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Experiences of Batswana women during the Second World War

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During the Second World War the Bechuanaland Protectorate government sought to increase food production for export. With so many Batswana men away in the army or in the South African mines this required an intensified use of women's labour. Women took on traditional male roles in addition to their own, but their control over their product was in fact eroded as compared to pre-war practice. Exports increased but the food supply within the Protectorate was diminished. However, it seems that women did not express much overt dissatisfaction, but instead took pride in coping with the strain and supporting their menfolk.

British Government economic policy in the Bechuanaland Protectorate during the war years

The war years, 1939–45, represent a period where the British Government implemented policies designed to wring a surplus product from the existing economic and social system of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and direct it into the war effort. In correspondence found in Lobatse, Mochudi and Serowe District Commissioner records, regarding grain production in Bechuanaland during the years 1939-1940, reference is made to the first steps taken in March 1939 for the 'storage of all grain'[1]. The 'situation in Europe' was explained to the Chiefs and following a particularly good season in most parts of the Protectorate, all sales and exports of grained were stopped by Tribal Order. 'By this means any available surplus was retained within the Territory as safeguard against leaner seasons'.[2]

The British Government then called for an extensive campaign to increase food production through the intermediary of existing control structures. A District Commissioner report states, 'Much can be done through keen Chiefs and Headmen to increase production by African farmers'[3]. Chiefs Tshekedi and Bathoen were immediately identified as 'keen Chiefs'[4]. Mr S.V. Lawrenson writes from Mafikeng on behalf of the Government Secretary that, 'District Commissioners should assist the Agricultural Department in every possible manner and should keep constant pressure on the Native Authorities in their areas to increase production'.[5]

Co-operation was obtained for the ploughing of extensive additional areas of tribal land, called 'war lands' based on the custom of *masotla*.[6] Individual families were also called upon by the Chiefs to contribute grain to the tribal granaries. In 1943, the acting Chief Agricultural Officer, W.H. Turnbull, noted that the Chief of the Bakgatla had already had land cleared. Known as the Chief's war land, it was situated between Pilane Station and his Residence. The Bakgatla decided to have a fifty acre block of land in each ward in 1944, making five blocks possible in all'[7].

The British Government aimed 'to render the population of the Territory self subsistent, but in addition to provide a surplus of grain for distribution to the African Troops in the Eastern theatre of war'.[8] A telegram from Mr. V.E. Ellenberger to the District Commissioner in Francistown, dated November 1940, gives a clear indication of British Government intentions, stating that in relation to increased foodstuffs, 'lands should be cultivated in accordance with native custom'. The produce would be the

property of the 'tribe' and 'offered for sale to supply food for troops in North Africa or wherever else required by Government', 'used to build up tribal grain reserves' or sold on the open market the proceeds being paid to the Native Treasury and 'expended for war or tribal purposes'.[9] Four years later, as Lobatse District Commissioner, Ellenberger writes that 'if they do not want to eat beans' Batswana should sell them, for the money would be useful for paying Taxes or War Levy[10]. S.V.Lawrenson relates the use of the surplus product extracted from the Territory, to the economic support and maintenance of Allied advances:

> The battle for food must be regarded as almost as important as the defeat of the enemy. Reoccupied starving countries must be fed besides our own people and our armed forces.... It is imperative therefore that the utmost endeavours should be made to increase the local supply of foodstuffs...[11]

This view is confirmed by the Resident Commissioner, A.D. Forsyth Thompson in his letter to 'the Chiefs and People of the Bechuanaland Protectorate'. He writes, 'Not only must we feed our own forces and our own people but we shall , to an increasing extent, have to feed the populations of starving Europe'.[12] G.E. Nettelton in a memorandum to the Chief Agricultural Officer and all District Commissioners, also relates the increase in food production to the needs of 'enemy occupied Europe, which, upon liberation from Nazi control, will require to be fed for some time'.[13] He goes on to state that,

> You should take immediate steps to ensure in co-operation with chiefs and the Agricultural Department for the... more frequent and effective weeding of lands and proper scaring of birds...[14]

Whilst calling for increased food production, the British Government was not in a position to encourage control of the land, most of which they considered barren, through white settler occupation, nor did it make any move to invest in the commercialisation of agricultural production. No recourse was made to machines or improved, capital-intensive farming techniques which would only have raised the cost of production. The demand for the rapid accumulation of foodstuffs was instead met by the extraction of the surplus labour of the rural population, with the main emphasis on women, by deliberately harnessing traditional semi-feudal modes of production and traditional control structures.

The British Administration was at the same time encouraging the Chiefs to send men to the mines in South Africa, where there, was an acute shortage of cheap labour. Gold production was considered vital to the purchase of armaments which stimulated capital investment in the mining industry and thus increased labour demand. Administration figures put the number of Batswana men working in South Africa at between 14,000 and 15,000 during the years 1940–43.[15] Batswana males thus became an important part of South Africa's, and thus British investment capital's, industrial reserve labour force. This was not to say that Batswana miners, were able to depend on their wage for subsistence. It is widely documented that migrant labourers in the South African mines were and are paid below the cost of reproduction , precisely because behind every miner is a family agricultural production unit that bears part of that cost. Apart from the importance of gold production to the British Government and the importance of increased surplus value to British capital, men recruited for work outside the territory were an important source of taxable income. 'Native Tax' and

'Income Tax' formed the major part of the Administration's annual revenue. A special war fund was also created to which each tax payer contributed in the form of a war levy[16]. The introduction of money into the economy through wage labour was necessary to the payment of taxes and maintenance of the Administrative structure. It also facilitated the entry of traditional semi-feudal economic formations into the commodity system.

In 1941, the British faced with the need for labour units, began to recruit men, again through the Chiefs, to form the Auxiliary Pioneer Corps which were to participate in the war, at different battle fronts. By 1942, another 10,000 men had been removed from traditional Setswana productive relations and had become part of Britain's reserve labour force which had been depleted due to the demands of war. Financially the Protectorate Administration subsisted on its own locally generated revenues. Finance for capital projects was phased out and a policy of extreme stringency and financial conservatism was followed. Whilst by the Financial Year 1940/1941, grants in aid from the Imperial Treasury dropped to 15,000 Pounds, for the years 1941 to 1944, all grants were totally withdrawn[17]. There was an urgent desire, on the part of the British Government to extract as much as possible, as cheaply as possible from the existing productive system in the Protectorate. The exploitation of women's labour is seen as having been vital to this process.

Women, labour and life during and immediately following the Second World War

It is within the context of British economic policy in the Bechuanaland Protectorate that the lives of and productive role played by Batswana women during the war years, are explored. Approximately 25,000 of the most productive elements of the male population, an estimated 10% of the total population[18], had been removed from the traditional production system. An understanding of women's productive and reproductive role and potential was necessary for the prevention of the total collapse of semi-feudal subsistence relations and the adaptation of such relations to the needs of a developing capitalist economy in South Africa, and the war demands of Britain's economy.

In exploiting the tradition of *masotla* to implement the 'war lands' scheme, and in calling for grain from `family granaries, the Colonial Administration saw the determining factor in the success of increased food production as a combination of 'the interest of the Chief'[19] and the exploitation and manipulation of what was traditionally women's work and duty. A memorandum from C.C. McLaren, the Assistant District Commissioner in Gaborone, notes the relevance of Shapera's observations that Bakgatla women controlled the storage and use of grain. It was taken for granted that the grain would be 'carefully and judiciously watched by them'. It goes on to say that 'the majority of Bakgatla women are well known for their frugality' and the way they were known to manage industries and products to provide a suitable safeguard against shortages of corn.[20]

Writing to the Chief Agricultural Officer in Mahalapye, Ellenberger states, 'the African woman... plays and indispensable part in the business of producing food and she should therefore not be over looked'.[21] In a typed letter to 'His Friend' the Acting Chief of the Barolong, Morena Tiego Tawana, he calls for a meeting to stress the urgency of increasing agricultural production and extending tribal lands. He asks 'that as many people as possible are present, more especially the Headmen of the tribe', then heeding his own advice that the African woman should not be overlooked, he has

added in pen, 'and women'[22].

That women were used to work the 'war lands' is confirmed in the following administrative observation :

> Weeding was often behind. In view of the large acreage cultivated this is not surprising. But a contributory factor is undoubtedly the use of women for ploughing. As a result of this practice they are not free to begin weeding until the ploughing is finished, and by then the weeds in the fields first ploughed are well established.[23]

The women questioned for the purpose of this research, talk of working the Chief's land or *masotla*, ploughing, planting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing. Their labour, like that of the men, was provided free of charge because it was the Chief who requested that they work the land. This is confirmed in a letter from Tshekedi Khama to the Tribal Agricultural Committee in Mahalapye, where he describes the ploughing of a forty-eight acre field within four hours and states, 'Expedition is the success of Tribal Communal Unpaid Labour'[24].

When questioned as to what happened to the agricultural produce resulting from their labour on the 'war lands', the majority answered that they did not know, that it was for the Chief to decide. Speaking in general terms, they would describe the traditional notion of *masotla*, which was to create a community reserve of grain under the control of the chief who would supposedly provide from this reserve for members of the tribe in times of need. The women had no control over the product of their labour, which was appropriated by tribal and the British administration and can thus be classified as social surplus product.

Whilst the legitimisation of the practice was that, at a community level, the product was to be given to the producers in times of need which would then technically render both the labour expended and the product necessary to subsistence, this did not happen. Sediapelo Balosang from Kanye, remembers that sorghum from the 'war lands' was sold to Bangwaketse during the war years[25]. Only one of the women interviewed knew of grain being exported from Botswana. Dikeledi Pilane of Mochudi, stated that they received no help from the Chiefs or the British Government in relation to the hunger they experienced during the war period. She explained that they were not suffering from hunger before the war but that when Batswana men were sent to the war, the grain the women produced was taken by trucks and sent to the soldiers. It was then that they experienced great hunger. She also explained that having worked to produce the grain for the tribal granaries, women were called to work on a dam and paid with a handful of sorghum by the local magistrate, a man called Redford.[26]

Another woman from Kanye, commented on how the time when the men left for war was particularly difficult. She remembered being given sorghum seed to plant from the tribal granary and being told that they were not to eat it as it was poisonous. The seed had apparently been mixed with 'red oxide' to prevent insects from destroying it. As there was great hunger, they however, washed, cooked and ate it, living to tell their story.[27] Keomantswe Mothogabo of Serowe, confirms that neither the Chiefs nor the British Government helped by giving them food from the tribal granaries during the war period, which was a time of hunger. The story is consistent amongst all the women interviewed. They remember the war period as being a time of great hardship in terms of their work load and the struggle for survival.

Although the hardship was said to have lessened after the war, many women said that they continued to carry out tasks that were previously considered men's work.

Women were expected to work the 'war lands' and provide for themselves and their families. Often the labour time spent an the 'war lands' was taking necessary labour away from the production of subsistence on their own lands. In a letter to the Tribal Agricultural Committee in Mahalapye, Tshekedi Khama writes,

> It was unanimously concluded that the ploughing, harrowing, planting and cultivation were quite easy of management, because all this work takes a few days to accomplish, when the members of the tribe in charge of the work, are released to attend their normal lands. But it takes 3 months to do the "bird scaring" and the general looking after of the fields.[28]

Grain from the 'war lands' can be classified as surplus product but the grain from family granaries that was taken to the tribal granaries was in fact necessary to the subsistence of the producer but appropriated as surplus product.

It is generally believed that there was a decrease in food production during the war period due to the withdrawal of such a large number of productive males. This is not, however, supported by Administration records which show a gradual, yet substantial rise in exports from £375,719 for the 1930-39 financial year to £720,413 for the year 1945-46.[29] It appears that whilst women, as a source of surplus labour, were used to increase food production, the quantities that were sent out of the country were greater than the increase. Thus grain and labour were taken from that which was necessary to the subsistence of Batswana, causing famine and extreme hardship for the majority of women responsible for subsistence.

Those women who had access to money were able to supplement the family diet with the purchase of maize meal, sugar and tea. They speak of the existence of some unscrupulous shopkeepers who took the opportunity to make a quick profit by selling goods at excessively high prices. Money sent by soldiers and salaries earned by nurses or teachers were the main sources of cash income mentioned by the women interviewed. A cow would occasionally be sold by a woman, when permission was given by her husband but in general the sale of cattle being a male prerogative was a financial transaction carried out by those men who did not go to war.

Mine workers' wages were not mentioned as a source of income. The amount of money sent to women by their soldier husbands appears to have varied according to the husbands wishes. Some women speak of receiving one pound ten shillings, others two pounds ten shillings. Some of the men interviewed said the amount could vary from one pound to ten pounds. Some men sent money to their brothers or mother who in turn decided the amount to be given to the wife. Most of the women interviewed saw this money as a helpful supplement but not enough to survive on.

Those women who were trained as teachers or nurses, the two professions encouraged by the British, earned salaries and were thus in a far better position than those who relied entirely on the land. They were able to buy food and clothes for their children and send them to school. They were also able to spend the money received from their husbands at war, on commodities such as furniture and general home improvement or cattle. These women formed part of the elite of society, along with priests' wives and members of royalty, who did not have as great a burden to bear. Ellenberger describes existing class division when he writes to the Chief Agricultural Officer in Mahalapye,

> The upper classes have the pick of the arable areas; if the crops are good their' share is greater than that of the common man. If the crops fail, they are not hit as hard as the common man as they have reserves to fall back on.[30]

Some women were fortunate to have relatives who helped them and their families to cope, but the majority appear to have survived by ploughing, planting and harvesting with the help of other women and children. Many helped other women plough in exchange for some of the produce—*majako*. They would sometimes call in a party of men to complete the heavier work and pay them by brewing beer. The British Administration's attitude to such beer brewing was, however, that it was a waste of vital grain.[31]

Aside from the extra duties associated with increased food production women were also called upon by the British Administration to knit jerseys, socks and gloves f or the soldiers. The District Commissioner would involve the Chief's wife in organising women into groups and then into pairs. They were given patterns, wool and cotton and competitions were held to see who could produce the most articles. Mare Mogwe, born in 1900 and the wife of a priest, was proud to have been the leader of one such knitting group in Kanye.[32] Her sister-in-law, Anna Seanego Mogwe, was equally as proud that she and her partner produced two pairs of socks per day.[33] There was however, no mention of Prizes for the winners of the competitions. The women wrote their names on a ticket which was attached to the article and sent to the war zone. The patronising view adopted by the British administrators towards the knitting effort is captured in a report which states :

> The women took up knitting and it is no uncommon sight to see women and girls in the villages or at lands knitting as they walk, though the finished article may not always serve the purpose for which it was designed.[34]

An increase in disease and sickness contributed to the hardships women had to endure during the war period. Epidemics of sleeping sickness, plague, yellow fever and smallpox are noted in the British Administration records. Tuberculosis and venereal disease initially spread by mine workers and later, to a lesser degree, by returning soldiers, assumed menacing proportions. Bilharzia and malnutrition were rife.[35] With the cutbacks in British Government finance, there were limited health facilities to cope with such outbreaks. Lack of food and overwork were also seen as contributing factors. However, in the minds of most of those interviewed, the sicknesses of the period are eclipsed by the magnitude and seriousness of those prevalent today.

Women had to bear the anguish of not knowing whether their men would return from the war. Not one of the women interviewed described any feelings of malice towards the British Government for taking their men to war, but they all spoke of the intense fear that haunted their lives. The fear that their husbands or relatives would die or suffer injury so far away from home dominated their thoughts. In general terms, they appear to have been very ill informed. Most of the women only heard of the war in 1941 through their husbands after the recruitment drive started. They saw their husbands as going off to defend Botswana, rather than going to fight a foreign war. When asked what the war was about, most found it difficult to answer. Some saw 'Mageremane' or 'Hitlara' as the threatening party. They did not follow the progress of the war and received very little news from their husbands. Although their husbands wrote, it was generally to ask of domestic affairs and keep in touch, not to talk of the

war.

Buisanya Pule, from Tlokweng, did receive news of the war from her husband. His letters described the terrible killing and rivers filled with the blood of other human beings. She worried a great deal for him.[36] Some women reluctantly spoke of the problem of caring for men who returned mentally disturbed due to their war experiences. In two cases the men concerned were sitting in the yard, unable to communicate. The existence of this problem is supported by the following statement from a health report relating to the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund :

> There is a large increase in the number of Africans in the Bechuanaland Protectorate suffering from mental disorder, in great measure due to the number of men of the African Pioneer Corps who have been repatriated on account of mental disease. The Territory has no adequate or suitable accommodation for certified lunatics.[37]

Although it is a subject that neither men nor women particularly wish to talk about, infidelity and the birth of illegitimate children were a reality of life during the war years. In women's minds it is seen as something which just could not be helped. It is generally viewed that some women did not have the strength to resist such temptations and this was not a great crime but as an expected human weakness, given the circumstances. No consideration or thought is however, devoted to the male that must have made such an act of infidelity possible. The assumption is that it was a female weakness.

It is widely documented and supported by the oral interviews that there were more girls than boys attending primary schools during the period under study. This was not due to any importance being placed on the education of girls, but because boys were needed to herd cattle. Men state that when they returned from the war, they felt it was a priority to provide their sons with education. The war demonstrated to them their own lack of formal education and the importance of such education. Thus, although the number of girls at primary level did not drop following the war, the number of boys increased. At secondary level boys outnumbered girls.

It is recognised that the Second World War created a demand for labour far exceeded Britain's traditional reserve labour supplies. Labour was extracted from Botswana in the form of mine labour for South Africa, and labour units to fight and work at the various war fronts. As wages or allowances were paid to these men, they are easily classified as a reserve labour force to British capital. The value of labour power can be measured a simple way by the length of time expended. If a worker labours for eight hours, he produces a value of eight hours of work. If in paying the worker's living costs, it is found they are equivalent to eight hours work, then there is no surplus value created. It is evident that labour paid below the cost of reproduction will render more surplus value than if under conditions where labour is wholly dependent on wages for its reproduction. It is in this area that women played an essential role.

Women in Botswana were to provide the labour necessary to the reproduction of labour, not only in the sense of giving birth and rearing replacement labour, but in physically providing for the family, including, to some extent, the husband or male relatives at the mines. It is interesting to note that whilst the British Administration made arrangements to control the distribution and sale of grain, including banning the sale and export of grain by local traders, it did not place any restriction on the 'sending of occasional bags of grain to friends or relatives working in Johannesburg'.[38] Although some farming was carried out by the worker, the length of the contract and

time spent out of the country did not coincide with the seasonal needs of subsistence farming. The Motswana labourer, whether a soldier or a miner, was therefore producing the desired labour time required but was being paid far less than the labour time it took to provide for him and his family's subsistence. The labour time necessary to his and his family's subsistence, and the reproduction of labour, was in general provided by women's labour and was not compensated for. The surplus labour and surplus product provided by women was appropriated by British capital through the labour of men and realised as surplus value.

The British colonial authorities also used women as a source of surplus labour to provide surplus product in the form of grain in the campaign for increased food production, and in knitting garments for the soldiers. Women's unpaid productive labour was thus intensified to ensure the subsistence basis of the Protectorate as a labour reserve and to produce surplus grain for British war needs. Their productive capacity was however, stretched beyond its limits, given the lack of capital investment in agriculture. The appropriation of labour and product encroached upon necessary labour and product, causing hunger and hardship. Women had to bear the burden of trying to provide for their families under such conditions. They had to care for the ill and contend with the stress of worrying about their husbands and male relatives at war, and the societal disapproval associated with infidelity and illegitimate children.

The British Administration recognised the importance of existing traditional forms of control and production in the implementation and legitimisation of the extraction of surplus labour and product. They did not, however, limit their analysis to the hierarchical structure of chiefdomship. Existing gender relations, provided a form of control which was most effective in the mobilisation of women as a source of surplus labour, and were to play an important role in increased food production and reproduction of mine labour. The methods and degrees to which men traditionally held control over women's unpaid domestic labour and their reproductive capacity must be explored and related to the manner in which British capital organised around and perpetuated existing gender relations and divisions of labour based on sex. It is essential to an understanding of women's relation to changing production processes and their experiences during the war period.

The Second World War and the deepening of Setswana gender relations

Before the war, the division of labour between men and women, as understood by those interviewed, was that men ploughed, looked after the cattle and cleared virgin land, whilst women were responsible for the children and the home. That women held and still hold such responsibility is deeply embedded in the minds of the men and women interviewed. It is seen as a natural part of existence and presented as something that has always been and shall always be. This assumption formed the basic means by which women's labour could be both manipulated and justified. Women thus carried out the vast bulk of agricultural labour. They planted seed, weeded the fields, chased away birds, harvested, threshed and winnowed as a natural extension of providing food for the household. Similarly ploughing and taking over what were traditionally considered as men's tasks, during the absence of men, were seen in this light.

The women interviewed said they did not question the extra burden they were expected to take upon their shoulders but saw it in terms of their responsibility to either their chief or their household. Kgolagano Diranyano, an ex-serviceman from Serowe, sums up this position in his statement, '*mosadi ke selo sa lelwapa, sa bana le*

go jesa monna. Mabele aa jewang ke bana ba, aa leme ka dikgomo tsa gago wena monna'—a woman/wife is a thing of the home, for children and for feeding the husband. Sorghum is eaten by those children, ploughing is done with cattle that belong to the husband.[39]

The picture that emerges from the interviews is that both men and women recognised the central importance and essential nature of women's work to the traditional agricultural economy and society. Women's work is seen by both men and women, as being traditionally (*mo botshelong jwa Setswana*) more difficult than men's work in the sense that 'a woman's work is never done'. Again Kgologano Diranyana provides an example of the average view when he states that women's work is more difficult than men's work,

> Ke fitlhela gore mosadi o tshwara tiro e e bokete... kana rona banna ha o disa dikgomo kana o rema tshimo, o a lapologa, ha o rata go chaisa, o a chaisa. O tloga o mo raya o re ntle metsi ke tlhape, ya go n kapee la, mme le ene a ntse a tswa tirong.[40]

Similarly Mooketsa Mogwe from Kanye states, '*Mo setswaneng motho yo o tiro e bokete ke mosadi'*—In Setswana culture the person who does heavy work is the woman. While the traditional male task of ploughing a field is heavy work, a man doesn't have to work constantly. He can leave his work. After a woman ploughs, she must then go and pound sorghum, cook and collect firewood.[41] Typically when women finished their work in the fields they walked home, to collect firewood, cook and complete the household chores directly associated with the home and the family. Upon waking in the morning they fetched water, lit the fire, swept, washed and fed the children and themselves, and then walked to the fields. Seasonally there was no respite. When there was less to do in the fields, women carried out household repairs and made pots and baskets.

The recognition of women's economic value was and is woven steadfastly in to the fabric of Setswana culture and life, as indicated by such proverbs as *Mosadi tshwene o jewa dinala/mabogo*—no matter how ugly a woman, even if she looks like a baboon, she is hard working; she produces—and *Mosadi mooka o nya le mariga*—a woman is like an earth bee, she produces even in winter/hard times. Women were valued in terms of their ability to create surplus product and reproduce labour. The more wives a man had, the more prosperous he would be. Information gathered by British authorities in 1941, indicate that the average areas for ploughing in the 'Tati Native Reserves varied from 4 acres to 5 acres apart from one polygamist of about 72 acres'.[42]

Women did not own the means of production. Land and cattle were controlled by men. Unlike wage labour where the labourer sells this labour, women did not own their labour to sell. The chief, the father, the brothers, the uncles and the husband owned and controlled a woman's labour. Guy argues that women under such a system gained security, social standing, importance and integrity, and that their exploitation cannot be viewed with our contemporary ideas of oppression in mind. He finds that women had a significant degree of economic independence as marriage entailed access to productive land, which they worked themselves. They also retained a substantial proportion of the agricultural product f or their own use. Their work was heavy but it took place within a community which provided substantial security.[43]

This argument may to some extent point towards women's agency but also tends to obscure the oppressive function of restricted power and relative security within an

exploitative system. That which is seen to empower women in this case contains the seeds of their oppression. Any respect and authority accorded to women fell strictly within the boundaries of the household and traditionally definitions of women's roles. The control of grain for family consumption fits in to this pattern. As Molokomme finds, a married woman is traditionally considered and treated as a minor. Any significant financial transactions can only occur with the consent of her husband.[44] Campbell, writing on women's struggles in South African townships, refers to the fact that older women have traditionally derived social status and power by virtue of being their sons' mother.[45] Ramphele situates the power of older women in their co-optation by patriarchal family structures and sees it as playing a key role in the perpetuation of patriarchy. She refers to a divide-and-rule policy whereby older women are given power within the family with younger women falling strictly within their authority.[46] Due to the restraints of *bogadi* or bride price, and societal norms, a woman was not free to withdraw her labour and go elsewhere. She was forced to fit into the established pattern of gender relations or be faced with destitution and social isolation and ridicule. Her acute vulnerability was thus one of the reasons behind her continued subordination. Whilst others traded and controlled her labour, she received 'substantial security', in return. An effective and pervasive ideology has been constructed and is reproduced around the material reality of women's subordination. It relies heavily on the restricted security and limited power that is offered by the system to create a sense of women's own worth and participation.

The British Administration's assumption that women would not only provide for the reproduction of labour and hold together a severely strained subsistence farming economy to support the young and the very old, was supported at a domestic level. Women did not think it strange or unfair that their men could leave without providing for the survival of the family they were leaving behind. Most of the women interviewed felt, that even though life was hard, they had at least been given access to land to grow crops, small stock and cattle. Those men who left to fight in the war showed a certain amount of surprise at being asked if they made any provisions for their families and wives while they were gone. using the same logic, they felt that women were left with the means to survive. In the minds of these men and women, women were expected to look after the possessions of their men folk. They clearly state that they controlled the home, the land and the stock as a faithful caretaker would, until the rightful owner returned. There were, however, checks as to just how far this control could extend. Few women claim to have had actual control over the sale of cattle. The majority said that they could not sell any of their husbands cattle without having first received permission from his brothers or mother. Some asked the sons to write to the father and request his permission. As already stated, it wasn't unusual for a woman's husband to send money to his brothers or mother who would then allocate it to his wife. The control women exercised over the distribution of grain was eroded by the British demand for increased food production and the measures taken to control the produce. The control of grain was very much in the hands of the chiefs and the British Administration.

Ideology and resistance

The women interviewed saw men's role as that of a decision maker and leader in the home and community. They compared a man's position in society to that of the central pole that supports the roof of a hut. They saw themselves as producers and men as the rightful owners of the means of production. Yet when asked to imagine 10,000

women leaving Botswana, they all laughed at the thought of men coping by themselves. They felt that men would not be able to survive and that society would just fall apart. Kinsman's description of early nineteenth century subordination of Tswana women is very apt,

> As only an ideology of the subordinated can do it meshed acceptance of subservience with rejection of the dominant world of men. The work ethic made women's acceptance of their circumstances a point of pride.... Perhaps women saw themselves as beasts of burden—those who, humbly and without strain, carry the load.[47]

It is very difficult to determine to what extent women were breaking away from. the traditional rationalisation of their position of subordination. Most of the women interviewed did not think that their roles needed redefinition. Any expression of discontent was very subtle. When asked if women were happy to stay at home when the men went to war, Mathe Gouwe of Mochudi, stated that they were not happy in their thoughts. As to whether women agreed to carry such a heavy burden on their shoulders, she answer, that women are never lazy.[48] Such actions as washing the red oxide off sorghum seed and eating it in defiance of *kgotla* instructions to plant the seed, reflects rebellion against traditional authority in the face of extreme hunger. A letter from Tshekedi Khama to the Tribal Agricultural Production Committee in Mahalapye, refers to the amount of corn brought into the tribal granary and states that 'quite a fair amount of grain, however, is never accounted for'.[49] It is evident that people did not passively accept hunger, given that there was grain being produced.

British administrative records show that women refused to use the long handled hoe in tending the 'war lands'. The hoe, used by Afrikaner farmers in the Orange Free State, was believed by the British to be more efficient. Whether their action reflects deliberate sabotage or a refusal to use an implement that made them feel very stiff the first time they used it, is again difficult to determine.[50] It is evident from British records that the Administration and the chiefs had a great deal of trouble in persuading women to participate in weeding and bird scaring on the 'war lands'. Whilst the British authorities were all for compulsion, both Bathoen Gaseitsiwe and Tshekedi Khama were opposed to the proposal. It was decided that there should be 'active and adequate propaganda and if that fails to bring any improvement compulsory measures should be sought'.[51] Eventually schoolchildren were made to do the work. As seen in a report by Tshekedi Khama, weeding and bird scaring entailed that women neglect their own subsistence needs.

It thus appears that women rebelled, although not at an organised level, against the demands on their labour at the point where they found that they could not provide for their families. There actions appear to have been quietly, defensive rather than revolutionary and do not necessarily reflect recognition of a position of exploitation.

The general ideology surrounding male-female sexual relations was and is that women remain faithful to their husband, whilst men are allowed and even expected to be promiscuous. The large numbers of women who were unfaithful to their husbands during the war period and the increase in divorce after the war posed a threat to traditional control structures relating to female sexuality, fertility and production. Meetings were called by the British authorities to discuss the problem of female infidelity and how it could be curbed.[52] In terms of the existing ideology, many see the Second World War as the beginning of the breakdown of traditional morality. The motivation behind women's actions does not however, necessarily reflect protest, realisation of their oppression, or a conscious rejection of male domination over their

sexuality.

Setswana patriarchal ideology was clearly deeply entrenched in the beliefs and attitudes of both women and men. A powerful combination of varied social and economic factors bound Batswana women to a system of production which was harnessed by the British colonial authorities and pushed to its very extreme during the war period.

Conclusion

The Second World War created a demand for labour which far exceeded Britain's traditional reserve labour supplies. The British colonial authorities implemented economic policies designed to wring surplus labour, product and value from the Bechuanaland Protectorate, as cheaply as possible. Gold production was considered vital to the purchase armaments which stimulated capital investment in the South African, mining industry and the demand for cheap labour. There was an urgent need for labour units at the war front. Batswana men were recruited, using the hierarchical controls of chiefdomship, as mine labour and soldiers. Britain was able to link the needs of capital to what up until then had been a relatively superfluous population by incorporating the Protectorate into its reserve labour force.

The incorporation of Batswana men into the capitalist labour market relied heavily on the unpaid labour of women. Batswana women provided the labour necessary to the reproduction of male wage labour. Their surplus labour and product was appropriated through the wage labour of men and realised as surplus value. Women in Botswana were also used as a source of surplus labour to provide surplus product in the form of the grain required by the British to feed their troops and the populations of 'starving Europe'. They were neither compensated for their labour nor their product. Given the lack of capital investment in the Protectorate, women's productive capacity was stretched beyond its limits. While exports from the Protectorate increased, the appropriation of labour (including the removal of an estimated 25,000 men from the existing system of production) encroached upon necessary labour and product. This resulted in food shortages within the Protectorate.

The little control women had over the product of their labour before the war was eroded. They acted as caretakers over the means of production but did not increase their control over such means. In many cases women continued to carry out tasks that had previously been traditionally performed by men, and shouldered an increased labour burden. Men were freed to sell their labour and become involved in the changing political structures of the Protectorate, whilst the cost of their reproduction was born by women's work in the subsistence sector.

Women viewed themselves as the producers, and men as the rightful leaders and owners of the means of production. The relative power and security that was granted them within the limits of the household and their role as producers were viewed with pride. They saw themselves as carrying out a role and coping with hardship in a way that men could never do.

Women's economic vulnerability, combined with a powerful ideology of legitimisation, placed them in a position where they were largely dominated by chiefly patriarchal systems and emerging capitalism. The most evident forms of resistance appear to have erupted when the existence of the household unit was placed under threat by demands on necessary labour and produce. Women's agency and struggles for change within these contexts of oppression; the interconnections between personal, interpersonal and political levels of organisation need further investigation and analysis

to understand the 'breaking out' processes which are constantly in play.

Notes

This essay, supervised by H. Zins, was completed in 1991.

[1] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 5 'Grain Production in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Position in Season 1939-40'.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 33, 'Notes of Meeting on Tribal Agricultural Production'.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 24, Circular Memorandum No.5472, 'Increased Food Production'.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 10, Circular Memorandum No.5472/1 II 'Food Production'.
[6] *Masotla* or *mapasha* was a system whereby tribal land was allocated by the chief. The chief provided the seed and members of the tribe ploughed the land using their oxen, ploughs and other implements. The produce was left in the Chief's custody for distribution to the poor or for use during ceremonies. In this sense *masotla* are seen as tribal property.
[7] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 48, ' Progress Report on Tribal Agricultural Production'.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 5, 'Grain Production in the Bechuanaland Protectorate—Position in Season 1939-1940'.
[9] BNA DCS 43/7.
[10] BNA DCL 11/1. p.169.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 10 Circular Memorandum No.5472/1 II.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] BNA S605/3/4/5/6/7/8/9 Administration Blue Books.
[16] BNA DCL 11/1 p. 169.
[17] BNA S605/7 Administration Blue Book 1943-44.
[18] This estimate is based on the last census taken in 1936. BNA S288/8.
[19] BNA DCS 31/8, p. 68.
[20] BNA DCM 4/15, p. 14.
[21] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 186.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
[23] BNA DCS 43/7, pp5-6.
[24] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 65.
[25] Informant No. 6.
[26] Informant No. 20.
[27] Informant No. 5.
[28] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 66.
[29] BNA S605/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9 Administration Blue Books.
[30] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 186.
[31] BNA S197/11.
[32] Informant No. 1.
[33] Informant No. 5.
[34] BNA BNB/447 Civil History of the War 1939-45, p. 34.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[36] Informant No. 10.
[37] Khama Family Papers, File 92.
[38] BNA DCM 4/15 p. 25 Export of Grain from the Bechuanaland Protectorate.
[39] Informant No.15.
[40] Informant No.15:"I find women's work is hardest. When we men herd cattle, or clear the field, we can rest or stop when we want. You can tell her to bring you water so that you can wash, to go and cook for you, even though she has just come from work."
[41] Informant No.11.
[42] BNA DCS 43/7, p. 5.

[43] J.Guy, 'Gender oppression in Southern Africa's precapitalist societies' in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), p. 46.
[44] A. Molokomme cited in 'The Effects of Gender on Access to Credit and Grants in Botswana', *Inception Report*, Nov.1990, Prepared by SIAPAC-Africa (Pty) Ltd., p. 35.
[45] C. Campbell, 'The Township Family and Women's Struggles', *Agenda*, No.6, 1990, p. 13.
[46] M.Ramphele, 'The Dynamics of Gender Politics in the Hostels of Cape Town', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1989 cited in C. Campbell, 'The Township Family and Women's Struggles', *Agenda*, No.6, 1990, p. 13.
[47] M. Kinsman, 'Beasts of Burden', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.10, 1983, p. 53.
[48] Informant No.10.
[49] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 64.
[50] BNA DCS 43/7, p. 6.
[51] BNA DCL 11/1, p. 29.
[52] BNA S391/8/1-2.

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1. Mare Mogwe: Female. Born 1900, Kanye. Residence Motebejane Ward, Kanye. Housewife. Interview conducted 6 June 1990.
2. Kgosinkwe Sebati Dikgageng: Male. Born 1911, Kanye. Headman, Sebako Ward, Dilora, Kanye. Interview conducted 6 June 1990
3. Masiela Masire: Female. Date of Birth not given. Born and currently residing in Tlokweng. Husband went to war 1941. Teacher. Interview conducted 14 June 1990
4. Tshepo Gaborone: Female. Born 1914, Tlokweng. Residence Tlokweng. Husband went to war 1941. Housewife. Interview conducted 14 June 1990
5. Anna Seanego Mogwe: Female. Born 1912, Kanye. Residence Motebejane Ward. Kanye. Husband went to war 1941. Housewife and teacher. Interview conducted 6 June 1990
6. Sediapelo Balosang: Female. Born 1913, Kanye. Residence Kgosing Ward, Kanye. Housewife. Interview conducted 6 June 1990
7. Morulaganyi Kgasa: Male. Born 1914, Kanye. Residence Kgasa Ward, Kanye Tsholofelo Kgasa. Interview conducted 7 June 1990
8. Tsholofelo Kgas: Female. Born 1913, Kanye. Residence Kgasa Ward, Kanye. Husband went to war 1941. Housewife, ex-teacher. Interview conducted 7 June 1990
9. Gauta: Female. Born 1912, T lokweng. Residence Tlokweng. Husband went to war 1941. Housewife. Interview conducted 15 June 1990
10. Buisanya Pule: Female. Born 1918, Tlokweng. Residence Tlokweng. Housewife. Interview conducted 15 June 1990
11. Mooketsa Mogwe: Male. Born 1921, Kanye. Residence Gaborone. Member of Parliament and Minister of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs. Interview conducted 8 June 1990
12. Ramonti Segwati: Male. Born 1903, Mochudi. Residence Mochudi. Worked in the mines. Soldier in Second World War. Interview conducted 29 May 1990
13. Makwata Lewatle: Male. Over 70 years old. Born in Serowe. Residence Serowe. Soldier WW2. Ex-driver. Farmer. Interview conducted 26 July 1990
14. Gaebotse Lewatle: Female. Born 1922, Serowe. Residence Serowe. Housewife, Husband went to war 1941. Interview conducted 26 July 1990
15. Kgolagano Diranyana: Male. Date of birth unknown. Born Palapye. Residence Serowe. Soldier WW2. Night watchman. Interview conducted 26 July 1990
16. Keomantswe Mothogabo: Female. Born when Makobamotse built Serowe's boundary and named after it. Residence Serowe. Housewife. Husband went to the war in 1941. Interview conducted 26 July 1990
17. Kabelo Boiteto: Male. Aged 67. Born and lives in Serowe. Soldier in WW2. Farmer. Interview conducted 27 July 1990
18. Mathe Gouwe: Female. Born 1921, Mochudi. Residence Phaphane Ward, Mochudi. After

the war worked in South Africa 'in the kitchens'. Now relies on her children. Interview conducted 28 May 1990

19. Motlapele Tladi: Female. Born 1912, Morwa. Residence Phaphane Ward, Mochudi. Housewife. Husband went to war. Interview conducted 27 May 1990

20. Dikeledi Pilane: Female. Date of Birth not stated. Born and lives in Mochudi. Housewife. Husband worked in South Africa. Interview conducted 28 May 1990

21. Selogwe Dikeme Pilane: Male. Born 1902 Transvaal. Residence Mochudi. Cattle herder, soldier, guard Interview conducted 28 May 1990

22. Mme Mma Pilane: Female. Unsure of birth date. Born and lives in Mochudi. Wife of Selogwe Dikeme Pilane. Housewife. Interview conducted 28 May 1990

23. Rathanyane Rathan:yane: Male. Born 1901, Mochudi. Resides Tshukudu Ward. Worked in a shop with a white person. Soldier in WW1 and WW2. Interview conducted 28 May 1990

24. Nkae Pilane: Female. Born 1899 Mochudi. Residence Mosanta Ward. Housewife. Interview conducted 29 May 1990

25. Setswakae Segwati: Female. Date of Birth not stated. Born and resides in Mochudi—Mosanta Ward. Housewife. Interview conducted 29 May 1990

26. Debarah Motlhabane: Female. Born 1901 Morwa. Residence Morwa. Housewife. Interview conducted 28 May 1990

27. Khutsafala Pilane: Female. Born 1929. Residence Kosing Ward, Mochudi. Housewife. Husband went to WW2. Interview conducted 29 May 1990

28. Rev. D.T. Mogwe: Male. Born 1905 Kanye. Resides Matebejana Ward, Kanye. Priest and soldier in WW2. Interview conducted 6 June 1990

29. Ngakakemodimo Sekgoma: Female. Born and lives in Serowe. Housewife. Interview conducted 26 July 1990

30. Rradiphofu Sekgoma: Male. Born and lives in Serowe. Soldier during WW2 Interview conducted 26 July 1990

31. Mrs Sekgoma: Birth date not given. Wife of Rradiphofu Sekgoma, Housewife, Interview conducted 26 July 1990

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