance they keep up a steady exchange of Solo and Chorus phrases. The bright patches of colour provided by their clothes seem to move as well and add to the visual spectacle of the performers swaying, swinging, shifting and turning in the dance. Their ankle rattles add ornamentation, and also a further rhythmic dimension to the music, when the dancers execute dance patterns involving stately walking, to shifting, to shuffling, to stamping, with lighter and louder treads, to energetic stamps on the ground with the ball, or whole of the foot. Arm gestures are also prominent in *Sekgapa*, and may involve the upper arms and the wrists (as in the gentle 'sending away' gesture in the Good-bye songs). The use of the dance props such as switches, axes, or small spears and the like, held in one hand, also adds ornamentation to the movement patterns. Even if some of the gestures made are metaphoric in that they convey a meaning to the audience, when the dances make them as part of a dance style they seem to create special designs above their heads. These groups of actions are specific to *Sekgapa* dance structures, and this is what distinguishes the genre from other BaPedi song and the dance genre, and in which the same song may be used in all the different repertoires.

When cultural outsiders witness performances of *Sekgapa* music they often feel that all the different dance songs and styles sound much the same, and this is understandable, especially if the performances are viewed indirectly, i.e. in film footage. But in the real social environment of the music, every performance of *Sekgapa* music is a different event for the performers and the community. This is because, as Blacking put it so well for Venda music, every new social context requires "cognitive re-adjustment" from the performers. Every situation of the same music demands "re-creation of a special situation as much as a repetition of learned skills" (1982: 422). "Re-creation" is a keyword in *Sekgapa* performance practice and is applied through improvisation i.e. variations on standard patterns but in ways which are innovative and which excite audiences. Although the sounds of *Sekgapa*, like other African cultural music, are highly organized, there is no fixed or final version of any dance song. This is because of the oral nature of the music, which comes into existence through performance and is transmitted in the same fashion. To quote Blacking again, on the crucial difference between African and Western European musical processes and products:

If there is an important difference between Venda music and European written or 'art' music, it is that the 'art' composer freezes a particular improvisation and its corresponding social situation or produces a composite, statistical model of several different performances of the same song (ibid).

It is this radical difference between African music and western music-that favours 're-creational' music-making, because it permits the music-makers to draw continuously, (one might say even endlessly) on musical experiences which come to them through their social experiences. Doing this satisfies them emotionally as well as musically. I know this also from my own experiences as a composer working with African cultural music.

This is why change is an essential process in the continuity of musical traditions, which is acknowledged by the *Sekgapa* women who want to transmit the *Sekgapa* tradition and its historical traditions and habits to the younger generation, who are sharing social experiences very different from those of their parents. They are going to have to make changes as well, but (hopefully) based on a familiarity with traditional values and attitudes which they inherit, and which their parents believe have the potential to regenerate a society in social and moral disarray.

As a child growing up in an environment that was in BaPedi cultural music, my friends and I were always accepted in situation of drumming and music, even though we were not an actual part of it. From an early age I became aware of an association that was commonly made between the "surface" sounds of BaPedi music with drums, particularly when heard from a distance. The only prominent sounds were those from the drums, with the sounds of the two small drums the most easily heard. As they came through the total music, they always seemed to be saying something, and the sequence of pitches always suggested a phrase or sentence, because the rise and fall of the drum tones, heard at a distance, suggested the rise and fall of spoken SePedi words.

The actual words suggested depended on the drumming tones which emerged from the music. Because of this fact, it became almost habitual to identify an item of BaPedi music from the "words" that emerged from its overall sound, and punctuated by the drum tones. One example which remains fixed in my mind is a short catchy

phrase that was suggested by a particular item of music (*Dinaka*): *Ditapola ka pitseng*<sup>41</sup>.

The words when spoken carry a sequence of speech tones-high, low and falling-within a descending intonation pattern that is a trait of statement utterance. But this sequence of 'speech tone' was in fact suggested by the sequence of sounds coming from BaPedi music being performed. What is more the sounds out 'on top' of the music in a rhythmic grouping, makes the music's identity even more apparent from a distance. Phrases such as this are mnemonics or memory jogging which help one to identify a particular music and also to recall and even play its predominant rhythm pattern which comes over the patterns of the smaller drums. We used to recognize other styles of BaPedi music in the same fashion, the mnemonics generated by the drumming and which also identified the music and its predominant 'over-rhythms'. I have never lost this habit of critical listening and relating musical sounds to speech ones. Menomics such as *Ditapola ka pitseng* are rarely found outside their immediate communities, and they are also dialect-based, but they were in regular use among children, as was the case when I was growing up. This practise seems to have all but died out nowadays, as a result of huge changes in lifestyles. *Sekgapa* members recall it very well, but their own children are not familiar with it, because of the demands of education and modern living.

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<sup>41</sup> Potatoes in the pot.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

This study was inspired by my very personal interest in BaPedi women's *Sekgapa*, as a social institution (an event that takes place regularly for a specific purpose) and as performance practice. I have always known *Sekgapa* as a part of BaPedi cultural traditions. I have had a lifetime experience of the music, but only now have I attempted a formal study of it.

This dissertation attempts to document and analyse *Sekgapa* as a music defining BaPedi women's role in the rural economy and community life, in a village and district in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The full picture of *Sekgapa* has yet to be completed for reasons which were given earlier in this dissertation, and which are assessed in this concluding chapter. I chose to treat my topic with historical and cultural depth, and from the people's viewpoint, and to evaluate its current uses and functions. I also identified a range of structural and stylistic traits in the musical action. This included also the dancing dress and the use of dance props. The theoretical issues framing my analysis are, in short: what is *Sekgapa*, socially and musically?

(Deborah James'1999) sociology-based study of BaPedi men's and women's *kiba* provided some useful comparative material and perspectives for this study of rural-based *Sekgapa*, while Huskisson's work on BaPedi "social and ceremonial music" provided some much-needed musicological data. But the study of a single genre cannot really be complete without references to other genres and musical styles that are part of BaPedi musical system (which includes also the "solo" instrumental music). John Blacking and other ethnomusicologists have provided compelling evidence to show how necessary it is to examine the different kinds of a people's music, because the creative acts inside them may explain why certain musical traits are prominent in some kinds of music but not in others. Furthermore, the musical context may also influence the music's form and content. For example, Blacking found that the tonal harmonies in certain Venda children's songs, using 3-6 tones in the melodies, were neither pentatonic nor hexatonic, but were traceable to tonal-harmonic patterns in Venda's most important music, the heptatonic *Tshikona* national dance (played with bamboo flutes), and the vocal music of the *Domba* pre-marital

initiation school (1982: 421). Another 'discovery' by Blacking concerns the adaptation of the music of one social event for another. This happens also with *Sekgapa* songs, which include melodies 'borrowed' from other BaPedi genres, such as *Dinaka* flute ensemble music (which also 'feeds' the repertory of urban women's *kiba/Koša* music). But adaptation may go beyond mere variation, and instead be a true "transformation" of sounds. An example is the *Khulo* dance song of Domba, which is a vocal transformation of the *Tshikona* pattern played on flutes (Blacking 1982: 507). I cannot be conclusive about *Sekgapa* musically until I have collected a wider range of musical examples from other kinds of BaPedi music.

A *Sekgapa* musical performance presents for me a moving picture, literally and emotionally, of a tradition that stretches far back into history, but its origins remain obscure. It is possible to trace some of the songs to certain sources (other genres, and districts), but not the event itself. Galane (2003) has linked *Sekgapa* to a girl's post-initiation event, while Mönnig makes no mention of it at all. He merely states that "singing and dancing plays a great role in the initiation of girls" (1967: 126) for which "...a special drum-*moropa*-was used, being in the care of BaPedi chief and used only during *byale* (girl's initiation) sessions (ibid). Regarding the origins of *Sekgapa*, it is impossible to fill this gap in its history, nor has it been previously documented or even mentioned by anyone other than Galane. But this lack of *Sekgapa*'s early history is not detrimental to this study. As Blacking has rightly said on the subject of musical origins: "...they are useless chiefly because they can never be proved". He goes on to say: "...our knowledge of past music is often limited to what literate classes chose to recognize or record of such activities (Blacking 1974: 55).

Being a cultural insider I know most of the community people in and around Mailula village, where the *Sekgapa* group under study is located, although their activities take them to other villages and *Sekgapa* groups. But I had to comply with certain social 'protocols' in order to get permission to carry out research, and this cleared the way for free participation in the *Sekgapa* group's various activities.

Because *Sekgapa* is maintained and performed by women (married and unmarried) one might think that their music is mainly concerned with women's issues, and the public promotion of their "corporate identity" in the community. The reality is more than this, as *Sekgapa* groups are highly respected and influential factors in BaPedi rural social development, in an area in which so many people are still living on a subsistence level.

One could say that a *Sekgapa* group is indispensable to its community. The women do not just perform their songs because they enjoy them. Their community's interest is also in enjoying the music, but this also centers on the various reasons why the women perform this music. They are a part of mutual self-help schemes which benefit community members, and compensate the meagre incomes of families who have to rely on the irregular wages of their migrant menfolk.

A major purpose of *Sekgapa* performance is social education i.e. the transmitting of traditional values which are still held to be valuable. Many of the song-texts recall age-old sotho memories of BaPedi domestic life, customs and values, and this information is imparted musically, and intended to educate as well as to entertain. As selected songs in the previous chapter have shown, their texts may bring home the reality of social irresponsibility and unacceptable conduct, which can lead to social and moral breakdown. Some songs stress the need for respect for self and for others, and especially for women, who are the socio-economic mainstay of their communities. So *Sekgapa* music functionally goes beyond the personal concerns of women although these are central to the institution.

Events like *išhentshi*, *ngwana o wele*, wedding celebration and competitive musical festivals, involving regional and inter-ethnic styles, are all occasions of *Sekgapa*, and as such are prominent features of BaPedi rural life.

The standard BaPedi *meropa* drums, in four sizes and named *kibo* ('bass' drum), *Keedišo* ('alto' drum) and *ditiimeišo/ditiitinti* (high-pitch drums of differing size), are fundamental to much BaPedi communal music. In a country like South Africa, in which the largest African language group, Nguni, had no tradition of resonator drums and drumming before the arrival of the colonialists, the concentration of drumming traditions in the northern part of the country seems surprising, and scholars have suggested that this state of affairs may have been promoted through inter-cultural contact with many drumming peoples further north and eastward of the borders. BaPedi drums constitute a standard set of drums, and may be compared to a degree with similar sets of drums employed by neighboring African peoples. But the cultural meanings and values of the drums and drum sets differ from one cultural group to the other. The Venda employ a standard group of three drums for their communal music, but one of these is restricted in its use. This is the largest drum-*ngoma*-a closed pot-shaped drum which has ritual significance, and is also a metaphor for the Venda chief.

The Tsonga have the same drum type also called *ngoma*, reputedly borrowed from the Venda, but it does not have the status of their *mantsomane* frame drums, which are used in Tsonga rites of exorcism (Such drums are also unique for Southern Africa). The Lobedu people also have the same pot-shaped drum, called *goma*, cognate with the Venda drum, and played in the same fashion with a beater. However, four such drums (*digomana*), in four different sizes, form a special ensemble which is used only for certain ceremonial occasions and constitute a "drum cult" (Krige and Krige 1943, 1980: 126ff). Furthermore they are played by hand and not with the usual beater (*ibid*).

The drumming traditions of BaPedi and their fore-mentioned neighbours make interesting comparisons and contrasts, although the Lobedu musical system has yet to be researched. All four traditions make use of polyrhythm as a basic principle of drumming. BaPedi drumming styles have been handed down for generations to posterity, and even though the construction materials have undergone changes, the drumming patterns have remained fairly constant, according to existing documentation. In any performance using the four *meropa* drums, each instrument is perceived as "speaking for itself", although it does so according to established musical conventions. In *Keedišo* playing there is no random placing of strokes on the drum head. The player must strike specific playing areas to produce the required drum patterns. The timbral aspects of drum rhythms are important in *Keedišo* playing. In terms of the rhythmical "load" carried by each drum, the *keedišo* patterns are the most involved. Although both Kirby and Huskisson have drawn attention to the "melodic use" of this *moropa* drum, they did not say anything about BaPedi perception of the four *meropa* drums as "family". This is how BaPedi generally think of these drums, and this is why I referred to their "conversation" in the previous chapter. *Kibo* and *keedišo* are the male and female parents, while the two smaller drums are their "children". In any performance using all four drums *keedišo* has the most to say; on it are played the variant drum patterns and their elaborations. The metrical patterns of *kibo* serve as an authoritative "time-keeper" or metre controller, above which may be heard the high-pitched 'comments' of the "children" (*dititimetšo* 1 and 2). This notion of a drum family is found in other parts of Africa, a notable example being the Bata ensemble in Nigeria, which has been described by Samuel Akpabot (1971). It is a "complex ensemble" of four drums "...being made up of mother, father, brother and sister drum representing the four members of the average African family" (1971: 37).

The ensemble is used for rituals enacted for Sango, a 'Thunder deity'. The most "talkative" drum is the largest drum, the "mother drum. ...with good reason... a woman can outtalk any man" (ibid). While BaPedi do not go so far as to express this interpretation, they regard their standard drum ensemble in the same light. They expect a high degree of drumming expertise from the *keedišo* player, who also has to have a wide knowledge of patterns and variant styles. The combined drum patterns of all four drums provide the metric-rhythmic framework, and also the momentum for the *Sekgapa* vocal songs, which are structured antiphonally and are homophonic in their harmonic elaboration. Homophony is another multipart musical style that is widespread in Africa, and Gerhard Kubik has said that "its remote history ... is sometimes rooted in the experience of the mouth-bow tuning with two fundamentals a whole tone apart" (Kubik 1999: 111).

This is true for BaPedi pentatonic music generally, and for which two traditions of musical bow have been documented, the braced gourd struck bow called *sekgapa*, and the braced plucked mouth bow called *lekope*, although this latter bow was also reportedly tuned a 5<sup>th</sup> apart (Huskisson 1982: 352, 370). Huskisson noted this in a *lekope* bow ensemble she encountered (ibid.). In vocal homophony people sing together "...rhythmically in line...each voice standing at a different pitch level" (Kubik 1999: 111). In BaPedi *Sekgapa* songs this occurs principally in the chorus phrases, and the selection of harmonizing tones is based on the principle of "harmonic equivalence", the voices combining in parallel movement. Kubik also noted that parallelism is the rule in music which is based on languages in which speech tone is "semantically and grammatically important" (ibid). But in those African languages in which speech-tone requirements are not so strictly observed, then "contrary and oblique movement is the rule" (ibid). BaPedi vocal homophony is therefore radically different from the multipart polyrhythmic harmony of Xhosa cultural music, and the polyphony of Zulu and Swazi musics. From the evidence collated so far, the melodies of *Sekgapa* songs are set in tone-rows deriving from an anhemitonic pentatonic scale. In every performance of the same song, by the same or different group of singers, the melody is "re-created" to a degree, but the song is always recognizable.

One of the most intriguing and challenging aspects of *Sekgapa* performance is the delivery of *direto* (praises), an oral tradition long practiced by women, and involving the familial ancestors and relationships through marriage (James 1999: 182-4). *Direto*

are also customary practice in urban women's *Kiba* performances (1999: 91). Praising has great cultural prestige, and 'specialist' praisers show their expertise in the skilful use of a stock or praises, 'on the spot', using some well-chosen metaphors and allusive language. A woman may deliver idiomatic phrases, and switch from praising someone in third person mode, to a very direct focus on that person in first person mode, so that references are made indirectly and with subtlety. A similar use of language is also found in the texts of *Sekgapa* songs, which always mean more than appear they to say. I found it unexpectedly difficult to translate and interpret praising language from SePedi into English, and making a careful and exact use of that language. *Direto* are worthy of study on their own, but if one is not careful in handling the texts, then the finer shades of meaning can be lost through a poor translation. The word *Sekgapa* may be a metaphor, embodying the notion of 'sufficiency' or 'plenty'. It means literally a domestic utensil for carrying or sharing out food and made from a gourd with the same word-root. I cannot be conclusive about this, but the importance of women to BaPedi family continuity and economic life suggests such an interpretation. *Sekgapa* song themes go back to historical traditional patterns of BaPedi life, and recall women's duties in their households and in crop production, and these are extolled and even enacted in musical performances. This is the essence of *Sekgapa* song texts, but they may also express new ideas. But the intention is to inculcate knowledge of BaPedi customs and values in the youth, so that they may come to know something of their past history as a people. *Sekgapa* informants frequently expressed concerns for the stress and confusion of modern living which creates irrational fear and anxieties in girls and young women in particular, and they feel that knowledge of the past may help the young people to cope with the present. In recent years there has been much written about the "globalization of music", a topic that is prominent in "world music" studies today. Writing in 2000, Max Peter Baumann observed that "today regional traditions have an interactive relationship with musical multilingualism and intercultural music-making and improvisation" (2000: 121). Baumann makes the point that, because of "cultural globalization", which is promoted by cyberspace interconnections and the multimedia, cultural traditions "are subject less to culturally immanent aesthetics than to the laws of the market ... Globalization places existing cultural identity concepts in an uncertain position" (2000: 122). Although many different cultural traditions the world over have been affected by this process and especially instrumental traditions,

in South Africa it seems that the cultural music is holding its own against the tide of musical globalization, although it is true that over the years a number of older music genres have been lost or become passive. But others are also being revived and revitalized as recent research has shown. In the case of *Sekgapa* music, this is possibly because the music is little known outside its regional performance locales. But what is real cause for concern is the general apathy shown towards South African cultural music and musicians by government and the media and educational institutions. In the editorial for the *African Music Journal* of 1991 (vol 7 (1), Andrew Tracey drew attention to “the government’s distinct responsibility” to encourage the development of traditional arts and culture, and he gave some reasons for this.

Writing at a time of huge political changes in South Africa, Tracey pointed out that, while “popular urban African music ... is doing well”, there seems to have been “the stagnation of traditional music almost everywhere” (1991: 3). Tracey also gives a number of reasons why the traditional arts should be supported by government, “despite the fact that they are known only to isolated groups of rural people”, and despite the urban view-‘everyone prefers the popular music’ (ibid). Among the most compelling reasons he gives are because they:

- “represent the refinement of artistic growth, inspiration and development”,
- “they belong to a people as nothing else can”,
- “they are irreplaceable” (1991: 4).

In concluding this Editorial, Tracey cautioned that that “government patronage is not easy, because it has to break through the bourgeois lace curtain of the people who make up governments” (ibid). Fourteen years have past since Tracey made a plea for cultural equity, and for “counterbalancing the overwhelmingly lop-sided arts patronage situation” (ibid), and very little has changed since then. There are a number of cultural musicians who are internationally known, but back home they receive little if any financial support which allows them to live and create their music drawing on their traditions as sources of inspirations. They do this for the love of it but at great expense to themselves. Meanwhile popular urban African styles continue to enjoy the patronage they have had for so long from the recording industry, the media and the business world. Even in the area of education the so-called “serious” (western classical) and “light music”, (popular musics) receive more financial and public support. The delegation of cultural music to the *bundu* (the backwoods, the rural

areas) is apparent in the way in which some South Africans speak of African cultural music, like the languages in which it is set. The perpetuation of any music helps to conserve it, and as yet there is no viable and substantial framework to ensure that the music is conserved and transmitted sensitively and sympathetically through active performance and research and documentation. I know of several young researchers who had to drop out of their research work because they did not have the finance to support their research in the areas in which the music is being maintained.

The *Sekgapa* women assert through their music the necessity to learn about the importance of BaPedi cultural values, because they offer a strength which the youth may draw on in times of social and moral confusion. Modernity is relentlessly imposing itself on our local cultural music. As a SePedi-speaking musician and activist, I also have my doubts about the future of our cultural musical traditions. Unless they are seriously studied now, in all their variety, I doubt whether they will be studied at all.

**APPENDIX:**  
**BAPEDI SEASONAL CYCLE AND AGRICULTURAL**  
**ACTIVITIES**

According to BaPedi, there are twelve 'moons' (*dikgwedi*- 'months') which define and regulate the seasonal calendar of work in the lands. The names and explanations of these months refer to the state of the land and its crops and wild life, and the actual agricultural work done on it.

May was the month which marked the beginning of winter, and was also the right time to hold the first initiation sessions for BaPedi youth. This month is called *Mopitlo* ('separator') because it separates the summer season (*Selemo*) from the winter season *Marega* (lit) ('the time when everything dries up') (Mönnig 1967: 148, Nokaneng, 1976: 224; my trans, from SePedi text). This was the time of plenty of food, and of de-cobbing mealies (*hlakola*).

*Moranang*, 'the heart of the herdboys', (Nokaneng 224), is the month of June, which is very cold, and is the time for threshing (*lefolo*). In this name there is a reference to herdboys, who are going to be eligible for initiation (ibid). (cf also Mönnig 1967: 149).

*Mosegamanye* 'the one [the moon] that cuts disappointment' is the name coinciding with July, and this is the time when plants and trees start to show green things of the coming spring, (*Seruthwane*). So this month literally 'cuts' the disappointment of the winter and the trees start to grow new leaves. This is also the time for 'little threshing' i.e. the last of the threshing active ties. (ibid). In this month the *Selemela* stars (the Pleiades) appear for the first time, which is a good sign, holding the promise of another good agricultural year.

August has a SePedi praise, name, being *Ngwato*, and the full name for August is *Ngwato a bošego*. ('Praise-name of the night'). This month brings spring, when the people must prepare to work the land. This is a time of newness, and all the hibernating animals, creatures and snakes come out of their winter homes (Nokaneng loc.cit; Mönnig loc.cit).

September is known as *Phupu* 'the searcher', and is the time when '*Phupu e fuputša dipeu tša selemo* ('the searcher looks forward to the seeds of summer') (Nokaneng loc.cit); Mönnig 1967: 150). This is the time to prepare for sowing seeds. The *Mokgoba* trees start to flower, which indicates that ploughing lies ahead for the people. Another name for *Phupu* is *Moranang* 'the ruler' and this underlies the importance of this month for ploughing the fields. The importance of this month is also stressed in the wellknown BaPedi saying for this month: *Moranang wa pelo tša balemi*, meaning 'the ruler of the heart is the farmer' (Mönnig loc.cit.).

*Phato*, 'the moon which bursts', is October, and it is also referred to as *Phato ya mmadika a palane*, 'the one which bursts is the mother of beauty'. This period is one of abundance. Impala give birth, as do smaller animals, and the small trees sprout. This is the 'spring-into-autumn' phase, (*Selema-Lehlabula*), when there are plenty of good things to eat. BaPedi say also: *dingwetši di laelwa ke bommatswale go šoma ka mašemong* 'the mothers-in-law order their daughters-in-law to take over the agricultural work after the ploughing in the lands'.

*Lewedi* is November and means 'the fall'. It is the time when a *Mmadiku phalane* ('the female antelope drop their young'). There are also signs of rain (falling) and *dikhunkhwane* (red beetles) are seen everywhere (they 'fall' from everywhere understood).

*Dibatsela* 'the fountains of the road' is the name for December, and refers to the (hoped for) abundance of water (rainfall), and of the young of the wild animals, the kudu in particular, expressed in an explanation of this month: *Dibatsela ya tholwane*, because these antelope foal at this time of the year. There is also an abundance of the edible fruits and plants available, following good rains, and people break the branches of trees to reach the fruit, which hangs in plenty from them.

*Manthole* ('mother, take off') is January, and the reference here is to young girls who come from the lands with baskets of food crops on their heads, and their mothers help them to take down/off their laden baskets. It is time to 'take' the pumpkins, (and melons) and to leave the seeds (for sowing later on). It is a time when there is *legobje la mpa le modula* 'the shaking of the belly of grass' (meaning the swaying movements

of long green grass). It is a time when grass and corn begin to grow ('swell' and ripen) and come into seed. (Nokaneng: 1976: 224). January is also referred to as *Sedimo - thole* ('the sacrifice of the heifer'), denoting the time when the people should 'make a ritual sacrifice to the ancestors and give thanks to them' (*go lebogwa badimo ka sedimo ka puno*), by 'go rola thakga-ngwaga' ('offering the fruits of the land'). This was the month in which BaPedi traditionally held their first-fruits ceremony. (Mönnig 1967:151).

February is known as Dibokwane ('Caterpillars') which appear on the *Morula* trees (*ke dibokwane tša marula*). Another spoken reference for this month is *se mpheke ke khotšhe* (lit. 'do not give me, I have had enough'), meaning that there is an abundant supply of food.

*Pherekgong* is the SePedi name for the month March. The meaning of this term is not clear, but it also implies 'bigness' i.e. abundance. BaPedi speak of *pherekgolo ya dinawa* ('abundance of the beans'). This is also the month of 'spies' (*dithlodi*), referring to the 'boys and girls who have to drive away birds from the ripening land crops' *Bašemane le basetsana ba raka dinonyana ka mašemong*. This is the time when the beans are ripe for picking, and the lands have much to be harvested. It is also the time of 'whitebreast' (*tsweletšheweu*), when the maize cobs (Mekgopu) are white and hang down like breasts. So this is a month of plenty of food.)

April is known as *Hlakola*, meaning 'the one who wipes/takes away the hoes'. There is the well-known saying: *Hlakola mohlakolane matsepoi mogale o ragwe ke sefularo* ('the strict one who takes away things is kicked from behind' (Mönnig 1967: 151). The implications are: this is midsummer, (*lehlabula legolo*), and when people go into the lands (*dibjalo*), plants hook onto their clothing. The weeds are many and the land has to be weeded, and after this the hoes are taken home again because the weeding is done. The first harvesting and threshing begin in this month, as noted by Mönnig (1967: 152): In this month the star called *Senakane* by BaPedi (i.e. 'the little horn', or Achernar), appears, and this is a 'precarious' time, because all the grass is dry and burnt, and winter is about to come. In earlier times no marriages took place at this time, and no initiation sessions would be planned.

BaPedi names for the 'moons' show how closely these were linked to and even regulated their agricultural cycle, and the social events which took place at certain times in the year. BaPedi names of the twelve months also occur in correlative forms of the English names .e.g. *Januware, Feperware, Matshe, Aporele, Mei, Junem Jujaem, Agostose, Setemere, Oktoboro, Nofemer and Disemere*, but the original SePedi names and associated explanations are still considered to be most important, and they are taught to young people via school books in the schools. The vernacular names are also important because they reflect how close to nature was BaPedi culture and social life, and the extent of their knowledge of their environment that they have always had. In fact, this knowledge extended also to the earth, the soil from which their crops came. BaPedi recognized seven different types of soil, distinguished in colour and texture and also by the kinds of plants, trees which usually grew habitually on the soil. The different types of soil are:

*Sehlaba* (red earth, on which sorghum, millet, pumpkins and beans grew well)

*Sekuba*-dark-grey earth which favours maize, gourds, sorghum and pumpkins and sweet-reed. The danger here is the likelihood of crops growing quickly but being scorched by the sun.

*Seloko*-black heavy earth-good for all crops except beans and melons. It holds water for a long time, but tends to crack when it is hot and dry. It is one of the best earths for sorghum.

*Masu*-a gray earth, favouring all crops, but scorches easily.

*Mahlabane*-sandy loam earth, very good for sorghum,

*Lehlwahlwa*-a sandy soil, not needing much rain, and favouring beans in particular.

*Makuru*-blackish earth-only used for grazing and never farmed for crops (Mönnig 1967: 152-3).

Women were the main agricultural workers in BaPedi society and since the different kinds of earth did not occur in every community area, women could choose their lands-having more than one-so that they could benefit from the advantages of different types (ibid). Every MoPedi married woman had her own lands (*Mašemo*) to which she was entitled, and they also were the main cultivators of these lands. These lands were located not too far from the women's households. As stated earlier in this study, the importance of BaPedi women as cultivators of their lands and as the essential cogs in the agricultural machine should not be underestimated. They were

also the brewers of *Bjala* traditional beer, which, as this study has shown, has always played a vital role in BaPedi social and economic and religious life.

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