

CHAPTER 3

CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Contact with missionaries made people lose their attachment to their traditional culture. In his dramas Maredi's concern is the preservation of one's customs and practices. When reading his works one notices that he encourages people not to despise their own culture. Much as he believes in Christianity, he also feels that his culture should be preserved. Peter Magubane supports Maredi's concern about preservation of one's culture, musing thus,

It is crucial that we revive interest in our history and culture so that our youth know and understand where we come from. (*Ebony magazine* Dec 1999-Jan 2000:26)

Among some of their focus areas, the missionaries targeted what they deemed to be pagan customs especially where they were in conflict with Christian principles. This contact with missionaries resulted in the converted Africans paying scant attention to their own customs and traditions. In his works, Maredi's attitude is that he does not want Christian belief to interfere with those of his tradition.

Mphahlele on the other hand feels that

Evangelisation does not presuppose denationalization
(1978:863)

It sounds unfair when one cultural group condemns and discredits another's culture. In his works, Maredi therefore does not show any attitude of condemnation to his culture and tradition. He discusses institutions and activities in Sotho culture which he considers as socially essential. This he does so that we do not lose touch with our aboriginal

culture. The subject matter of his works is didactic. He gives a glimpse of customs, which are normally carried out in various institutions. 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). The focus will therefore be on certain customs which form part of specific Northern Sotho institutions. This chapter also covers rituals and customs associated with those institutions.

On reading Maredi's works it becomes clear that he is not in favour of Christian interference with African cultures. This is exemplified by the kind of the subject matter he preoccupies himself with as it would be shown in the following:

3.2 THE CUSTOM OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a significant event among the Sotho-speaking people. David Hicks defines it as

...A socially sanctioned contract spelling the domestic and civic rights and duties of the people (usually one male and one female but not always) who enter into it (1994:36)

What Hicks says is surely true of all cultures. Marriage is thus a state that moves individuals out of a bachelor/spinster state. In traditional African culture, marriage is viewed as the most important phase every young man and woman has to go through. After courtship, paying of the brideprice is the first step towards marriage.

The traditional African marriage is an agreement that involves both parents of the marrying couple. It is important that both parents should be in favour of the union. Certain formalities have to be observed to make the marriage valid.

The most common type of marriage among the Sotho speaking community is the one where cousins marry each other, that is, where children of uncle and aunt marry each other. This is a marriage between children of a brother and a sister. It is called cross-

cousins marriage. This type of marriage was preferred because it was believed that it strengthened the bonds between brothers and sisters .

Straus in Howard explains cross-cousins as follows:

For a male, cross-cousins include mother's brother's daughters (MBD) and father's sister's daughter (FZD), and for a female they include mother's brother's sons (MBS) and father's sister's sons (FZS)(1989)

This type of marriage suggests that one marries within one's own kin. In this case personal choice in selecting a spouse is limited.

Cattle are seen as a binding factor in the Northern Sotho traditional marriage. The parents of a prospective husband choose a few people, normally uncles and sisters as their representatives and mouthpiece in the marriage procedure. The husband-to-be is referred to as "mokgonyana" or son-in-law by the wife-to-be's parents. The aunts and uncles who will be acting on behalf of the prospective husband are therefore referred to as "*bakgonyana*" (sons-in-law). They are the delegates who will communicate directly with the family of the wife-to-be.

Bridewealth or brideprice consists of the groom passing wealth, previously in the form of cattle, to the bride's family. The cattle given by the prospective husband to his father-in-law however does not have the same value as that of the woman he marries. A woman is therefore not an equivalent of the goods or cattle that are given to her parents. Some people call "*magadi*" the bridesprice. This term does not imply that goods in the form of cattle or money are used to buy or pay for the woman. It is just the traditional gesture observed to secure a wife. The term 'buy' is therefore not used in the custom of "*magadi*". The traditional form of wealth was cattle and nowadays the trend is towards money. The disadvantage of using money as bridesprice is that husbands-to-be pay greater amounts due to circumstances such as high costs of living. The introduction of money as bride-price or bridewealth has reduced marriage to a profit-seeking

enterprise.

In contrast to brideprice, there is the custom of dowry which is practised in Indo-European societies. Howard explains it as

The woman's share of her inheritance from the group of her birth, which is taken with her upon marriage,
(1989 :226).

The Northern Sotho culture does not have the dowry custom as the prospective husband gives his father-in-law cattle to secure a wife.

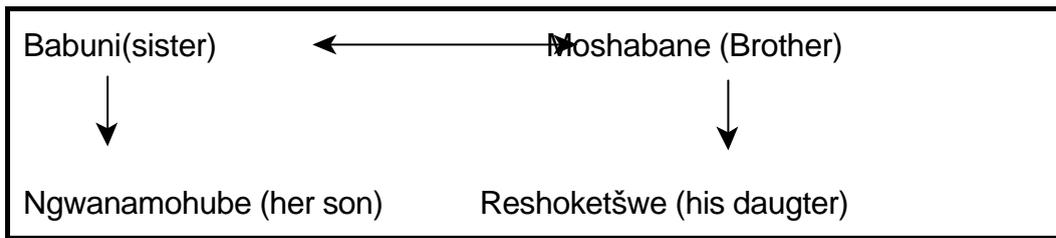
In conclusion, we align ourselves with E H Brookes in Matthews who opines thus:

"magadi" is a contract between the father and the intending husband of his daughter, by which the father promises his consent to the marriage of the daughter (1934:114).

Once the husband-to-be has passed this stage of *"magadi"*, a new relationship between a married pair and the relatives of both of them is established. Anthropologists use the terms 'affinity' to refer to this relationship and 'affines' to people related by marriage. This implies that marriage creates alliances between the relatives of a married pair. *"Magadi"* is therefore an important part of marriage. In the Northern Sotho culture, both parents of the marrying couple refer to each other as *"bakgotse"* (friends).

3.2.1 Mo go fetileng kgomo

In *Mo go fetileng kgomo* the type of marriage called cross-cousin can be illustrated as follows:



Ngwanamohube and Reshoketšwe (cross-cousins) were supposed to marry. Traditionally when Moshabane married his own wife, Reratilwe, he used cattle which were given as “*magadi*” (marriage goods, bridesprice or brideswealth) for Babuni. Part of the brideprice is cattle, paid for Babuni’s marriage. This means that Moshabane used cattle that were paid out to marry his sister, Babuni. Babuni then retains her share by taking one of Moshabane’s daughters, and becomes her guardian. She takes Reshoketšwe. Her claim extends to Reshoketšwe who is supposed to be her son’s wife. Babuni and Reshoketšwe therefore belong to the same lineage by birth and, as a result, Babuni’s son is supposed to marry a wife from his mother’s lineage or vice versa.

Reshoketšwe is Moshabane’s third daughter. Her two elder sisters are married already. When any one of his three daughters got married he was supposed to give Babuni a cow since none of his daughters was married to Babuni’s son. Babuni’s son, Ngwanamohube, on the other hand, did not marry his cousin, Reshoketšwe. This being the case, Babuni therefore gave Moshabane a cow together with a sheep to compensate him since her son, Ngwanamohube, could not marry any of his daughters. “*Malome*” (mother’s brother) is also entitled to have the head of a slaughtered cow. On the other hand, “*Malome*” should also be given a cow when his sister’s son gets married. When Ngwanamohube got married Moshabane was given a cow which is also seen as his share, that is, “*hlogo*” (head of a cow). The fact that Ngwanamohube married a woman of his choice shows that his family is not immersed in a cultural tradition in which cross-cousin marriage is a norm.

Customarily one of Moshabane's daughters, specifically the one that was raised by her aunt Babuni, was supposed to be married by his sister's son. Should this not happen, then when the sister's son marries a woman not his uncle's daughter, the uncle (Moshabane in this case) must give her sister a cow. It is believed that the very cow contributed by "*malome*" will lead the rest of the cattle used for marrying the woman who is not his cousin. If the uncle does not have any cattle when his sister's son marries, he should wait until one of his daughters gets married because he is obliged to fulfil this deal. Maredi here illustrates that the maxim, one good turn deserves another, is strongly practised among the Northern-Sotho speaking people.

The fact that Moshabane received a cow and a sheep from Babuni obligates him to return the good gesture. He neither gave Ngwanamohube a wife nor gave any of his sister's sons a cow when they married. His behaviour is unacceptable to relatives and he is liable to a fine. To show how serious the matter is, Phogole, a neighbour, reprimands Moshabane as follows:

*Ge o sa ikemišetša go phetha ye nngwe ya tše pedi tše,
o tsebe o fehla marumo (1968:72).*

(If you are not prepared to do one of those two you should know that you are provoking a fight).

Reratilwe, Moshabane's wife, does not want to comply with the norms of her culture. She knows very well about the cow Babuni gave them. It was through this very cow that they came to have other cattle. Surprised by Reratilwe's strange behaviour, Phogole remarks:

*A ga a tsebe ge boyakgomo e le boboakgomo?
(1968:75).*

(Doesn't she know that giving away a cow implies a return on exactly the same investment?)

The statement '*boyakgomo e le boboakgomo*' simply implies that one good turn deserves another. The role of a cow is also emphasized because it was in the past used as the bridesprice or "*magadi*".

We have earlier referred to representatives of both the husband-to-be and his parents, that is, "*bommaditsela*" (delegates / the go-between). When the "*bommaditsela*" arrive at the home of the bride, they are now referred to as "*bakgonyana*" because they act on behalf of their prospective son-in-law.

When "*bommaditsela*" arrive at the bride's home, they are housed in a secluded place where they can relax undisturbed. This place can be in one of the neighbouring families.

The "*Bommaditsela*" or "*Bakgonyana*" are given a "*legogwa*" (traditional sleeping mat) to sit on. They do not sit on chairs. It is customarily compulsory for them to sit on it and failure to do so can result in a heavy fine being imposed on them. The significance of this "*legogwa*" is to show that they are important guests and are also welcomed. This rite of the "*legogwa*" is equated to that of Western culture where a red carpet is laid as a sign of respect and a warm welcome to a person or persons. On the other hand, the "*legogwa*" symbolizes the permission for the newly wed woman to have sex with the man to whom she is betrothed. If the "*bakgonyana*" can hardly put their feet on the "*legogwa*" then it is believed that the bridegroom may not perform his sexual duties well in future.

Namane emphasizes the importance of sitting on the "*legogwa*" by saying

*Afa ba a tseba gore legogwa leo le beilwe ka molao,
gomme ga la swanela go hloka motho yoo a le gatilego?
Gore le gatagatogwe, ke molato o mogolo wo o kago
lebanwa ke go ntšhetšwa setseka. Ga ke rate gore ngwana
yo wa rena, le bogadi a yago, a ye a alele lefeela. Taba*

ye e nyaka tlhokomelo (1968:46).

(Do they really know that that mat has been spread out on the floor according to procedure, and should not at any given time be without a person's foot put on it? To keep removing your feet from it, is a taboo and therefore a mistake which can cause money. I do not want this child of ours, to go to her in-laws and spread the mat for nothing. This matter needs our attention.)

The idea that “*legogwa le adilwe ka molao*” implies that it is a matter of utmost importance for the mat to be occupied. The emphasis made here is to remind those that take their culture for granted that there are rites which have serious implications if they are not observed.

Babuni also conveys other implications if the mat is not occupied. She says,

...gore legogwa la ngwetši le alwe gomme go hlokwe yo a robalago go lona, taba yeo e ka ba bohloa, le gona e ka hlola marumo, le tsebe kgomo ge e lla, ba bannyane ba re e re 'mmu' ba bagolo ba re e re 'marumo'.

(1968:46-47)

(...that the bride's mat should be spread out on the floor and [there should be] no one sleeping on it, will be an abomination and over and above, such could cause friction, mind you when a cow bellows young people say it says 'mmu', but the elderly ones say that its bellowing is an omen of 'war/battle' Never allow a cow to bellow.)

Babuni's statement supports what Namane said earlier about the “*legogwa*”. What he said earlier implied that the marrying couple may experience sexual problems when they live as husband and wife. Babuni now refers to it as the '*legogwa la ngwetši*' (the mat of the bride). “*Ngwetši*” is the term used by the parents and family of the groom when they refer to their daughter-in-law. One of the aims of marrying a woman is to have children. Laying the '*legogwa*' for the

'*bakgonyana*' to sit on implies that 'ngwetši' (bride) is ready to sleep and have sex with her intending husband, who is called a '*mokgonyana*'. When the '*bakgonyana*' (delegates) sit on the mat, it is a sign that the prospective husband is also ready to sleep and have sex with the woman to whom she is betrothed.

Babuni takes the violation of this ritual as an insult that could result in serious problems in the married life of the couple. Once more Babuni expresses the danger people could find themselves in if they do not respect a cow that has been used as brideprice or marriage goods. It is therefore essential to carry out all rituals concerning the institution of marriage.

After the '*bakgonyana*' have completed the phase of '*magadi*', they agree with the family of the intending husband on the actual day of the couple's marriage.

One other important matter is to inform the "*kgoši*" (king) about the ceremony. He is given the '*sebege*' which comprises of '*lehlakore*' (a specific portion of meat cut from the slaughtered cow) and home-brewed beer. This is to inform the *kgoši* of what is taking place in his society and it is also a token of respect shown to traditional leaders.

Maredi uses Namane as a character who still adheres to his own culture. The questions he asks his younger brother, Moshabane, give us a glimpse of the correct steps to be followed as far as the Northern Sotho traditional marriage is concerned. He asks,

Afa o hlabišitše bakgonyana? Seo ke segageno. Ge se go timeletše a ke go gopotše, ke gore a o ba begetše, wa ba laetša, gomme wa ba botša gore kgomo ye o ba hlabišago goba o ba hlabišitšego yona ke ye? (1968:44)

(Did you slaughter something for the sons-in-law? That is your culture. If you have lost it, let me remind you, that is, did you tell them and show them the cow you will slaughter or

you have slaughtered for them?)

The “*bakgonyana*” are the ones to slaughter the cow. This ritual is performed after the bride’s parents have received the brideprice from the delegate representing the prospective husband. The purpose of this ritual among others is to spill blood of the slaughtered animal. This is believed to be a way of communicating with the ancestors to inform them about the marriage that is to take place. This ritual also strengthens the bonds between the two families and their ancestors.

In most cases the “*bakgonyana*” are given a sheep instead of a cow to slaughter. After slaughtering it they take along the head and the skin. This is proof that they have complied with all the demands of the bride’s parents. Apart from the animal that belongs exclusively to the ‘*bakgonyana*’, they are also entitled to a piece of meat cut from the cow the parents of the bride have slaughtered.

This is normally the whole limb of the animal the bride’s parents have slaughtered. This meat is given to the ‘*bakgonyana*’ during the wedding day because this is the day the bride will leave her parents and join her in-laws. In some communities people use a portion of meat cut from the back of a cow and not a limb. This meat is called “*mohlobolo*”. The purpose of giving the “*bakgonyana*” this portion of meat is to introduce the new bride to her parents-in-law. The “*bakgonyana*” will then give the meat to the husband’s parents.

The ritual is performed by the aunt. The “*rakgad*” (father’s sister), in this case Babuni is supposed to cut pieces of meat from various parts of the slaughtered animal. The “*rakgad*” has the right to do this if the bride has been raised by her as her guardian. In *Mo go fetileng kgomo*, Babuni raised Reshoketšwe but Reratilwe, her sister-in-law, denied her this right. Babuni took strong exception

to this by informing all family members present. She stated the importance of following all cultural practices. She condemns Reratilwe's attitude by saying,

...eupša moo go tshelwago molao wa segagešo, oo e lego gore go o latela ke go fa bana ba rena mohlala wa ka moo ba swanetšego go phedišana ka gona, ke bona e le tshwanelo gore phošo e lokišwe... Ge go tsenywa dinama tša kgomo ye e hlabilwego, o ganne ke dira seo se swanetšego mofepi wa ngwana, e lego go kina. Ke segile sethong se setee, a be a šetše a fihlile, a nkamoga le yeo ke bego ke šetše ke e segile, a mpotša ge e le gore ke tlo hlaiša batho (1968:48).

(...but where people transgress our cultural laws, which if it is well observed will be to set for our children a good example on how to conduct themselves in life, I think it is correct that where a mistake has occurred it should be corrected.... When portions of the cow's meat were brought in she refused me the right to perform the ritual appropriate to be performed by a person who tendered a child which is to "kina" (cut a small piece of meat from each portion by the tenderer –a ritual-) I only managed to cut from one portion and she immediately wrenched even that piece I had already cut and told me that I would cause people to run short of meat).

Babuni's words depict Maredi's intention to pass the cultural traditional norms and values on to the young generations. The heritage of traditional African culture and good human relations is emphasized here. On the other hand, Reratilwe is influenced by Western values. She condemns and discredits her own African culture.

Maredi incorporates Western custom into the African wedding. By the inclusion of the religious setting as a component of an African marriage, he shows the impact of Christianity on the lives of Africans. Reshoketšwe and her husband-to-be go to church to receive nuptial benedictions and also to take their matrimonial vows. The wife-to-be's father or the next male relative, who is much senior in years, accompanies her. Namane, the elder brother of Reshoketšwe's father ,

takes her father's place. Namane therefore represents the life she is about to leave and her husband to-be represents the status she is about to occupy. The reason that this occasion takes place in church is that the Bible tells us that marriage was instituted by God when He declared " *It is not good that man should be alone*" (Gen2:18). The duty of the priest is to transform the bride into a married woman. Moruti Malapeng then ratifies their marriage by saying the formula such as:

Ka baka la boipolelo bjo bja lena, nna ke lego motseta wa Lentšu la Modimo, ke tiišetša nyalano ya lena mo leineng la Tate le la Morwa le la moya o mokgethwa (1968:56).

(Because of your confessions, I, who am an emissary of God's word, I solemnly confirm your marriage in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.)

The couple has thus assumed its new status of husband and wife. This type of occasion is always held at the wife-to-be's church. This event shows that traditional and Western cultures complement each other. There was first the traditional transaction and then the Western-style address to seal the couples's marriage.

Before the bride could be handed over to her husband's people, she must be advised by her family members on good behaviour. This aspect is important because if she does not behave well she would be misrepresenting her own family. It would also imply that she was not previously advised on good behaviour and respect. She can be advised publicly in front of the guests attending her marriage ceremony, but it is essential that the 'rakgadi' or the senior aunt provides a praise poem first. This is how Babuni praises Reshoketšwe:

Ai!Ai!Ai!...[O a hlakela] Tlang le mpontšheng Marota, Maloba ke be ke le bontšha! Ke kgokgwana ye e tšwago legapung. Ge nka re kgokgo ke tlo be ke aketša, kgokgo ke tša bomogolo tša bomonyane lerarana. Rena re boa

Sepitsi se rwele nkata a kgomo. Se etela mogodumo a bana ba Shikwe ba Nape. Thaba tše kgolo go ratana go etelana.

Ai!ai!ai!ai!ai!ai! (1968:57)

(Ai!ai!ai! [she is singing and dancing] come and bear me witness the Marota , the other day I showed you! I am a small pith from the watermelon, If I could say a full pith I would be deceiving you, a full pith belongs to elders whilst those of the young are merely small. We originate from Sepitsi which carries the hump of an ox. The one that visits Mogodumo of Shikwe, Nape's children, Big mountains which likes visiting each other.
Ai!ai!ai!ai!ai!ai!)

It is characteristic of this type of a praise song to have the interjections “*ai!ai*” and “*iu!iu*”. These interjections are commonly loudly pronounced during African traditional wedding ceremonies. The praise song gives a brief background of the person being praised. “*Marota*” is the name of the people who lived in the area known as Maroteng or GaMarota in Sekhukhuniland. Babuni is summoning this people to come and witness this wonderful occasion. Sepitsi and Mogodumo are the two mountains found in the areas where they originate.

The day of marriage celebration is the day for the bride to say goodbye to her parents. The “*rakgadi* “ now counsels the bride to affirm her new role. Babuni confirms Reshoketšwe's new status by saying,

O thomile bophelo bjo bofsa lehono ngwana wa kgaetšedi ya ka (1969:57).

(You have started a new life today, my brother's child.)

In the process of this, the ululations, “*liuu!*” punctuate what she says. “*Bophelo bjo bofsa*” (*new life*) implies her new status of being a wife. During this occasion she is given a great deal of presents to congratulate her on the status she has

achieved. On the other hand, there is singing, dancing and drinking to incorporate her into the new family.

Living with the husband's family is a step a married woman has to go through after her wedding. The good intentions behind this custom are to help sustain the couple's marriage and introduce her to the ancestors of her husband. This custom officially regards the newly married woman as a member of her in-law's family and it should not be regarded as a form of oppression. People celebrate this day by eating and drinking. After the celebration she is handed over to her husband's parents. She becomes fully integrated into her husband's family if she bears children.

Reshoketšwe is now set to say goodbye to her family. This comes as a bitter pill to swallow but the fact is that she no longer belongs to her former family. The "rakgadi" and the "malome" are the people who accompany and submit the bride to her in-laws. The bride's maids also go along. This is the time that "mohlobolo", (meat around the spinal column of the slaughtered cow) is also taken along to the husband's family. The "rakgadi" and the "malome" can be replaced if they cannot take the bride to her parents in-law. Babuni has other commitments and could therefore not perform the abovementioned duty. Namane's wife was therefore requested to take Babuni's place. The stage directions explain this moment thus:

Go kwagala mekgolokwane le dikopelo,ngwetši e išwa bogadi. Reshoketšwe o ntšhwa ka ntlong, o llišwa ke ge a gopola a laetše ba gabo, kgadi e a mo homotša (1968:81).

(Ululations and singing are heard as the daughter-in-law is taken to her in-laws's place. Reshoketšwe is taken out of the house crying because of the realization that she is no more a member of her former family, her aunt soothes her.)

It becomes difficult for a woman to part with her parents and siblings and start a new life with people she is not used to. On the other hand, if a woman is married she has to go through this rite of passage. It cannot be avoided. That is why we notice Reshoketšwe crying but her aunt, Babuni, consoles her by saying,

Ka moka go fetilwe fao, gomme go bogadi. Gona go wene go lebeletšwe setee Mokone, diatla. Mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo wa rotha diboko o tlo boa mo, gomme leepo ke leo (1968:82)

(Everyone has had that kind of an experience. The main thing expected of you Mokone, are your hands [working ability]. A good wife is a diligent one and if you become lazy, you will come back here, if that happens expect slander.)

The expression “*Ka moka go fetilwe fao*”, every woman has passed through that stage, implies that this is a rite of passage. “*Diatla*”, hands, implies a married woman is expected to be industrious in household responsibilities.

In our time it seems that African tradition is diminishing in importance in favour of Western culture. Today, spending time with the in-laws is no longer enforced on brides. Maybe the blame should be on modern times which no longer require the bride to remain the following day and relieve her mother-in-law of her household chores. Dr Mathole Motshekga of the Kara Institute is quoted as saying the following about living with the in-laws:

Since we now live in modern times, this is no longer the case. Culturally, she is supposed to, but she is not forced. (*Sowetan*, Monday June 9 2003 page3).

The newly married woman is officially regarded as a member of her in-laws’s family. She usually lives with her husband’s family temporarily yet, if her husband is the youngest son in his family, she is expected to live with them permanently.

The order of delivering messages among the Northern Sotho-speaking people

is interesting. During the family gathering where preparations are made to hand over Reshoketšwe to her in-laws, we also notice the presence of women like Reratilwe, Babuni and Malegelegele. Men in this kind of a gathering play a predominant role as women are allowed to talk only when they are asked to do so. For example, when Babuni suggests that Malegelegele should take her place she (Malegelegele) does not respond immediately but waits until the right moment. Phogole supports Babuni's suggestion by saying Malegelegele is the best substitute. He directs the suggestion to Malegelegele and she responds positively. Moshabane reports Malegelegele's response to Reratilwe who in return expresses her gratitude. Moshabane reports back to Namane. This way of reporting information is an expression of respect.

3.2.2 Mošwang wa Matuba

In *Mošwang wa Matuba*, Maredi does not say much about marriage. We only come across an incident where he mentions in passing a cross-cousin-marriage. In this incident we realize that as time changes people no longer use cattle but money as brideprice. Maakopi tells the other woman, Motodi, about the money their son saved for his marriage. She says,

Tšhelete ka mo gae e gonanyana, mošemanyana o be a e rometše gore re yo mo nyalela mosadi kua ga rakgadiagwe. (1982:34)

(There is a small amount of money in the house, the boy had sent it so that we could go and marry him a wife at his aunt's place)

The quotation above shows that in his works, Maredi concentrates on cultural matters and thus emphasizes the importance of the "magadi". A woman who finds herself living with a man who has not paid the "magadi" for her is believed to be undignified. Leseilane describes this kind of relationship this way

Gona o kile wa bona kae mosadi wa go ya bogadi a se a ntšhetšwa le pudi ya leleme le letala? Ya mohuta woo ga se nyalo, ke kadimo, tšatšing le a gopotše gagabo, o fo tšhuba lesaka (1982:83).

(But where have you ever seen a woman who goes to the in-laws without them having paid out some brideprice for her? Such is no marriage but lending, when she is longing to go home she just goes)

The term “*kadimo*” (borrowing) suggests that cohabitation is not long-lasting and that it is also a disgrace. The woman that finds herself in this kind of a situation is believed to be dishonoured. Women who are not married that belong to this tradition of living-together, thus acknowledge their status once they are married. Lekgoloane states her status clearly by saying

Nna ke tlile ka kgomo ka mo (1982:95)

(Marriage [with cattle] brought me here)

Cattle are respectable animals and they award the woman who has been properly married the respect of her people. Matlakale becomes angry with his wife because she gives him food served on a plate of the type used by Westerners. As a typical African, man he wants his food dished up on a traditional wooden dish. He displays his anger over this matter by saying,

Ge nka be ke sa go nyala ka dikgomo nka be ke go phaphatha gona bjale, morwago a re a fihla a hwetša o boetše gageno, eupša ka gore ke go nyetše, di fedile mogatšaka (1982:18).

(Should I not have married you with cattle I would beat you up just now, so that when your son comes he would find you already gone back to your family, but because I paid the brideprice for you everything is all right my love.)

Cattle as brideprice also play a role in cementing the relationship between

husband and wife and thus in perpetuating their marriage. Had there been no cattle paid out for Matlakale's wife, she would probably have got into trouble. As a rule of conduct, it is scandalous for a traditional African woman to desert or divorce her husband. That is why the elderly women advise newly married women by saying; "*Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*", (the grave of a woman is at her in-laws). This implies that a married woman should spend her entire life with her husband's family even if she becomes a widow.

3.2.3 Lapa ke mosadi (A woman is the harbour of a household)

Amanda's incorporation into Thema's family is seen at his home where there is a celebration to welcome her as a new member of their family. Mogome, one of the old ladies welcomes Amanda by saying,

Hunadi, ke gona gae ga Bahunoto mo, mowe re sa lebalego ge re le bathobatho (1997:66).

(Hunadi, this is the home of the Bahunoto regiment a place where we never forget that we are genuine people.)

Mogome assures Amanda that she has become a part of a loving family where they will treat her as their own child.

Amanda is character that proves that living with the in-laws is not a form of slavery. She spent her entire life with her husband's mother who was always supportive. Through Amanda we see how the title of this drama which is "A woman is a harbour of a household" is realised. Her mother-in-law, Maakopi, lost her husband when her only son and child were very young. Amanda treated her as her own mother and this made Maakopi grateful. Maakopi got on as well as if they were mother and daughter.

3.2.4 Modipadi'a Ngoato

In this drama Maredi highlights the degeneration observed in African culture. Her youngest son has his own house and she lives alone. This shows that as years pass by, Africans become more Westernised. Although Maakopi seems to have accepted that these are different times, she still wants her youngest son to inherit all her belongings including her house after her death. She says the following to her youngest daughter-in-law, Khudu,

O tsebe kgorulane ke yona mošalalapeng, le ge e bile o šetše o agile ya kganyogo ya pelo ya gago ntlo; ye mohlang ke ikelago go bagologolo, o tsebe, ke ya gago le tšohle tše di lego ka go yona (1994:18).

(You should know that the youngest son in the family is the one who remains in the homestead, even if you have already built a house of your own desire, this one, you should know, is yours together with its contents.)

The impression here is that choosing to live in one's own house if you are the youngest son in the family seems to be a waste of time and money. In the event of Maakopi dying, her son Marumo and his wife, Khudu, will own two homesteads. This will now mean they will have to own two homesteads at the same time. They will thus have to surrender one of the houses. These are the problems encountered when we shun our African cultural heritage.

3.3 DEATH

Death is the *irreversible ending of life*. (The South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary 1994:233) Death can occur early or late in an individual's life. It is a passage everyone has to go through. It is also one of the subject matters dealt with in Maredi's works.

3.3.1 Lapa ke mosadi

In *Lapa ke mosadi* Maredi preoccupies himself with this aspect extensively. It is

customary among Africans living in a community where death has occurred to spend a night of vigil at the deceased's home in order to console the next of kin with hymns and prayer. It is during this time of loss that people come to demonstrate community concern. Relatives who have heard the news of a death case in distance places keep arriving at the deceased's home to assist in the funeral arrangements. As sympathizers arrive to express their condolences, they are seated and relatives serve out tea to them. The character, Gobetse, dies in a mineshaft in Kimberly. It is unfortunate that his body cannot be found and, as such, no burial ceremony can be held. However, a memorial service is held to pay tribute to him. Memorial services are modern trends and the inclusion of this occasion in this drama indicates the period during which it was written. Usually such an occasion is held at home before the deceased can be buried. This gathering also helps the mourners to get over the natural feelings of grief after the loss of a loved one. Talking about the deceased is helpful to the mourner. One of the old women, Mmantlatle, sympathises with Maakopi over the loss of her husband by saying,

Gopola, lehu ke kobo re a apolelana.
(1997:5)

(Remember, death is a garment which is passed on from one person to the other.)

Such a conversation helps mourners to begin the process of getting over the grief. People also comfort the bereaved family with songs of comfort. In the African culture the belief is that the deceased becomes part of the ancestry. Photo, one of the characters, substantiates this belief by saying,

Wa ya o ile o motho wa badimo (1994:4).

(If you go you are gone forever, you belong with the ancestors.)

The term “*badimo*” (*ancestors*), shows how Africans regard their deceased people.

Young men in the neighbourhood dig the grave either in a private family or public graveyard for the burial. Traditionally the body of a dead person was wrapped in an animal skin before being placed in the grave. Nowadays coffins are used. After the burial people would return to the home of the deceased. People wash their hands and are served with food that has been prepared by the women. The meat eaten there has no salt. Today people are buried in expensive coffins and there is no longer salt-free meat. A day or so after the burial, close relatives of the deceased have their hair cut. Kwabena N. Bame says the following about the belief of the Bantu Kavirondo:

....Any people who have been in contact with a deceased person while he was ill or any people who handled his dead body have his illness stuck in their hair and so the hair-shaving ceremony is performed to make the illness ‘come out’ (1991:214).

The purpose of cutting hair after funeral is therefore purificatory.

Burial is followed by a lengthy or short period of mourning. Mourning is an expression of sorrow for a dead person. This is in most cases symbolised by wearing black clothes which create a social identification for the mourner. One could tell by the style of dress that a person is mourning the loss of a spouse, for example. A widow in most cases wears black clothes and a sleeveless outer garment that hangs from the shoulders and fastened at the neck whereas a widower ties a black band around the sleeve of a jacket or a shirt. A man/woman has to mourn the loss of a spouse for a certain period, in most cases one year. During this period, the mourning spouses do not mix freely with other people because it is believed that bad luck has befallen them. During this period, the mourner withdraws from the society in which s/he lives.

As an African woman, Maakopi too has to pass this stage of mourning the death of her husband. At the end of the mourning period, there are specific rituals performed to burn her black clothes and also to have her hair cut. The stage directions in Act 3 explain that Maakopi has completed the period of mourning and is thus incorporated back into the society. It is reported thus:

Maakopi o hlobotše tše ntsho (1997:8).
(Maakopi has been cleansed)

The black clothes are burnt and members of the family feast together and all restrictions on the family would be lifted and thus incorporate the mourner back into the broader society where the widow/widower can mix freely with other people.

Maakopi is now free and therefore asks her mother-in-law's permission to look for work as she is now the sole breadwinner. It is after Maakopi's mourning period that Maredi draws our attention to the custom of "*go tsenela*" which arises out of the marriage custom. According to this custom, a younger brother or some other relatives takes on the responsibility for the wife of his deceased brother. The purpose of this custom is to have someone who will perform his duties as a spouse. The death of a husband does not automatically bring their marriage to an end. A close relative of the deceased husband takes his place to prevent the widow from marrying an outsider. Children born of this relationship will therefore have the same blood and quality as heirs of the deceased husband.

In this drama Maakopi finds herself in a situation where she has to be given someone to take the place of her deceased husband. Maakopi feels that her husband's death has automatically terminated their marriage. As a Christian she is not in favour of this custom. She feels that this type of involvement with another woman's husband will cause conflict in the family of those whom God have given the chance to live together. She anticipates hatred between her and the wife of

her new partner. She also feels that the children of her new partner will suffer as they will have to share their dues with her. She perceives this custom as an act of threatening the status of the first wife.

The custodians of this custom see it as a means of enabling the widow to have children with a close relative so that children born out of this relationship should have the same blood as her deceased husband. This practice causes jealousy and rivalry among co-wives and is generally repugnant to women today. It also encourages concubinage. Concubinage can be seen as a practice that fulfills the desire of the male for sexual satisfaction. Maakopi's attitude to this custom shows the gradual replacement of pagan customs with Christian ones. The church encourages one recognized partner. That is why sometimes widows or widowers would take vows of celibacy on the death of a spouse so that they do not have to remarry. The fact that Maakopi defied the custom of replacing her deceased husband shows that Maredi is also not in favour of it. One tends to conclude that he supports the missionary attempts of discouraging polygamous marriages.

3.4 ROLE OF 'RAKGADI'- FATHER'S SISTER

3.4.1 Mo go fetileng kgomo

The *Rakgadi* is the most respectable female person among the Northern Sotho-speaking communities. Maredi emphasizes this fact and comes to illustrate this through the voices of characters contained in his works. Malegelegele describes the '*rakgadi*' as

Modimo wa motho (1968:24).
(A personal god)

She equates the *rakgadi* to a demigod because it is believed that if she is not

given the respect she deserves, the offender will then experience a lot of misfortunes.

Namane is known for his intransigence. Personally he feels not obliged to buy his son some pair of trousers. However his sister, *the 'rakgadi'* to his children, caused him to change his attitude. When he gave his wife money to buy their son, Sefako, a pair of trousers he says,

*Ga ke rate gore kgadi e tloge fa e sa rometše pelo mafiša.
Le gatee, ga ke rate go swarwa ke kgadi ka pelo o a
nkwa? (1968:29)*

(I don't want the aunt to leave this place perturbed. Not at all, I do not want the aunt to begrudge me, do you hear me?)

The repetition of the negative formative '*ga ke*' (I don't) justifies Namane's respect for the '*rakgadi*'. He does not want the ancestors to cast a spell of bad-luck on him as a punishment for not respecting the '*rakgadi*'s' advice. After Babuni expresses her happiness Namane is relieved and says he will have a peaceful sleep, without any guilty conscience.

We have already heard about Namane's abhorrence for Christianity. He detests the Christian religion that he does not dream of setting his foot in church. Babuni is the only person to make him change this attitude. We also hear about a group of churchwomen who come to pray for him. Had it not been of Babuni he would not have allowed these women to come and pray for him. He interprets the expression "Thy will be done on earth" in the Lord's prayer to mean "let God's will to cause him death be done". After the prayer, he gets better and believes that the Lord only heard his sister's prayer which he interprets to mean God's will to save him be done.

When Babuni and Namane arrive at Moshabane's place, he (Moshabane) should report

to them all important matters that pertain to his daughter's marriage. When Namane realizes Moshabane's mistake he says the '*rakgadi's*' mere presence should have brought him (Moshabane) to his senses. Moshabane and his wife Reratilwe take the '*rakgadi's*' role for granted. Reratilwe deprives Babuni of performing one of the rituals that ought to be carried out by her. During the marriage occasion of Moshabane's daughter Babuni is supposed to cut pieces of meat from various parts of a slaughtered cow. This ritual is known as "*go kina*" (cutting out pieces of meat). The *rakgadi* does this especially when she has tendered the prospective bride. It is part of the Northern Sotho tradition for the '*rakgadi*' to be given one of her brother's daughters to take care of. Babuni is then given Reshoketšwe who is also supposed to be one of her son's wife. Now that Reshoketšwe has married an outsider not her cousin, her father is supposed to give her aunt (*rakgadi*) a cow when she gets married or when her cousin (the *rakgadi's* son) marries. As Babuni is denied the privilege of performing the abovementioned ritual, Moshabane and his wife are liable to a fine of a sheep.

The presence of 'the *rakgadi*' plays a vital role in neutralizing conflicts. She is the one that can calm troubled waters. When Namane loses his temper Babuni is the only one who can calm him down. Phogole's following statement supports 'the *rakgadi's*' influence:

Kgadi e boletše, a nke re swareng dipelo hle! (1968:67)

(The aunt has spoken, let us hold our hearts! Let us control ourselves)

Phogole uses the short name for '*rakgadi*' which is '*kgadi*'. This is how she is usually referred to. It is essential that she should be present during such gathering to get things back to normal when they get out of hand.

3.4.2 Lapa ke mosadi

The important position of the *rakgadi* is further exposed in *Lapa ke mosadi* .

Maakopi discusses her problems of accepting a substitute for his deceased husband with one of her sister-in-law, Tebogo, as follow:

Mola ke hweditšego yo kgaetšedi ya Chipane, ngwana mmagwe, a kwana le nna godimo go kgato yeo ke e tšerego ka go tsenelwa mowe ga bona, ga ke sa tekema. Kgadi ke yona modu wa lapa, mola go rego yona ya re : “Tsela yeo o e swerego e lokile”, ditlhokwa di tlo nthobalela (1997:21).

(That I have found Chipane's sister, his mother's child, and he duly agreed with me on all the steps that I have taken concerning their arrangement of allotting me a spouse, therefore I am no more weaving. An aunt is the root of the family, she having concerned that “you are on the right track” everything will be well with me).

Tebogo is also not in favour of this custom and this relieves Maakopi because she has all the support of her child's 'rakgadi'. An unplanned development such as the death of Maakopi's husband has disturbed her relation with some of her in-laws. Her father-in-law's younger brother is one of those who wants to see this custom of 'go tsenela' carried out. With the support of the aunt (*rakgadi*) of her child Maakopi does not regret her decision to defy this custom.

3.5 THE CUSTOM OF “SEYANTLO” (SORORATE WIFE)

The term “seyantlo” is a compound noun that consists of the prefix *se-*, verb stem *-ya-* and the noun *-ntlo*. The prefix *se-* refers to someone who will perform the action of going (*ya*) into the house (*-ntlo*). The house referred to is the one whose owner, in this case a woman, has passed away. In other words 'seyantlo' is the term for a female that has to take the place of a widow, that is, be the wife of a widower.

In some of his works Maredi reveals that this is part of the African traditional custom.

3.5.1 Lapa ke mosadi

This custom is explained through Maakopi, Amanda and Releabetšwe's dialogues. Maakopi tells them about her brother-in-law's fate after his wife's death because no woman among the relatives is prepared to take his wife's place. Maakopi explains

Gore yoo mogadibo a ikela go bagologolo, babo ba lekile go ka hwetša yoo a ka yago seantlo. Ka go mo tseba, ba ile ka swara yo ba šikinya yola, ka moka dikgarebe tša itlhotlhora, tša lla ka lona la gore "Photo? Ge e be e le yo mongwe" Ya ba e le gona go padile (1997:85).

(After the death of my sister-in-law, her relatives tried to search for someone who could replace her. Because they knew the type of person he is, they tried everybody, and all the young ladies refused, saying "Photo? If it were maybe someone else." That was how it failed.)

Looking at the year during which this drama was published one will probably understand why none of the women is prepared to take the place of Photo's wife. Nowadays people do not comply with the demands of their culture. Today people know their rights and marriage is an institution no one should be forced into. Most women see this custom as a practice that violates their rights because traditionally a woman's consent was not considered. One other factor, that influenced the women to defy this custom is Photo's tendency of physically abusing his deceased wife and besides today every woman has to follow her heart's desire.

3.6 CIRCUMCISION

During the period when traditional customs were fully carried out, it was compulsory for young boys and girls to spend a few weeks in the bush where they were instructed in tribal traditions which included circumcision. Circumcision is regarded as an important

Rite of passage. At the end of this phase they would have acquired the status of manhood and womanhood. Initiation transforms young boys and girls into marriageable men and women. According to Northern Sotho tradition, young boys move through each of the two stages of initiation in order of succession called “*bodika*” (*first initiation ritual*) and “*bogwera*” (*second initiation ritual*). During both stages the boys are separated from girls and their families. The initiates are normally grouped according to their ages and there are general names for each group to show different periods of their initiation. For example “*Maswene*” and “*Makwa*”

3.6.1 Mošwang wa matuba

Mashilo explains to his co-accused about the period within which the Law against killing of wild animals was passed. He says,

Ge ke sa aketše, o dirilwe ge Makwa a bolla bodika
(1982:45).

(To be precise, that was promulgated during the circumcision of the Makwa group.)

The general name of the peer group is Makwa. During the entire period of Makwa’s initiation certain rituals are performed. This period marks the transitional stage because rituals performed will identify them from those that are not initiated. The initiates are told words of wisdom and also learn their personal praise poems. Everyone of them is also given a new name.

Maredi also gives a name of the regiment called “*Moroto wa maswene*”. “*Moroto*” is the peer/age group of initiates and “*Maswene*” the general name of the specific initiates. Matlakale, who belongs to Maswene regiment is proud to reveal his status by saying,

Ke šetše ke kile ka swarwa ke banna ka diatla.

(1982:2)
(I have been initiated by real men.)

“*Swarwa*”(handled) suggests the rituals performed during the transitional phase of initiation.

After the second stage of initiation the initiates achieve the status of manhood. To incorporate them into the abovementioned status, their families invite relatives to a feast in order to celebrate their achievement. This kind of celebration rejoins the initiates into the society in their new status. They now have the right to marry and will never be addressed as “*mašoboro*” (non-initiated males).

3.6.2 Modipadi'a Ngoato

In this drama, Maredi mentions briefly that young girls also have their initiation sessions. In this case the elderly women are the ones that perform the rituals. Once more we come across the recurrence of the statement made by Matlakale in *Mošwang wa Matuba*. Modipadi, like Matlakale, is proud to reveal that she has gone through the initiation phase which is traditionally perceived as vital in the lives of traditional African people. She says,

... *ga ke ngwanyana, nkile ka swarwa ke basadi ka diatla.* (1994:6)

(I am not a small girl, I have been initiated by real women)

The fact that Modipadi has passed through this rite of passage suggests that she is a full-fledged woman. She will under no circumstances be addressed as “*lethumaša*”(non-initiated female). Girls are also initiated so that they can be transformed into marriageable women. In modern society, persistence of the initiation custom is a controversial subject because rituals performed have proved to be a threat to the initiates's health. Many of the operations are botched and some of the initiates have died due to excessive bleeding. Medical doctors

and other concerned groups are strongly against the traditional practice of circumcision advancing reasons such as the initiates are vulnerable to high risks of infection as no antiseptics or anaesthetics are administered to protect them from pain.

Instances such as those mentioned above show that Africans cannot cling completely to all old customs and traditions but the best they could do is to modify their lives.

With regard to paying out “*magadi*”, different opinions have been heard from various young black men and women. Some young men do not deem it necessary to pay it. They raise problems like exorbitant prices that are set by parents of daughters. Other young men like Shadrack Masele, a legal adviser of Centre for human Rights, Hammanskraal branch, feels that ‘*magadi*’ is a traditional custom that should not be destroyed by those who abuse it. Those who abuse it are also husbands who beat their wives and justify such physical abuse by statements like “I paid for you”.

3.6.3 CONCLUSION

“*Magadi*” is a traditional practice that should not die out. It is our cultural heritage. Former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, paid 60 cows to marry Graca Machel. Can one imagine how much Mandela could have paid out in terms of today’s actual market price? If a well-known personality like Mandela paid it why shouldn’t the rest of young men pay their manly dues? “*Magadi*” is an African cultural heritage. It should not be seen as an archaic practice. In Maredi’s latest dramas, we discover that although he still highlights incidents of marriage he does not mention anything about the practice of *magadi*. This shows the current controversy surrounding this practice. However, parents should also not take advantage of this custom. It becomes abusive of the practice if parents take

“magadi” to be a business transaction. If parents expect young men to come up with extravagant amounts, then they will be auctioning the souls of their daughters.