

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 AIMS OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this study is to understand HP Maredi's literary practice by means of the exploration of three selected dramas he authored. These are *Mošwang wa Matuba*, *Mo go fetileng kgomo* and *Lapa ke mosadi*. However where necessary and for the sake of clarifying some issues, his other drama, *Modipadi 'a Ngoato*, shall be considered.

### 1.2 METHOD

The basic approach to this study will be comparative in order to judge whether Maredi's chosen dramas are related. If Maredi's dramas are similar in their subject matter or if they show a number of regular correspondences like phrases which occur in all selected works then they are related. The similarity of ideas will also be investigated. In other instances Levitt's approach will be followed to assess certain issues.

### 1.3 SCOPE AND DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one outlines the aims of the writings of HP Maredi and provides summaries of the selected dramas.

Chapter two discusses the different perceptions Africans and Westerners hold with regard to depletion of wild animals and the smoking of dagga.

Chapter three focuses on the institutions and activities in the Northern Sotho culture which Maredi considers socially essential. This chapter also covers rituals and customs associated with institutions such as marriage, living with the in-laws, sororate wives,

death and circumcision. The role played by cattle in the lives of Africans is also discussed.

Chapter four examines portrayal of characters through their relations to, and interactions with their physical and social environments. How Maredi combines African and Christian/western habits in creating his characters will be focused on. How his ideas are developed through the polarization of contrasting characters will also be analyzed.

Chapter five analyzes recurrence and reversal as the elements that produce rhythm in drama. The importance of a cause - effect patterning is also explained to show the relationship of events in the chosen dramas.

Chapter six comprises the conclusion and the recapitulation of this study. Levitt's law of "continuation and closure" will be employed in this concluding chapter to assess whether Maredi has succeeded in arranging actions in the chosen dramas in a coherent chronological order. Interrelatedness of all scenes in the chosen dramas will also be assessed.

#### **1.4 BACKGROUND OF MAREDI AND HIS WORKS**

Knowledge of Maredi's life and background is essential in understanding his works. In his writings he shows knowledge of his social and cultural community. The contents of his works expose his aims as to teach people about the cultural values that should govern them as a community. He writes about situations he knows and thereby register the feelings of his community regarding issues that concern them. His works thus provide an opportunity of reevaluating peoples's attitudes towards issues that govern them. In other words he writes about the realities of life in the society in which he lived and from which he derived his thematic material.

Maredi writes about contact between white and black races in South Africa which has

resulted in Africans looking down on their customs and traditions. Before Christian missionaries invaded Africa, African children were taught various tribal laws and customs. This type of education was orally passed down through a series of rites of passage and even through myths and fables. The teachings by Christian missionaries undermined customs, beliefs, authority and the government of indigenous people. Their aim of coming to Africa was to spread the Christian faith. To facilitate meeting their goal, schools were established so that Africans could be taught to read the Bible. Christian missionaries had to learn the languages of the black people and also to translate the Bible into local languages. This resulted in Africans being able to read the translated Bible on their own.

As time passed Christian missionaries saw the need to build teacher training institutions where African teachers could be trained as evangelists and teachers. Such teachers were also expected to extend the teachings of the missionaries to their fellow black people. Their main task was to alienate Africans from their loyalty to their traditional beliefs and practices thereby leading them to the light of Christianity.

In the then Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province) for instance, the following teacher training institutions were established by missionary churches:

MISSIONARY	INSTITUTION	YEAR
Lutheran(Berlin)Missionary Society	Botšhabelo	1906
Anglican Church	Grace Dieu/Diocesan	1906
Roman Catholic	Pax College	1932
Dutch Reformed Church	Bethesda	1933

*(Mphahlele, 1978:49)*

Mphahlele expresses his dismay at the aims of Bethesda Opleidingskool which was to produce “missionary-minded school teachers” by remarking thus:

Ironically it was the black teacher who was to be an instrument of the church in fighting “everyone of the pagan laws and customs” (1978:862).

Chinua Achebe shares the same sentiments, musing thus :

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (1958 :124 -125).

“*His religion*” as Achebe puts it, implies a foreign religion which has come to replace the cultural beliefs of Africans. He is angry that the lives of many Africans have changed because of what Christian missionaries taught Africans. African converts then viewed their traditions and customs as primitive and deserving dereliction.

Teachers of missionary schools then found themselves in a dilemma because it was not easy for them to change the lives of every African. Circumstances turned out to be the reverse of those anticipated. People continued to take their children to circumcision institution schools where it was believed that they are prepared to be real men and women; polygamy and ancestor worship were upheld.

Some of the people did not embrace Christian faith as it was taught to them. Some picked up certain aspects of the Christian faith and dropped those aspects of their tradition that no longer suited the new life they now led.

It becomes obvious that continuous contact of Africans with Westerners resulted in subjugation of African cultures and values to cultures of the Europeans. This attitude

destroyed the identity of many people.

Mission education therefore expanded to include primary and secondary schooling. Almost all of the students taught at such institutions were also authors of literary works whose themes were morality.

Let us now trace the influence exerted by the Christian missionaries on authors like Pookgoadi Maredi by evaluating some of the books he authored with special references to his thematic engagements. When analyzing Maredi's biography, one notices that he obtained his teaching diploma at Botšhabelo, a Berlin Training institution that produced more than 80% of the black authors of Northern Sotho (846:1978). Some of his writings were awarded prizes and most of them were prescribed for school readership.

Hernaus Pookgoadi Maredi was born at Tšatane, Mmalegale, Sekhukhuniland on 11 April 1922. He completed his primary education at Marishane tribal School in 1938. He studied for a Teachers Diploma at Botšhabelo which he completed in 1940. He first taught at Woyenthin Lutheran Church School, near Heidelberg, where he started private studies for the Junior Certificate. He later moved to Devon on the East Rand to act as a school principal for a short time. He later returned to Botšhabelo to teach at Botšhabelo Practising School and there he pursued his education through private study and obtained his matric certificate. After completing his matric, he enrolled as a part time student at UNISA, majoring in Northern Sotho and Administration. While at Botšhabelo he became the secretary for Sekhukhuniland African Students Association for 16 years and he later became its president.

He worked as a bookkeeper at Transvaal Education Department library in Pretoria from 1948 to 1950. In 1953, he worked for the Translation Bureau at the Union Buildings. In 1964 he worked as a publisher for Better Books and in 1970 he was elected as Leboa Urban Representative. He later worked at Old Mutual where he finally became the manager until he retired in 1985. He was also an active member of Sepedi Writer's Guild. Maredi passed away on 23 April 1997 at the age of 75.

Maredi is one of the most prolific Northern Sotho writers who made his debut during the time called the Matsepe period .He has written the following Northern Sotho books:

1.	Tlala ya Mohlopi	1963	Novel
2.	Mošwang wa Matuba	1966	Drama
3.	Mo go fetileng kgomo	1968	Drama
4.	Se sa feleng	1986	Drama
5.	Aowa wene thaka ye tshese	1986	Short Story
6.	O kolobile	1993	Short story
7.	Moswane le Theron	Unpublished	
8.	Modipadi 'a Ngoato	1994	Drama
9.	Ruri	Unpublished	
10.	Lapa ke mosadi	1997	Drama
11.	Bokoloti	Unpublished	

### 1.5 VIEWS ON MAREDI'S WRITINGS

Maredi has emerged as an author who had acquired his teaching qualification at Botšhabelo Training Institution. Although the influence of missionary teachings can be detected in his writings, he however does not show an attitude of condemnation towards tradition. Through his works Maredi, depicts the cultural treasure of African people. He tells the reader about the rituals, ceremonies and feasts embedded in initiation, marriage and death. Some of the cultural traits of the African he portrays in his works are hospitality, politeness, discipline and a sense of order. He is not totally the role model of what missionaries desired.

He has a deep emotional identification with his African tradition. He wants black people

to be aware of their historical origins and also to participate in mapping out new directions for their society. According to African tradition, the spirit of the ancestors have ultimate power over their living descendants and it is only through ritual and sacrifice to the ancestors that people could be forgiven for their wrong doing. In all his works one can sense that Maredi is an ancestor worshiper.

His themes cover aspects such as family and marriage problems. Under the subject of marriage Maredi emphasizes values associated with the lives of married couples. In all his dramas he ponders over the conflicts caused by Western laws in African traditional communities. He depicts cultural divergencies and common beliefs and practices among the Northern Sotho speaking societies. The status of a woman in African traditional societies is also highlighted. By discussing such topics he simply wants to pass down native customs, traditions and family organisations to future generations and also to outline modern values which encourage change.

He also highlights inequities in the relationship between males and females in rural African communities. He also portrays issues concerning women's liberation. This can be established by his understanding of experiences and fates of women in his society.

In passing, he also touches on the subject of migration from economically depressed regions to wealthier areas. In some cases, migrant workers die in mineshafts and in others workers they stay on, thus cutting ties with their families. His message is spelled out by the maxim, "*rutang bana ditaola le se ye natšo badimong*" (Teach children about their cultural wisdom so that you should not die with it). In all chosen dramas, Maredi demonstrates his positive attitude towards the value of education. Parents who themselves have been denied the chance to receive formal education do not want their children to have the same experience. We see parents go to the extent of taking their children to boarding schools. Although he does not place much emphasis on this subject, he reveals the fact that every child has the right to education and therefore attending school is a phase every child has to go through. His subject matter in his recent dramas shows the period during which they were written. Certain events in

*Modipadi 'a Ngoato* conveys a sense of disapproval of the idea of big families, as is the case with Madinoge and Phaahle. This couple has eight children and have financial problems. In this drama there is also an occasion to celebrate Modipadi's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, an event foreign to African people. Such events show how African people have adopted the lifestyle of western cultures.

The manner in which he describes the village called gaSekhukhuni, its people and their way of life, its plants and animals, convinces the reader that he is conversant with the culture and the tradition of the people to whom he belongs and whose life he shares. People there still sleep on "*legogwa*" (sleeping mat) and not on beds. All what the people of this village could hear day and night there are the bellows of cows and the crows of cocks to wake them up every morning. People there do not understand why wild animals should not be poached. All these show a knowledge of his social and cultural community.

As far as the names of his characters are concerned, Maredi only uses African names . We are told that one of the painful destructive legacies unleashed by Christian missionaries is the changing of the African names. At baptism Africans were given Christian names to signify that they had been transformed from pagans to Christians. All of Maredi's characters have African names which bear meaning and significance. That is why today many Africans prefer to use their natural meaningful names which were given to them at birth instead of Christian names.

### **1.5.1 Authorial attitude towards characters**

In all his plays Maredi juxtaposes two characters each representing opposing cultures to emphasize black people's historical origins and their subjugation to foreign policies and laws. Some of Maredi's characters can be perceived from the perspective of their hard stance on adhering to their traditional customs. They rather believe in ancestral veneration than in divine worship. To them Christianity

has impeded their ancient way of living. Their attitude to the Christian faith shows that Christianity has caused divisions among families and communities. They are therefore committed to a revival of the African's search for his identity. They also portray Africans in their ceaseless struggle against external forces which interfere with their ways of living. These traditionalists tend to be rigid in order to defend their culture. Practices such as polygamy, for example, are endorsed.

On the other hand, there are characters who depict new ways of life. They show an assimilation of foreign cultures and the retention of their own. They depict their double allegiance to both cultures. Characters that portray roles of conveyers of Christianity, for example Rev Malapeng, do not show any disregard of the cultural realities of the African environment. By using such characters in all his works, Maredi wants to convey the message that the Christian faith has not totally destroyed traditional beliefs. This implies that evangelisation does not disbar a person from his culture. There are also those cultures that have adhered rigidly to Christianity and have rejected their cultural heritage. These characters have accepted Christianity as an inevitable obligation.

Characters encountered in *Mo go fetileng kgomo* have counterparts in both *Mošwang wa Matuba* and *Lapa ke mosadi*. Characters representing female subjugation to masculine authority are portrayed in all the above mentioned dramas which depict societies in which the interests of the group prevail over those of an individual. In all his dramas we always come across the motif "*Mosadi o tlile ka kgomo*" to show how married women are perceived in their black societies.

### **1.5.2 Dress and milieu**

The plot in Maredi's works is set in typical rural areas where characters represent

both traditionalists and those that are westernized. The mode of dress differentiates such types of characters. One can tell by the cruppers Matlakale and Namane put on that they are traditionalists.

## 1.6 SUMMARIES OF THE SELECTED DRAMAS

### 1.6.1 **Mošwang wa matuba**

This drama is set at Sekhukhune in the area of Leolo mountain. In 1951 this area was raided for dagga. Maredi therefore depicts addiction to dagga and its consequences. He educates people about the dangers of this drug which is still a social problem even today.

**Mošwang wa Matuba** (drug) is the name coined in reference to dagga or cannabis. Mošwang is ground grass found in an animal tripe. Matuba is the name of a group of fellow initiates from chief Malekutu's village. They believed that *Mošwang wa Matuba* is a herb that is their source of energy. The Matuba group had built a big pot under the ground to which a long pipe was connected and only its mouthpiece emerged above the ground. *Mošwang wa Matuba* was stuffed inside the pot and every morning members of the group would meet at their makeshift furnace to have puffs of their favorite blend. The manner in which these men smoked their stuff is strange. Before taking puffs, they would first put water in their mouths. It is believed that this prevents them from being intoxicated.

This play is based on the police raids of dagga in 1951 at GaSekhukhune. During this period Laws against smoking dagga and killing wild animals were already in existence. Kodi, Matlakale's son, went on a spree of hunting wild animals with his friends. This event had an unhappy ending because on the same evening police raided houses with a mission of clamping down on those who kill wild animals and deal with dagga. Africans believe that God made wild animals

for food. Those that were found in possession of killed animals were apprehended. It came to the notice of police officers that Matlakale's house was full of the smell of *Mošwang wa Matuba*. Matlakale is an ardent smoker of dagga. He denied the police officers access to his homestead. A senior police officer, Sergeant Kgobalale, tricks him into believing that he is also a smoker of *Mošwang wa Matuba*. Sergeant Kgobalale lies to Matlakale by pretending to have been fired from work for dealing with dagga. He gives Matlakale the impression that, as he is no longer, working he is interested in full time dealing with dagga. Little did Matlakale realise Kgobalale's intentions were in spite of warnings from his wife Lehlelehlele. All that Kgobalale wanted to know was where *Mošwang wa Matuba* was grown.

Matlakale introduced Kgobalale to Masellane, the rich man who planted a lot of *Mošwang wa Matuba* and sold it, to many people in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Masellane, like Matlakale, could not smell a rat in spite of warnings from his mother. Masellane took Kgobalale to the secret garden and with all this information a plot was hatched to have Masellane arrested. On the day of his appearance in court the officer that apprehended him brought to court only a handful of the stuff and destroyed the rest. Mokgonane, Masellane's defense counsel, took advantage of this blunder by saying that there was no convincing evidence that the dagga brought to court was actually that found in the possession of his client. The charge of dealing with dagga was dropped and he was acquitted. Masellane swore that he would never deal with dagga again.

Those who were found guilty of killing wild animals were also fined.

### **1.6.2 Mo go fetileng kgomo**

Incidents portrayed in this drama take place at GaMphahlele. Namane and Moshabane are brothers and Babuni is their sister. Namane still follows the

traditional way of living. How he still dresses says it all. He does not put on trousers like the other men who have 'outgrown' the old way of dressing. He regards people who lead a western life-style as "*majakane*", which Kriel defines as Africans who have become Christians (1985 :289). Namane is also against his son, Sefako, wearing trousers. He had made him a crupper but Sefako refused to put it on.

Babuni is the only person whom Namane could listen to simply because she is "*rakgadi*" (*father's sister*). The reason for this respect is that "*rakgadi*" in Northern Sotho culture is regarded as the most respectable person because it is believed that she is the one that can communicate effectively with the ancestors. The respect due to "*rakgadi*" is observed when she changed Namane's view of buying a new pair of trousers for Sefako. Sefako's only pair of trousers was eaten by a cow while he was relieving himself in the forest. Namane swears that he will never buy his son another pair of trousers. Babuni took strong exception to this and Namane realised how wrong he was. He instantly apologised and promised to buy Sefako another pair of trousers the following day.

Babuni and Namane together with their families were invited to the wedding of Moshabane's (their younger brother) daughter at Gareagopola. Traditionally Moshabane's daughter was supposed to be married to Babuni's son, that is, she should be married to her cousin. If this does not happen then when Babuni's son who was supposed to marry Moshabane's daughter marries someone else, he (Moshabane) should give his nephew a cow. It is believed that the cow he gives his nephew will lead the herd that will be used as a brideprice for his wife. Babuni's son, (Ngwanamohube) and his cousin never married and he instead married someone else. Moshabane, as a result, did not comply with the demands of his tradition. He did not give his nephew the cow but when one of his elder daughters got married, Babuni gave her nephew a cow and sheep. This became a source of conflict at the wedding of Moshabane's youngest daughter.

Namane had bet that the wedding would not take place until Moshabane gave Babuni the cow due to her. Reratilwe, Moshabane's wife, was totally against this. She regarded Namane as a person who still lives in darkness and who is resistant to change. She mentions that one can see by the way he dresses. Even among many people at the wedding, Namane still had a crupper on. Indeed, Namane did everything to make Moshabane give Babuni the cow and this is a good illustration of the way in which one good turn deserves another.

### **1.6.3 Lapa ke mosadi**

This drama depicts the clash between traditional African beliefs and Christianity. Maredi portrays the plight of a young widow, Maakopi, a devout Christian, after the death of her husband. Maakopi is married to Chepane who dies in a mine shaft at Kimberly. Chepane and Maakopi have one son, Thema.

As a married woman she is expected to toe the line prescribed to her by her society. Chepane belongs to a clan called Bahunoto known for its strict adherence to traditional cultural beliefs which is more stringent than any other clan in Pshiring (the area where all clans lived). One of the senior members of Bahunoto clan is Mmateme, who is the elder brother to Chepane's father. Maakopi is persuaded by Mmateme to cohabit with one of her husband's brothers after her mourning period is over. She rejects this oppressive tradition, basing her argument on the fact that Chepane was the only man God had given her. Her mother-in-law, Manyaku, on the other hand, encourages Maakopi to comply with the policies of Bahunoto as this will help her to have more children.

As the sole bread winner, Maakopi went to Cullinan, a small town outside Pretoria, where she works at Mr van der Merwe's farm as a house servant. Her son, Thema, was assigned to clean the pigsty and the barn for six months. This disappoints him because he wants to go to school like the children of his mother's employer. Maakopi also becomes worried that she did not work long

at van der Merwe's place. She then sought another work at Witbank where Thema was admitted to one of the primary schools but he only studied until standard six (now grade 8). He works as a secretary at a mine in Witbank. He marries Amanda and they are blessed with three children.

Thema goes to work in Pretoria and ends up living a reckless life. There he squanders his hard earned money on pleasures like beer and women. His wife leaves home for the city in search of her husband who has long ago severed contact with her. She later finds him and finally his family joins him in Pretoria.

#### **1.6.4 Modipadi 'a Ngoato**

In this drama Maredi portrays the unpleasant relationship between the wives of two brothers. The story is about two brothers who both have families. The wife of the elder brother, Madinoge, has eight children because she believes that a woman should have as many children as she can. The other woman, Khudu, has only two children who are all receiving their education at boarding schools. Madinoge and her husband, Phaahle, finds it hard to take all their children to school. She suggests that her first three children quit school and go and work. She says the two girls, Kgarebe and Shadi are ready to get married. To her a woman is better off when married than when she is educated.

Madinoge's three children are worried by the idea that they should rather leave school. They discuss this issue with their father's mother, Modipadi. She is an old woman but she emphasizes the advantages of both a small family and education. She is against the idea of the three girls leaving school. She solicits aid from her other two children, Marumo and his younger sister Mahlako, to help their elder brother by paying fees for his children's education.

#### **1.7 Conclusion**

Cultural divergences, common beliefs and practices, social and religious structures as well as cultural values among traditional and modern Northern Sotho communities will be identified. Maredi's subject matter of preoccupation will indicate whether he has fully carried out the aims as prescribed by the Christian missionaries.