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Sister, spouse, lazy woman: commentaries on domestic predicaments by Kiba performers from the Northern Province

Book section

"Sister, Spouse, Lazy Woman: Commentaries on Domestic Predicaments by Kiba Performers from the Northern Province"

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The oral performance of secular or ritual texts, once assumed to be merely reflective of its social surroundings, has been claimed in recent writings to be capable of bringing new or transformed social structures and values into being. If it involves "repetition" of what has been said, sung, or enacted before, this is transformed by a "critical difference" which marks each text as unique (Drewal 1991:41). The new text, in turn, generates a reconstructed social setting: thus no mere "repetition", either of text or of context, is possible.

In South Africa, there have been two main areas in which these ideas have been explored. The first, subsumed within the category of the "popular arts" because of its urban constituency and its syncretic nature, has been township music, with marabi as one of the most well-known examples (Coplan 1985:105-9; Barber 1987:58-9). In these and related studies (Fabian 1978), genres generated in the process of urbanisation have been shown to play a key role in articulating - indeed, in bringing into being - new identities which transcend people's divided and parochial origins.

The second is a series of genres of oral performance by rurally-based labour migrants (Coplan 1987, 1994; Erlmann 1992), one of which is my focus in this paper. Unlike the bricolage style of more obviously urbanising genres, their texts are often composed in a manner described as "traditional", and often include forms of eloquence, and allusions to events, which are claimed to have originated or taken place in the far-off past. Despite the appearance that these texts are rooted in the repetitiveness of custom, however, writers have insisted on their role in creating new social spaces and identities for their protagonists: identities with particular pertinence because of the widely divergent polarities of migrant experience and the "otherwise unbridgeable" gaps which these divergencies create (Coplan 1987:431; Erlmann 1992:690). Powerful metaphors are required to link "here" to "far" (Erlmann ibid.); the image of the rural homestead-dweller to the image of the wandering and homeless orphan (Coplan ibid.,429-30), and the like.

The "traditional" styles of the labour migrant, like the popular styles of the emerging townsman, are thus claimed to have played a crucial role in the constituting of new identities. But these claims would seem to be easier to substantiate in the popular case than in the traditional one. Popular arts, emerging in tandem with the emergence of an urban-based working class, have played a demonstrable role in "making" this class of people and in giving it an identity, even if only because it simply did not exist before. Migrant genres have certainly been claimed to be equally constitutive: both through the capacity of metaphor to transcend the extreme polarities of the migrant existence (Coplan 1987:431; Erlmann 1991:158), and through the capacity of performance to create alternative and autonomously-controlled time and space, separated from the rigid controls of apartheid (Erlmann 1992:691-7). But it is difficult, on the strength of the

evidence provided, to establish precisely what effect these songs and poems have on the broader social existence of their constituency, or to assess how far they actually transform older forms of group or individual identification. The reader is given little opportunity to estimate whether the transformed social reality exists solely within the moment of the performance and its apprehension by the audience, or whether it transcends the limits of this moment and thus has an impact on the broader social existence of both performer and audience. A sceptical reader might even revert to earlier theories of aesthetic anthropology and ask, bluntly, whether these forms of expressive culture do much more than mask or provide momentary alleviation for the uncertain conditions of people's existence.

Such issues are difficult to resolve without becoming entangled in the complex and apparently irresolvable debate about the relationship between text and context. Some studies framed by performance theory have been accused of limiting their idea of context to the microdynamics of performance situations and to the immediate conditions surrounding such situations, and thus of ignoring the broader socio-historical conditions within which such performances are embedded. In response, it has been pointed out that it is impossible to define the "true" context, since "the researcher becomes the judge of what merits inclusion" (Baumann and Briggs 1990:68). To decide on what constitutes the relevant background to a performance is also to deny one of the fundamental tenets of this approach: that performance is not simply reflective of its social background but that it is reflexive; that it constitutes the social settings in which it occurs rather than simply being cradled within them.

My own research into a northern Transvaal-based "traditional" performance genre called kiba - in particular its female version - reveals that the relationship between text and context is far from straightforward. Its performers' creative reinvention of pre-existing songs has indisputably had a direct bearing on their emerging roles as autonomous wage-earners, whose self-sufficiency offers a challenge to existing gender roles. But kiba lyrics communicate this challenge in muted and inverted ways. On those occasions when singers concern themselves with the domestic arena - usually interspersed with commentary on contemporary socio-economic circumstances, or on their own proudly polished performance (James 1994a) - they present a woman in one of a few archetypal situations. She is shown as a girl dependent on her suitor to initiate courtship and marriage; as the dependent sister of a wage-earning brother who resents her brother's marriage to an unworthy wife; or as the highly critical but equally dependent wife of a lazy and unworthy husband. None resembles the actual position of autonomous wage-earner which female kiba singers have achieved.

To understand the relationship between these lyrics and the lives and new identities of their singers, it is necessary to view the kiba genre within a broader conceptual classification. As part of the overarching mmino wa sesotho (sotho music/dance), more recently and inclusively conceived of as mmino wa setšo (traditional music/dance, literally "music/dance of origin"), it falls not only into the category of mmino (music/dance) alongside other types such as church and gospel music, but also into the category defined by its qualifying adjective wa sesotho or wa setšo which encompasses a whole range of practices and beliefs thought of as sotho or - more broadly - as customary or traditional. It includes other oral genres such as direto (praises), but also dress, forms of inheritance, and behaviour appropriate to women and

men respectively. If kiba is understood as part of this inclusive class of things, then it is not only in its lyrics and dance-steps that we must look for evidence of transformed social action and identity, but also in these cognate areas of thought and practice.

It is in the light of this broader context that the inverted lyrics of kiba singers should be understood. While apparently commenting about the conduct befitting a dependent wife or sister, these women have enunciated their own roles in terms of the dependability associated with a brother or a son. Their assumption of such responsibilities is phrased, not directly through the lyrics themselves, but by means of an ongoing reconsideration of "proper sotho" kinship roles. Here, the pertinent contemporary domestic relationship is not that between a dependent woman and a male provider, but that between a brother and sister, equally important in the providing of resources within a natal family. The co-operation that should exist between such siblings, and the antagonism and competition which may result from their attempts to occupy similarly central roles within a family, are areas strongly contested in this process of redefinition. When kiba lyrics do offer strident criticism of male behaviour, they phrase this in terms of the marital-style relationships in which almost no migrant women performers are involved. But their criticisms have a pertinence in the light of this fundamental recasting of gender roles within the natal household.

Men's music, women's music: some background

Female migrant performers from the northern Transvaal, while inventively recasting the lyrics of older, women's songs from rural origins, have won recognition for their music as a branch of the originally exclusively male migrant genre called kiba. Kiba, originating in a rural pan-pipe dance, acquired its characteristic uniform of Scottish kilts, and its polished style which derives from intensely competitive situations, in the compounds and later the townships inhabited by northern Sotho-speaking male labour migrants working on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria. Men's kiba combines a heroic discourse celebrating the glorious past of independent chiefs with an ethos of modern soldierly behaviour deriving from experiences of World War II (James 1994a:88-9).

Female kiba, although it has recently achieved classification alongside the men's version and has thus avoided the stigmatization of a women's-only style, differs in significant ways from its male equivalent. Its rural precedents, being songs (dikoša) rather than being played on pan-pipes (dinaka), allow opportunities for considerable content improvisation: a feature which has made the genre easily adapted to an urban migrant context. Women kiba singers have used the heroic idiom of their male counterparts, but at the same time have subverted this to comment with critical and often comical directness on the quality of contemporary socio-economic conditions in general, and occasionally on domestic relationships (ibid.:94).

Underlying these stylistic differences are the contrasting childhood experiences and work-histories of male and female performers. The male and female members of a specific performance group, such as the Tembisa-based Maaparankwe SK Land (those of the royal leopard-skin clothing, Sekhukhuneland), although claiming to represent the same home area, came to Johannesburg from two distinct parts of the northern Sotho

homeland of Lebowa, where they experienced widely divergent socio-economic and cultural conditions as youths and young adults.

The men were raised in the villages of the Pedi heartland Sekhukhune, and travelled to work at the Reef to support their wives and children living in the heartland. All began to play kiba as children, and all have followed a well-established migrant trajectory, from compounded employment through to less restrictive forms of labour, in which kiba performance played a central role.

Their female co-performers, on the other hand, grew up on freehold land, on white farms or in reserve areas further north. Physical relocation and social dislocation experienced by their families drove these women, mostly oldest daughters, to find work as domestic servants on the Reef, in order to support their natal families and/or their own children. On the farms or freehold areas where they grew up, the influence of mission Christianity lent itself to a musical culture of adolescence which favoured choir, concert and church songs. Some had not sung "traditional" sotho music since early childhood. Many others learned to sing such music, and took to dressing in "traditional" sotho dress, only after arriving on the Reef. For these women from a diversity of rural homes, the style of music they learned did not signify, as it did for their male counterparts, a geographical and cultural continuity with a common home area. Rather, it represented an identity which, although constructed on the basis of a female performance culture "borrowed" from rural women, acquired its meaning in the context of a set of shared urban experiences.

Kiba: men as husbands, men as brothers

In the rural women's songs on which kiba is based, and in later kiba songs themselves, the lyrics express apparently conservative views of womanly roles. The necessity of being courted and chosen in marriage is sung about in the song mankgodi:

Mankgodi o a pholo ke saletswe
Ke saleditswe ke go hloka diphego
Ke nna kgarebe ke a bina
Ke bina koša ye.
Bjale thaka tse tsaka mo lekgotleng
Ba tlo no ferewa nna ke saletse
Wa nkwa gore ga ke na diphego
Ka gore nka sere ke a go rata.
Esita motho ge a robetse o wa tsoga
Sella tsa gago, tsa gago di tla tla.

I, the vulture, am delayed
Delayed by not having wings
I am an initiated girl, I am dancing/singing
I sing this song.
Now my peers in this group
They will be courted, and I, delayed
Hear me, I have no wings
It's because I cannot say that I love.
Even if you are lying down you can rise up
Do not cry for yourself, your turn will come.

The vulture left behind without wings to fly with is the kgarebe (initiated girl) who, unlike her fellows, is not approached by a suitor: as she is a woman she cannot propose love or marriage to a man. "As I don't have wings, I will just stay behind until maybe someone comes to me". Others advise her "don't cry, wait, your turn will come".

Linked to this theme of dependency on men to initiate courtship is the preoccupation with the necessities - clothes, cash, and other material goods - such men are relied upon to provide.

In the song Marashiya, a woman bemoans the fact that her husband has failed to bring her necklaces:

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

Commenting on this line, one singer said

> when other men have gone to town to work, he is always here at home not working, so I won't be able to dance as I have nothing to put on, no shiny necklaces.

A further theme, intrinsically connected to this dependency on a husband or suitor, is the importance of childbearing to give a woman her proper status in society.

Makonkwane sebata makonkwane
Moswari wa theka laka
O sa ile Mabulane
Theka laka le ge le se ne sebako
Theka laka le tseba ke wene
Makuku we..e. maraga theto
Ke bommago Joubere
Mošimanyane wa sekolo
Re re o a lla legokgolana
O a lla Joubere wa Hlabirwa Mmamorei
Hlabirwa ke monna yo elego rragwe
Leba shoti ge ba ntshwana ke aya
Ke yo ekelwa mehlamo ka mo nthago ga Meswana

Ntemogeng ke imile
O tla mpona ka foiye ge dumisiwa.

Makonkwane the beast
The holder of my waist
Has gone to Penge mine
My waist, even if it has nothing around it
My waist, the one who knows it, is you
Makuku, you, the ones who kick away string aprons
The people of Joubert's mother
The school boy
We say he is crying
He is crying, Joubert, son of Hlabirwa Mmamorei
Even if he is a short man and holds me
I will go with him to hear what news he has for me
I went with him behind the thorn tree
Notice me, I am pregnant
You will see me with prickly pears (i e pregnant).

This song celebrates courtship and childbearing. The ones who "kick away string aprons" are the recently-initiated youths who cause young women to become naked: that is, their lovers. The song was accompanied by a dramatic tableau in which one female singer played "mother", another played "father", and a doll was assigned the role of "baby". The baby was named Joubert, and his father was given the sereto (praise name) Hlabirwa Mmamorei. The use of the praise name was an acknowledgement in general terms of a young man's achievement of fatherhood: but it also had the effect, according to informants, of concealing the specific identity of the lover of the song's original protagonist. The song as a whole stresses not only the importance of childbearing to giving a young woman (and her suitor) their aspired-to status in society, but also the importance for both of fidelity: he, as her lover and intended husband, should be the only one who knows whether there is anything tied around her waist.

When the excitement and risks of early courtship give way to the burdensome and even lonely experience of being a daughter-in-law, the songs assume a critical dimension. They explore the ambiguous links between a woman, her place of birth where she feels at home with her siblings, and her place of marriage (bogadi). In ngwana o tshabile bogadi, a "child" (young woman) has run away from her in-laws. Her siblings chase her back again, saying that although marriage entails many pains, she should not run away from these. They, in their turn have had to put up with these sufferings, so they advise their sister to return to her in-laws' place and endure her hardships in silence.

A similar theme is contained in a version of the song mararankodi:

Mararankodi, taba tša lesego
Taba tša bogadi le bagaditsong
Ebego ke dibotša mang?
Ebego ke dibotša mang, taba tša bogadi ye?
Bana ba bogadi ba nkgowa-bjang
A ba nkgowa bjang ba sa bone mpa mantsha
Ke bolabolong ngwana sesuwana?

Mararankodi, news of laughter
News of marriage and of being a co-wife
To whom will I tell this news?
To whom will I tell this news of marriage?
The children at my husband's place are shouting
about me
They are shouting about me because they don't see
stomach (I am not pregnant)
What will I say as an orphan?

The image of a daughter-in-law as an orphan, deprived of the support and friendship of parents and siblings while living at her place of marriage, is a common one in the southern African sub-region.

Images of appropriate womanly behaviour are celebrated in some of the rural songs which served as the basis for kiba improvisation, and in kiba songs themselves, while unbecoming or disorderly behaviour is sharply criticised in others. Of a series of songs about beer and its consumption, for example, some, like sekhekhe sa go nwa bjalwa (a drinker who drinks beer), celebrate the act of drinking if it is done in appropriate circumstances by older women, while others, like o tla loiwa ke batho (people will bewitch you), warn against the loss of self-control, particularly inappropriate to a woman, during excessive drunkenness, and about the possibility of being bewitched by an enemy while in this state.

But many of the most strident criticisms of unfeminine behaviour in these songs are interpreted as being directed, not towards women in general, but towards the woman a brother is planning to marry. One of these is sebodu (lazy person), a contemporary kiba song:

Sebodu sa go rata go ja
A sa sile a sa reng
Sehlwela boroko
Sebodu o mmotse tee, o mmotse seturu-turu
O mmotse "condense", basadi baraga-theto
Ke sebodu mahlwela boroko
Masogana kgaetsedi tša ka
Le mo tsee lang le mmona a le sebodu?

Lazy person who likes to eat
Who doesn't grind meal
Sufferer of drowsiness
Lazy person who likes to be told about tea,
about a big tea-pot
Who likes to be told about condensed milk,
women who kick away string aprons
[young women who immodestly expose themselves]
It's the lazy person who suffers drowsiness
Young men, my brothers
Why do you take her knowing she is lazy?

Similar slovenliness in a sister-in-law is criticised in the song dinala di a rotha (long nails), which tells of a woman who refuses to go with her fellows to fetch water, but who will want to drink once the water has been provided. A rural version of this song expresses similar sentiments:

He wene mosadi wa sebodu mammabjang
O reng o babjwa ge o bona go lengwa?
Ge re sola o wa tsoga.

Hey you lazy woman who is always sick
Why do you get sick when you see people plough?
When we dish out food you get well again.

The sharp criticism of these songs has a poignancy since it anticipates a sister's immanent loss, not only of the companionship of her brother, but also of his earning power as a migrant. Lebowa, one of the most widely-sung kiba songs, expresses a sister's need for a brother as wage-earner:

Lebowa la kgomo le motho
Pula-medupe yana Mohlakeng.
Lebona ge ke te kapere
Ke tšhonne ke hloboletse
Ke setse ka dibesete.
Ke lebowa le kgomo le motho.
Pula ya mamehlaka e yetla
Nke be ke na le kgaetsedi
A nthekele onoroko.

Lebowa of cattle and people
Stormy rain.
Seeing me half-naked
I have no clothes to put on
Except a vest.
It's Lebowa of cattle and people.
A stormy rain is coming
I wish I had a brother

Who would buy me a petticoat.

Like those of other kiba songs, these lyrics consist of a densely-packed combination of themes, some surviving from older songs and others introduced by the current singers. Interpretations of these vary between different singers, and between different contexts in which the song is to be understood. One of these is the context of dancing itself: within this, the semi-nakedness of the woman in the song is interpreted as rendering her unable to dance with her fellows. Alongside these other referents, the theme of reliance on a brother to provide a young woman with clothes can be clearly heard.

Similarly emphasising a sister's feelings, Setimela bewails the absence of a brother who has become a lekgolwa (a person who leaves for the city and never returns). Here, the sentiment is not simply one of material dependency, but of love and emotional loss:

Setimela sa Mmamarwale
Nthshwanyama
Setimela nkabe se rwale buti bokgolwa
Buti e sa le a eya bokgolwa
Ngwana-mme o tla nwa ese ka mmona.

Train of Mmamarwale
Black carrier
Train should carry my brother from bokgolwa
My brother home from bokgolwa
(the state of being a migrant who never returns)
My mother's child would die
without me seeing him.

The themes in kiba and proto-kiba songs of sisterly reliance on a brother, and of jealousy and antagonism between sisters-in-law, point to the centrality of the brother-sister relationship in northern Transvaal communities. But this is a bond of closeness from which strains arise when sisters begin to play an active role as breadwinners. Kiba's portrayal of men in the role of lover/husband in these songs is certainly not without relevance to the lives of kiba singers.

Salome Machaba, for example, has a male companion in town, while Rosina Seshothi and Flora Mohlomi are married to men whom they met while working in Johannesburg. But in terms of their structural relationships with the rural families which they support, the link to a man of most significance is that with a brother. The role of major breadwinner, responsible formerly for siblings and presently for their own children and mothers, makes many kiba singers central in the continuity over time of their own families of origin or orientation. Their brothers, occupying a similarly central role, are co-operators but also potential competitors with them.

The kinship roles of sesotho

Even at a time before female migrancy was common, an adult sister had considerable importance in her natal home, and especially in relation to her brother. Anthropologists documenting rural life among Lovedu and Pedi of the northern Transvaal have pointed

to the central role played by a kgadi (eldest sister) in ritual and in intercession with the ancestors (Monnig 1967:56-7; EJ and JD Krige 1943:235). She became "the ritual head of a family, just as the eldest brother [became] the jural head" (Kuper 1982:60). That this sister was important not only to her family as a whole but to her brother in particular can be seen in the practice of the "cattle-linking" of these siblings through cross-cousin marriage. The bridewealth paid to a family for a girl's marriage would be used by one specific brother when he required cattle with which to pay bridewealth in turn, and this linking would give the sister particular ritual rights and duties over the house established by the brother through his marriage (ibid.)

Bonds between siblings, with these precedents in the northern Transvaal, have become increasingly important under present conditions of conjugal collapse in the labour-sending areas of southern Africa more broadly. Sibling bonds, being more flexible, informal and having "a greater component of willing reciprocity" than marital ones, have even served as a model for the formation of households in situations where maritally-based domestic units have proved unviable (Niehaus 1994:118).

This broader reciprocity within the natal or agnatic family has been of considerable significance in ensuring continued support for women whose desertion by their husbands would otherwise leave them without support (Schapera and Roberts 1975:267; Murray 1981:110; Izzard 1985:268-9, 272-3). Among village-dwellers of the northern Transvaal, for example, stay-at-home women unsupported by husbands or lovers often receive some support from men in the broader agnatic group into which they were born (James 1994b:158-198). A sense of obligation originating between siblings even extends to members of the descending generation. It is considered appropriate for a brother to provide support not only for his sister when her husband dies, but also for this sister's children and even for their children in turn.

But for a wage-earning woman such as those who sing kiba in town, the situation is more complex. Although she may be bonded in co-operation and amity with her brother as custom dictates, she occupies a position of great structural similarity to him which often results in rivalry and even displacement. Through becoming a wage-earner she has taken steps to counteract her brother and to be like a brother/son herself, but this assumption of a leadership role within the family may put her in a position of competition with her brother for a variety of resources.

The means by which these migrant women singers think of themselves as family wage-earners, and thus as almost-brothers, are complex. Sotho custom enshrines the obligation of an oldest son to support his younger siblings, and, later, of a youngest son to look after his parents. But a son, whether older or younger, acquires alternative obligations towards his own wife and children, which render him unable or unwilling to offer full support to parents and siblings. Where a daughter succeeds in fulfilling these obligations in her brother's place, and thus in redefining a role sanctioned by custom as that of a son, this gender interchangeability shows a distinctly modern character. But her capacity to perform this role of support where her brother has failed to do so indicates her success in behaving in accordance with "real sesotho".

"In sotho, the oldest child should support the younger ones". Thus kiba-singer Helen Matjila invoked the expectation that a family's oldest son will hold family assets such as

cattle in trust for his younger siblings (Monnig 1967:336-7; James 1988:39-40), by way of a justification for her entry, as an oldest daughter, into migratory wage labour as a domestic servant. But women like Helen appeared in their parents' eyes as not simply "like" but "better than" a son. Becoming wage-earners and later having children of their own placed them ideally, like migrant daughters elsewhere, to offer financial support to their mothers while relying on them for childcare (Izzard 1985:273-5; Preston-Whyte 1978:62-9). This reciprocal interdependence, both prompted by and enabling intergenerational family continuity, meant that the wage-earning capacities of a family's daughter were less likely to be lost to her relatives than those of a son who acquired his own wife and children to feed.

Certain married brothers, like Helen's, did help with the upkeep of his natal family. But this was possible because he had not yet built his own house, established a separate household, and so undergone the transformation from *lešogana ga na le lapa* (young man without a yard) to *monna o a lapa* (adult man with a yard). A man's metamorphosis from one to the other was often, indeed, prematurely precipitated by conflict between his wife and his natal family laying claim to his support (Molepo 1983:81).

From the point of view of a brother, the contestation over who he should properly support is expressed through a redefinition and a narrowing of his proper - sotho - duties:

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

The sloughing off of responsibilities by brothers/sons for their sisters, sisters' children, and parents, like the assuming of these responsibilities by these sisters/daughters in their place, are much discussed and contested. Both processes involve a change in roles formerly played by men and women, but are nonetheless justified in terms of custom and sotho tradition.

There are other matters for ongoing renegotiation between kiba singers and their brothers. Some men, like Anna Dikotlo's brother, do assume responsibility for broader natal family upkeep and so enter into potential competition with their sisters over access to family land and the right to negotiate over and receive bridewealth payments. Others, like Sarah Motswi's three brothers, monopolize the available child-care resources and leave the unmarried daughter without help from her parents. And it is perhaps not surprising that the least ambiguous position is enjoyed by those migrant kiba singers, like Julia Lelahana and Joanna Maleaka, who have no brothers or male relatives in the immediate family. These women feel that the role they have played as breadwinner during difficult times entitles them to an uncontested authority within the family, and to have sole access to bridewealth payments when their daughters eventually marry.

When defining domestic relationships within rurally-based families, migrants thus make extensive reference to sesotho. Bonds between siblings have precedents in rural

society, drawn on to sanction co-operation between brother and sister in the present. A brother's responsibilities to his sisters and their children are either validated or avoided by reference to the sotho kinship roles of kgaetsedi (brother) and malume (mother's brother). And a sister's assuming of new responsibilities, substituting for or adding to her brother's position in the family, is conceived of in terms of the duties expected, in sesotho, of an oldest or youngest child.

New roles are thus defined by reference to the domestic relationships of old. But how do these claims to position, phrased in kinship and domestic terms, relate to the domesticity and dependency of the kiba lyrics mentioned earlier in this paper?

Kiba: dependency and criticism

Although many kiba lyrics transcend the concerns of domesticity (James 1994a) others, especially those of the older songs from which women's kiba has evolved, do contain comment on relationships within the immediate household. Those cited earlier reflect on situations both of courtship and marriage, and of sibling affection and the concomitant jealousy of a sister-in-law.

Despite the apparent preoccupation in these songs with the praise or censure of other women, they also concern themselves with the behaviour of men. Unacceptable male conduct appears in kiba lyrics as that of a husband or lover - unfaithful, unreliable, or incapable of behaving as a proper husband should - towards his dependent wife or consort. In some songs the criticism is direct. A man is castigated for failing to work and support his family –

Mme a bolawe ga ana mosomo	Mother, he must be killed, the unemployed man
A swanetše a bolawe.	He should be killed.

- or for trying to restrict his wife in her pursuit of independence and entertainment, as in the song sekgalabjana which recommends a treatment of similar severity for an old man who will not let his wife stay out late singing with her group. Complaints about men's restrictions on their wives' activities are contained as well, though less stridently, in sekhekhe sa go nwa bjalwa (a drunkard who drinks beer).

Sekhekhe sa go nwa bjalwa
Ke a le bona le sobetse
Ba ipshina ka go re sega
Le a re bona re tagilwe
Legodimong re tla no ya
Legodimong go bo kgaule.
Mathiri ge la kgobokgane le sang go nwa bjalwa

Nkwenya ya lena ke mang?
Nkwenya ke Maleaka.
Le a re bona re tagilwe
Felegetšang Mmanotwane sa go nwa bjalwa
Ke bana ba Mamotswiri
Kgane ga go na Masogana a go nwa bjalwa?

Dirang ka pela le tloge
Se apa bošula o etla
Le a le bona le sobetše
Banna ba bangwe ba a betha ge se nwele bjalwa
Dirang ka pela le tloge
Blouberg Makgameng
Ditšhweu tša Malebogo
Lebelela Rita o bone.

A drunkard who drinks beer
I see it is sunset
They enjoy laughing at us
You see us, we are drunk
Heaven is where we will go
Heaven, the place of forgiveness of sins.
Young women, when you are together, stop
drinking beer.

Who is your leader?
Your leader is Maleaka.
You see us, we are drunk
Go with Mmanotwane, the one who drinks beer
They are Mamotswiri's children
Are there no young men who drink beer?
Hurry up so that we may leave
Bad people are coming
You see the sun has set
Some men beat their drunkard wives
Hurry up so that we may leave
Blouberg Makgameng
The bright ones of Malebogo
Look and see Rita Mountain.

But comments on men's behaviour are usually veiled. Appearing more in audience interpretations than evident at face value, the meanings of these songs are open to contestation. Lyrics apparently enshrining conservative views of women's roles can prompt explanations more contemporary in import which challenge established norms about passive female behaviour. Mokankanyane, a favourite song about beer with roots well established pre-kiba, is a good example:

Bjalanyana wa mmago Mpoyi
Ge o ntima, ntime
Ge o nkgela, nkgele
Ge o ntima wona
O tla mpona ge ke tagilwe.
O setlatla seota
Setlatla tena le go aga polata bodimo mahlong
Thaka tša gago ba go jela bodimo mahlong.

Beer of Mpoyi's mother
If you refuse me some, refuse me
If you give me some, give me
Even if you refuse me some
You will see me drunk.
You are really a stupid one
The stupid one who builds a flat-roofed house
Your friends are eating your sacred things in front
of you.

These lyrics have a range of referents, including not only the older songs and known contexts from which snippets of them are drawn, but also the private associations they spark off in particular singers or listeners. On the surface, the song refers simply to a context in which people are drinking together, and in which the singer intends to drink whether or not she is offered beer by the hostess. Sexual infidelity appears as a hidden reference, however. The woman is mocked, not only because she built a flat-roofed house where a pitched roof would have been a sign of higher status, but also for her inability to see that her friend, "eating your sacred things in front of you" is having an affair with her husband. He has been able to provide her neither with the outward trappings of material wealth, nor with the security of sexual faithfulness.

Such inadequacies and infidelities, described in songs, give rise in turn to a variety of interpretations. These were sharply divided along gender lines in a case I witnessed where female kiba singers disagreed vehemently with a migrant man about the morality of an unfaithful husband described in a song. Reuben Malaka, listening to Mokankanyane, pointed out its parallel with the theme of another song:

Ge a tshika mmethe nko tse
A tswe mokola.

Hit him on the nose when he is cheeky
So that he can bleed.

He claimed indignantly that a wife often lays a trap for her husband, to prove him guilty of infidelity, by hiding on a plate some food which he did not eat the previous night. Having done this on three consecutive nights, on the fourth she will accuse him of sleeping away from home with a lover, strike him in the face, and then use the plate of uneaten food as evidence when the case is brought to court before his kinsmen. Three of the women who had been performing the song disagreed with this interpretation. Since husbands often stay away for the night with their lovers, they argued, the accusation against the husband in the song must have been well-founded, and his wife was thus entitled to strike him.

Lyrics describing domestic interactions between men and women may, then, contain veiled criticisms, with the true meanings of these being contested between male and female members of the audience. But however insistent female singers or female listeners may be about the inadequacies of male behaviour which songs are held to portray, the domestic situations they represent remain couched in the idiom of marital dependency. The orthodoxies of marriage are endorsed, not only in lyrics, but in

spoken homilies as well. Rosina Sesothi, who has worked inn town to support her children since being widowed in 1974, echoed the feelings of many of her co-singers in similar predicaments:

> I view it as a bad thing [that women come to town to work] because it is a known thing that husbands should work for their wives

Such women's battle for financial independence has been hard won. But their lyrics andother expressions underwrite the scenario of a conventional marriage, with householding wife dependent on wage-earning husband. If there is a challenge to standard gender roles being articulated here, it is phrased in an idiom which is far from militant.

Following one well-established line of argument, one might see kiba lyrics as holding up a template to everyday experience. The songs could be viewed as operating to contextualise women's present predicaments by juxtaposing them with their (and their audience's) understanding of the past (Barber 1991:15; James 1994a); as generating a utopian vision of a "traditional" family which serves as a platform for the appraisal, and denouncing of the inadequacies, of present-day kinship roles and relationships (Vail and White 1991:248-264; Coplan 1987:424). This is an approach which certainly offers some insight into the songs' peculiarly inverted form of expression. In order to gain a full understanding of kiba and its commentary on domesticity, however, we must return to the critical review of performance theory with which this paper began.

Conclusion

From an examination of kiba lyrics alone, without any information on the musicians' social background, one might deduce that their composers were entrapped within custom-bound domestic relationships characterised by extreme dependence. Combining a knowledge of the lyrics with an insight into the singers' social background, on the other hand, would lead one to puzzle on the apparent lack of fit between the lyrics' expression of dependence and their singers' financial self-reliance and social autonomy. As mostly single women, they have stepped into social positions markedly masculine in their attributes and attendant duties. And they have become "like men" in other ways as well: their initial dependence on networks of "home boys" on first arriving in Johannesburg gave way to a gradually increasing autonomy from these networks, which eventually enabled them to group together as female migrants within their own independent associations (James 1994b:76-108), and the musical genre which gave them the occasion for forming these clubs, and which gave them the means for performing once thus united, was originally a male one (James 1994a). Yet they continue to assess men's and women's interactions in terms of the criteria of conventional marital domesticity.

It is only if one broadens the notion of performance to include not only the lyrics of songs but also the wider field of sesotho or setšo (tradition) of which they are a part, that one can make sense of this apparently anomalous combination of dependence and autonomy. Songs sketch the outlines of a set of customary and rurally-based relationships: initially girl-to-suitor and sister-to-brother, transmuting into sister-to-sister-in-law and wife-to-husband. Within the context of these relationships,

women singing the rural songs on which kiba is based would take advantage of poetic licence to be critical, both of other women (especially sisters-in-law) who failed to behave with customary propriety, and of husbands who failed to provide for their wives. But migrant women kiba singers have assumed for themselves the (male) mantle of dependability which these songs celebrate: that which a brother ought to show towards his sister and other kinsmen, and that which a husband should manifest towards his wife and children. Both the old familial roles whose integrity these women uphold in song, and the new ones into which they have moved and which they validate in terms of kinship duties,derive their authority from sesotho or setšo.

Seen in this broader context, the performance of "traditional" songs allows women to achieve diverse and apparently contradictory ends. The songs themselves, by juxtaposing nostalgic visions of the past with the flawed relationships of the present, equip singers with an opportunity for critically appraising the latter, as suggested earlier. But the broader context of sesotho or setšo also provides women with a mandate for appropriating roles which transcend the limits of female dependency. And at the same time as legitimising these roles, kiba lyrics hold out to singers the promise of future marital domesticity, within the context of a modern, nuclear-style family. In giving a promise of progress while holding firmly to a sotho or traditional identity, kiba singers do not contradict, but rather give shape to, their emphasis on the importance of the modern way.

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