FEMALE INITIATION: BECOMING A WOMAN AMONG THE BASOTHO

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation submitted for the degree of Masters of Social Science at the University of the Free State is my own, independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

Shirley du Plooy
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SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to investigate and report on female initiation among the Basotho of the rural eastern Free State and Lesotho. Triangulating the data gleaned with multiple methods and techniques (participant observation, the use of key informants, in-depth interviews, life histories), a descriptive account of the initiation process was possible. With the empirical evidence, a number of issues could be addressed. Firstly, the lacuna in the existing Southern African ethnographic literature concerning initiation, particularly that of girls is filled. Secondly, applying Van Gennep's (1909) tripartite scheme for rites of passage, a theoretical framework, unlike abstaining only with a detailed ethnographic description, on the one hand was used particularly in the evaluation and analysis of the data, and on the other offered an opportunity to verify the applicability of said scheme. Thirdly, not only did this study attempt to answer the question of the occurrence of female circumcision among the Basotho, it argues that the existing literature does not clearly distinguish between the two actions 'to initiate' and 'to circumcise', thereby placing their credibility in question.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 FEMALE INITIATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ELUCIDATION

Within the broader field of anthropology, ethnographers have always been interested in rites of passage and particularly initiation from childhood to adulthood.[1] This interest has developed into the empirical documenting of rites and rituals, as well as the analysis of these data to eventually come to a better understanding of the people and cultures among which such practices prevail.

This section offers an ethnographic orientation to female initiation in Southern Africa. In so doing, the occurrence of female initiation among ethnic groups of the region is set forth. Aspects dealt with include the age of initiates, customs and tasks, participants, practitioners, location, time of year, taboos, status, motivation, etc., as well as ascertaining whether any type of circumcision occurs among the groups.

Although children in Bantu-speaking communities are, to a large degree, a sign of wealth and generally enjoy a carefree existence, they are not regarded as having particular rights or responsibilities in that community until they have undergone certain rituals. These, by and large, constitute some form of ceremony, commonly referred to as initiation or 'tribal school'. From this, we see that an important dividing line in Bantu thought is that between childhood and adulthood. Only after this period is bridged, is the individual regarded as an adult or at least standing on the threshold of adulthood.

This division in nature is puberty and often these admission ceremonies take place around this time. It is not possible to pinpoint an exact time that this transition from childhood to adulthood occurs. For some cultures, it is at the first sign of maturity, usually

[1] Some reasons for this include: Firstly, culture is learned and the processes and problems of cultural transmission and acquisition are always debatable issues that require research and reflection. In the light of culture change and culture loss as consequences of Westernisation/modernisation and development, this is particularly relevant. Secondly, since culture is symbolic in nature, the study of the initiation institution that is rich in signs and symbols helps to shed light on the underlying principles and systems that govern a particular culture. Thirdly, anthropology's interest in initiation rites, together with the common accompanying practice of both male and female circumcision, has necessitated intense meta-level reflection in recent times. Fuelled by public interest and debate which largely neglects relativist approaches and rather presses for the abolition of practices it does not truly understand, anthropology finds it forced to defend itself as a study field, or abandon its principles and join the emotionally charged stampede toward so-called advocacy. The media is quick to sensationalise and climb onto the bandwagon of human rights violations. Both abroad and nationally, the issues of female genital mutilations/cuttings and male circumcisions elicit frenzied opposition. It is particularly concerning the latter that in South Africa, formalised prescriptions and regulations to guide these traditional practices and protect initiates from money-hungry and poorly skilled practitioners have become necessary.

the first nocturnal emission in boys and the first menstruation in girls, and for others, it is at the time that the society has deemed the individual mature enough to take his/her place in the adult ranks (cf. also van Vuuren and de Jongh 1999:143). Regardless of which it is, the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa celebrate this time through rituals that help protect the individual from the dangers associated with this time, as well as guiding him/her through this period of potential crisis[2].

These transitions or initiation rites may vary in nature; for example they may be collective, during which time a group of individuals undergoes the rituals together, or individualistic, in which case the person undergoes the rituals separately (Bruwer 1963:93,94; Van Der Vliet 1974:227; van Vuuren and de Jongh 1999:143 cf. Eiselen 1929:8-9, 25-26). The culture of the particular group essentially determines what the specific objectives and nuance variations of these rituals are going to be, but the overriding focus is the same, namely the eventual incorporation of the individual into the adult realm of the community (as a functional and contributing member). Besides acceptance into adulthood, together with the responsibilities that this new status imposes, these rituals seem to be prerequisites for marriage and having children.

An important fact is that although the individual is regarded as an adult, this does not imply that s/he has the rights imposed by Western law on him/her who is no longer a minor. In the Bantu-speaking communities, an individual is always under the guardianship of senior relatives. Further, it is under this guardianship principle that the individual body corporate is subjected. Women in traditional Bantu-speaking cultures hardly ever achieve total body corporate independence (Bruwer 1963:93; Zietsman 1972:317).

According to Richards (1961:52-54), *puberty rituals*[3] among the Bantu-speaking peoples may be classified as falling into the following categories: puberty ritual proper; nubility ritual and fertility cults; puberty ritual associated with initiation into age grades; puberty ritual linked with the joining of special associations; and maturation rites dissociated with

[2] It is argued that puberty among the Bantu groups and all others that have some form of puberty rite, is not as severe as that experienced among Western children. The reason proposed is that in the aforementioned societies the individual knows exactly where s/he stands in the social scheme of things: s/he is either a child or an adult. Refer in this regard to Bruwer (1963:93) and Haviland (1999:396).

[3] Cf. Van Gennep ([1909] 1977:65-110) about his aversion to the use of the concept 'puberty rituals'.

puberty. For the purposes of this study, only the first three types are applicable, but for the sake of clarity, the last two categories are briefly explained.

Puberty ritual proper, encompass those ritual actions that are directly associated with the first signs of physical maturity and take place immediately after these signs manifest themselves. In the case of boys, they usually occur at the time of the boy's first so-called 'wet dream' and for girls, at the onset of her first menstruation. These rites, although not as elaborate as some others, due to their immediate implementation and general lack of preparation, aim at protecting the individual and his/her family, and not the group, from the magic dangers related to these physiological changes.

To distinguish *nubility rituals and fertility cults* from other puberty rituals, is an arbitrary task since most puberty rituals, to some degree, are prerequisites for marriage and the consequent task of bringing forth children. Contrary to fertility rites, the nubility ritual seems exclusively directed at a girl and aims at protecting her from the dangers associated with her first marital intercourse. Fertility rites, on the other hand, may be performed for both boys and girls as a group rite, as well as a preparation for individual marriage following puberty.[4]

Puberty rituals associated with initiation into age grades are generally group rites for boys and girls, respectively. These aim to initiate the individual into adult status or the lowest rank in a complex system of age sets. Because of their collective nature, long periods often elapse after an individual has reached physical maturity, before the ritual is performed. Unlike in the case of *puberty rituals proper*, social maturation becomes more important than the physical or sexual elements in these rituals.

During *puberty rituals linked with the joining of special associations,* the individual joins an age grade, as well as a secret society that serves magical functions and accords

[4] "The *domba* of the Venda which culminates in the famous python dance is described, for instance, as a means of preparing boys and girls for marriage and securing fertility for the community. The *Boxwera* schools for boys of the Northern Sotho and Tswana and the corresponding *byale* for girls follow a circumcision ceremony and are described as closely associated with fertility. The Lovedu of the Northern Transvaal practise individual puberty rites for boys, followed by a circumcision ceremony, a *boxwera* ceremony and finally a *komana* ceremony, which is a form of rain ritual. For girls there are individual puberty rites, followed by a long *byale* ceremony" (Richards 1961:53).

certain social rights. Entry into such a society seems confined to selected community segments and admission is not so much a requirement as it is a privilege.

In societies where there is a clear distinction between *puberty rites proper* and those where social maturation are emphasised and where these two rituals are consecutively performed, we talk about *maturation rites dissociated with puberty*.[5]

Together with Richards' (1961:52) classification of *puberty rituals proper* and the fact that some puberty ceremonies are individually (and not collectively) performed, an elucidation complying with these criteria among various ethnic groups of Southern Africa, follows.

According to Bruwer (1963:94), it is practically only the Zulu, Xhosa, Tsonga and Herero[6] that initiate their girls individually. Van Der Vliet (1974:226) adds the Pedi and the Lovedu, Hammond-Tooke (1993:145) includes the Kgaga, Krige (1966:100) states that all the Shangana-Tongo groups[7] as well as the Venda should be added to this category and Eiselen (1929:26) includes the Ndebele as well. Van Vuuren and de Jongh (1999:143) conservatively state that the Zulu, Ndebele, Swazi and Xhosa initiate girls individually. From Junod's (1927:176-177) account, Tsonga (Ba-Ronga) girls do not have a ceremony marking their coming of age, but that some of the northern clans do have a nubility rite, which three or four girls undergo together. It thus seems that a discrepancy exists among authors with respect to the inclusion of the Tsonga in this category. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the majority opinion is accepted and where applicable, the Tsonga are included in the discussion.

An important point at this juncture, is that most the Bantu-speaking groups of Southern Africa exhibit a fear of menstruation (and blood in general), in that it holds danger for the

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[5] The triple ceremonies performed by the Akamba of Kenya, illustrate these *maturation rites dissociated with puberty*. Initially, boys and girls undergo individual puberty rituals (*puberty ritual proper*), followed by 'small initiation ceremonies' during which time circumcision takes place and finally, 'great initiation ceremonies' which are only occasionally performed in cases where men have achieved considerable wealth or honour (Richards 1961:54).

[6] The Herero are mentioned here, but it should be recognised that this group is regarded as forming part of the south-western Bantu speaking group, which essentially falls outside of the scope of this dissertation.

[7] Cf. Van Warmelo (1966:55) for the three major Shangana-Tonga groupings, together with the respective tribes of which each group consists.

entire community.[8] For this reason, girls experiencing their first menstruation, are often placed in isolation for a period of time during which special medicines may be administered in order to protect the girl herself and the community as a whole. In this regard, it is noted that menstruating girls and women are not permitted to enter the cattle kraals, for fear that they will harm the cattle. Furthermore, these females have to comply with many rules and taboos, which aim at protecting their homes, husbands and the environment from becoming 'polluted' (Bruwer 1963:96). It is then no wonder that a girl's first menstruation marks the time that she should experience certain ceremonies that initiate her into the realms of womanhood, as well as the secrets and practices associated with menstruation.

On reaching physical maturity, the girl is isolated in a secluded hut (Pedi, Xhosa and Thembu) (cf. Eiselen 1929:47; West and Morris 1976:18), behind a wickerwork screen which is placed in the mother's hut (Zulu) (Krige 1965:100; Binns 1974:184) or in her mother's cooking hut (Lovedu) (Krige and Krige 1947:112). During this time, only older women, past their childbearing years, divorced women and unmarried women may enter (Thembu and Xhosa) (Eiselen 1929:48; Bruwer 1963:96). The former then act as instructresses, tutoring the initiate in the 'secrets' of married life and in her responsibilities as a home keeper (Xhosa and Thembu) (Eiselen 1929:48; Bruwer 1963:97). Van Der Vliet's (1974:227) opinion is that the Xhosa, as well as the Zulu do not receive instruction during this time. She does, however, mention that sex instruction and the correct behaviour to exhibit while menstruating is emphasised among the Pedi, Lovedu and Tsonga (Van Der Vliet 1974:227; cf. Mönnig 1978:125 concerning the Pedi and Krige and Krige 1947:113 regarding the Lovedu). According to Mönnig (1978:124), this change of status among the Pedi is a secret affair and only the girl's mother and a few older female relatives are involved. As maintained by Mertens and Gray (1973:10), the Xhosa girl has an attendant with her throughout the seclusion period, while the Zulu girl's attendants basically spend the evenings with the initiate and then return to their respective homes during the day (Binns 1974:184-185). It is with her peers that much time is spent singing monotonous (Xhosa) or obscene (Zulu) songs. In the case of the Zulu, the obscenity of the songs is believed to facilitate the discharge (Krige 1965:102). When appearing outside, the girl is wrapped in a blanket and further hidden amongst a group of her friends (Eiselen 1929:48; Krige and Krige 1947:112; Mertens and Gray

[8] Refer to footnote 27, Chapter 2 with regards to the pollution and menstruation ideas.

1973:11; Mertens and Schoeman 1975:14), for to be seen particularly by a man would be regarded as extremely unfortunate. According to Binns (1974:184), a task of the Zulu attendants is to plait grass ropes into girdles, which are worn by the initiate, as well as the attendants (cf. Krige 1965:101). They also have to dig up roots that will be used by the initiate's mother to prepare a medicinal porridge for her daughter which she eats during the time that she is secluded.

In the case of the Lovedu, the situation differs somewhat. In charge of the real novice and other girls undergoing their puberty rite, are the elder girls who have already completed this puberty rite, as well as the initiation ceremony (West and Morris 1976:134). They in turn, are subject to an older woman chosen by the initiate herself (Krige and Krige 1947:112). On arrival at the seclusion hut, the Lovedu girl is treated with a mixture of herbs, ochre and some of the girl's menstrual blood. The purpose is to strengthen the girl, preventing her from becoming ill. In order to do this, the mixture is smeared on various parts of her body: around her wrists, on her head, nose, mouth, neck and arms (Krige and Krige 1947:112). Each evening, the women of the area gather at the initiate's village to drum and dance. Every morning, the girl is accompanied by the minders of the puberty ceremony, to the river, where she has to submerge herself until the guardians are satisfied (Krige and Krige 1947:113).

This period of seclusion may last for anything from three to four days (Pedi), to as long as a month (Tsonga, Xhosa and Zulu[9]) or as is the case among the Lovedu, a girl is not only secluded for her own first menstruation (*khoba*), but for the first menstruations of four to six other girls (in non-royal and royal areas respectively). Thereafter, she may continue to the next phase, namely the initiation into regiments (Krige and Krige 1947:111; Van Der Vliet 1974:227). The Lovedu girl's first seclusion lasts six days and during the subsequent seclusions she is essentially treated like the real novice, in that she eats the same food (without relishes), is beaten and may not participate in the dancing (Krige and Krige 1947:111). According to Bruwer (1963:97), the length of the seclusion among the Xhosa is directly proportional to the father's wealth. This applies to the Thembu as well (Eiselen 1929:48). The reason for this is that while the girl is in

[9] Binns (1974:184) and Mertens & Schoeman (1975:14) regard seven or eight days to be the average length of the Zulu girl's seclusion. Krige (1965:101) on the other hand, says that the seclusion period varies from one to two weeks or may be as long as two to three months depending on the girl's father.

seclusion, the rest of the family engage in festivities and for as long as the father can provide for these celebrations, they are likely to continue. Among the Zulu, the girl's attendants announce the end of the seclusion. They inform her father that the *beer is ready* (that her menses is completely over) and that it is time for him to announce the day on which he will sacrifice a goat to "clear his daughter from uncleanness and to release her from her seclusion" (Binns 1974:185).

During her seclusion, a girl may be subject to certain hardships. According to Van Der Vliet (1974:227), Tsonga and Lovedu (cf. also West and Morris 1976:134) girls are compelled to sit in cold water for long periods of time or, as in the case of the Lovedu, they might have to eat dry pap and are beaten or teased, pinched and scratched, as is the case among the Tsonga. To this, Krige and Krige (1947:113) add that Lovedu girls are sometimes given sand to eat as relish, given water to drink in which of the minders have cleared their noses, given a frog to eat, their blankets withheld at night and surely the most revolting, is that menstrual blood is mixed with a girl's porridge (Krige and Krige 1947:113). It appears that the Bhaca and the Zulu are not as harshly treated, but have to comply with more food taboos (Van Der Vliet 1974:227). Binns' (1974:184) account of the Zulu seclusion coincides with that of Van Der Vliet (1974:227) in this regard, when he says that: "[w]hilst in seclusion the girl must lie quietly on her mat, be completely hidden in her blanket, speak but rarely and then only in whispers, and do no work except smear herself with ochre. The only occasions on which she is allowed to venture outside the hut are at the calls of nature and for her daily bathe, to which she goes and returns completely enveloped in her blanket". An example of such a food taboo among the Zulu is the prohibition to drink sour, clotted milk (Krige 1965:101; Binns 1974:184; Mertens and Schoeman 1975:14). On the other hand, the Zulu girl also receives special care, in that her mother prepares a porridge that is said to act as a tonic which she is required to eat during her seclusion (Krige 1965:100; Binns 1974:184). It is Bruwer's (1963:97) contention that the Xhosa girl and Eiselen's (1929:48) belief that the Thembu girl, do not undergo any bodily treatment, besides the removal of her pubic hair. In a similar vein, Zulu girls pluck their pubic hair (Krige 1965:102), while Lovedu girls are expected to lengthen their labia minora (Krige and Krige 1947:113).

After the Xhosa and Thembu girl has been in seclusion for a period of time, the young people of the district come to perform the *umdudo*-dance. The male participants pay the

father to participate in this dance. Eiselen (1929:48-49) and Bruwer (1963:97) also mention that incomplete sexual relations take place during this time and when the festivities draw to a close, the initiate washes her body, destroys everything that she previously wore and receives new clothes. Washing off all traces of the ochre with which she had smeared her body during the seclusion, marks the final day of the Zulu girl's seclusion. On her return to the hut, she and her attendants paint themselves red and white, adorn themselves with beaded ornaments, dress in married women's skirts and wear plaited grass ropes diagonally draped across their breasts and back (Krige 1965:103; Binns 1974:186). Before she shaves her hair, the inner membrane enclosing the foetus (cawl) of the goat sacrifice is placed on her head and shoulders (or shoulders and breasts) (Krige 1965:103; Binns 1974:186). She then leads the girls in dance until the meat is cooked and devoured. The ceremony is concluded when the grass ropes that have been worn during the seclusion are burnt in the presence of the old women of the community (Krige 1965:103; Binns 1974:106). The last night of the Lovedu puberty ceremony is characterised by much dancing and the showing of many mysteries (Krige and Krige 1947:114). The following morning, while the girls are at the river, having their hair shorn (leaving a circular plate), the seclusion hut is swept and freshly plastered. On her return, she is anointed with red ochre and fat and also receives three leather pelts to wear – one in the front, one at the back and one for around the shoulders. She then salutes the gathered women by lying on her side with her palms together, but this does not yet signify her graduation. She still has, for a couple of days, to walk with her head bent, speak with no one and clench her fists, holding them to her breast. It is during this time that the minders take her around to greet various family members, who have to present her with small gifts before she may be released (Krige and Krige 1947:114).

Such symbolic acts serve as recognition of the girl's emergence from childhood and her reincorporation into the society as an adult who may marry (Van Der Vliet 1974:227). Among the Pedi, new clothes are worn; Zulu and Bhaca girls wear clothes normally reserved for married women; heads are shaved by the Lovedu and Zulu; and among the Bhaca, the grass of the seclusion hut floor is burned; while the Tsonga simply remove the veil worn during the seclusion period (Van Der Vliet 1974:227).

According to Mönnig (1978:125), the fact that the Pedi girl is given new clothes, simply serves as recognition that the girl has undergone a change in her biological being;

although referred to as a mature girl, she is only recognised as a woman after having undergone the initiation, together with other girls. This is essentially true for the Lovedu girl as well. The young girl has to undergo puberty ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, marry and have children. Her children grow up and undergo the puberty and initiation ceremonies and only when her children have children and she is an old woman, does she reach the peak of her life (Krige and Krige 1947:123). It is thus only after completing the initiation that she will be accorded new status and role, but that this puberty ceremony is a rite of passage, is evident.

The next type of initiation is the collective type – group initiation ceremonies that correlate with Richards' (1961:53) classification, namely *initiation into age grades*. These are generally more elaborate than the former: firstly, because they are group events and secondly, because they are held at particular times which allow for enough preparation time. In societies where these ceremonies are performed, the physical maturation of the individual is not so much the determining factor, although it certainly directs the time at which they are to be held. More important is the social maturation of the individual and subsequently the group.[10] For this reason, one often finds that the age range of initiates varies somewhat. Girls as young as ten and those in their twenties might be found attending the same initiation school.

Such collective initiation rites are found among the Lovedu – *byali*; Sotho groups, including the Pedi – *byale*, South Sotho – *bale* and Tswana – *bojale*; and the Venda – *vhusha* and *domba*[11] (Bruwer 1963:94; Van Der Vliet 1974:232; cf. also van Vuuren and de Jongh 1999:143).

According to Van Der Vliet (1974:233), the female initiation rites of the Lovedu, Pedi, Tswana and Venda are closely aligned with those held for boys. The Tswana and Pedi rites take place shortly after the closing of the boys' schools (Eiselen 1929:41; Mönnig 1978:126). Lovedu initiations take place simultaneously and in conjunction with one another (Krige and Krige 1947:130-131), while the *vhusha* (girl's initiation) and *thondo*

[10] Cf. Chapter 2 (2.2) and as well as Davies (1994:5-6).

[11] According to Bruwer's (1963:94) analysis, the *vhusha* of the Venda is a collective initiation ceremony, while Van Der Vliet's (1974:226) contention that it *may* be postponed until two or three girls have begun to menstruate, but that the *vhusha* essentially is a *puberty ritual proper*, therefore an individual initiation ceremony (cf. Krige 1966:100). The *domba*, according to Van Der Vliet (1974:226) is preferably viewed as their collective initiation ceremony.

(boy's initiation) of the Venda occur separately and then culminate in the *domba*, a communal ritual for both boys and girls (Van Der Vliet 1974:233; Hammond-Tooke 1993:146). Girls' initiations are primarily a women's concern – women organise, instruct and guide – but among the Lovedu and Venda, their respective initiations are organised by men and women (Van Der Vliet 1974:233).[12]

The purpose of the girl's initiation hut is to offer privacy and an element of isolation from the everyday activities of the community. For this reason, it is typically built on the outskirts of the village (Pedi, South Sotho), yet close enough to offer protection in case of danger. Venda girls gather at the headman's village and are housed in a specially prepared seclusion hut (Bruwer 1963:101; cf. Eiselen 1929:28; Van Warmelo 1932:40). After reporting at the chief's kraal, the girl's are instructed to urinate in a potsherd and then red ochre is mixed into it. This mixture is used to draw lines around all the joints, around the breasts and along her back and front torso (Van Warmelo 1932:40). Pedi girls are summoned to the chief's kraal, from where they depart to a secluded place in the veld, where their hair is shaved and they receive a leather apron from their mother, and then their bodies are smeared with red ochre and fat (Mönnig 1978:126).[13] It is the duty of the girls to collect firewood for the chief and early the following morning, they are lined up according to rank, treated with protective medicines and then whipped, before departing for the veld (Mönnig 1978:126). After imploring the gods to bless the proceedings, Lovedu girls smear their bodies with the stomach contents of a head of cattle (Krige and Krige 1947:131). Only after a preparatory period of about a month does the official opening take place (Krige and Krige 1947:132). At this time, girls are treated with special medicines to strengthen them, as well as to protect the initiation courtyard against the entry of witches (Krige and Krige 1947:132). According to the Kriges (1947:133), the Lovedu attempt to focus all activities, with the exception of a few special occasions, to the evenings and mornings, thus freeing initiates to continue their daily work. They also state that the initiates sleep at home (Krige and Krige 1947:133), implying that the seclusion hut does not feature as strongly among the Lovedu as it does among other groups. When considering the length of the Lovedu initiation, it makes

[12] With respect to the Lovedu, consult Krige & Krige (1947:130, 131, 132) and regarding the Venda, see Eiselen (1929:29), as to the participation of males and females in the initiation rites.

[13] According to Eiselen (1929:41) and Bruwer (1963:99), the Pedi initiates' bodies are smeared with white clay and their clothing is made from reeds, berries and pumpkin pips.

sense that to totally seclude initiates for a year would be disruptive to the entire society's economic activities. Throughout the entire initiation period, singing and drumming take place every morning and evening (Krige and Krige 1947:133).[14]

It is at the seclusion or initiation hut that the initiates spend their nights. During the day, the Pedi *bale* gather at a secluded place in the veld where they are tutored (Eiselen 1929:41), while the Venda girls are taken to the water where they sleep for a couple of hours before instruction commences. Such teachings include sex education, appropriate behaviour towards men, tribal practices and tribal lore (cf. Eiselen 1929:28, 42; Molema 1963:123; Geisler 1997:97, 103).

The duration of these traditional schools vary from a week in the case of the Venda's *vhusha* (Eiselen 1929:28; Van Warmelo 1932:43; Bruwer 1963:102); one month in the case of the Tswana and Pedi; one year in the case of the Lovedu (Krige and Krige 1947:132, 133, 139); and anything from three months to two years in the case of the *domba* of the Venda (Van Der Vliet 1974:233; Hammond-Tooke 1993:146). The first part of the Pedi initiation lasts one month (West and Morris 1976:138), after which they return home for approximately nine months. Not yet released from the transitional stage, they are secluded for a further ten days, before coming together at the chief's kraal for two more days and then the initiation is deemed concluded (Mönnig 1978:126-128).

Van Vuuren and de Jongh (1999:143) state that "clitoridectomy has not been part of female initiation, except probably in the Tsonga community of Mozambique", but initiates of these collective schools often undergo a form of genital operation, sometimes seen as synonymous with the circumcision in the male schools. The South Sotho adhere to this practice and the hymen may also be broken by means of a horn or having a woman's finger inserted into the vagina (Ashton [1952] 1967:57). The Mmamabolo (a Pedi tribe) also deflower girls with a cow horn (Krige 1966:105). Concerning the Lovedu, a small cut is made above the clitoris (Geisler 1997:98). The interesting feature of this operation is that it takes place on the last day of initiation and not early on in the rite (Krige and Krige 1947:138). Krige (1966:105) contends that the Venda[15] should be included in this list of girls that undergo circumcision, but unlike Van Der Vliet (1974), she states that a cut is

[14] Refer to Krige & Krige (1947:133) about the songs sung during the Lovedu initiation.
[15] Cf. Van Warmelo (1932:79-103) for a detailed description of the circumcision rites for Venda girls.

made on the clitoris and not above it (Lovedu and Venda). Van Warmelo's (1932:99) description correlates with that of Van Der Vliet (1974), but adds that after a small piece of skin is removed, an awl is heated and lightly applied to the wound, after which two incisions are made on the thighs (to deceive the uncircumcised). Eiselen (1929:27) and Van Warmelo (1932:79) maintain that circumcision rites among the Venda are not a typical tribal tradition, but instead adopted from the Sotho.

According to Van Der Vliet (1974:233), the Tswana and Pedi include rites imitating genital operations. The Tswana would cut the inside of the girl's thigh and then apply a burning stick to the incision (cf. Schapera 1976:38; West and Morris 1976:120) and among the Pedi a knife is placed between the girl's legs while she lies under a blanket, leaving her unscathed (Mönnig 1978:126; cf. West and Morris 1976:138). Eiselen (1929:42) and Bruwer (1963:99) however, indicate that Pedi initiates undergo a circumcision operation, which entails a small cut above the pudenda ("skaamtedele"), or as is the case among the Xababwa, Tlokwa and Moletse (Pedi tribes), a diagonal cut is made below the urethra (Krige 1966:105). Initiates are further required to continuously manipulate the labia minora, a practice that is also performed by the Venda (Van Warmelo 1932:37-39; Bruwer 1963:102; Stayt 1968:108) and the Lovedu and Kgaka (Sotho-Venda) (Hammond-Tooke 1993:145; cf. Geisler 1997:98). To this category, Junod (1927:182) adds the Zulu, but says that among the Tsonga, this practice has disappeared. According to Van Warmelo (1932:38) and Krige (1966:105), a medicine made from parts of a bat is used to facilitate the stretching (Venda).[16] Van Warmelo (1932:38) explains that the wings of a bat are pulverised together with char, forming a powder, with which the labia minora are lengthened. He also mentions that other ingredients may be used for the same purpose (cf. Van Warmelo 1932:38). Stayt (1968:108), on the other hand, pronounces that the bat is killed and cooked and this concoction is used. A stone is also often tied to the labia minora to expedite the process (Stayt 1968:108). The aim of this latter practice seems to be to stretch the labia minora and results in what is known as the hottentot's apron (Eiselen 1929:42; Bruwer 1963:102; cf. Junod 1927:182). According to Mönnig (1978:126), this stretching of the labia minora among the Pedi is thought to result in greater sexual satisfaction for the man. Eiselen (1929:42) adds that men prefer women with stretched labia minora and it is

[16] According to Van Warmelo (1932:37), Venda girls begin this stretching of the labia minora between the ages of ten and twelve years, before they enter the *vhusha*.

believed that it will facilitate the birth of children (children will have something to hold on to, thereby being able to pull themselves out). Although Geisler's (1997:101) explanations for the elongation of the vaginal lips centres around findings among Mozambican women, their beliefs are noteworthy. Women without lengthened labia minora are not called women. Men dislike such women because they do not give as much pleasure. Extended lips help a small-penised man. The belief is that elongated vaginal lips ensure drier vaginas, which facilitate male pleasure. Not having stretched labia minora are grounds for divorce and ultimately, such a woman may not be able to marry at all. Initiates are then instructed to sit in cold water for a few hours (Pedi, South Sotho and Venda).

After a day spent in this manner, the girls depart for their initiation huts. In the case of the Venda, initiates are frequently commanded to carry large stones or to leopard-crawl all the way back to the hut (Bruwer 1963:102). Stayt (1968:108) adds that girls have to pick up and hold hot ashes. Once there, they sit in a submissive manner, watching their tutors perform exhausting dances that they will be required to emulate. The design for the dancing that usually lasts deep into the night and that is repeated for six nights is to test the initiates' stamina and dancing ability (cf. Stayt 1968:108-109). Although girls' initiations observe certain hardships and ordeals, among which the above applies, Krige (1966:105) further remarks that initiates may be severely beaten, expected to gulp down their meals of dry pap and be required to complete unpleasantries, such as eating fresh cow-dung. All that Schapera (1976:38) divulges about the Tswana is that initiates are severely punished and have to endure other hardships. Among the Pedi, each initiate is required to carry tightly bound on her back, a clay doll covered with thorns (as a mother would her infant child) (Mönnig 1978:126). To this, Geisler (1997:99) adds, "Pedi girls were forced to attempt the impossible, such as picking up with their mouths small sticks placed close to a fire or to make a fire in the river. This would be followed by severe punishment and ridicule such as stripping naked and dancing in front of the elders. Towards the end of the seclusion, the girls were marked on the cheek with the red hot circular end of a whistle, causing in some cases severe swelling and infections". Pertaining to the Lovedu, the Kriges (1947:133-134) acknowledge that initiates are sometimes beaten for transgressions, but caution that the *beatings* that they witnessed were not that severe as to seriously hurt or depress the girls. Nor for that matter are they common practice. They go further to say that the dancing, which often lasted until about

eleven o'clock at night, coupled with early rising, was about the hardest test Lovedu girls had to endure. On occasion, the girls had to "…crawl along a path strewn with the velvet stinging-bean which causes intense irritation and itching over the whole body" (Krige and Krige 1947:134). As a rule though, female initiation schools are far less strenuous than those of boys' schools.

During the initiation period, initiates receive instruction in various matters. Although tribal history and aspired values are instilled, it seems that much time is spent tutoring girls as to the roles of women, including their domestic, agricultural and marital duties, particularly in which case sex education receives much attention (Eiselen 1929:42; Stayt 1968:107-108; Van Der Vliet 1974:233; Schapera 1976:38; West and Morris 1976:120, 138, 152; Mönnig 1978:126). Besides all the hardships initiates have to endure, complying with taboos and receiving instruction, a great deal of time and energy is devoted to singing and dancing (Krige and Krige 1947:133-134, 138; Van Der Vliet 1974:233; Mönnig 1978:126). Playing the initiation drum as accompaniment during these times is common. The songs often serve as vehicles, together with mummery and complex formulae, by means of which large amounts of information and knowledge are transmitted (cf. Krige 1966:105, 106, 107). According to Hammond-Tooke (1993:142), "the object of this was not so much the imparting of cognitive knowledge (many of the songs and liturgical formulae were recondite and sometimes couched in archaic language) but rather to provide proof, in later life, that one had indeed been initiated".[17]

Among the Lovedu, the last month signifies that the initiation is drawing to a close (Krige and Krige 1947:137-138). During this time, an important ceremony takes place: old men tie the initiate's hair in little tufts. Women from the previously initiated regiment enter, followed by the initiates, one of whom is taken to have her hair shorn and then to be dressed in leopard skin and adorned with beads around her neck. On her return, she sits on a mat supplied just for her and her head is shaded with feathers held by an office-bearer. Clothes are tied around the initiates and after much dancing, all are aware that

[17] Geisler (1997:96) argues that the meaning of many of the initiation songs is not taught. Sometimes the songs that had to be learned by heart, such as in the case of the Pedi, "made no sense at all, some of them being incomprehensible mixtures of Sotho, Afrikaans and English" (Geisler 1997:96). Together with the drama and mystery that only becomes known after completion of initiation, Geisler (1997) essentially agrees with Hammond-Tooke's (1993:142) statement that it is not so much knowledge that is inculcated, but the perpetuation of a mystery, that may later in life be alluded to, that lies at the root of these songs. Consider for example, the songs included in Chapter 5 (p. 120-121).

the initiation is drawing to a close. The *Bird* indicates the end of the initiation. He hangs his head, saying that his time is up (Krige and Krige 1947:138). The following morning the initiates proceed to the river, where their hair is shaved and they are given new clothes to wear. Their demeanour is submissive; they may not speak freely and at night they ask riddles, all typical behaviour for *things from the rubbish heap*. After burning the enclosures, a final washing in the river and a small operation, initiates return to their normal life and activities.[18]

When the initiation rite of the Venda draws to a close, usually on the last morning, initiates are ritually washed at the water place (be it a river or dam) that serves an important role during the entire rite. Thereafter, they smear themselves with fat, often mixed with red clay (Venda) or red ochre (South Sotho). The shaving of hair is also customary. In the case of the Venda, only a hair-crown remains. Before returning home, an elaborate closing ceremony is held at which time much beer and food is consumed, generally adding to the festive atmosphere characteristic of these ceremonies. At this point the girls return home, where they are given clothes and ornaments (gifts) befitting a girl who has just graduated from initiation school. Bruwer (1963:102) and Stayt (1968:109) relate an interesting practice observed among the Venda, where an object – referred to as *thahu*[19] - resembling a tail, is attached at the back of the girdle. For the duration that this tail-like object is worn, usually a week, the girl is subject to very strict rules. For example, she may not stand erect in the company of others, has to greet her seniors by lying flat on the ground and has to walk in a forward stoop with hanging shoulders and head submissively bowed (Stayt 1968:109). After this period, the girl is regarded as marriageable, indicating that many initiation ceremonies include nubility elements, as well as fertility rite overtones (Lovedu, Pedi and South Sotho) (Eiselen 1929:42, 49; Krige 1966:105; Van Der Vliet 1974:234; and cf. Richards 1961:52-53 and Geisler 1997:103 in this regard). Van Der Vliet (1974:234) offers the latter as a reason why the South Sotho do not compel girls to attend initiation, for if a husband discovers that his wife has not been initiated, he is likely to insist that she attend the next time for fear that she will experience difficulty conceiving.

[18] According to the Kriges (1947) the Lovedu *vyali* (initiation) is overshadowed by it being a fertility and rain cult. Consult Krige & Krige (1947:139-140) for more information in substantiation of their argument.

[19] Stayt (1968:110) relates various other occasions when this *thahu* is worn, as well as what the original meaning among the Venda was.

The Pedi *bale* is at this time not yet concluded. Although this period of seclusion does draw to a close when the girls ritually bathe, their legs are bound together at the knee; they are given large grass mats and are permitted to return home (Mönnig 1978:127). For the next nine months or at least until the next harvest, the girls remain in transition. Resulting from the fact their knees are tied, they can only walk very slowly and girls are additionally required to carry a long stick, which renders them recognisable. Their demeanour is submissive, as is illustrated by the fact that when coming in contact with men or appearing in the village, they have to wrap themselves up in the mat so that their entire body is covered from neck to ankle. Furthermore, if spoken to by a high-ranking male, they may reply only in whispers and keep the interaction as brief as possible; while speaking with other men is strongly discouraged. Although girls assist their mothers on the lands, they generally keep together, sleeping in groups and regularly gather at a special hut where initiation songs and formulae are taught (Mönnig 1978:127). Nearing the end of this period, girls have again to be secluded in the veld for ten days. Here numerous secrets of the initiation are revealed. After this period, initiates are formed into regiments, hair is shorn, they wash and smear themselves with a mixture of ochre and fat and proceed to the royal kraal for two days (Mönnig 1978:128). Girls bathing and receiving new clothes mark the conclusion of the initiation. Subsequently, they return home and introduce themselves to all who bear gifts and ask their new name (Mönnig 1978:128; cf. also Eiselen 1929:42). The girl's status of maturity is now recognised, although she will only truly be regarded as a woman once married and ultimately after the birth of her first child (West and Morris 1976:138; Mönnig 1978:128).

An interesting feature of Venda initiation is that after completion of the *vhusha* by girls and the *thondo* by boys, a communal ceremony is held, in honour of both sexes (Eiselen 1929:29; Hammond-Tooke 1993:146). This *domba*, is essentially a social, festive occasion (lasting about three months). During this time marriage partners are often chosen and initiates are further educated in the subject of sex and guidance with respect to marriage and many everyday matters (cf. Van Warmelo 1932:52; Stayt 1968:111-112, 116; West and Morris 1976:90). An outstanding feature of this ritual is its symbolism and the symbolic manner in which information is conveyed (Bruwer 1963:102). Probably the most well-known part of this ceremony is the execution of the python dance.[20]

[20] For a description of the *domba* ceremony, as well as the python dance consult Van Warmelo (1932:52-78), Bruwer (1963:102-104) and Stayt (1968:111-124).

The supernatural aspect of initiation should not be neglected. This is clearly illustrated in the numerous ways that the sacred objects or mysteries of the tribe are shared with initiates (Van Der Vliet 1974:234; cf. also Krige and Krige 1947:134-135; Hammond-Tooke 1993:146). These may include specific practices in honour of the ancestors, "masked figurines, mummeries, clay, wooden or other models of animals and people or simply interesting and elaborately decorated objects", whose mystical content, when revealed, stand central to many initiation ceremonies, particularly those of the Lovedu, Pedi and Venda (Van Der Vliet 1974:234). Among the Lovedu, for example, the mystery most central to the initiation is that of the *Bird*. The *Bird* is fed, it is entertained with song and dance, because it rules the initiation and for this reason, its wishes and commands should be respected (Krige and Krige 1947:135; Van Der Vliet 1974:233).[21]

In societies that have strong totem affiliation, it is found that the animal representing the dominant totem group regularly features in the rites (cf. Eiselen 1929:50-51, 88-90).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The importance of initiation in a society, for both boys and girls, as a vehicle by means of which culture is transmitted to the younger generations and by means of which individuals are prepared for the roles they will be expected to fulfil as adults, is paramount. The deficit in South African anthropological literature, however, is that female initiation is largely neglected in general ethnographic works. This may be ascribed to the fact that early ethnographers were males and reporting on a female rite was either considered unimportant (from within their male dominant perspective) or because of the sensitivity of the practice, men were not allowed to witness or talk about these customs. The aim here is neither to downplay the important ethnographical works that these authors did produce, nor to enter into a debate from a feminist or activist standpoint. It is, however, to state that documentation about female initiation in Southern Africa and particularly among the Basotho is severely limited.

[21] Cf. Krige & Krige (1947:135-137, 140) for a description of the *Bird* mystery among the Lovedu. See also Hammond-Tooke (1993:144-145) who explains the great mystery of the "Bird or Beast" among the Lovedu and Kgaga and also offers Henri Junod's account of the Kgaga Senkôkôyi (great mystery) in 1905.

Detailed research exclusively on female initiation and the puberty rites of girls is few and far between (cf. in this regard Van Warmelo 1932; Blacking 1957; Richards 1961). The work of Zietsman (1972) may also be included here, although he reported on both the boys' and girls' initiation among the Basotho, but did so with respect to female initiation in the most comprehensive fashion. To my knowledge, no recent research has significantly documented the female initiation of any of the ethnic groups of Southern Africa or for that matter elaborated on the custom of female circumcision among these groups.

From the above ethnographic orientation to female initiation, it firstly becomes apparent that a theoretical frame of reference to explain this phenomenon is lacking. Generally, researchers suffice with detailed ethnographic descriptions. In the second place, among the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa, distinctive/autogenous and unique practices are apparent. An anthropological study that focuses on a specific ethnic group is thus justifiable. Thirdly, researchers differ with one another regarding the occurrence, nature and extent of female circumcision. It also appears that concept-confusion exists in this regard. Lastly, recent research results are wanting. Data in some instances were documented more than eight decades ago, and we may thus accept that the image we have does not take into account all the changes that have taken place.

Subsequent to the above remarks, the general aim of this study may therefore be stated as: To investigate and report on female initiation among the Basotho of the rural eastern Free State and Lesotho. The following specific objectives are thus set:

In order to present the ethnographic material within an appropriate theoretical framework, the decision is to follow the phases of separation, transition and incorporation, as proposed by Van Gennep (1977) regarding *rites of passage*. Cognisance is taken of the critical analyses and interpretations of his work. Chapter Two elucidates, among other things, Van Gennep's and the adjusted and reinterpreted versions in this regard. Also contained within is a discussion pertaining to the concept-confusion alluded to above – i.e. the use of appropriate terms.

Anthropological research is largely time consuming. When investigating sensitive matters such as initiation, the socialisation demands are ever greater. Chapter Three

details the socialisation process that is followed in this study, together with the research design, methods and techniques, as well as the introduction of the research area and group.

The ethnographic material is presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter Four is devoted to an elucidation of the factors that influence the convening of an initiation, as well as the preparations for female initiation among the Basotho. A systematic description of the initiation rite among the Basotho appears in Chapter Five. The structure of this presentation keeps to Van Gennep's tripartite scheme. Strikingly, female Basotho initiates' transition through very observable phases marked by smearing their bodies with different coloured ointments. Rudimentarily, the three colours coincide with Van Gennep's three ritual stages. A significant preparatory period precedes the above description; as does a discussion on the post-initiation period succeed it.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

2.1 GENERAL

This study deals with female initiation among the Basotho, which is seen as a rite of passage, marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The discussion in this chapter begins with an exposition of *rites of passage*, as conceptualised by Van Gennep (1909) and others. Following the theoretical base and features of rites of passage, the concept, *initiation* and the essential features and characteristics illuminated by previous studies are presented. The concepts of *female circumcision*, *female genital mutilation and cutting* are briefly clarified, as is awareness fostered surrounding the *concept-confusion* that exists relating to the use of female circumcision and initiation in the South African literature.

2.2 RITES OF PASSAGE AND A TRIPARTITE SCHEME

Rites of passage, a term coined by Van Gennep in 1909, illustrates the rites associated with the change in status and position a person undergoes as a result of the transition from one life phase to another (Hunter and Whitten 1976:336; Seymour-Smith 1990:248; Winthrop 1991:242; Davies 1994:2; Coertze and Coertze 1996:260). Such rites might include among others birth, initiation, marriage and death.[22] For Van Gennep ([1909] 1977:11; cf. also V. Turner 1967:94; Winthrop 1991:242; Davies 1994:2; Barry III 1996:652; Haviland 1999:395), each rite of passage may be divided into three ritual stages: (1) separation, seclusion or isolation; (2) transition, marginalisation or liminality; and (3) aggregation or (re)incorporation. Van Gennep describes these three phases of rites of passage in terms of the "Latin word *limen* meaning threshold or doorstep" (Davies 1994:3; Hockey 2002:213), thus referring to them as: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. To explain, Van Gennep uses analogies by comparing human societies with large European houses that had many rooms, passages and doors, on the one hand, or entering a village and crossing streets and squares, on the other (1977:192). During the course of everyday life people would move, using the first analogy, "from room to room through passages and across thresholds. By analogy, society was composed of

[22] It should, however, be noted that rites of passage are not bound to life crises as defined by a culture, but may accompany what Victor Turner (1967:95) calls changes in 'states'. Such changes might include the transition from peace to going to war, the passage of scarcity to abundance in the case of first-fruit festivals or being inducted into a new status determined by personal achievement, such as being elected into a position of political leadership (V. Turner 1967:95). Compare Haviland's (1999:397-398) discussion on rites of intensification.

particular social statuses with individuals moving from one status to another by passing over thresholds and walking through passages. Rites of passage were organised events in which, as it were, society took individuals by the hand and led them from one social status to another, conducting them across thresholds and holding them there for a moment in a position when they were neither in one status nor another. The overall process of movement or change in social status was seen by Van Gennep as falling into three phases which mirrored the leaving of one room, then being in no room at all while in transit before finally being received into the new room" (Davies 1994:3). A noteworthy citation from Van Gennep's (1977:189) *The rites of passage* sums up this idea: "For groups, as well as individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way".

During the **separation** stage, the person (as an individual or part of a group) is removed from the larger community, signalling the end of a life-phase and the commencement of a new period in the person's life. The **transition** stage is essentially ambiguous; the person finds him/herself in a state of limbo, no longer part of what was before, but also not yet part of what is to come – what Victor Turner (1967:93-111), so descriptively denotes as "*Betwixt and between*". According to Douglas (1980:96), it is that "period which separates ritual dying and ritual rebirth" or as stated by Hockey (2002:213, 214), "symbolic deaths and resurrections" or "metamorphic death and metamorphic rebirth". It is the passage through which the individual has to pass in order to reach the destination, the door, the new state. The actual passing through the passage is dangerous, since "transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable … novices in initiation are temporarily outcast. For the duration of the rite, they have no place in society" (Douglas 1980:96). During this stage, the person receives instruction and attention from assigned community members in order to equip the person to cope with the new expectations concerning behaviour, responsibility and status that accompany the new life-phase. The final stage, namely that of **incorporation,** is characterised by the person being reintroduced into the community after being separated and having undergone the particular rites of transition. During this time, the person is introduced to the community as now being of different status and having new responsibilities. This "reincorporation constitutes a symbolic rebirth" (Seymour-Smith 1990:152; cf. Haviland 1999:396), without this *cooling down* period, "with no rite of aggregation which can definitely assign

him to a new position he remains in the margins, with other people who are similar credited with unreliability, unteachability, and all the wrong social attitudes" (Douglas 1980:97). This theme of rebirth is powerfully presented in Mircea Eliade's (1965) *Rites and symbols of initiation: The mysteries of birth and rebirth*.

The second phase, encompassed in liminal rites, it must be noted, exhibits different characteristics to that which precedes and succeeds it. It amounts to "inversions of the properties of profane social organization or secular space-time bracketing the rite as a whole" (T. Turner 1977:53). Van Gennep (1977:13) expresses this inverted quality of the transitional phase as the pivoting or displacement of the sacred. What he means is this: as a person moves from one place in society to another, shifts occur in perception of the here-and-now juxtaposed with the 'other', placed-apart-world of the sacred (cf. Hockey 2002:214-215). "[W]hoever passes through the various positions of a lifetime one day sees the sacred where before he has seen the profane, or vice versa" (Van Gennep 1977:13). Terence Turner (1977:53) explains this pivoting or inversion for those going through the transition rites, experiencing it as being "set apart from the rest of the (profane) society" and viewing "the latter as if *it* were 'sacred' and therefore prohibited or dangerous to them". The notions of moving from the profane to the sacred and then back to the profane; or between the here-and-now everyday world and the out-of-bounds world and back again, mediated by rites of passage, is the crux of Van Gennep's schema. This instance refers to a spatial binary (cf. Hockey 2002:214-215), which Van Gennep (1977:13) perceives as disruptive or harmful to society and the individual. It is then the function of rites of passage to limit or reduce the said effects, thereby demonstrating its protective function[23] (cf. Hockey 2002:215). "That such changes are regarded as real and important is demonstrated by the recurrence of rites, in important ceremonies among widely differing peoples, enacting death in one condition and resurrection in another" (Van Gennep 1977:13).

Arnold Van Gennep's (1909) *Le rites de passage* (the rites of passage), was certainly not the first contribution to encompass transition rites, but most certainly may be regarded as a highly influential work pertaining to rites of passage. Although criticised for not having

[23] Victor Turner (1967:93) criticises Van Gennep's (1909) lack of vision regarding the protective function of rites of passage. On the contrary, he argues that they are indicative of and constitute transition, thereby implying that they have a creative function as well (cf. also Hockey 2002:215-216).

elaborated on the theoretical underpinnings of (T. Turner 1977:53-54; Hockey 2002:213) his threefold scheme[24], it is today still used in a variety of contexts to structure transition rituals. From his work, it appears that form or structure and not so much function (Winthrop 1991:242; Hockey 2002:212) or meaning, was his 'primary' concern. However, he did pay attention to these to a lesser extent. Identifying a common or universal pattern based on a flexible schema, instead of a law-like approach, was his goal (cf. T. Turner 1977:53; Hockey 2002:212, 213). This descriptive framework for the structure of rites of passage thus seeks to stress "the cross-cultural similarities in all rites as transitional ceremonies that separate, instruct, and reincorporate their candidates" (Jules-Rosette 1980:391; cf. also Hockey 2002:212).

Besides the three-phase characterisation of rites of passage, they encompass certain features. Firstly, an inconsistency often exists between the personal circumstances and the socially defined identity of the individual (Van Gennep 1977:65-74; Davies 1994:5-6). To illustrate, it is observed that boys and girls are not always accepted as adults at the exact time they reach biological or sexual maturity, but at times either before or after reaching this point. Therefore, the individual experience is not always congruous with societal attitudes of the individual. In such cases, it seems that societal perceptions of the individual override the biological reality (cf. Richards 1961:52-54).

Secondly, depending on the purpose of the rite, one of these three aspects will be emphasised, more so than others (T. Turner 1977:53; Van Gennep 1977:11-12; Davies 1994:6; Hockey 2002:212). Furthermore, because of the complexity of rites of passage, contained within them may be a variety of emphases. In the case of the former, a funeral rite may stress the first phase (pre-liminal), the removal or separation from the physical world. On the other hand, a marriage rite may rather stress the third phase (post-liminal), the incorporation into society as a new family. When thinking of the variety of emphases that a rite might have, a funeral might, on the one hand, emphasise the mourners' separation from the dead, or the incorporation of the dead into the ancestral realm. In similar vein, a marriage rite may stress the incorporation into society of a new family, as stated above or the separation of the couple from their pre-marital households, in the case of neolocal residence patterns. At once the parallels between the numerous

[24] This scheme or structure denotes too "'the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status sets, and status sequences', on the whole consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society" (V. Turner 1977:46).

components of a ritual are highlighted (Hockey 2002:213). Van Gennep largely accepts this stance, but to understand how societies or individuals "produce and manage social change", the second, liminal phase, requires further scrutiny (Hockey 2002:212-213).

Thirdly, Victor Turner (1967:99-102) elaborates a further characteristic of rites of passage, namely "a sense of *communitas*, or intense awareness of being bound together in a community of shared experience".[25] In *Betwixt and between*, Victor Turner (1967:99-102) mentions the comradeship that develops between initiates of the same initiation rite. It seems that the initiation ritual strips initiates of any previous or future rank or position, levelling the playing field as it were, thereby affording initiates the opportunity to form relationships, bound in equality and shared experience. The special ties that evolve as a result of communal experience link initiates together, often extending their entire life-span and furthermore, enable initiates to claim certain privileges of hospitality, protection and advice (V. Turner 1967:101). Obviously, as in the example above of initiation, the bond that most often develops between individuals who have undergone the same experience, is intense and long lasting. In general terms, survivors of natural disasters, women who have given birth or young people who have undertaken a back-pack trip through Europe, all share with those of the same experience a sense of *communitas*.

Fourthly, society in essence takes the individual by the hand, guiding him/her to the point where the status endowed by society is consistent with the self-identity of the individual (Davies 1994:7-8). As alluded to above, status is accorded to the individual by the society, depending on birthright or personal achievement, while self-identity "reflects the more personal process of becoming what one is supposed to be" (Davies 1994:7). Thus, self-identity is "our own sense of who we are in and through the various statuses we hold" (Davies 1994:7). It is my contention, that this is what Douglas (1980:97) means, when she states that without the aggregation, an individual will forever be a marginal being.

[25] The scope of this study does not allow for a complete discussion on the *communitas* idea, but for interest's sake, three types of *communitas* may be differentiated: spontaneous, ideological and normative. Refer to V. Turner (1977:46) and Davies (1994:4-7) in this regard.

Fifthly, the giving of gifts warrants a mention. Davies (1994:8) warns that this important aspect should not be ignored, since it assists in impressing the very important social nature of rites of passage. Instead of being those spontaneous uncompelled gifts they are often thought to be, the giving of gifts is part of an ongoing system of relationships in which reciprocal obligations are exhibited and fulfilled.

I wish to acknowledge Van Gennep's scheme as a core theoretical resource upon which much of the empirical data is structured, but admit that it has limitations, and therefore take note of the critical reworking of his ideas by, among others, Victor Turner (1967) and Terence Turner (1977:53-70).

2.3 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION AND CONCEPT CONFUSION

2.3.1 Initiation

Now that the concept of rites of passage has been conceptualised, the focus will be on a particular rite of passage, namely that of ***initiation***. According to *The concise Oxford dictionary* (Sykes 1980), initiation is the admission of a person, especially with introductory rites or forms, into society, office or secret. The definitions of Bettelheim (1955:12-13), Barry III (1996:652) and Coertze and Coertze (1996:128) essentially agree with this, when they contend that initiation are those ceremonies that make a person eligible to enter a new office or status; for example, the initiation of a member into a secret society or the initiation of an adolescent to adult status. Eliade (1965:x) goes further by defining initiation in general terms as "a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated" and "[i]n philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*" (cf. V. Turner 1967:108).

From the above, two features of the concept of initiation emerge: the rituals or ceremonies that serve to admit an individual into office, a secret society or a new social status; and the aims of which are to change the initiate in such a way that they are accepted by the wider community or institution, in their new position. When considering

this in conjunction with rites of passage and the majority of anthropological literature written on these issues, it is evident that initiation generally means and is used in the context of puberty rites (Seymour-Smith 1990:152; Barry III 1996:652, 655).[26] Henceforth, when referring to initiation, it should be understood as those rites marking the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Barry III (1996:652-653) identifies several characteristics of initiation ceremonies. Firstly, in the majority of cases, initiation ceremonies are exclusively for boys or girls, not both sexes. Secondly, initiation ceremonies for one sex more often than not, predict the presence of such ceremonies for the opposite sex. Thirdly, participants other than initiates are, in most cases, the same sex as the initiates; thus exclusively male in the case of boys' initiation and exclusively female in the case of girls' initiation. Fourthly, a physical component is observed. Initiates are required either to perform some or other physical activity, or the initiates must undergo some form of physical hardship or test. Sometimes, initiates are required to experience pain. Such painful procedures might include beating, tattooing, tooth extraction, scarification or circumcision. It seems that there exists a correlation between the painful procedures during initiation for both boys and girls, and sleeping arrangements during infancy and early childhood and the resultant conflict of sex identity (Barry III 1996:654-655). According to Brown (1963:842-843), girls are likely to be compelled to experience painful genital operations or tattooing in societies that have exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangements, which ultimately result in the conflict of sex identity. The hypothesis is that a young girl identifies with her mother, developing primarily a feminine identification after experiencing exclusive mother-child sleeping arrangements. When she, however, moves into and becomes aware of the male dominated domestic unit, a secondary masculine identification develops, causing confusion with respect to her gender identity. An explanation would be that when there is a conflict of gender identity for girls, the pain experienced during the initiation ceremony is intended to compel women to accept their feminine identity (Brown 1963:844). The problem with this notion is the supposition that the acceptance of female

[26] Hunter & Whitten (1976:336) define *puberty rites* as those "rites marking a person's entry into adulthood". They also propose that "in many societies initiation rites represent a ceremonial recognition of an individual's physical maturity and may involve genital mutilation, scarification, and similar modification of the body as well as changes in the initiate's dress and ornaments" (Hunter & Whitten 1976:336), thus demonstrating the close connection between initiation and puberty rites. However, it should be noted that Van Gennep (1977:65-110) expresses strong feelings against the use of the concept 'puberty rituals', as these transition rites seldom occur in conjunction with biological puberty.

sex roles is less problematic in societies that are not characterised by *conflict of identity* than in other societies. It seems that Brown (1963:845) is not absolutely convinced that the *conflict in identity* hypothesis is watertight and thus proposes that another explanation exists for inflicting painful initiation procedures. This explanation corresponds with the second characteristic mentioned above, namely that the presence of initiation ceremonies for one sex, as it were, predict the presence of such ceremonies for the opposite sex and that painful male initiation is indicative of painful procedures in female initiation. Brown (1963:845) then concludes that it is, in fact, in those societies that have painful male initiation that also have child-rearing practices that foster conflict in identity.

In general terms, adolescent initiation ceremonies may be associated with: small communities that exhibit low to medium technological complexity; societies with matrilocal or other uxorilocal residence; societies where women's contribution to the subsistence economy is considerably high; differentiation between the sexes is emphasised in early childhood; and less stratified societies which permit more freedom and privileges in adolescence than in childhood (Barry III 1996:653; also cf. V. Turner 1967:93). On the other hand, adolescent initiation ceremonies tend not to be observed in the following cases: intensive agricultural societies; where the average population exceeds 400 members; a high degree of cultural complexity; and industrial nations where school attendance, equal education for both sexes and the multiplicity of religious, occupational and residential groups would be obstacles (Barry III 1996:655).

Certain attributes are found to occur more often in girls' initiation than in those ceremonies for boys. For example, girls' ceremonies tend to correlate with genital maturation, the subject is a single initiate, participation in the ceremonies is generally limited to the immediate family and the focus tends to be on fertility (Barry III 1996:654). Girls' initiation ceremonies are more likely to be present in societies where polygyny is practised and where extended families are the norm (Young 1965, cited in Barry III 1996:654). In this regard, the proposed function is to emphasise solidarity among the multiple women within these households. Brown (1963:841-842; 847-849), on the other hand, argues that initiation ceremonies for girls are more likely to be present in societies where matrilocality or bilocality are the norm and where women make important contributions to the food supply. The purpose of these rites is the announcement of

genital maturity and the change in status necessitated by the fact that the girl is likely to remain in the domestic unit in which she grew up and not to leave to reside in a household where she has not been known as a child, as is the case in patrilocal and neolocal residence patterns (Brown 1963:841-842). Societies where women make a significant contribution to the subsistence of the community tend to have initiation ceremonies for girls in order to educate and assure both the girl and the community that she is capable of fulfilling her obligations, as well as emphasising the importance of her role (Brown 1963:849).

Kitahara (1984, cited in Barry III 1996:654) suggests that societies in which girls' ceremonies are commonplace, are likely to have highly developed menstrual taboos. It is believed that the odour of menstrual blood might frighten away herbivorous animals which are considered important sources of food, or that it may pollute[27] and harm the cattle that are so often significant sources of wealth and status in these societies. For this reason, observing taboos to restrict the spread of the odour and secluding women, particularly during a girl's first menses, is customary (Barry III 1996:654).

Writing from a psychoanalytic point of view, authors like Bettelheim (1955) and Eliade (1965) interpret initiation as grounded in envy. Male initiation, particularly circumcision, is interpreted as male envy of the female ability to reproduce and menstruate. Female initiation, on the other hand, is viewed as women's envy of a male institution, a jealousy of their freedom, dominance and power and a desire to level the inequalities by emulating institutions not originally in their frame of reference.[28]

Undertaking the analyses of ritual symbolism are, among others, authors like Richards (1961), Turner (1967) and Douglas (1980). Richards' (1961) study of female puberty rites among the Bemba of Zambia, not only offers profound descriptions of *chisungu* (girls' initiation ceremony), but further analyses the purpose, symbolic explanations, emotional attitudes related to aspects of the ceremony, as well as illuminating the relatedness with other institutions of the society. For Victor Turner (1967) and Douglas (1980), the main emphasis is on symbols as part of the social system; as it were, symbols in action.

[27] Cf. Douglas (1975:47-59, 60-72; 1980:94-113) with respect to the idea of pollution and menstruation and also refer to Victor Turner (1967:97) in this regard.

[28] Cf. Seymour-Smith (1990:152-153) for arguments relating to 'envy' and the perpetuation of both male and female initiation.

Turner's (1967) analyses of Ndembu ritual encompasses a variety of rituals including: rites of passage, circumcision rites, witchcraft and sorcery, a hunting ritual, as well as the treatment of disease. His focus is always on the underlying symbolism, from the interpretation of colour, to the relation between symbol and event, forever aiming to determine the true meaning or intention. For Douglas (1980), notions of pollution and taboo are the vehicles that differentiate that which is pure from that which is dangerous. In this regard, competing principles are at work, threatening the social order. Rites of passage, in essence, acknowledge the possibility of disorder, by marking the transition through a symbolic death and ultimately enforcing a rebirth.

2.3.2 Female circumcision, genital mutilation and cutting[29]

Closely related to initiation, is an extremely provocative topic in the women's movement and human rights spheres, namely the practice of ***female circumcision (FC)***. It seems that before the mid-1970s, when the harmful effects of these operations became an international human rights issue, the term most readily used was female circumcision. This term was then also used in context with initiation rites. According to Hosken (1993:32), the term 'female circumcision' is the one most commonly used, but it is medically incorrect. In fact, at the Inter African Committee (IAC) on "Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children" held in Addis Ababa in 1990, it was unanimously decided that the term "genital mutilation" be used henceforth, regarding these procedures (Hosken 1993:32). As the abolition of female genital surgeries was promoted by women's movements and human rights organisations, a more severe term was adopted namely: ***female genital mutilation (FGM)***. This expression is hard-hitting, conjuring up the grotesqueness of the operations, motivating one to take action against the practice. In the mid-1990s, however, many organisations adopted the use of a more neutral term: ***female genital cutting (FGC)*** – a concept that does not immediately alienate, but rather invites solution-seeking discourse (Population Reference Bureau 2005). According to much of the literature on this topic, FGM/C is one of the gravest human rights violations against women and children. In the first place, because of the

[29] The purpose of this study is purely to present comprehensively, the case study of female initiation. Since this is not a comparative study and for practical reasons a section is not devoted exclusively to the discussion of female genital mutilation/ cutting. Simply accessing the Internet will, at the press of a button, yield a mine of information regarding FGM/C (both elementary, as well as more comprehensive). There are also a number of very well-written books available.

serious genital mutilation that is the consequence of many of these operations and secondly, because of the harmful effects, both physically and psychologically, that many of these procedures cause. The term ‘female circumcision’ will be used for the purposes of this study.

A discrepancy exists in the literature as to whether such a practice occurs among the South African Bantu-speaking groups. In an article published in a popular magazine (*Rooi Rose*, 29 October 1997:92-94), it was argued that female circumcision does not occur in South Africa. The argument is: if and when such a practice is mentioned, it involves a symbolic representation of female circumcision and that no genital mutilation occurs.

On the other hand, authors like Ashton (1967) acknowledge that the practice did occur among the Basotho of Lesotho, even though he did not report on the custom. More recently, Zietsman (1972) and Buys (1981) confirm that at the time of their research, female circumcision was still practised by the Basotho (in the Free Sate) (albeit not widely). With respect to the international literature (e.g. Abdalla 1982:12), the occurrence of female circumcision in Lesotho is acknowledged, although no data are presented. However, no confirmation appears regarding the occurrence in South Africa.

It is my contention that part of this uncertainty is embedded in the concept-confusion that evidently exists regarding the correct term to use: initiation or circumcision. As mentioned above, a debate concerning the correct terminology to adopt and apply when referring to the range of genital operations performed on women and girls, continues. To my knowledge, however, no meta-level reflection or basic acknowledgement exists surrounding the concept-confusion in the South African context between initiation and circumcision.

It was by accident that I stumbled across this confusion. I had, in my mind, clearly delineated between what female initiation is and what female circumcision means; so much so, that I was unaware that others were not making the same distinction. It was only when talking with friends and family that I realised that a confusion exists. It seems this confusion is rooted in an acceptance that Bantu-speaking boys (e.g. Xhosa and Basotho) undergo a circumcision operation during their initiation ceremonies. This is

widely documented and reports of such practices frequent media reports at certain times of the year. However, when speaking of female initiation (among the same groups), the immediate assumption is: if girls undergo initiation, then they too are circumcised.

With this in mind, I revisited the literature. Given what informants were telling me, together with the problems of translation, for example, from Sesotho to English (or Afrikaans), I began questioning sources that claim that girls undergo a circumcision operation. In Sesotho for example, lebollo, means initiation; and ho bolotsa, means to initiate and to circumcise. It is my contention that researchers fail to discern the exact meaning from informants. Thus, in the literature one finds that a clear distinction is not made between the process of initiation and the action of circumcision. Therefore, particularly in cases of female initiation, one might be led to believe, based on the findings presented in the literature, that a circumcision operation of some type occurs.

To make my case I address the ambiguity in the literature by referring to two sources, that of Zietsman (1972) and Moitse (1994). Zietsman (1972) for example, explains the procedure of the removal of clitoris, but admits that he was not permitted to many of 'secret' rituals, one being the witnessing of the significant events down at the ditches where this operation is said to take place. He is subsequently relying on information provided by informants, and we have ascertained in this study that women let on to their men that they still perform such an act. It is possible that their explanations to him correspond with those they share with their men-folk. Additionally, I am not convinced that Zietsman (1972) adequately discerns between the two actions, to initiate, and to circumcise. Granted, he concedes that circumcision was not common practice in rural Clocolan at the time of his research, but on a number of occasions he refers to the circumcision operation, when it might as well have been reference by his informants to the notion of initiating with sticks i.e. being hit.

Although Moitse (1994) is a Mosotho and has access to a completely different type of information because of her origin and cultural heritage, she does not produce evidence that substantiates her claims that Basotho girls undergo a 'real' circumcision operation. Yet, throughout her work she refers to the 'ritual of circumcision' and then perhaps without even realising her error, a 'physical initiation'. The two are not necessarily synonymous and in my mind, the latter can mean something very different to the

physical circumcision operation. It may mean the sexual initiation by Motanyane or being beaten, which is evidence not refuted by any of my informants. It is my contention that she was taking as her evidence of a 'real' circumcision operation the many references of 'to initiate' in the initiation songs she evaluated, as proof. At once though, I challenge that her assumption is based on her confusion or blind acceptance of everyday oral telling, not on scientific evidence. Obviously, one must consider the possibility that as a Mosotho that she may have been initiated herself, and knows the details as fact. To my knowledge though, she does not admit this anywhere in her work, and for this reason I must accept that her assertion is based on flawed reasoning.

Particularly in the last three decades, initiation – and the often accompanied circumcision of girls during these events – has come under intense scrutiny, especially from feminist camps. Issues that have captured the imagination of scientists and the public alike, include: the abuse of children, children and women's rights, health issues emanating from genital operations and the general exploitation and control of women and children, as a result of underlying power inequalities. Despite these strides, the consequences of female circumcision, if any, have not been (adequately) documented in South Africa.

2.4 SUMMARY

All rites of passage, as ceremonies that ally the individual's change in status or position from one phase in his/her life to another, may be seen as consisting of three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. These rites may also be characterised by a number of specific features: an inconsistency between individual experience and social identity; an emphasis of one stage depending on the purpose of the ritual; each rite has a number of emphases; a sense of being bound by shared experience; the lining up of status and self-identity; and gift-giving.

Within the context of this study initiation, a rite of passage, is viewed as those rituals and ceremonies that admit individuals (collectively or individually) into a new status. In many societies the transition from girlhood to womanhood, often, but mistakenly referred to as puberty rites, because of their association with the teen years is marked by ceremonies that denote this change. Female initiation is (most times) an exclusively girl and woman

event where candidates are subjected to hardships and trials, often involving a physical, pain component together with instruction of sorts.

Initiation ceremonies in general, and those of girls' in particular have enjoyed interest from anthropologists and others whose interpretations vary from the analysis of ritual symbols to psychoanalytic elucidations.

Closely aligned with female initiation is the often accompanying practice of female circumcision, a practice that has earned the title of female genital mutilation/cutting and a reputation to go along with it. The Southern African literature is not clear to what extent this practice is common among the south eastern Bantu-speaking peoples. Specifically concerning the Basotho a number of authors allude to such practices, however, no conclusive statements are made. Significantly, this ambiguity is ascribed (in this study) to a concept-confusion. Authors fail to discern between the concepts 'to initiate' and 'to circumcise'.


CHAPTER THREE
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 GENERAL

The problem that is addressed in this study is formulated and set out in Chapter One. The task now is to articulate the blueprint, the plan and the strategy this study follows. The research methods and techniques that are used to gather information are but a part of a larger strategy and methodology which may 'make or break' any study. This section is thus devoted to a description of this larger process, including the methods and techniques applied to gather the information, but also to elucidate the type of socialisation that I underwent as I embarked on uncovering the layers of this elaborate, yet very well-guarded custom.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

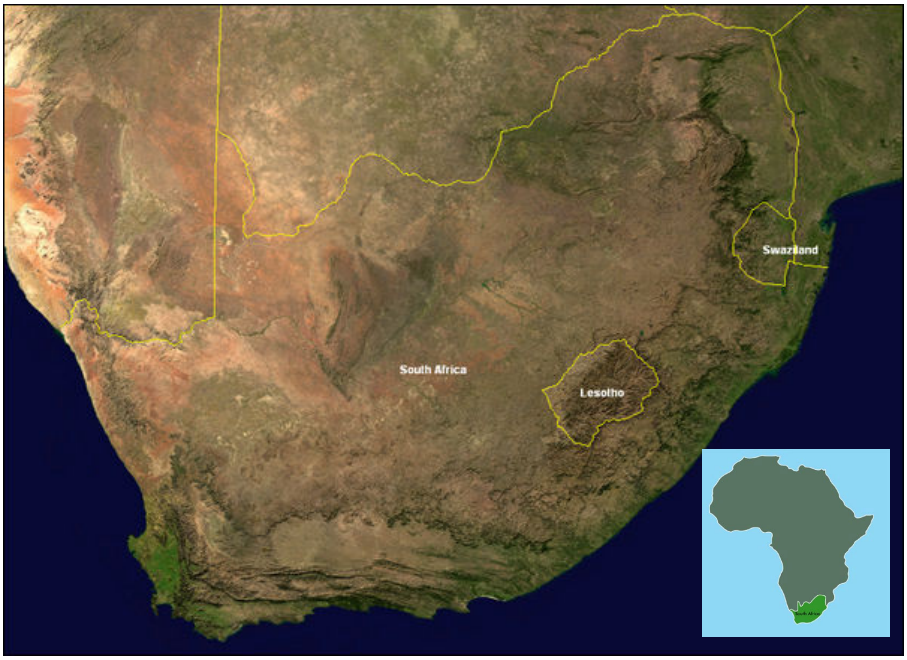
The prospective investigation is an empirical study, following a qualitative methodology and in true ethnographic fashion, this study will be descriptive in nature. The case study method and triangulation are applied in the data gathering, evaluation and analysis. In particular, participant observation, the use of key informants, in-depth interviews and the documentation of life histories are deemed particularly suitable methods and techniques by means of which data are gathered. A range of photographs offering visual insight into the topic are included in later chapters, but were also instrumental in the collection and analysis of data.

In a world that is fast becoming a global village, the trend has been in the past to merely report on universals and particularities pertaining to certain practices and concentrate on the public cultural experience of the participants under scrutiny. However, the personal, private cultural experience of graduated Basotho women begs a voice. Pursuing informants' candid experiences as real people, behind the intricate customs and including such accounts in this narrative, are worthy quests.

At this juncture, it is necessary to remark on a few issues. Delineating the specific design into precise, specific types, rigidly adhering to prescriptions of either/or, is almost futile. The eclectic and often overlapping nature of the design and methodological approach is demonstrated in the following. Ethnographic research is argued by some to encompass both the case study and life history (e.g. Babbie and Mouton 2001:279). Furthermore,

participant observation is viewed as a framework for conducting fieldwork and basically includes participation, observation and interviewing (cf. Crane and Angrosino 1992:64). The latter also brings together the use of informants of a number of kinds, as well as a variety of interviewing styles, for example, the unfocused depth interview and the life history method. Life history research is additionally proclaimed as a special type of case study (cf. Babbie and Mouton 2001:283). Depending on the unit of analysis, a case study may be viewed as the resultant information from (a number of) interviews representing the life history of an individual (individual case study). On the other hand, a case study of the female initiation institution among the Basotho is equally acceptable.

After broadly deciding on a topic for this study, namely “female circumcision”, a preliminary literature study pertaining to this topic was done. The severity of the FGM/C operations at once both intrigued as well as repulsed me. What was immediately apparent, was the dearth of local ethnographic works regarding female initiation and consequently circumcision operations. Furthermore, contradictions appearing in the literature were confusing as to the actual occurrence of female circumcision among South African peoples.



Map 1: Satellite view of South Africa & Lesotho

3.3 SUBJECTS, SETTING, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.3.1 Introducing the group and area[30]

In broad terms, the target group of this study are the Basotho. They are one of the three groupings classified by Hammond-Tooke (1993) as comprising the Sotho group (the other two are the west and northern Sotho). Together with the Sotho, the Nguni (Zulu and Xhosa), Thonga, and Venda comprise the south eastern Bantu groups of South Africa.

The Basotho were traditionally patrilineal (practising patrilocal residence), comprising of various clans/sibs and together with strong totem affiliation, they exercised their chieftain authority over much of the present-day Free State and Lesotho. These people sustained themselves by practising limited animal husbandry (sheep, goats and cattle); horticulture; hunting and gathering; and trade with neighbouring tribes. Their religious beliefs may be summarised as a belief in a supreme being and the practise of ancestral worship. In broad terms, the Basotho have accepted the introduction of Christianity by the missionaries. Elements of the traditional religious orientation that the Basotho embraced, remain embedded in their worldview, such as the belief in ancestors and the malevolent and benevolent forces and beings exhibited in witchcraft, traditional healers and the like. Their education system was primarily characterised as being informal, besides, that is, the initiation institution, which added the only structured training individuals received.[31]

As a result of contact with Western culture[32], the traditional conception of the Basotho culture has changed (more so in some areas than in others). To a large degree, they remain a patrilineally ordered group with patrilocal residence continuing in the rural areas, but the urban requirement for mobility and the emphasis on smaller family units

[30] Map 1 is a satellite view of South Africa and Lesotho, providing a necessary orientation to the larger area within which the research took place.

[31] Obviously, many other interrelated cultural systems could have been referred to, yet here brief cognisance is given to the political, economic, religious and education systems. For a more comprehensive look at the traditional Basotho culture, consult among others Sheddick (1953), Casalis (1965), Ashton (1967) and Matsela (1979:95-139). For directed discussions, see Kriel (1976:105-287) [political organisation and judiciary]; Matsela (1979:140-216) [education]; Buys (1981) [women's roles]; Rascher (1985:19-262) [family, property, succession and person law]; and Strydom (1985:188-272) [political system].

[32] For more encompassing discussions regarding Basotho culture change as a result of contact with particularly Western culture, consult Zietsman (1972:2-3), Kriel (1976), Buys (1981), Rascher (1985), and Strydom (1985).

have begun to replace this residence type. Although many factors such as the migrant labour system; increasing divorce rates; pre-marital pregnancies (without marrying the father, and the extremely high incidence of rape); death of the husband (consider also the tremendously high rate of HIV and AIDS infection in South Africa and Lesotho), etc. are contributing to a sharp increase in female-headed households and matrifocal households.

The most outstanding changes have no doubt occurred in the political and economic spheres. In relation to the former, those Basotho groups living within the South African borders have mostly lost their autonomy, although representative chiefs or headmen remain their mouthpiece.[33] By and large, political affiliation is voluntary and leadership is accepted as dictated by national elections. Those Basotho who remain in Lesotho are subject to the King (presently King Letsie III) and the ruling political party (as determined by democratic elections). The traditional chieftains do wield more authority, though, than is the case in South Africa.[34]

The reliance on limited animal husbandry, horticulture, hunting and gathering and trade, has largely been replaced by reliance on a market economy. People generally seek employment outside the household in urban, semi-urban and farm settings (cf. Ashton 1967:7-9).

Children, as determined by the South African constitution, are compelled to attend school and receive an elementary education, although those forced to do so by financial constraints seek employment at an early age; thus, many do not attend initiation. Those that do continue their formal education often look disdainfully upon the archaic custom of initiation, rather choosing to pursue other avenues of training better suited to equip them with skills with which to earn a living.

Since the attendance of initiation is becoming less customary, usually only being found in rural areas, where people tend to be more traditionally orientated, this study is conducted in two rural areas in which these rituals still prevail. This, together with the

[33] Cf. Buys (1981:42-51) for a discussion on political development in Qwaqwa and refer to the current debate pertaining to traditional leaders.

[34] For more detailed elucidation, refer to Ashton (1967:6-7), Ellenberger (1992), and Kriel (1976).

fact that many Basotho people reside in the eastern Free State, either in towns or on farms and because initiation ceremonies tend to be held on farms – away from the hustle and bustle of town/city life and where the resources and setting more readily lend itself to the traditional environment conducive to these rituals – the farm and small village settings are the logical area choice and the women and girls the logical target group and unit of analysis in the investigation. Specifically, investigations were pursued in and around Ficksburg and Clocolan in the Free State, and centred in Butha-Buthe and Mphosong in Lesotho.

Map 2: Orientation map, identifying the research area

At this point, it is appropriate to say something about the research area (see Map 2 in which the research area is identified). Situated in the central-eastern interior of South

Africa, approximately 400 km southeast from Johannesburg and 1200 km north from Cape Town, is Ficksburg, the eastern Free State town I used as my base. The Caledon River to the east of this picturesque town, serves as a physical boundary, but also as an international borderline between South Africa and Lesotho. Acting as a gateway to the Mountain Kingdom, Ficksburg is the “second busiest point of entry and exit” to Lesotho (Nyamane 1996:6). Some reasons for this are: the large number of migrant-workers to the Free State Goldfields and Gauteng and the building of a network of dams (notably the Katse Dam), as part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). The topography of this area is largely mountainous, with elevations ranging between 2000 m and 3000 m above sea level, temperate grassland vegetation and spring (100-250 mm) and summer (250-400 mm) rainfall. The climate is moderate, with temperatures in January rising above 30➡C, but dropping well below freezing in winter. Snow is also common in the higher lying areas of the Maluti Mountain Range that dominates the landscape of Lesotho to the east, with some areas being as high as 3482 m.

Clocolan is some 35 km from Ficksburg to the southwest, while the two villages visited in Lesotho, approximately 80 km respectively. Butha-Buthe is situated some 20 km from the Caledonspoort border post (close to Fouriesburg), in an area commonly referred to as the lowlands. Mphosong, on the contrary, is deeper into Lesotho, located in the foothills of the country. It should be irrefutably understood that the research area is rural. There are no intermittent villages between Ficksburg and Clocolan – just farmland. Fields of maize, wheat and, increasingly, sunflowers abound, while the familiar asparagus plantations line the road. The area to the north is also renowned for its cherries and other deciduous fruit such as peaches, while beef and dairy farming does well in the temperate climate. From the above, it is evident that the economic activities of both the Ficksburg and Clocolan Magisterial Districts are closely related to agriculture. The second economic characteristic of these two regions is that they are largely dependent on the buying power of Lesotho residents, including sales to industries, as well as purchases by individuals and industries in Lesotho (Van Rooyen 1985).

En route from Ficksburg, through the border post, Maputsoe and Leribe (Hlotse), to Butha-Buthe or Mphosong, a degree of organised chaos assaults the senses. Masses of entrepreneurs compete for a living in the informal trade and service sectors with chain stores hailing consumers with bass-heavy music. Trumpeting car horns and a veritable

cacophony of human voices add to this. At first one passes through, and by villages, that seem to melt into one another. However, they become less frequent, developing into scattered settlements. Here, ox-drawn and hand-held ploughs are used to prepare small plantations. Maize and sorghum are the dominant crops of these subsistence farmers.

Children, dogs and donkeys vie for right of way with four-wheel drive vehicles. As one drives toward the mountains, it is as if one is driving backwards in time and civilisation drops away like a discarded robe, and, the forlorn beauty and majesty of the landscape envelops one. From the lowlands, moving towards the foothills and the higher lying areas of Lesotho, a characteristic sight is of solitary herd-boys attending their sheep or goats. Strikingly, there are very few trees – partly because of the elevation, but also because they have long ago served as fuel for cooking fires. If visiting the area in the spring though, the peach tree blossoms announce the villages with their signature pink.

Photo 1: Scene of a typical Basotho village

The villages, with a mixture of traditional round rondavels and thatched roofs and their more modern rectangular counterparts, vary greatly in size (see Photo 1 for a typical Basotho village scene). Some are literally the dwellings of solitary extended families, while others are established settlements, complete with distinct ‘neighbourhoods’, schools and a centralised trading hub. Such villages may be home to more than 300 households. Upon closer scrutiny, each household consists of at least three dwellings used for all household activities and very often there is a vegetable garden. Utilities we

habitually take for granted, such as electricity, running water and a sewage system, are luxuries none of the households I visited, possess. In fact, none of them even had the exclusive used of a pit-latrine. Many of the villages lack a communal water pump and accessing water purely for household use is a task that routinely takes the women to the closest stream that may be some kilometres away.

Even on the farms, mundane tasks may take the best part of a half a day to accomplish, because of the settings in which these people live.

3.3.2 Tools and Procedures

Separating the methods and techniques applied in this study is an arbitrary exercise. Each is an extension of the other, flowing naturally from one to the other and through it, to the next. A natural extension of the framework of participant observation (cf. Crane and Angrosino 1992:64) is developing relationships with respondents. Some relationships become more meaningful during the fieldwork endeavour and in addressing the 'problem'. Identifying key informants and life history candidates is thus an inherent process. The type of information sought largely dictates the form the interview will take. Applying a snowball type of sampling, both the unstructured/ unfocused depth interviews and those following a life history style, were conducted until a reasonable response saturation point was reached (in accordance with the original purpose of the study) (cf. Miller 2000:77, 95).

Any research, including a narrative approach such as applied here, begins with a search and survey of the literature. Following are the categories into which the numerous literature are divided and grouped.

a) Works that describe *social science and anthropological research methodology and techniques*: Babbie and Mouton 2001; Miller 2000; Le Compte and Schensul 1999; Denzin 1996; Mouton 1996; Bernard 1995; Hardon *et al*. 1995; Huysamen 1993; Crane and Angosino 1992; Spradley and McCurdy 1975.
b) Sources analysing *rites of passage and initiation* in broad terms: Hockey 2002; van Vuuren and de Jongh 1999; van Wyk and Kriel 1985; Kitahara

1984; Douglas 1980; Van Gennep [1909] 1977; T. Turner 1977; V. Turner 1977 & 1967; Eliade 1965; Brown 1963; Bettelheim 1955.

c) Literature concerning *female circumcision, female genital mutilation (FGM), and female genital cutting (FGC)*: Population Reference Bureau 2005; Silverman 2004; Geisler 1997; Joseph 1996; Brownlee and Seter 1994; Hosken 1993; Lightfoot-Klein 1989; Slack 1988; Abdalla 1982; Boddy 1982; El Dareer 1982.

d) Documents offering *historical data about the peoples of Southern Africa*: Pauw 1994; Hammond-Tooke 1993; Inskeep 1978; Hammond-Tooke 1974; Legassick 1969; Mönnig 1978; Schapera 1976 & 1966; Krige 1965; Bruwer 1963; Marwick 1940; Krige and Krige 1947; Van Warmelo 1935; Junod 1927; Molema [1920] 1963.

e) General *ethnographic works pertaining to initiation and puberty rites, particularly female initiation in Southern Africa* (see Chapter One, Section 1.1).

f) Sources focusing on the *Basotho culture*: Rakotsoane 2001; Ellenberger [1912] 1992; Koen 1986; Rascher 1985; Van Wyk 1985; Buys 1981; Matsela 1979; Kriel 1976; Zietsman 1972; Ashton 1967; Casalis 1965; Sheddick 1953.

g) Local documents pertaining to *legislation and policies surrounding the issue of traditional or initiation school*: Free State Initiation School Health Act 1 of 2004.

The wide-ranging and directed literature review contributed to the formulation of the research problem and questions, as well as a well-grounded base from which to approach and address the said problem.

3.3.2.1 Participant Observation

Fundamentally, participant observation denotes observing while participating or participating while observing. Both observation and participation lie on a continuum, from direct to indirect and from total (high degree of participation) to none, respectively (cf. Pelto and Pelto 1984:68). For the purposes of this study, I both directly and indirectly observed. Additionally, the degree of my participation varied according to the situation.

Some circumstances called for full participation (e.g. everyday activities), while others dictated lesser levels of participation (e.g. specific initiation rituals). My overall intention was to interact as an insider with the group under study and not merely observe as an outsider (cf. Pelto and Pelto 1984:68; Seymour-Smith 1990:216; Crane and Angrosino 1992:64; Huysamen 1993:175; Coertze and Coertze 1996:55). In essence, the emic understanding (and eventual reporting) of the cultural phenomena under study – standing in the shoes of the people and seeing the world through their unique set of spectacles was rigorously pursued.[35] In so doing, the necessary rapport could be built up (cf. Bernard 1995:137) to address the research problem and at the same time, comply with the criteria of the qualitative approach being followed. The biases created, on the one hand, by my presence among the group of people and on the other, by my preconceived ideas and my own cultural norms and values, could largely be eliminated or at most, be minimised (cf. Crane and Angrosino 1992:64, 66, 72).

The culmination of this investigation is the writing of this ethnographic report. It is therefore not surprising that the entire endeavour, founded on the holistic principles of anthropology, aims at presenting thick descriptions of the case study. Participant observation is therefore particularly suited to gather "the type and depth of insight and interpretative material", to achieve this purpose (Seymour-Smith 1990:216).

Nevertheless, it may be expected that any methodological technique has its deficiencies and participant observation is no exception. In the first place, I could not participate in all the activities of the particular group of people and much more information had to be accumulated about the event or culture pattern than I could glean from observation alone; limitations alluded to by among others, Coertze and Coertze (1996:55) and Pelto and Pelto (1984:69). For these reasons, it was essential to triangulate participant observation with other research techniques, such as making use of informants, conducting interviews, individual case studies and life histories.

Secondly, it was vital that I ensure that my key informants and other community members, from whom information was obtained, were relaying actual or real culture

[35] The ongoing debate in anthropology regarding the whole issue surrounding the pursuit of emic information is acknowledged. The *emic* view may be defined as "a perspective in ethnology that uses the concepts and categories that are relevant and meaningful to the culture under analysis" (Ferraro 2001:381).

patterns, instead of ideal culture patterns; concerns that, for example, Nel (1985:8), Haviland (1999:47) and Ember and Ember (2000) put forward. Human nature is such that the ideal is more readily presented, rather than the flawed reality – we want to impress that our behaviour, values or norms are in line with cultural expectations. Consequently, I had to take care in validating information. Added to the above, and in line with Nel's (1985:8) warning, I had to take note of traditional continuing and discontinued culture forms, syncretism, dualistic and foreign culture forms that are adopted into the original or reinterpreted form, as these may clearly influence the research findings.

A third problem, highlighted by, among others, Huysamen (1993:175) and Pelto and Pelto (1984:69), is that I had to guard against not becoming biased in my reporting, in favour of the group under study. Furthermore, I had to be aware of how time-consuming participant observation is. Additionally, I had to be reflexive, conscious of personal observational biases and to develop a systematic and reliable observational style to limit distorted views of the particular culture pattern or event under investigation. Authors such as Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999:72-76) and Schultz and Lavenda (1998:38-40) emphasise the former, while Crane and Angrosino (1992:71) and Pelto and Pelto (1984:70) stress the latter.

A noteworthy remark, for the sake of transparency is admitting that while undertaking my fieldwork, I at times experienced mild feelings of 'culture shock'. The degree of personal discomfort centred on not being sure of appropriate responses or procedures while initially making contact with the culture group and different villages.

3.3.2.2 Key Informants

For the purposes of this study, I gathered information of varying degrees of complexity and depth from different types of informants. More 'superficial' or commonly known information was attained from a category of respondents referred to as informants. Conversely, more detailed and in-depth information was obtained from what is commonly known as key informants.[36]

[36] Paul's (1970:443) definition encapsulates the essence of this category of respondent: "an articulate member of the studied culture who enters into a more or less personal relationship, with the investigator for a relatively long time".

I relied on key informants because the communities were too large to interview all their members. Additionally, limitations existed regarding time, money and other research resources (cf. Crane and Angrosino 1992:53, 54). Ultimately though, because of the sensitivity of my line of questioning, ten key informants as culture specialists, were essential contributors of information.

I did not rush into choosing key informants; instead, I was led by the circumstances and my familiarity with the group under study. In so doing, I was in a better position to determine which individuals were likely to be the best informants concerning the particular information required. I also considered whether certain key informants would limit access to other individuals and important information (cf. Bernard 1995:168). This principle was followed even when relying on key informants for reference to potentially new informants (snowball sampling). Besides this, I selected key informants based on the criteria set out, among others, by Nel (1985:11-12); Bernard (1995:165-170) and Schensul *et al*. (1999:84-87).

The issue of key informant compensation was, in my view, satisfactorily dealt with in this study. As no golden rule exists (cf. Bernard 1995:178-179; Miller 2000:103), I felt it proper to compensate my key informants with photographs taken during my fieldwork and token grocery items, for the time and energy they devoted to assisting me. During special occasions, like the festivities of initiation, I contributed food items and interestingly, this evolved into a reciprocal gift-giving practice.

With these considerations in mind, the information obtained from key informant interviews was continuously verified by own observation, by other members of the community, as well as by posing the same questions at a later stage during the research process (cf. Babbie and Mouton 2001:282-283). Similarly, interviewees commented on the accuracy of my understanding of previous interviews, which led to additional, reflexive discussions based on prior findings (cf. Miller 2000:103). Regardless the cautions to choosing key informants and in the acceptance of the information they offer, key informants were fundamental to the research process, particularly demonstrating their value when it came to meeting people and helping with background information, as well as divulging personal experiences that pertained to certain institutions. My key

informants were thus the link which connected me with the group under study; a sentiment shared, for example, by Crane and Angrosino (1992:54).

3.3.2.3 Interviews

When making use of informants and key informants one is, in essence, conducting interviews, the nature of which, for the purposes of this study, were all of an *unstructured* kind. The topic under investigation, as well as the design of this study, required that the method leave much room to clarify respondents' answers, as well as to determine the interviewees' feelings and beliefs surrounding the particular issues being investigated (cf. Huysamen 1993:149,178, 180).

Besides not being bound by a formal questionnaire, my in-depth, open-ended interview style departed from the very detached stance characteristic of structured interviews, favouring rather interaction with respondents (cf. Huysamen 1993:178; Bernard 1995:209; Schensul *et al*. 1999:121-148; Miller 2000:88, 103). Arguably, this type of interview is particularly suited to exploratory[37] research (cf. Huysamen 1993:149). Moreover, when dealing with a sensitive issue such as female initiation, I was able to demonstrate true empathy and apply a flexibility suited to individual informants and circumstances. Having compiled an interview guide also ensures the reliability and comparability of information (cf. Bernard 1995:209). This informal interview style, resembling a normal, everyday conversation, further allowed me to ask follow-up questions, prompt and probe, in order to ensure clarity. Not only did I recount previous data to verify it; I further made use of two specific aids during my interviews with key informants. Photographs are familiar tools used in interviewing to elicit information from respondents, both to verify and corroborate information. They were particularly useful in pinpointing regional and totemic differences in dress during the various stages of the initiation. Furthermore, informants used the photographs as concrete sources of reference in their explanations – using them as chronological reference, pointing out certain demeanours, or expanding explanations. Additionally, I made use of a life-size mid-riff model that detailed the female genitalia. The purpose in using this lifelike representation was firstly, to elicit the correct terminology for certain anatomical parts

[37] I accept the view of Schensul *et al*. (1999:121) that 'exploratory', has to do with the "purpose of the interview – to explore domains believed to be important to the study and about which little is known".

and secondly, to have informants indicate what type of genital modification was/is practised by Basotho women (if any).

I personally conducted all the interviews for the purposes of this study in Sesotho (the local language of the Basotho people). Key informant interviews all continued for several hours at a time and often on successive days. Besides my taking notes, interviews were all tape-recorded, transcribed and translated. In the case of initiation songs, an expert assisted with translations to minimise the loss of significant meaning.

3.3.2.4 Life Histories

As a supplementary technique by means of which data are collected, life histories, as presented here in their characteristically "anecdotal or literary style" (Seymour-Smith 1990:168), are very effective in presenting the individual experience of a particular cultural reality, as well as personalising the reader's experience.

Life histories, in essence, are biographical renditions of the individual's experience (micro-mechanisms) of a particular cultural institution through a process of 'cross-referentiality' (cf. Seymour-Smith 1990:168; Coetzee and Wood 1997:3-4; Miller 2000:74-75). Defined here, life histories are those studies "which emphasise the experience and requirements of an individual – how the individual copes with and develops within society" (Crane and Angrosino 1992:75-76). They are not necessarily, in the common sense of the word, the entire autobiographical history of the particular person; rather, the finished product, following a narrative approach, was a collaboration between me and the life history candidate(s), compiled from the verbal accounts offered by my informants, a stance also adopted by Crane and Angrosino (1992:76) and Miller (2000:viii-ix, 12-14, 100).

When used in conjunction with other research techniques, the value of life history research, as applied in this study, lies in the fact that they are more discursive, informative accounts of the individual's experience, rather than the peculiarities and universals that have come to dominate much of the cross-cultural and ethnographical works. My decision to use life histories was, among other things, motivated by the notion that information obtained and presented in this form, adds a necessary element of

realism to a report. Added to this, life histories offer a thick description of the individual life experience in relation "to the social group in which they have grown up" (Crane and Angrosino 1992:76). Furthermore, the value of life histories as a methodological technique lies in the notion that, since people move and interact between a number of social settings, their understanding and experience of these are disjointed.[38] To understand the individual's 'social reality' it was necessary to apply a fragmentary technique when gathering and interpreting the data. It is here then, that life history research is most apt, since it "provides the possibilities for understanding grassroots activities and for gaining profiles of everyday life" (Coetzee and Wood 1997:2-3).

Similar to the choosing of any key informant, I became somewhat familiar with the community and group under study before commencing with the collection of life history data. Familiarising and becoming comfortable with the community (and they with me), contextualises the information and reduces misunderstandings, as well as faulty interpretations. Very importantly, waiting offered informants the opportunity to become accustomed to my presence; s/he was not immediately the focus of my attention, or that of other community members.

No problems were experienced in convincing the informants that there was a genuine wish on my part to hear their unique stories and experiences, nor was maintaining motivation especially difficult. That this is not always the case, is discussed by, for example, Crane and Angrosino (1992:80) and Miller (2000:80-81). It is my contention that the informants had a sincere desire to impart the truth about female initiation. Furthermore, my candidates were enthralled to have such an eager audience. On the other hand, one informant in particular had very strong feelings against the institution, which fuelled her desire to tell her story.

3.3.3 Socialisation

Realising that pursuing a study of this nature was not possible without considering the larger context of initiation, I set out by testing its feasibility in the summer of 1998. As I

[38] The argument set forth by Coetzee & Wood (1997:1-13) concerning the value of life histories, is fundamentally based on the revived interest in the Frankfurt school, particularly the works of Georg Simmel in *The field of sociology* (1976) and Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the philosophy of history* (1989).

was working full-time, I had occasion to visit the study area only during school holidays[39] and because of the sensitivity of the topic, a prolonged socialisation process was warranted. It was apparent from the outset that it was going to become necessary to establish extraordinary levels of rapport and that sampling would follow a snowball type (cf. Miller 2000:79). In this endeavour, during the very early stages of the study, I began speaking to Basotho women but observed how the 'blinds were drawn' or the 'walls went up', as soon as I broached the subject of their initiation rites. After at least half a dozen rejections such as: "*It is such a well-kept secret that we do not even speak to our own people who have not undergone initiation. What makes you think we will speak to you? It is a Basotho tradition that may only be spoken about amongst those who have undergone it. So, if you undergo it yourself, we will then only be permitted to speak with you about such matters*; *if at least you had children of your own, we might have considered telling you about lebollo*", etc. Fortunately, there was a woman, an instructress (mosuwe) of female initiation ceremonies on a farm some 24 km from Ficksburg[40] who agreed to teach me about the lebollo; thus, my journey of discovery began.

The farm on which Mme Lydia had lived for the last 32 years, Hoekfontein[41], is nestled in the most beautiful sandstone mountains that characterise the region. Foreign visitors know it as a guest lodge and polo school. To locals it is just another farm, but to the labourer inhabitants it is among other things, a venue for hosting female initiation. The chief crops are alfalfa hay and beans, while a guest lodge supplements the larger farm income.

The motse (village) in which Mme Lydia lives, consists of nine households, arranged in a somewhat untraditional manner – on successive wired-in stands. Each of the central buildings is a rectangular cabin which is very colourfully decorated, with adjacent lean-tos attached to it.

[39] It is customary for anthropological fieldwork to span a number of years. Having initially begun working on this study towards the end of 1998, until 2001, for personal and financial reasons it was interrupted. However, when my work situation changed in 2004, I could rigorously pursue the type of fieldwork necessary to satisfactorily complete this investigation.

[40] Ficksburg is an eastern Free State town, bordering Lesotho on its western side.

[41] Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of all informants and certain details are altered to the same purpose.

During the two initial encounters, conversation revolved generally around life on the farm, her family and superficially, about the initiation ceremonies held on the farm. At that time she requested that I not come to the farm for some time, as the traditional healer (ngaka) from Lesotho was there (for an initiation). Mme Lydia was afraid that my presence might alert the other community members as to the real reason for my visits and she would get into trouble. When I asked what they would do to her if they found out, she said that they would kill her. I doubt whether this literally meant that they would dispose of her, but rather that she would be in a lot of trouble for divulging such confidential information.

Because of this and my work commitments, it was only possible to visit the farm again three months later. Mme Lydia and I arranged a meeting to continue our discussions. Upon my arrival on that Thursday morning in March, I was disheartened not to find her at her home. I was told that she was with the other women up near the farmstead. To my initial disappoint, Mme Lydia and some of the other women were sorting beans. They would be working for the next couple of weeks and it would not be possible for any private discussions about the initiation (lebollo), as there were too many straining ears around, she said.

I had been wondering how I could persuade Mme Lydia to introduce me to other women of the village (motse) and to me, this would be an ideal opportunity. There was great interest in my identity and where I came from. Thus, amidst light-hearted conversation I asked whether I might help sort beans so that the farm foreman would not be led to think that I was wasting their time in frivolous banter. They thought this amusing, but readily accepted and so we all settled into our respective tasks and exchanged favourite “dried sugar-bean recipes”, talked about mutual people we knew, as well as the preparations for the upcoming Easter weekend.

On my arrival at the sorting and drying tarpaulins that morning, there were four other unknown women, but as the morning progressed, more women came to lend a hand, among them, three girls who I thought might have recently undergone initiation.

As I prepared to leave, I had to promise that I would visit again, which was very gratifying, as so much headway had been made and that they had accepted me with

such open arms. After exchanging good-byes they presented me with a large bag of dried beans – a symbolic gesture of good faith (and a very large pot of “bean-soup” for my family and I – I thought).

The following morning the weather was inclement, and with so much rain, another day of building up a good rapport was out of the question. The rain cleared and two days later I found myself in the lands, ankle deep in mud but glad to be taught how to and which bean plants to pick so that they could be dried.

On this occasion, Mme Lydia was not present but the other women, four of whom had been present at the previous encounter, were happy to show me the ropes. Two of the younger girls, referred to earlier, were also present, eager to know what type of education I was pursuing at university. The conversation and atmosphere of this work-group was cheerful and accepting. As before, the immediate issue was to build up a trust relationship between the women and me.

The time spent with the women at Hoekfontein sped by and soon it was time to return to Bloemfontein. It would be some months before a return trip could be made to the field. In the mean time, I had met Dr Kobus Zietsman, the expert of both boys’ and girls’ initiations in the eastern Free State. I gladly accepted his invitation to visit him on his farm near Clocolan (June – July 1999) and could not contain my delight at having the opportunity to pick his brain, as well as meet and interview two Basotho women on a number of occasions, the last of which was in September 2000. The interviews with Dr Zietsman always continued well after dark, as he the mentor and I the student, found it difficult to terminate a discussion when we had ‘just’ (so it seemed) reached such a critical point. The two women, Mme Matsaba and Mme Mapaseka, a Mokobung and Letebele respectively, were enormously generous with their time and patiently tutored me in matters of female initiation. They clarified my rudimentary understanding and broadened my knowledge of the initiation institution. The older of the two, who had lived on the farm for 43 years at that stage, had the honour of her grandmother acting as promoter for her initiation. The younger, Letebele woman underwent initiation in Lesotho before she married and moved to her husband’s home.

I also had occasion to depth-interview a very astute young woman from Mequeleng (Ficksburg) during July 2000, who had undergone initiation for the unequivocal purpose of her traditional healer apprenticeship after being called by the ancestors. Fortunately, our families were acquainted and our relationship had already been established. She explicitly understood the purpose of my enquiry and came prepared to share her experience of initiation, as well as to point out errors in my understanding of the process. She was soon to depart for Qwaqwa to continue her training, therefore our meetings were closely spaced and characterised by a fervent intensity. She was teaching me and I was eager to learn.

Intermittently, from the very beginning of my investigation to the present time, I have had the honour of relying on the first-hand knowledge of a very dear woman. Having established our relationship in my early teenage years, Mme Mmalipuo, a member of the Bakwena clan and I are confidants. She has been my sounding board, always consistent with her verification of my information and lovingly re-enacting initiation dances and songs for me.

It had been some time since I had heard of or was able to locate Mme Lydia. After unsuccessfully searching, I eventually traced the old woman to Ficksburg in March of 2005. I was taken aback by the frail and stroke-debilitated woman in front of me. However, without losing her composure, she knew exactly who I was and the nature of our previous connection. In fact, she affectionately chastised me for not coming to see her for so long.

For the next five months I visited her at her home at every opportunity – witnessing much of what may be called ‘everyday routine’, but also building important relationships with other members of the community, both young and old. We would sit talking for hours about all sorts of things, but mostly about initiation: what it really entails, all the while clarifying information I had obtained elsewhere. This was particularly useful in understanding the diversity that actually occurs from region to region, as well as over time. Mme Lydia was also instrumental in gaining access for me not only to observe, but also to photograph certain aspects of an initiation that was under way in the neighbouring village. I believe that our relationship paved the way for two other very meaningful key informant alliances. The first was with a female traditional doctor

ministering at the initiation and the second was with a young woman who had three years previously undergone initiation.

The doctor (ngaka) and I actually met accidentally. It was the day that the initiates were transitioning from pilo (black phase) to phepa (white phase). During this changeover, the traditional doctor must ritually protect initiates – applying special medicines and invoking ancestral fortification. All activity was on hold in anticipation of the ngaka's arrival. However, no one knew where she was. Therefore, I suggested that I take the car to go to look for her. After a few kilometres, I saw in the distance a woman with distinctive beading in her hair, shoes in hand, running as if her life depended upon it. Pulling up alongside her, I asked if she wanted a lift. Considering that neither of us knew the other at all, she sceptically accepted. Explaining that I had been visiting on the farm and had heard that the ngaka needed for the initiation was in transit somewhere, perhaps needing a lift, grateful recognition lit up her beautiful open face into a gigantic smile. She chatted non-stop all the way back. I had no idea that this simple act would yield such rewards (in a currency I was desperately in need of): access, albeit restricted, to the inner circle of witnesses as the initiates transitioned. During the coming out, Mme Sita (the traditional doctor) again led the initiates directly in front of me, positioning them to photograph properly. Since then, I have called on her at her home in an adjacent town. Here we have revisited some of my questions and also called on another traditional doctor involved in the protective rituals of initiation. Our custom of reciprocal gift-giving which started with the lift I had given her still continues; the last I received, being two beautifully decorated, hand-made traditional brooms (lefiêlô).

Mme Lydia initially instructed the young woman, Setho, to accompany me to the public viewings of the initiates. During these events, her commentary proved invaluable. It was here too, that we had occasion to cement our relationship and she to offer a very personal, real account of female initiation among the Basotho. Perhaps because our ages are similar and because I had already built up a comprehensive knowledge of female initiation by the time of our interviews (July – October 2005), I was able to ask very directed questions and in turn, her narration abounded in detail. Quite simply, she disarmed me with her candour.

Also during March 2005, I made contact with a wonderful character from Mphosong, in the foothills of Lesotho. A gifted storyteller of note, the highly intelligent 71-year-old mother of five and grandmother to ten, was an endless source of knowledge. On the other hand, she is a fierce protector of what I have come to know as the 'big secret'. The in-depth interviews and life history collection primarily took place during four days of very intense questioning. Mme Matsidiso also preferred that I fetched her and that the interviews be conducted away from her home and village. Subsequently though, I have spent time visiting her and her family at her village. Acting as instructress (mosuwe) on a number of occasions and serving on the village's female initiation committee, Mme Matsidiso warmed to my line of questioning. Often her reminiscences transported both of us back some 50 years.

I had heard of an initiation legend, so, one day, when returning to Ficksburg from Maseru (Lesotho), I took a different route. Upon arrival at the village, near Butha-Buthe, my travelling companion and guide for the day and I made our way to the chief's residence. It is customary in Lesotho when arriving at a village to announce oneself to the chief. We were fortunate that he was in residence and agreeable to our meeting. After the initial introductions and small-talk, Morena Kholobe told the complete story surrounding the legend of his mountain, after which the conversation reverted to generalities, before he suggested I speak to a well-known member of his village about the institution of female initiation.

Accompanied by a chief's messenger to do the introductions, I met Mme Matsalo. A short, hardy woman, she regarded her visitors with suspicion. At first, she tried to dismiss us with pleas of ignorance. Fortunately, after I had thanked the men for their introductions and sent them away, thus illustrating my knowledge of Basotho etiquette, Mme Matsalo relented somewhat. I suppose my already evident knowledge of initiation helped her thaw. In fact, she was amused by my appreciation of and desire to grasp fully the particulars of initiation. Considering that we made our acquaintance for the first time that day, the information extracted from the conversation was immense.

Since our initial meeting, Mme Matsalo has proved to be a key informant of note. Not only have we discussed extensively the intricacies of initiation and she imparted in-depth cultural knowledge pertaining to initiation, but she has also paved the way for me to

attend certain initiation ceremonies. Her motherly concerns for my comfort (and safety) during these events have been reassuring. For example, at all times, during the festivities either she, or the chief in whose district the initiation was held, had a clear view of me.

A key informant of another calibre is a Mosotho poet and author, from Maseru: Ntate Bereng. I first contacted him hoping that he could elaborate upon certain aspects of initiation, because I had heard of his being described as a veritable storehouse of knowledge. Unfortunately, he could not give me the details I was looking for. However, what he did do, was offer a different interpretation of said aspects. I also relied on him to translate a number of initiation songs into English. Like poetry, these songs are rich in symbolism and permeated with authentic Basotho culture. I felt that the true meaning of the songs may be interpreted wrongly and consequently lost, if translated by anyone other than a 'real' Mosotho. In our discussions, he often admiringly looked at me, shook his head and laughed: "*Why did you choose such a difficult topic? If you had chosen an easier subject, you would have finished with your study ages ago! I take my hat off to you*."

3.3.4 Data analysis

The systematic description of the initiation process based on the empirical data with its narrative character is primarily presented in Chapter Five. Van Gennep's (1909) tripartite scheme (see 2.2) is applied in the structuring of the chapter. The elements of separation, transition and reincorporation largely correlate with the phases identified by the Basotho making this appropriate. With the evaluation and deeper analysis of the data too, these component elements are particularly significant.

3.4 SUMMARY

Following a qualitative methodology the case study method and vigorous triangulation of participant observation, the use of key informants, in-depth interviews and life histories were applied in the gathering of information, its evaluation and analysis.

The study group, primarily Basotho women living in rural eastern Free State and Lesotho, were accessed by means of snowball sampling. Approaching informants with questions about the very sensitive issue of female initiation required a lengthy socialisation and relationship-building process. Once the trust was established more in-depth enquiry could be pursued. The different research methods and techniques were often applied in unison. Separating the one from the other would have been futile, but also contradictory to their purpose.

The research area, in a word, is rural and the people largely simple living and tradition bound. During the research process, a varied group of informants were consulted, depending on the information required. Ultimately a selected group of ten key informants were repeatedly interviewed. On the one hand, to gain the depth of information required for this study and on the other, pertinently to validate information gleaned from interviews with them specifically, as well as to verify that obtained from other informants.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAITING FOR THE FULL MOON: A PRELUDE

Basotho female initiation is planned to correspond with the rising of the full moon. The significance of the full moon is explained by Brandell (1961:32), as symbolising “female sexuality and fertility”.

4.1 GENERAL

Having already presented an ethnographic elucidation of female initiation among the south eastern Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa in Chapter One, from which the rationale of this study is derived, it is at least fitting to refer to the functions. It is accepted that such functions are familiar to most, hereby not necessitating a discussion.[42] Additionally, discussing them here may detract from the outcomes initiation might have specifically for the Basotho. It is understood that the motivations for initiation are the foundation upon which any other decision related to initiation is made. This chapter serves as prelude to the description of the initiation process (Chapter Five) and therefore considers the factors that influence the holding of initiation, the admission criteria and the groundwork necessary for a successful Basotho event. In addition, the roles of important functionaries are explained.

4.2 THE DYNAMICS OF CONVENING AN INITIATION

4.2.1 Presence of candidates and the availability of functionaries

The primary concern when talks about hosting a female initiation commence, is the availability of candidates eager to participate. The norm is that two or more candidates should make their desire to participate known, so that the elaborate arrangements may commence. However, there are cases where a single girl undergoes initiation on her own. Here, the wish to complete initiation is so great that postponing her initiation is not an option. According to informants, when a prospective initiate indicates her wish or need to undergo initiation, a minor hurdle such as no other candidates coming forward, should not be a reason to deprive her of her wish. "*The problem when initiating only one girl is that the public interest is little, and therefore it is not very powerful*." The rationale

[42] In brief, the functions of initiation may be classified in two categories: primary and secondary. Primary functions and motivations for female initiation are preparation for adult status and symbolising of the transition stage; prelude to marriage (nubility and fertility); and education and instruction. Secondary functions are the preservation and promotion of traditional culture; entertainment value and social interest; prestige and political function; and the religious function. For further elucidation on the functions consult among others Laydevant (s.a); Sechefo (s.a); Postma (1954); Beals & Hoijer (1959:); Schapera (1959); Coertze (1960); Richards (1961); Bruwer (1963); Ashton (1967); Germond (1967); Zietsman (1972); Van Der Vliet (1974); Buys (1981); Nel (1985); and Ellenberger (1992).

behind attending is expressed by informants; in the first place to strengthen the child; secondly, to heal from sickness; or finally, as a prelude to becoming a traditional healer.

The promoter (monga mophato) is the person who proposes that an initiation school should be held, thus becoming the "*owne*r" or presenter of the school. Such a person is tradition bound, often proposing an initiation even though s/he no longer has a child to be initiated, sometimes even becoming a permanent promoter, renowned for the work that s/he does.

The promoter is generally responsible for supplementing the food supplies, for the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as for the animals to be slaughtered on these occasions. These kinds of expenditures are carried by an event-promoter (temporary promoter), making their financial situation a determinant for hosting an initiation (see 4.2.2). Since permanent promoters become renowned for the work that they do, they are often approached to present an initiation school and then receive remuneration in the form of meat and money. They do not have to foot the bill for all the animals that are ceremonially slaughtered or for the feasts, because they usually do not have children in the particular initiation school; the initiate's parents are responsible for this.

The promoter's most important functions are to organise and present the initiation and to appoint a traditional healer (ngaka) and instructress (cf. also Zietsman 1972:87). Interestingly, at one school that I attended, while the candidates were already being inoculated and protected (phatsa), an instructress had yet to be appointed. The instructress is usually an older, adult, initiated female person who has a vast knowledge of the Basotho traditions and laws. A teacher may also be a younger person with character (Zietsman 1972:88). At one of the initiation schools I had the honour of visiting, the instructress was exactly such a person; being, at the most, 27 years old. Usually only one full-time instructress is needed, but more than one may be appointed from the group of initiated women who visit the initiation school nightly and over weekends, making her an apprentice coach. This junior teacher reports and answers to the principal instructress, who in reality gives the orders. However, most of the time, the apprentice accompanies the initiates on their routine activities and is responsible for the elementary training. An informant from one of the villages in Lesotho explains that there is a hierarchy of authority. The principal oversees the apprentice. However, a ward and

district committee supersedes the principal. It is to the committee that problems are reported and advice sought. To become a member, one must obviously be initiated, have acted as an instructress and then be nominated by peers. If uncontested, one serves on the 'board', as it were.

The most important functions of an instructress (mosuwe) [43] are to mind and train initiates for the duration of the initiation period and they are responsible for initiate discipline. Only a full-time teacher receives remuneration. Such payment is calculated at a certain amount per initiate; a new blanket or perhaps the veld blankets of the graduated initiates.

During the planning stages of the initiation school, a suitable traditional doctor (ngaka) must be found. Tempels (1946:57) explains that a traditional healer is a person who has clearer than normal vision of natural forces and their interaction; the power to select these forces and to direct them for specific purposes or situations; becoming who s/he is because s/he is seized by the influence of ancestors or spirits; or because s/he is initiated by another initiated doctor. In the event of one not being found, it may delay proceedings. Local traditional doctors (dingaka) are sometimes asked to oversee the initiation; however, such specialists are often invited from elsewhere. It is the promoter's task to find a well-qualified and respected traditional healer. Most times a primary functionary is assisted by a group of two to six other traditional doctors and apprentices. It is believed that by combining their 'powers', they can better withstand multiple malevolent influences. Interestingly, if a female doctor inoculates the initiates, then male apprentices should complement her spirit (moya) by performing the other tasks. Pragmatically too, a number of doctors can sooner perform all the activities required of them. According to Zietsman (1972:83), these aids might perform a specialised task such as the circumcision. The norm during female initiation is that different people fulfil all 'official' positions, but sometimes, one person can act as promoter, instructress and religious specialist.

The main functions of a traditional healer are: to treat the slaughtered sheep's meat; to inoculate and treat initiates against evil, thus protecting them; to make sure initiates do not run away during the initiation; to treat the initiation hut against evil; to ensure that

[43] In Sesotho, mosuwe means, the one that tans hides ("looier").

undesirable individuals do not enter the initiation hut and harm the initiates; and to treat water or drinking and fire places. For his/her services, the doctor usually receives a certain share of the sheep that is/are slaughtered for the purposes of the opening ceremony. These days, it is common for this functionary to expect a fee (tjhelete ya ngaka). The amount varies greatly from area to area. At some schools the price is set at R50 or R120 per candidate, while it is reported to be significantly higher in the towns of the Free State, where as much as R1000 is charged.

4.2.2 Financial situation and farming activities

Language (1943:111) and Zietsman (1972:61) both class economic considerations as significant when thinking of hosting or attending an initiation; an assumption on which I cannot fault them. The economic situations, particularly that of the promoter (as discussed above) and the initiates' parents, greatly determines whether an initiation school for girls will be held that particular year or not. For example, a candidate's parents are responsible for her food for the duration of the initiation. Furthermore, her outfits are expensive. Among others, she requires a tanned sheepskin apron, cowhide skirt and bead adornments for the initiation period and after successfully undergoing the initiation, she needs new blankets, clothes, beads, adornments, ornaments and red-ochre. Moreover, the traditional-healer(s) (ngaka/dingaka) and instructress require remuneration, while at the time of Zietsman's (1972) research, the farmer (if the initiation was held on a farm) had to be paid for allowing the initiation to be held on his farm.

The promoter too, carries much of the financial burden. The opening and closing festivities are largely his/her responsibility. Of particular significance for these occasions is a slaughtered sheep – parts of which are used for important rites, as well as sufficient quantities of traditional beer and food for the guests.

Traditionally, Basotho initiation was held when the sorghum (mabele) was ripe (Dutton 1923:88). Sorghum was particularly important for girls' initiation and Moitse (1994:49) explains that it would constitute the majority of the food that would be eaten; what is more, it is the basic ingredient for the preparation of the traditional beer. In accordance with Zietsman's (1972:63-64) observations, the ripening of sorghum no longer plays as important a role. Rather, money is now of ultimate importance. Because of the changes

that have occurred and are continuously occurring with respect to the reliance on subsistence farming, we see that female initiation presently is less dependent on a good harvest. Instead, irrespective of what kind of economic system prevails, the financial situation of participants and their relatives – the amount of money that they can save – remains an important deciding factor.

Closely related to the previous point, farming activities, specifically in cases where initiation is to take place on a farm, would largely determine whether the farmer would allow the initiates to take leave or not. Interestingly, popular times to host initiation are April/May and again August/September; months during which there is the least work on the farms. These times also coincide with school holidays, making them ideal. The suitability of the latter months is best because winter is passing and many farm labourers receive their 'mealie ration'.

This correlates with what Zietsman (1972:68) says about initiation taking place after the maize and sorghum harvests. One has to ask though, whether it is not so much the farming activities, but the availability of food that determines the time of the initiation.

If many of the initiates and their families reside on farms and if the initiation school is hosted on a farm – as was also the case when Zietsman (1972) conducted his research – farming activities greatly govern the time at which the initiation is held, since food is often plentiful. However, from my observations, other factors, as will be seen, are more decisive in determining when the initiation is to be held.

4.2.3 A suitable locale

Consistently over time, two attributes paramount to an initiation terrain are isolation and a body of water[44] (dam, stream or river). The availability of wood and flammable shrubs is also important. As is seen in Section 5.3 (a discussion about daily routine), the gathering of wood is one of most prominent activities of female initiation during the day.

[44] According to Rakotsoane (2001:206), "[m]ost of the objects which the Basotho use for religious purposes are those which are connected to water".

For female initiation among the Basotho, an isolated hut in the village (motse) satisfactorily complies with the needs of an initiation hut. From observations, this 'isolation' and privacy is effected by a courtyard enclosure erected from reeds or thatch-grass, as well as taboos (behavioural rules of movement) and protective medicines, restricting access to the immediate surroundings of the initiation lodge to a selected few. It is only during the day and for certain ceremonies where much privacy is needed, that the initiates move away from the initiation lodge (mophato) to a secluded place out of sight and ear-shot of village inhabitants. During their initiation, girls are often seen and heard by others. For routine activities, initiates spend much of their day in the veld (naheng), but where special secrecy is required as well as when very important rites take place, initiates are taken to the 'ditches' (lengopeng).

4.2.4 Legislation, permission from local authorities and employer

Gaining permission from local authorities to host initiation is, on the one hand customary and accepted and on the other, a bone of contention for presenters of initiation. Traditionally, one would not speak of gaining an employer's permission to host or attend initiation. In Lesotho, the right procedure to follow when wishing to host an initiation school has for aeons been to consult and inform the chief (morena), as well as district headmen and ward heads, of one's intention. To the chief it would be said "*ke kopa lengope*" (I ask for the use of the 'ditches'). Moitse (1994:50) explains the significance of asking permission to use the 'ditches' or gully, as it is within the seclusion of these that "the secret activities of the school, *koma*, take place". This is still the customary channel to follow; however, recently talk is of formalising legislation surrounding initiation. It is unclear at the time of writing what the implications are for female initiation in that country.

At the time of Zietsman's (1972:69-70) research in South Africa, certain magisterial districts of the then eastern and northern Transvaal, had a law to control circumcision schools viz. *Native Administration Act 1927 (No. 38 van 1927)*. Pertaining specifically to the Free State, no law existed preventing initiation schools. According to Zietsman, the magistrate or police could be informed, but it was not obligatory. Such an action was also very unlikely as the authorities frowned upon initiation practices.

New legislation has however been passed and particularly in the Free State the *Free State Initiation School Health Act 2004 (No. 1 of 2004)* formally stipulates a number of criteria surrounding the hosting of initiation schools, together with regulations about acceptable conduct at initiation schools. Among others, explicit, written permission to host an initiation school and treat initiates must be obtained from the District Medical Officer (in conjunction with the Local Municipality or Traditional Authority[45], where applicable). Written parental consent if the candidate is under the age of 18 years, or signed consent by the prospective initiate, if of majority, is a necessity; so is a certified clean bill of health by a primary health care nurse or medical practitioner a requirement. A district Environmental Health Officer, as designated by the MEC, must act as inspector for initiation schools, ensuring that there are adequate supplies of clean water, acceptable ablution facilities, that food is prepared in a hygienic manner and that instruments (if used for circumcision) are kept, prepared and used in a way that will not place the initiate at risk of injury, disease or death. Additionally, a traditional surgeon (if to perform a circumcision operation) may only do so once written permission from the District Medical Officer is obtained. Such permission is subject to the inspection of the instrument(s) and if determined to be inappropriate, to training with surgical instruments supplied by the District Medical Officer. Notwithstanding the above, the length of an initiation school may not exceed two months, nor may initiates be subjected to corporal punishment. Although persons contravening the stipulations in the Act [Sections 2(1), 3(4), 5, and 6(1)] may be fined or imprisoned for a period of up to ten years, I am not convinced that an adequate monitoring system is in place in the Free State to implement the law. Furthermore, I am of the opinion that this legislation does not unambiguously set out to what extent it proposes to protect or intervene, if necessary, on behalf of initiates from female initiation schools or to what extent it even includes the female initiation institution under its authority.

For those residing on farms, the employer's permission to host the initiation on his farm and/or to grant leave to those participating, largely determines whether the school will be held or not. At the time of Zietsman's (1972:66) research, girls and boys were usually in full-time employment by the time they were initiable. This, however, was more applicable to boys than girls, since farmers rarely permanently employed girls at this age, except if

[45] According to the *Free State Initiation School Health Act 2004 (No. 1 of 2004)*, 'Traditional Authority' is defined as "a traditional authority established in terms of the law recognised by Section 211 of the Constitution" of South Africa.

they were in full-time employment as domestic-help. Typically, girls were employed as seasonal labourers, during times of harvest.

4.2.5 Attitudes towards initiation

For the Basotho, initiation is a family matter (Ashton 1967:55). Ideally, parents should be in favour of their daughter undergoing initiation (Zietsman 1972:74). If a girl wants to undergo initiation, she speaks to her mother, who in turn speaks to her spouse who then discusses it with the promoter. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that parents approve, for they effectively request that the initiation be held.

Illustrating that initiation was traditionally a family matter, for example, if parents were deceased, another member, possibly a sister or rangwane (father's younger brother) would plan the initiation. The attitude and approval of other family members are also important since they help to provide the initiate with requirements like food, clothing and other necessities. The mother's brother's (malome) blessing carries considerable weight in this regard.

Although parental and familial attitudes toward initiation may mould the candidate's decision and actual attendance of initiation, they by no means supplant the candidate's wish. It is not necessary that parents or any other family members have an affiliation with initiation. If a girl wants to undergo initiation, she consults her mother. Even if her mother or other members are not initiated or do not support the initiation institution, they will normally not prohibit the girl's participation. An informant eloquently states: "*culture supersedes their authority*." Even if they are loyal churchgoers or opposed to initiation school, they are obliged to provide her with food, her outfit and other necessities. In extreme cases, where parents flatly refuse, an initiate will not be denied, "*if the parents don't want to 'buy the blanket', someone will come forward and do so*."

Candidates usually decide for themselves whether they want to be initiated and at which stage. Buys' (1981:143) research among the Batlokwa of Qwaqwa yields similar results, as is seen when she says that attendance is voluntary and depends on the girl's choice. On the one hand, there are cases where prospective initiates report for initiation without their parents' blessing or knowledge (ho titimela). Such prospective initiates will not be

prevented from attending; however, parents are sometimes fined because their child has spoilt the school. On the other hand, my informants assure me that the girl has the right to refuse to undergo initiation even if her parents wish her to attend. In rare cases, parents do force children to attend initiation. When and if this occurs, both parents and all their children have probably undergone initiation. An informant, not wishing to attend initiation, recounts how her mother pressurised her into attending. She relates that it was her grandfather's dying wish that all his grandchildren should undergo initiation. Compounding this, were the fears that she would become a "*spook*", or "*not right in the head*", if she did not also go through the institution. A mother, having undergone initiation recounts how she tried to dissuade her daughters from attending initiation. Her arguments were firstly, formal schooling currently better equips young people to cope with real life and secondly, the expense of acquiring just a sheep for her homecoming feast is not warranted for cash-strapped families.

Traditionally, parents and other family members were more strongly bound to the initiation custom. In the past, children underwent initiation because their parents followed that path and they were expected to do so as well. Presently, the parents' bond to the initiation custom is not a requirement, but traditionally, it was accepted as a given.

The attitude of village (motse) members where the initiation is to take place greatly influences the actual venue of the initiation. Since the girls' initiation compound is either part of the village or partly removed from it, initiates are often seen and heard by the village inhabitants. It is essential that the residents' approval be gained – the responsibility of the promoter – in order that the general atmosphere is congenial and accepting. This helps create a successful initiation without negative energies possibly spilling over to the initiates themselves, or making them susceptible to malevolent influences. Furthermore, for the girls it is particularly important that a good community attitude prevails as during the preparatory period (see Section 5.3), before the initiation commences, they interact closely with community members. Food also comes from the village, which necessitates a good relationship between initiation candidates and community members. To substantiate the idea that community attitudes are important, Ashton (1952:57) comments that female initiation was commonly practised in many parts of Lesotho, illustrating that it was generally accepted, approved and encouraged.

The church and school's attitude is an immense determining factor in holding initiation. Clergymen and teachers often forbid youngsters from participating in initiation. Reasons for these institutions' negative attitude might be attributed to the poor attendance at school and church during these times, as well as possibly influencing co-members to participate in delinquency. Cases have been reported where children who have participated in initiation, were placed under censure and were not permitted to continue their schooling or religious education (Zietsman 1972:77). Another problem is that the church and school may forbid parents to allow their children's participation in initiation. They may do this by denying the parents certain church privileges or the church may influence other family members and friends with respect to their participation in initiation ceremonies and feasts related to it. Besides placing censure on the children and influencing parents and other family members against initiation, the church and school may also influence children themselves so as not to want to participate in initiation (Zietsman 1972:78).

Since the earliest times, the church and schools have been against initiation. The literature is not quite clear on this as can be seen in Casalis ([1861] 1965) who states that initiation resulted in good behaviour and focused on expectations for their future, but that it could not be weighed against the demoralisation that took place. In the same vein, Ashton (1952:57-58) expresses this ambiguity when he says that mission stations did not oppose female initiation as much as they did that of boys', because it was not as rough and exhausting and it did not exhibit to the same extent the dramatic and heathen characteristics. Ellenberger ([1912] 1992:285) on the other hand, emphasises the Basotho's anger with respect to the church's stance against initiation. For the Basotho it was seen as doing away with the customs of their forefathers and as a disruption of the fundamental principles of the community. Similarly, an informant expresses his strong feelings against missionary intervention. His stance is that missionaries came, rigorously opposed the 'heathen' practice of initiation, but offered no substitute. Even today, he says, a vacuum exists, that begs filling. Consequently, one of the most important goals of initiation, viz. the periodic renewal of tribal and political loyalty, has been lost because of prohibiting initiation. In defence of the church's stance, Laydevant (s.a.:14-15) purports that the church was not against the circumcision custom if it was performed in hospitals and clinics, but the church was against the abuse and cruelty that occurred during the initiation period, after the circumcision operation.

4.2.6 The right time

Usually when planning the initiation, seasons and favourable weather conditions are considered. However, in the literature, authors seldom agree on the times of the year female initiation was traditionally held. Tyrell (1968:97) contends it took place at the end of summer, while Ligouri-Reynolds (1965:43) and Ashton (1967:57) say that it took place during the summer, a statement that Sechefo (1909:8) agrees with when pronouncing that October (Mphalane) was the right time for female initiation (lebollo la bale). Additionally, Buys (1981:143) logically and practically reports that by hosting initiation during December, allows for scholars to attend. Dutton (1923:88), on the other hand reports that initiation traditionally took place at the end of winter, while Zietsman (1972:91) contests this when pronouncing that girls are generally initiated during autumn and spring, tending to prefer April and September for the most appropriate weather. They do not have to be exposed to the same hardships as boys and because they are generally scantily dressed, the colder months are not suitable for them.

More specifically, with respect to the factors that influence the holding of initiation we see that traditionally, boys' initiation began with the full moon and girls' initiation with the new moon. Zietsman (1972:93) observed the reverse – boys begin with the new moon and girls with the full moon. He was unable to determine the reason for the shift, but Laydevant (s.a.: 63) and Moitse (1994:66) substantiate the observation that female initiation is planned to correspond with the beginning of the full moon.

Traditionally, female initiation preceded that of the boys', yet the two schools were to an extent dependent – one had always to follow the other. Sheddick (1953:41) and Zietsman (1972:61) are both of the opinion that among the Basotho, initiation was held in accordance with demand and not at a particular time, a stance correlating with the independently planned schools of today. Possible reasons for this include, firstly, that interest in initiation is dwindling and formal schooling and church are increasingly playing a more prominent role, with subtle changes in the Bantu-speaking people's lives as new ideas and needs develop. Secondly, Moitse (1994:49) proposes that the "growing rate of unemployment and the subsequent commercialisation of the institution as a means of a livelihood" contribute to non-related nature of the schools, as well as schools being held all year round.

4.2.7 Circumstances beyond control

Traditionally wars, revolts, illness, epidemics and other emergency situations such as natural disasters: droughts, floods, heavy hail and snow storms were factors that greatly influenced the holding of initiation rites (Zietsman 1972:93). Circumstances in Southern Africa that have affected the holding of initiation schools have, for example, been prolonged droughts. Even in the not too distant past, as recently as 1988, the most common situation in South Africa that influenced the initiation school was countrywide revolts, public demonstrations and uprisings; for example, where a state of emergency was declared and unlawful gatherings were prohibited.

4.3 ADMISSION CRITERIA

4.3.1 Age, maturity and marital status

In the literature, discrepancies exist regarding the exact age a Mosotho girl should be in order to undergo initiation. Traditionally, according to Germond (1967:523), girls of thirteen had to be circumcised. Norton (1910:199) on the other hand, says that girls traditionally of fifteen or sixteen were initiated, while Ashton (1952:57) contends that female initiates were between fifteen and twenty years of age. Segoete (1961:46) is less specific and says that girls had to be big and strong. This inability to say with certainty when girls undergo initiation is precisely because no hard and fast rule exists.

Age and physical signs (reaching puberty or sexual maturity) are discussed together, since these two indicators are closely related. It is usually with the reaching of a certain age that sexual maturity sets in.

A minimum age is required to enter initiation school: girls must at least be twelve years old (cf. also Zietsman 1972:96). The conception among the Basotho is that children of this age are already able to comprehend what is taught during initiation. In addition, they are physically strong enough to endure the trials. Today, the latter is less significant; rather, they must understand the complicated tribal history, kinship relationships, songs and praise-poems – which are memorised. This age requirement is not always strictly upheld. At times, to ensure numbers, girls younger than twelve are included. A

conception prevails that the young and the impressionable are those that gain most from initiation. The generally accepted age for girls is between 15 and 18. Puberty age is not a requirement in itself – if candidates are accidentally at this stage it is good: but persons may be initiated at a younger age as well.

Having reached puberty or sexual maturity and the presence of certain spiritual signs are a good indicator for admission to initiation, but they are not specific requirements. For a girl, having had her first menstrual period is a good gauge of maturity and she is regarded as physically and spiritually ready to begin initiation. Provided, that is, that the prospective candidate is willing to be initiated, arrangements would be made that she undergo initiation. Girls often join before sexual maturity and in such cases, the individual is incorporated into initiation school and is taught what reaching puberty is all about. Such sexually immature individuals would never be denied admission to initiation (Zietsman 1972:99).

What is meant by spiritual maturity? Generally, when a person begins talking and being interested in matters actually meant for adults or exhibiting certain adult characteristics such as being industrious and not lazy and subservient, then a girl is viewed as spiritually mature. Zietsman (1972:99) goes as far as to say that such signs might be a requirement for entry into initiation. Others believe that initiation is precisely meant for those who do not yet exhibit these qualities and that they should learn them at the school. In such a case, someone who is lazy, precocious and stubborn is signalling that the time for her initiation has arrived. Initiation is in fact believed to "*tame*" rebellious and unruly behaviour.

Buys (1981:142-143) mentions four criteria that were regarded as important markers for the Batlokwa of Qwaqwa pertaining to the reaching of maturity. As in the past, physical development is important.

- 45.45% of her informants regarded biological maturity, of which menstruation and breast development are the most important observable signs, as the most significant criteria for adulthood.
- 15.59% of the informants believed the above physical developments together with increasing interest in the opposite sex, as criteria for adult maturity.

- Only 10.39% of her informants viewed physical and spiritual/intellectual development (more responsible behaviour, interest in adult activities and consideration of career possibilities) as criteria.

- The remaining 28.57% of the informants proposed the age of fifteen/sixteen as a criterion.[46]

Some authors (e.g. Zietsman 1972:99-101) propose that another physical sign is virginity. Traditionally, it seems that bride price was higher for virgins. In fact, ideally, bride price would not be required for a girl who had lost her virginity. For this reason, parents kept an eye on their daughter's sexual activities, wanting her to remain 'pure' so that a higher bride price may be demanded. Virginity as a requirement for initiation does not have a sound foundation; rather, it is rooted in the parent's desire to demand a higher bride price. Thus, it is an economically determined reason and does not have anything do with initiation *per se*. Consequently, virginity in itself cannot be a requirement, as some females are initiated only as adults and have been married for some time. Moreover, it is common knowledge that a hymen may be broken by a number of activities, now necessitating a valid way for a girl's virginity to be determined.[47]

From the empirical data, it becomes clear that when initiation takes place, it has more to do with the initiate's own wishes and desires than her chronological age or level of sexual maturity. There is also no maximum age after which a candidate may no longer be initiated. Adults may enter initiation at any time, whether they are married or not. No distinction is made between them and other initiates; they are initiated in the same manner. Contrary to what one may think, married women (who in normal society have a higher status than unmarried girls), do not enjoy a higher rank as result of their marital status. It is only the clan affinity (seboko) that counts and according to which initiates are ranked (see 4.3.2). Regardless, it did not matter how old or whether they were married or not, candidates would seldom be rejected.

[46] It is important to consider that *not all* Basotho girls entering the adult stage of life do so by undergoing initiation. Compare Buys' (1981:145) findings regarding attitudes towards initiation.

[47] Currently the issue of virginity testing among the Zulu of KwaZulu-Natal is enjoying much attention in the media and opposition groups view it as a violation of individual rights.

Traditionally, reaching puberty was an important marker and it seemed that initiation was largely a puberty rite – also among other South African groups (see Section 1.1). A problem with such a view is that physical maturity is a gradual process; thus, binding initiation to a specific age, is impossible.

4.3.2 Totem affinity and relatives in the same school

According to Zietsman (1972:103), the Basotho from rural Clocolan would be initiated with the Bapedi (North Sotho) and the Ndebele groups, but would not enter initiation with the Xhosa, Zulu, Venda, Shangaan or Tshonga groups. He goes on to say that the Tswana are also excluded here. Because of the belief that Basotho initiation originated from the San[48] influence (Laydevant s.a.; Zietsman 1972; Ellenberger 1992), their descendents would be initiated with the Basotho and interestingly, they would then be the highest-ranking initiates. I have been unable to verify this notion from conversations with my informants. They rather purport that female initiation is traced back and originated from the legendary Mme Mantsopa.[49] An out-of-the-ordinary custom

[48] As to how the San came into contact with the Basotho in order to have influenced them, How (1962:53) explains that the first Basotho to arrive in present-day Lesotho found it to be occupied by the 'Mountain Bushmen'. The San population would have been quite large, so much so that their numbers exceeded those of the Basotho, yet these two groups lived in peace. They lived amongst each other, intermarried, protected each other, as well as stole from each other, fought and influenced each other's habits and customs. This is how it is proposed that the Basotho became strongly influenced by the San, particularly with respect to initiation and circumcision. Plyman (1963:1) also attests to the first contacts between the Basotho and the so-called Bushmen (cf. also Eiselen 1929).

[49] I ask whether the Mantsopa they are talking about is possibly the renowned Sotho prophetess Mantsopa Makheta (c 1793-1905) and for interests' sake provide some information about her. Mantsopa's life was long and her story complex. Born in the late 18th century, Mantsopa, sister to the celebrated Moshoeshoe, received the calling to divinity while quite young. Her powers grew steadily and in the late 1860s she was exiled to Modderpoort by King Moshoeshoe who feared her influence was becoming too great. When she arrived at Modderpoort she stayed in a cave, today still known as "Lehaha la Mantsopa". Originally occupied by San hunter-gatherers, the cave church, also known as the Rose Chapel, provided the first missionaries with shelter and a place of worship. Mantsopa later left them in this cave, settled at Spitskop Mountain and built a small house for herself. The cave is presently a place of pilgrimage for the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC). The cave church is considered a place at which ancestors are intensely near. Ceremonies, take place and many offerings are placed there. At Modderpoort, Mantsopa was baptised and given the name Anna, on 13 March 1870 - the same day King Moshoeshoe chose for his baptism, an event destined not to happen as the King died two days before his intended baptism. Though a Christian, Mantsopa continued to perform miracles and venerate her ancestors until her death. Her combination of orthodox and traditional teachings presaged the formation of the ZCC. Mantsopa's grave continues to be venerated today and each weekend sees new offerings placed on or near it. Mantsopa also had a fountain at a mountain called "Verve" and purportedly it does not dry up. According to tradition, she used the water from the fountain to cure the sick. The entire area mentioned above later became known as "Lekgalong la Mantsopa" (Mantsopa's Pass).
Sources: http://sagns.dac.gov.za/local_authorities.asp
http://whc.unesco.org/events/gt-zimbabwe/Tentative%20Lists.htm

mentioned by Guma (1962:44) is that Basotho boys and girls from one group were permitted to initiate those from another group.

The Basotho are divided into broad Sotho groupings based on clans with distinctive totem affiliation. These are ranked according to seniority for historical reasons. Although accepted that the similarities between the groupings are greater than differences and that totem alliance is not as prominent as it once was, within the institution of initiation, totemic differences are respected. Certain reported and observed practices differ from totem group to totem group. Traditionally, with respect to entry into initiation, a distinction might have been made between the different clan affinities (cf. Zietsman 1972:103), as the numbers were large enough, but presently this is no longer the case. Initiates are ranked according to totem position, which then determines their standing in the initiation school. For example, the most senior initiate is called Molobe, followed by Molobenyana or Lelate and the most junior ranked initiate is referred to as Senkothi, wa bo fello or wa getello (meaning the last in a series). Table 4.1 shows the standing of respective totem groupings according to Zietsman (1972) compared with that from three informants (represented in columns 2, 3 and 4 and indicated as Empirical data 1, 2 and 3). It becomes evident that an absolute ranking system is not applied, as information from different informants and that emanating from different areas sometimes differ. My deduction is that often informants have lived in an area for a protracted time without much opportunity to validate the criteria used in ranking totem groups. Moreover, informants would wrongly respond that a certain group had a superior ranking, only for me to find out that the reason for their stance is that during the time that the informant was initiated, other groupings were absent.

When more than one totem member is present, a further division is made. In such cases, the chief from whom a girl descends, is considered. Zietsman (1972:103) states that only some groups are divided in this manner, while an informant proposes a more prolific distinction, which is in line with Ngcangca (1990:24-37). In Table 4.2 Zietsman (1972) and Ngcangca (1990) are compared regarding the further differentiation of totem members attending initiation.

Table 4.1: Totem affinity: totem and animal association according to which initiates are ranked during initiation, according to four information sources

Ranking	**Totem group (Zietsman 1972)**	**Totem group & animal association (Empirical data 1)**	**Totem group & animal association (Empirical data 2)**	**Totem group& animal association (Empirical data 3)**
	Bushmen			
1	Bafokeng	Bafokeng – 'Mutla	Bafokeng - Rabbit	Bafokeng – Mmutla (rabbit)
2	Bakwena	Bahlakoana – Kwena	Bakwena – Snake/crocodile	Bataung – Tau (lion)
3	Bahlakwana	Bahlaping – Tlapi	Bahlakwana	Batloung – Tlou (elephant)
4	Batshweneng	Bahurutse – Tsoene	Bakubung – Hippopotamus	Basia – Katse/mosia (cat)
5	Bataung	Bakhatla – Lekholokholo	Bataung – Lion	Bakwena – Kwena (crocodile)
6	Batloung	Bakoena – Koena	Letebele	Bakgatla – Lenong (vulture)
7	Bakgatla	Bakubung – Kubu	Bakgatla (cannibal ancestors)	Bakolobneg
8	Baphuting	Bamangoato – Phuti	Batlokwa*	Bafula – Kolobe/fariki (warthog)
9	Makgolokwe	Banareng – Nare	Batloung – Elephant	Bakubung – Kubu (hippopotamus)
10	Basia	Bagoaketsi – Koena		Batshweneng – Tshwene (monkey)
11	Barolong	Bapeli –		Maphuthing – Phuti (steenbuck/duiker)
12	Bakubung	Baphuti – Sekho (Seokho)		Banarng – Nare (buffalo)
13	Makgwakgwa	Barolong – Noto / Tŝepe		Batlokwa*
14	Bapedi	Basiea – Siea / Phaha / Katse		Bhlakwana*
15	Batlokwa	Bataung – Tau		
16	Members of Ndebele and other Northern groups	Bathepu – Ba mefuta e mengata, baa fapana		
17		Batlokoa – Siea / Phaha / Katse / Nkae		
18		Batloung – Tlou		
19		Batsoeng – Tsoene		
20		Makhoakhoa – Koena		
21		Makholokoe – Khoho		
22		Maphuting – Lejoe		
23		Matebele – Ke mefuta emengata (tlou, letolo, etc.)		
24		Bafula – Kolobe-moru		

* Do not have an animal (phoofolo) totem.

Table 4.2: Finer totem group differentiation

Zietsman's (1972) division *		Ngcangca's (1990) division **	
		Bafokeng	
Mofukeng wa	Modipa Tshele Dijane Mahowana	Mofokeng wa	Mmamokgadia Motlalane Ha Modise Mokgadi wa Motlalane Mohaila-Tsepe Mmamaotwana finyela
		Bakwena	
Mokwena wa	Monaheng Mohlomi Nkopane Napo	Mokwena wa	Maiyane Mmantsane a Monaheng Mahaseng
		Bahlakwana	
Mohlakwana wa	Napo Nkokoto	Mohlakwane wa	Mmanapo a Mosito Mmapholo a Disema
		Bataung	
Motaung wa	Hlalele Moletsane Ramokgele Molete Tshukudu Thulo	Motaung wa	Ntthe a Morapedi Ha Rathulo a Mphethe Sefatsa sa Tshukudu Hlalele Ramokgele Ha Ramokgele a Mmamoholwane
		Batloung	
Motloung wa	Sekgwane Maloka	Motloung wa	Ha Matoka Ha Sejake Ha Mmasejake
		Basia	
		Mosia wa	Motubatsi
		Bakgatla	
		Mokgatla wa	Mmamodise a Setabele
		Bafula / Bakolobeng	
		Mofula, Mokolobeng wa	Mmarasakane
		Bakubung	
		Mokubung wa	Mohlamatsane Mmamotlhamatsana
		Batshweneng	
		Motshweneng wa	Mmakgiba (Ntshimana) Ha Kgiba, Sehowa Masilo
		Maphuthing	
		Lephuthi, Lephuthi,	Lekgolowe, Lekotsana Lekokotswana
		Banareng	
		Monareng wa	Ha Tswedipa Matshwele
		Batlokwa	
		Motlokwa wa	Ha Molefe Seala se kgaohile, Motonosi

Sources: *Zietsman, K 1972.

**Ngcangca, DJM 1990. *Diqatjwa tsa Basotho* (Basotho oral art). Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publishers.

Traditionally, numbers warranted separate initiation and although these days it can be done, it is not justifiable. Totem affinity was and still is not a requirement for admission to

initiation (cf. Zietsman 1972:104). As substantiation for this statement, I, for example, may wish to undergo initiation and although I do not belong to a Basotho totem group, I will not be denied my wish, provided that the significant persons are convinced of my good intentions.

Certain behavioural rules apply to relatives attending the same initiation. A girl may undergo initiation with her older or younger sister, father's sister, mother's younger sister or any niece or female relative. She, however, may not be in the same initiation school as her mother or her mother's older sister or grandmother, or for that matter, be initiated at the same time, albeit in different schools (Zietsman 1972:106).

No person in the Basotho culture occupies the same status in society. For sisters attending initiation one's status is either superior or inferior to one's sibling based on one's age. When sisters are in the same school, their tribal affinity is on a par. However, as in life, in initiation, the elder sister ranks higher than her younger sister. When the daughters of brothers are in the same school, the older brother's daughter ranks higher, even if she is younger. When a brother and a younger sister's daughters are in the same school and the sister is married to a man of a higher clan (seboko), her daughter is more senior. Thus, regular societal rules are applied in this case, together with those of the initiation school.

A custom of interest pertaining to relatives in the same initiation school is that when sisters are in the same initiation school, a kerrie (knob-stick) is placed in the fence in front of the initiation lodge and when they enter or leave the hut, they pass on opposite sides of the stick. Siblings, besides the fact that they differ in rank and have to pass on either side of a stick when entering and exiting the initiation hut, are treated similarly.

4.3.3 Lesser citizens

Delinquents such as thieves, fighters, drunkards, murderers, etc. are permitted to go to initiation school, so are trespassers of tribal law. Such persons include those marrying before undergoing initiation; those marrying without bride price (bohadi); those flirting and seducing the opposite sex; those not exhibiting the necessary respect towards seniors; those who are disobedient; and those who have used unacceptable language

toward certain persons. The belief is that they are "*not right in the head*" and the institution is exactly where they will be taught correctly. Furthermore, a problem child is never denied access to initiation.

Infringers of tribal law and criminals alike, are welcomed to initiation school, provided, that is, that they are willing to attend. The contention is that these persons gain the most from initiation training, because it is quite clear that they do not know the laws (melao) (Zietsman 1972:113). One must accept that the tribal laws spoken of above are watered down in comparison with traditional rules and regulations of conduct.

Traditionally, the belief was that sorcerers[50] (baloi) could damage the community as a whole by causing misfortunes, epidemics and droughts. One of the first things done when sorcery is suspected is to renew all protective medicines, to inoculate the victim and his/her immediate family, as well as to replace the village's medicines. Witches are not revered to the same extent as sorcerers are, even if the former cause their mediums harm. Mostly, they apply their powers to satisfy their own perverse pleasures. Beliefs in sorcery still prevail in certain circles. A particular belief is that sorcerers may harm the initiates themselves or the initiation lodge during the initiation period, but the hostile attitude towards these antisocial beings has lessened considerably. Presently, it is believed that without their magic articles, sorcerers cannot cause much harm. The contention is that initiating them with other initiates will cure their moloi or their magic (Zietsman 1972:115). Today's sorcerer is rather a person, although feared, who needs help to rid her/himself of malevolent spirits, which may only come about by means of initiation. For this reason a sorcerer is not totally rejected from the community, tormented or killed. According to Zietsman (1972:116), magicians and sorcerers may be taken up in initiation schools; even if revered and feared they will not be denied admission. Besides magicians and sorcerers, bewitched persons may undergo initiation. The contention is that these people are "*sick*" because they have brought upon themselves the scorn of a sorcerer. The traditional healer and instructress may try to cure such a person by

[50] According to Ashton (1943:5-18), sorcerers/magicians are similar to regular traditional doctors in that they use medicines. The difference is that sorcerers use their knowledge and power to cause harm, for anti-social purposes. Some medicines are thought to be so potent that if not used with great care or the taboos associated with them are broken, serious harm could be caused.

treating her with special medicines.[51] According to informants, the administration of these medicines occurs in much the same manner as when initiates are treated in the early stages of the initiation.

Sorcerers have two types of medicines: some is capable only of doing harm, the other are special medicines used for good, but could be harmful if applied to do harm. The medicines the traditional healers use are to protect the initiation school and initiates against sorcery and to foster good qualities in the candidates.

The mentally challenged or weaklings have no problem in attending initiation in rural Clocolan (Zietsman 1972:117). There are cases where blind, deaf and people unable to walk have successfully completed initiation. They receive no unique treatment with additional special medicine and have to go through everything the other initiates endure (Zietsman 1972:118-119). They will simply, at all times, have an initiated adult with them to assist with certain things and generally to look after them. Such an assistant may be a family member or any other adult. If their abnormality is ascribed to sorcery, the traditional healer will try to cure them by washing them and treating them with medicines, etc. However, if the person is born with the abnormality (made like that by Modimo), it is believed that nothing can be done about her plight.

4.4 PREPARATIONS FOR *LEBOLLO*

4.4.1 Youngsters and the status of the uninitiated

From about the age of twelve, when the puberty stage begins, it starts becoming important as to whether a person is initiated or not. The uninitiated status is ridiculed in some circles and the urge becomes stronger to be part of the initiated group, to share in the privileges and its status. According to Zietsman (1972:122), it is here that the psychological preparation begins to play a greater role. Among those who place high value on formal education, initiation talk receives little attention.

[51] Ingredients of such special medicines (black ointment) include: totabeta, sebetjane, seeqwane, sequlaba, mohlafota, moretele, phakisane, tuma-phantse, nka-nyapa, and mpobetsi (Zietsman 1972:116).

Where initiation is still valued, the uninitiated adult's position is unenviable. Such persons are regarded as not having achieved adult status and are not consulted on important matters. For example, an uninitiated girl who wants to marry might experience problems. The young man's parents might decide that she is not worthy of the bride price because of her uninitiated status. They might require that she first undergo initiation or the young man may decide to marry her on the condition that she graduates from initiation after the marriage. The everyday life of uninitiated, adult women may be difficult in that initiated persons purposefully discriminate against them. Conversations, for example, with uninitiated persons might be avoided and they are totally excluded from any discussions of import, such as, initiation, marriage, death and birth. Initiated persons will always make them feel unwelcome and weak and generally that they are not worthy of attention. Traditionally, Segoete (1961:46) says that a girl was not considered an adult until she was initiated. Not much notice was taken of her since she had not been initiated. Her talk was unreliable, as an uninitiated person did not truly exist; she was a lethisa (an uninitiated girl), who was not complete and uninitiated persons bothered others and were boring. Moiloa (s.a.: 95) says that an uninitiated was not regarded as an adult; even if she were physically mature, she would not be regarded as a woman because she had not learned how to behave in difficult times and everything said by her was regarded as untrue. Ashton (1952:46) states that uninitiated persons are told from an early age that they may not marry or participate in social activities and tribal occasions before they undergo initiation. Ellenberger (1992:288) relates that when an uninitiated girl desperately wanted to be initiated, it was because she believed that she would not find a husband and that she would not be able to conceive. It should however, be borne in mind that these attitudes toward uninitiated persons are only prevalent in circles where initiation is strongly adhered to. Such circles are becoming smaller and less significant than in the past (cf. also Zietsman 1972:123). The case presented below illustrates the disdain with which the uninitiated are sometimes treated.

How I came to be initiated

I was initiated in Mokhotlong, in June. It was icy cold. The frost was thick every morning and there was some snow. I remember how cracked my feet were, so much so that I could hardly walk. We were a group of 22 initiates that year. All of us were arranged according to tribal affinity, because there were many totems represented in that one initiation. The Bafokeng are senior. Ranking the initiates is a serious matter because if a person is placed in the wrong position, the belief is that she will become dim-witted or retarded (wa tserella, wa ba sehole).

My father had encouraged me to go to initiation, but I was

reluctant. It was only after I was married and living with my husband at his home, that I started thinking about being initiated. My sisters-in law would say: 'We're leaving for a party where the bale are going to sing. When we get back tomorrow, you must have food ready for us; you must have picked the peas and cooked them.' I thought, gee man, I'm staying alone and have to cook for them, while they go off to a party/feast, there where I don't know what they are going to do. That is not right. I made up my mind, but I first had to tell my mother and father (motswadi aka le ntate) that I wanted to be initiated.

I arranged to go home. Everyone at my husband's home was under the impression that I was simply going to visit with my family. It was early when I set out on my journey. On foot, I walked and walked all day – up this mountain and down the next, finally arriving that night, totally exhausted. My family members greeted me with consternation: 'What's the matter?' You see, they did not know I was coming, and perhaps they thought that my husband was violent towards me and I was running away. I responded that all was well at my husband's, and not much was up; I was just coming to tell them, that I wanted to be initiated. I explained that 'it's hard there where I live now. Everyone there has been initiated, and I am left alone when they visit the initiation, and I am left out of much of their conversation. I am the only one who has not been initiated. I'm living with hardship.'

My father said: 'You see I wanted you to be initiated but you didn't want to. Now you want to be initiated, but I no longer have the strength to initiate you. If, however, that is what you want, then that is how it is … go.' Having told them, there was no time to waste, I immediately began on my way back. I kept on repeating to myself: 'There is no time for resting. I have to get back because the opening ends tomorrow and the initiates are entering.' I walked and walked, and finally arrived home.

My mother-in-law welcomed me back, but she was astonished that I was back so soon. Remember, I told them I was going to visit. I said: 'Well I arrived, saw them, but then I came back.' My head was reeling and my body ached. I only rested a little while (butha-butha) outside. This gave me the advantage of seeing where the people were going. I was frantic: where were the initiates, where were they going?'

My mother-in-law was hovering over me, obviously concerned at my strange behaviour. She said: 'Why don't you go inside; it looks as if you've got a bad cold.' Acknowledging that I had caught a bad cold, my manner was certainly alarming her. Instead of going inside to rest, I was adamant that I needed to go up to the lands (tsimuing) to dig up some potatoes. She assured me that that was not necessary, encouraging me to rather go and rest. Realising the futility of arguing with me, she conceded.

After a short respite, I departed. My intention was certainly not to go and dig up potatoes. I had seen where the initiates had gone down. I joined up with their path, eventually seeing them. My internal struggle was consuming; I was unsure and afraid but knew that I should join. I jumped in among them. Startled, they said: 'Wow, who is this? Where does she come from, what does she want?' I answered, 'I am here now. I've come to join here.'

They sent a message to my husband's home to say 'the young one is here'. My mother-in-law was suitably surprised and I suppose relieved that my strange behaviour was not indicative of some disturbance.

Now that I was there, I did not know if I had done the right thing because I did not know where I was going or what I was letting myself in for. I had just seen them go to initiation. Now, I too was going. Pacifying my uncertainty with thoughts of 'I would just have to wait and see', I awaited word from my parents. The next day I was still waiting; the second day my female relatives came. My mother and father's sister (ragadi) came. Upon arriving, they said: 'We came, the child should be initiated then, after all she is here already'. I knew though that I had already told them. Then I entered and started with my initiation.

The truth is that, when I first saw them I was very nervous. I did not talk to anyone. I was just sussing each one out to see what each person was like. There was so much going on. The men were singing, the mosuwe was constantly giving instructions and some of the others were fast asleep. For me, on that winter's night, I would not sleep a wink.

I entered as an uninitiated girl, and left as a woman. I went to initiation, not because I was sick; it was those that kept on making

me do their work, while they were away, that in effect took me to initiation. That is what made me decide to go. That is how I came to be initiated.

– Compiled from interviews conducted with the informant during March 2005 –

According to Zietsman (1972:123), in rural Clocolan, it seemed that school education was often regarded as a form of status and here, contrary to the above, uneducated persons are ridiculed and referred to as 'wild or barbarian'. From my observations and communication with informants, the degree to which people are ridiculed and ostracised from society is no longer the norm. Initiated and uninitiated persons cohabit in a functional and on a daily basis.

4.4.2 Psychological preparation

In areas where initiation is promoted and within families that strongly encourage initiation, girls receive psychological preparation for initiation from an early age. Parents who attach value to initiation teach children that initiation school is an inescapable part of their training and that it is something for each Mosotho child to look forward to. Children are further witnesses to initiation within their communities and sometimes within their households. I observed young children asking about the nature and meaning of the ceremonies that they, as yet, may not attend. Parents play an immense role in the psychological preparation of children. A mother might promise her uninitiated daughter (lethisa) pretty clothes, blankets and other pretty articles – things that belong to initiated girls (barwetsana) like glasses, cups, plates, etc. – a kind of trousseau, as it were. At this stage, only promises are made and no initiation secrets are disclosed. The worst-case scenario for a girl who refuses initiation might be her not receiving new items of clothing. Instead, she is essentially forced to wear tattered clothes in an attempt to embarrass her. It is the initiated girls and women's task to make unwilling girls self-conscious. They might refuse for her to accompany them to collect wood or fetch water. They say they do not walk with uninitiated girls – those that are not yet mature. Additionally, they say uninitiated girls are blind, have not washed their faces yet, smell like grass-hopper/locust (tsiebadimo), are full of lice and smell like a secretary-bird (nkga jwalo ka mamolangwane); and uninitiated girls stand with their sheepskin blankets at the huts (lethisa le ema ka morepo lapeng) (Zietsman 1972:126).

If all the promises, teasing and insults do not help move an uninitiated girl to enrol for initiation, then nothing much can be done. Parents may go as far as to make life difficult for the uninitiated person; however, excluding or discriminating against them during routine activities such as eating, drinking or chatting, is not acceptable. The contention is that the young one will not be able to stand it any longer and of her own accord, will report for her initiation.

Traditionally, if all the other persuasive methods failed, force tactics such as whippings and intimidation were customary. According to my informants, not much may be done if an individual refuses to experience initiation, since her desire and willingness presently figure very prominently in such decisions. Although I argue here and in Section 4.3.1 that attendance is voluntary and based on the candidate's desire, there is a strong interplay between that and societal pressure to undergo initiation.

4.4.3 Determining a tentative date

While initiation is in progress, the promoter will test the feelings of visitors with respect to hosting an initiation the following year; whether there are candidates interested in attending initiation the next year. As soon as surety is attained in this matter, the promoter discusses it with his/her family. If the decision is favourable and the demand warrants an initiation school the following year, a tentative date is set. All visitors receive notification of the intended initiation. Particularly at the closing festivities of the current initiation, the news of the proposed initiation spreads like wildfire. To all those interested, it is said that they should get together early the following year so that a final date may be set.

In the mean time, all those with children who want to attend, may start making arrangements. At the meeting of interested parents, it is decided when the school should take place. In addition, parents ensure that the prospective initiate will report at the promoter's village for the preparatory phase at the designated time (before the official opening of the initiation) (see Section 5.3).

Traditionally, determining the time for initiation was accompanied by interesting customs. For example, according to Sechefo (1909:8), older women would go through the village

in October, blowing whistles (diphalana) made from sorghum stalks. This was to notify the neighbours and public in general that a most important ceremony would soon commence.

4.4.4 For appeasing hunger

Since most know ahead of time roughly when the initiation school is going to take place, there is sufficient time to amass grain supplies and other food. The grain is mainly maize, which is the initiate's primary food source; sorghum for the making of beer at the opening and closing ceremonies was also important. However, these days, money (see 4.2.2) is the most important item that must be collected and saved.

Since the promoter is responsible for the opening and closing festivities, s/he must ensure that there is enough sorghum for the brewing of beer. Other foods needed for the festivities include: bread, meat and vegetables. The latter are commonly picked in the veld or given as gifts. The most important food is thus mealies and maize meal or the money with which to buy it. Unlike in the past, today, because of the move away from subsistence farming, grain is generally bought from the dealers. According to my informants, each initiate has to bring with her a large sack (20 kg) of maize meal, which will serve as her staple food for the initiation period.

The slaughter animal(s) necessary for girls' initiations are sheep, while goats may also be slaughtered (cf. also Sekese 1962:18). More than one sheep is often slaughtered, sometimes, one for each initiate, depending on different customs (and availability). The sheep slaughtered for girls' initiation may be an ewe or wether, but it may never be a ram.

The acquisition of these slaughter animals usually occurs well ahead of time. The sheep needed for girls' initiation are easier to acquire than those for boys' initiation, but often during the opening day a sheep is yet to be procured.

According to my informants, the promoter is responsible for acquiring a sheep for the traditional healer. This sheep is used when the initiates are treated and protected. At one initiation school the promoter's predicament was obvious when the sheep he had

procured for these activities were stolen only twelve hours before the event was set to commence. It is customary where more than one sheep must be slaughtered that the parents acquire additional animals.

4.4.5 Initiation dress (outfit)

The outfits initiates wear during initiation and those for the day they are presented to the community, require much preparation. For example, a girl receives a sheepskin blanket from her maternal uncle. When girls report for initiation, they usually wear an old linen dress and an old, dull blanket (dikobo tse tokwa). This garb is discarded at the onset of the initiation, later to be replaced by a cowhide or sheepskin skirt. Innovative replacements for the traditional animal hide/skin skirts are canvas skirts or even a plastic fertiliser bag (cf. Zietsman 1972:138). The girl is also given a veil, as well as grass or rush/reed hoops (dikgolokwane) to wear around her waist. Tyrell's (1968:97) description of the traditional initiation outfit corresponds closely to that worn presently; for example, girls had masks (presently veils), clay necklaces, grass rings/bands worn around the waist; sheepskin aprons; and leather or linen skirts (cf. also Sheddick 1953:42). It may be assumed that the girls presently need more for their "coming-out" than was the case traditionally.

According to Zietsman (1972:138) the hide/skin skirts, aprons and rings may only be cut and plaited when initiation commences. As will be seen, the preparatory period, before the official opening, is lengthy in Lesotho. However, in the Free State, this period may be as little as a day; therefore, it is reasonable that the outfits are prepared in advance. The day the girls leave the school, elegant cowhide dresses, beads/necklaces, ornaments, decorated towels, new blankets, red-ochre and other necessities are needed. It is important that these items are acquired beforehand.

4.4.6 Visiting your mother's brother

Girls have to visit their mother's brother (malome) before initiation commences. In reality, it is only necessary for the oldest daughter of a family to comply with this visit (Zietsman 1972:140). Younger children may visit him, but it is not considered a prerequisite. This visit is in essence, to obtain the permission of the mother's brother to enter initiation.

Although the girl is essentially going to ask his permission, he may not deny consent as the parents and particularly the father, have already acquiesced. However, behavioural rules dictate that the maternal uncle ought to be consulted. This visit recognises him as representative of the matrilineal side of the family. The mother's oldest brother is consulted in this matter. In the case of one of my informants he commanded (laela): "*You must stick it out, if you go. You must not return home with an incomplete initiation*".

Secondly, this visit is an occasion for him to give the girl a sheepskin blanket (thari) for wearing during initiation. Such a sheepskin kaross is the sign that she has visited her mother's brother. He also has to buy the candidate a new (shop) blanket and other new clothes for the day when she washes off the ochre. It is customary for the graduate to wear this blanket closest to her body and the one from home over it. The oldest daughter to visit the maternal uncle is called mohlajweng. Usually, directly after this visit, the girl reports at the promoter's village where the initiation is to take place. Zietsman contends (1972:141) that no mention is made of this visit in the literature; therefore assuming that it was traditionally not customary. Although acknowledged by my informants, this visit seems no longer the norm, but the exception.

4.4.7 The initiation lodge[52]

The initiation lodges (mophato) that I observed, both in the Free State and Lesotho, were literally built on the same lot as the promoter's homestead. My informants from Lesotho impart that if a woman is hosting an initiation for her daughter, a hut, known as mohlomafatshe or mokgoro, a hut with a very low, protruding entrance is built. Surrounding this hut is a cane fence, forming a courtyard known as the seotlwana. Zietsman (1972:146) opines that on the Friday before the opening ceremony commences, girls collect materials to build the courtyard fence, but such a statement seems flawed since they already occupy the initiation compound during the preparatory period. The primary function of the courtyard fence is to create a secluded space in front of the hut where it is relatively private, away from the scrutiny of men and uninitiated persons. It may consist of dried khaki bush [*Alternanthera achyrantha*], maize (mealie) stalks, tjhelabelo, thatch grass, etc. Because the girls' initiation lodge is usually a secluded hut on the periphery of the village, it is not necessary to build a special

[52] See Photos 2, 3, 4 & 5.

initiation hut. There are, however, cases in which a special initiation hut is erected, away from the village, "*in the mountains*". Notably, such lodges are common in mainly populated areas such as Qwaqwa or other towns. In such circumstances, this special hut or shelter is constructed ahead of time and is not accompanied by any ceremony.

The entrances to the initiation hut and courtyard may face any direction (Zietsman 1972:242). In the centre of the quadrangle, there is a fireplace for the preparation of food and around which all the nightly activities are focused. A paraffin lamp is usually the only source of light, other than the fire.

Photo 2: Initiation lodge in final stages of preparation

Photo 3: Two informants standing within the initiation courtyard

Photo 4: Entrance to a mohlomafatshe hut built for female initiation

Photo 5: The promoter showing off the inside of the initiation hut

4.5 SUMMARY

Without prospective initiation candidates, the hosting of initiation is unjustified. Therefore, once potential initiates indicate their desire to attend, a number of other considerations come into play. That the positions of the important initiation functionaries be filled with worthy placements is next on the list of proverbial factors that influence deliberations for hosting an initiation. The event of initiation is a serious institution, the success of which may not be possible without careful budgeting. The initiates' parents and the promoter most heavily shoulder the financial burden. Payments must be made to the traditional healer and a number of food and beautifying items are required. The availability of a suitable locale at which the initiation will be held is also significant. It must comply with certain standards necessary for the special occurrence in the candidate's life. In this instance, not only are the physical structure and availability of water and wood important, but so too are congenial attitudes from the community as a

whole. The church and school as institutions of authority within such communities may at times encumber attendance and the overall attitude towards hosting an initiation in their midst. That the season during which an initiation is held is significant, is self-evident, but that other circumstances not in the control of the conveners such as droughts, civil or political unrest, may also determine whether an initiation will be held or not.

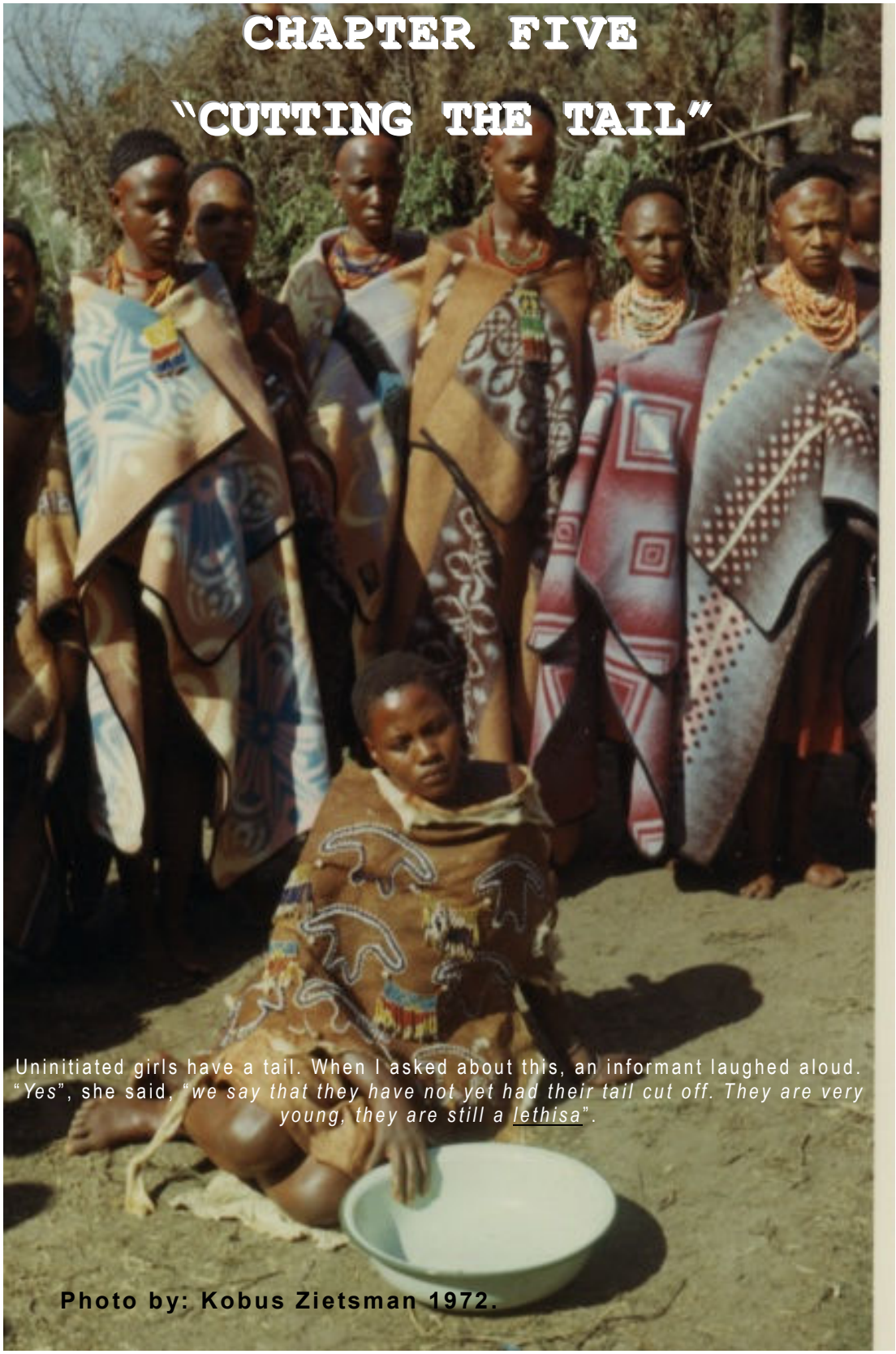
All the factors that may influence initiation are significantly interrelated, highlighting one or some above others and their order of importance may be costly. If pressed, besides the presence of the candidates themselves, the financial situation of both the parents and the promoter is paramount.

The requirements or criteria of admission to initiation among the Basotho are largely flexible. This is demonstrated by the fact that a specific age, or life stage, is not an exclusive standard regulating the right of admission; rather that very few prospective candidates would be denied access based on slight deviations of the normal standard applied. This is evident in the attitude that infringers of tribal law, delinquents of a number of kinds, sorcerers and even mentally or physically challenged persons are accepted.

A number of preparations, some emanating from the early socialisation process, to more immediate arrangements are effected before the actual commencement of the initiation process. As in any other society, the pressures and attitudes from outside mould decisions made at an individual level. Pertaining to initiation, the unenviable status and position of the uninitiated are impressed, as are the desirability of undergoing and completing the initiation, highly regarded. Of greater importance is that, the date for the initiation must be set, in order that a reasonable time-frame be given for the saving of money and the collecting and obtaining of specified foods and animals necessary for the initiation. The various components of the initiation outfit must also be prepared. For the prospective candidate as her imminent visit to her maternal uncle draws near, he too must acquire the necessary items prescribed by culture and his connection to his niece. For the promoter, besides the food and drink requirements, s/he too must make haste to ensure that the initiation hut and yard are suitable to receive the initiates who will arrive shortly.

CHAPTER FIVE

"CUTTING THE TAIL"



Uninitiated girls have a tail. When I asked about this, an informant laughed aloud. "*Yes*", she said, "*we say that they have not yet had their tail cut off. They are very young, they are still a lethisa*".

Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972.

5.1 GENERAL

The previous chapter offers an introduction to female initiation among the Basotho. It deliberates the dynamics at play when considering hosting an initiation, the requirements candidates should measure up to and the types of preparations that should be made in advance, among others, by the prospective initiate and her family, as well as the other functionaries.

This chapter, in my view, is the climax of the study. It is a description of the initiation process from the time the girl reports to the lodge, until after she has graduated and stands at the threshold of womanhood. In presenting the empirical data, Van Gennep's tripartite scheme (as outlined in Chapter Two) is taken into account. Gleaned from the fieldwork experience and the resultant empirical data, the Basotho too distinguish three primary stages of the female initiation process, each of which is marked by observable colour changes. When girls officially enter initiation, their bodies are smeared black. After a number of weeks or months, depending on where the initiation is held, the black is removed and they then paint themselves white. As the initiation draws to a close, the white is washed off and replaced by a red-ochre mixture. The visible three-colour distinction that the Basotho make during their female initiation ceremonies, broadly corresponds with Van Gennep's ([1909] 1977) scheme. For this reason, in the presentation and analysis of the empirical data it is logical that the phases as conceptualised by the Basotho be used. However, it becomes evident that pre- and post initiation periods exist and warrant elucidation. Following these distinct and yet interrelated stages already differentiated by supporters of the culture institution, this chapter is divided into five sections (see Table 5.1). The first part deals with the preparatory period immediately prior to the official opening of the institution. The second, third and fourth sections, which for understandable reasons I call black, white and red, take us on the girl's intimate journey, the hardships and trials she endures with apparent stoicism, all in the name of custom, while the last section enlightens us on her life after initiation.

Table 5.1: Female initiation among the Basotho: An elementary conceptual scheme.

	Preparatory period (rwalla & dika)	**Black phase (pilo)**	**White phase (phepa)**	**Red phase (letsoku)**	**Post-initiation period**
Length:					
Lesotho	2-3 months	1-2 months	1-2 months	1-3 weeks	6 months-1 year
Free State	1-4 days	2 weeks	2-3 weeks	1 week	6 months
Initiates known as:	Uninitiated girls (mathisa)	Initiates of the black phase (bale wa pilo)	Initiates of the white phase (bale wa phepa)	Initiated girls (ditswejane)	Marriageable young women (barwetsana)

The story begins directly after the visit to the candidate's uncle, when the prospective initiate goes to the promoter's village (motse) or the village where the initiation is to be held, if they are not the same place. Most potential initiates converge on the village at the designated time, while others arrive just before initiation commences and still others, a few days after commencement. Those who do not visit their maternal uncle (malome) beforehand, report directly to the village. Typically, this journey to the village is not made alone. Candidates are accompanied by their mother, female initiated family members or a friend and handed over to the promoter (monga mophato). In some cases, a girl arrives at the initiation village without an escort. This is usually the case when she has run away to be initiated (ho titimela), i.e. without parental consent. In such instances, parents approach the promoter after the girl has joined the initiation school. Sometimes the girl's head is immediately shaved and she is inoculated/treated (phatsa). In other cases, such actions are carried out only when the initiation (mophato) is officially opened. On this first night, prospective initiates sleep at the initiation lodge under the supervision of the promoter (if the promoter is a man, then it is his wife).

5.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

Initiates are categorised according to the stage of initiation in which they find themselves (refer to Table 5.1). During the preparatory and very early stages of the initiation – until just before initiates smear their bodies with the black fusion (pilo) – they are known as mathisa. Once they have endured the significant actions associated with the two days –

referred to as Madibeng and Mapumelo – they are called bale. After they have graduated and completed the refresher events, the initiates are called distwejane and barwetsana, respectively. That certain titles are accorded some of the candidates has already been discussed in 4.3.2.

One of the distinguishing factors of the female initiation institution is that no secret language is used. Certainly, a strange phenomenon is that the initiates (bale) are given male names. This name is generally an insignificant one and does not *per se* relay a hidden meaning, besides that this is henceforth known as their initiation name; for example, Ntai. Molobe, as senior initiate, for instance, is named after the traditional healer (ngaka) who inoculated (phatsa) them and treated the initiation compound (mophato) and immediate surrounds. Molobe further receives a pouch of medicine from the traditional doctor so that she may treat the initiates, if the instructress (mosuwe) is not present. When initiates depart from the school, they each receive the name of their father or grandfather, thus, Ra..... someone. This name is their age group (thaka) name.

Besides the initiates (mathisa or bale), participants include the teachers and coaches, as well as a few young already initiated girls (barwetsana). The latter were initiated the previous year and they help the initiates with their songs and dances. Further, there are only initiated women and girls who, from time to time, visit the initiation lodge and a secluded place in the field.

5.3 THE PREPARATORY PERIOD: TOUGHENING UP

Darkness overcomes witchcraft

The preparatory period, known as ho rwalla, may last for four days on the farms of the eastern Free State, to as long as 2-3 months, in Lesotho. Before taking up residence, initiates are arranged according to totem affinity and the initiation compound is protected (tharisa and upella) during a special ritual. The traditional healer and his/her apprentices, dressed in time-honoured healer attire, chanting and fortified with special medicines

hasten to bury a number of medicine sticks (mofifi)[53] around the perimeter of the initiation compound, including the secluded courtyard (mophato and seotlwana). Nobody besides the initiates and initiated women and girls may enter this area. The immediate surroundings of the promoter's dwelling are also included, as do they mist (foka) the corner posts and roofs of all the household lean-tos with a cow-tail switch regularly dipped in liquid medicines. Around the back of the initiation hut itself, on the tips of two very long reeds, reminiscent of the bull-rush head, a clay or putty-like concoction of protective medicines towers above the proceedings below. The doctor treats the watering place in the same fashion and Molobe is given a pouch with medicines (cf. Kriel 1997:4-7).

A definite energy is palpable during these proceedings. While the specialist, for example, is burying the medicine sticks, he hesitates for a split second as he approaches. The seat I was allocated from which to observe could either be included within the protective circle, or not. Although having met him before the proceedings, I was unsure whether he was going to banish me. My heart was beating very fast as he bore down on me. In an instant, he veered behind me, including me within the protective surrounds. Interestingly, as I had occasion to walk more freely after this ritual, awaiting the initiates who were being inoculated (phatsa) within the courtyard enclosure (seotlwana), I was prohibited from photographing the tall medicine sticks placed in the thatch roof on the back side of the initiation hut. Capturing them for posterity in this manner is believed to quash their powers.

From observations, it becomes apparent that mainly Lesotho initiates undergo two protective, inoculation rituals, almost certainly due to the extended length of the initiation – once, when they begin with the preparatory phase and again during the official opening of the initiation. It is more often than not the more junior doctor who performs this ritual, whereas when they enter, the senior functionary is responsible for the protective ritual. So too, the medicines administered then are said to be very potent. Similar to the immediate environs of the initiation compound being safeguarded (tharisa), so too the initiates themselves must be protected and treated with medicines, if the

[53] Some facts about Mofifi: Botanical name *Rhamnus prinoides*, common name Dogwood (dense shrub or small tree); In Sesotho 'mofifi' means darkness; In Lesotho they say, "darkness overcomes witchcraft"; and twigs or little pieces of the Dogwood are applied as a protective charm to ward off lightning and evil influences from homes, crops and brings luck in hunting.

result is to be a good one (cf. also Dutton 1923:87-88). The purpose is to make initiates strong (ba tiê) for the duration of the initiation. Specifically too the ritual intends to ward off evil forces (tibella moloi) in their numerous forms, as well as to keep lightning at bay (tibella maru). "*If the doctor's medicines are powerful, the lightning may hit and strike all around you, but you will not be harmed*."

The traditional healer performs this protective ritual. Two slight parallel cuts[54] are made on significant points of the body. Notably, these include: at the base of the throat, at the hairline in the centre of the forehead, on top of the head, at the base of the skull, on the points of the shoulders, the inner part of the elbows, inner and outer wrists, lower back, at the back of the knees, ankles, the top of the feet and between the big and second toes. The practitioner applies (sesetsa) protective medicines into these small incisions. My informants explain the linctus as being a black 'secret formula', with a granually, Vaseline-like consistency, known as lenaka.

Dull blankets

After these important protective rituals, the initiates (mathisa), wearing only their dull blankets, are escorted among a throng of ululating women, through the village, to the veld (naheng). Here a place, hidden by trees and rocks is found, where candidates will receive coaching until just before they graduate. The notion is that it should be so inconspicuous that if and when people pass, the concealed candidates should not be seen nor heard. At the first opportunity, the rules (melao) are clearly set out for all the new candidates. Among other things, what they must do, how they should work, how they should walk, how they should show respect, etc.

Before the sparrows fart

In the very rural areas, initiates begin rising by four in the morning. Besides the initiation activities, all the domestic chores such as fetching water, lie ahead. Unlike in developed areas, running water is not on hand. Fondly reminiscing, an informant relates that she was often the first to wake and there is a prescribed song with which to wake the others. "*If for example, I get up before them, I do not wake them the normal way. There is a*

[54] Informants impart that unlike in the past, separate blades are used to make these nicks to prevent the spread of disease.

drum that I play and sing at the same time so that they get up." This song is simply known as the "day-break song" (pina ya mafube).

Initiates take turns cooking (and no-one is singled out). Food preparation (cooking) is done within the secluded courtyard, where they eat twice a day, once in the morning (08:00) and once in the evening (18:00). Sharing from communal dishes, the initiates eat with their hands. An informant complains that some candidates have dirty hands and some even spit on the food – which makes this practice unsavoury. She also imparts her fear of disease that might be transmitted this way. About the spitting, she says that often jealousy among initiates or rows develop and they try to be vindictive towards one another. The consequence is: "*if you do not have a strong stomach, you are very likely to go hungry.*" Regarding this issue, the informant does concede that, in the beginning, you have the opportunity to tell the instructress that sharing from communal bowls is not for you or that you do not eat certain foods (e.g. mutton). It is then her responsibility to dish out a portion for you before the meal commences, as well as to ensure that the prepared food accords with your dietary restrictions. Alternatively, you may then prepare the food that you do eat. If this is the case, the most senior initiate (molobe) still has to lift her hand to her mouth before you may begin your meal. When the initiates go out into the veld no utensils are taken with them. An exception to the rule may be a tin of motoho (sour porridge drink).

During the initiation period, initiates may eat practically anything, besides food that is prepared and brought from another village (Zietsman 1972:243). In this event, after the traditional doctor has screened it and perhaps treated it, to draw out any hidden ill will, it may be eaten. However, for the duration of this preparatory period, initiation candidates must comply with certain food restrictions. Notably, the limitation placed on eating eggs and innards (malana) is emphasised, because of their perceived association with fertility. The rule is that during the time of the official opening, "*you will be given*" (o tla o di fuwa) of these prohibited food items in a special custom. The staple food consists mainly of mealie pap; cooked mealies (dikgobe); vegetables, essentially of a green leafy kind (moroho); and a sour porridge drink (motoho), while meat too, is regularly eaten.

From all the initiation discussions I have had with informants, all agree that there is plenty of food. Considering the hardships that they undergo, I thought that graduating

initiates would at least have lost weight. On the contrary, an instructress from Lesotho goes so far as to say that when initiates graduate from initiation they are 'fat'. According to her, this is so "*because they are happy*". A well-rounded figure is perceived as particularly desirable and a sign of fertility.

Every morning at about 09:00, after they have eaten and completed their domestic chores, initiates go to the veld. Accompanying the initiates on these daily excursions are the initiated girls and sometimes the instructress. Although the boys on the farms seldom take cattle to pasture, as was traditionally the practice, the initiates' departure time remains between eight and nine in all the areas that encompassed my investigation in order to have avoided contact with the herd boys. During the preparatory period, once in the veld, candidates collect large amounts of wood, which is stockpiled at the initiation compound. Primarily it fuels the fire for cooking, warmth and light. But since this preparatory period (rwalla) aims at toughening initiates to cope better with the ordeals to come, gathering and carrying wood serves partly to strengthen them physically. In contrast, after the official opening of the initiation, candidates (bale) gather only small bundles of wood (see Photo 6). The bundles of wood are not carried by initiates on their heads, as is typical of African women carrying heavy loads. Instead, they carry them on their backs, since the veils they wear make it impractical to balance an irregular shaped bundle on their head.

Before their return to the initiation compound, the initiates spend time at their secluded place in the veld (leqhalo/qhalo ya bale), where the girls may on occasion catnap. More purposefully, coaching in the secret songs (dikoma) and initiation and totem laws (melao) commence (i.e. Basotho custom). Moitse (1994:45) explains the significance of the former in the following citation: "[o]ne of the most important aspects of the initiation schools is *koma*. *Koma* is a highly guarded secret teaching of the institution and as such is viewed as the 'soul'" of initiation. The secrecy, she explains is to "safeguard and maintain" the institution's integrity (Moitse 1994:46). To this Guma (1962:116) adds these secret songs are "couched in a secret language tending to be obscure and unintelligible to the uninitiated". At once, this brings to light a problem because "[t]hey found in them the meaning they wanted to find and not the meaning they actually contained" (Rakotsoane 2001:21). There are, what is more, a number of games and dances performed to keep busy, but which also make up an important component of the initiates'

physical training before the initiation officially opens. In the afternoon, traditionally the hour of the day before the cattle return to the kraal, the girls return to the lodge.

Photo 6: Initiates during the black stage returning home with their bundles of wood

Table 5.2: Types of songs sung at female initiation

Secret initiation songs (dikoma)	**Light initiation songs (dipina tsa hae or dipina tsa ka lapeng)**	**Songs of praise (mangae)**
♠ Known & sung only by initiated women ♠ Sung only in a secluded place in the veld & down in the ditches (lengopeng) where important rites take place	♠ Not secret ♠ Sung during the day and night while in the veld or at the initiation compound	♠ Not secret ♠ Sung at the initiation compound at night

The cane

Singing songs to pass the time sounds like pure entertainment. However, certain formal forms of instruction are intended with some types (see Table 5.2 for the categories of songs distinguished for female initiation purposes). The secret songs, known only to initiates and initiated women and girls, are one such type. Rakotsoane (2001:16) highlights this principle when he says "[s]o as they were memorizing them they were at the same time memorizing the traditions, customs and important Basotho religious teachings enshrined in them." Dances, clapping and drum playing may also accompany some songs, while others are exclusively sung in a kneeling position. Secret songs are not sung while gathering wood out in the veld where others may hear their secret content and therefore, they will never be sung at night at the initiation compound. Although not secret, initiation songs (dipina tsa hae or dipina tsa ka lapeng) sung in the veld or at the initiation lodge, also have pedagogic value. They are light songs that are accompanied by rhythmical dance movements, slapping the hide skirts and the monotonous playing of the initiation drum (moropa).

A comprehensive analysis of all the songs and their particular meaning is a momentous task falling outside the scope of this particular study. Preliminary examinations do however, allow certain judgements which are in line with those made by for example, Zietsman (1972: 239, 246-249, xxx-lxiv); Buys (1981:72, 143-144) and Moitse (1994:46, 67-70, 72-75, 97, 117-120). Table 5.3 presents certain recurrent themes gleaned from a number of secret and light initiation songs, as well as songs of praise

Table 5.3: Themes emerging from secret and light initiation songs, as well as songs of praise

Secret initiation songs (dikoma)	**Light initiation songs (dipina tsa hae or dipina tsa ka lapeng)**	**Songs of praise (mangae)**
♠ Sexual intercourse is the privilege of married and initiated women. ♠ It is the woman's task to make intercourse as pleasurable as possible for the man. ♠ Married women should not deny their husbands' advances, but at the same time, they should not concede to the flirtations of other men. ♠ Themes related to being a woman; for example, menstruation and what it means. ♠ Predominantly young girls are cautioned not to be licentious or fornicate with boys, particularly not to become pregnant before marriage. ♠ References to female sexual genitalia and that enlarged labia minora are desirable. ♠ Candidates are warned not to abscond from the initiation school. ♠ Divulging initiation secrets to uninitiated persons and particularly men is prohibited.	Light initiation songs, such as the secret songs, have many sexual references. For example, suggestions of/that: ♠ The practices of 'to initiate' (ho bolotsa). ♠ Withholding sex in marriage is undesirable. ♠ Uninitiated persons are sexually disappointing. ♠ Menstruation symptoms. ♠ Genitalia and the functions thereof. Light initiation songs among other things teach about: ♠ Respect for those interested in initiation. ♠ Men's preference for initiated girls. ♠ The splendour of the opening feast. ♠ The length of female initiation school.	Tribute is paid to: ♠ Traditional way of marriage. ♠ Transcendence of men with many cattle. ♠ Initiation institution. ♠ Initiates' mothers and the instructress. ♠ Procedures that are adhered to. A serious caution goes out about divulging the secrets of initiation – particularly to Europeans (whites). Songs of praise further mention: ♠ The participants and functionaries of the female institution. ♠ That initiates have male names. ♠ That Molobe is the senior initiate. ♠ That the people of the crocodile (Bafokeng) have the highest rank.

Examples of secret initiation songs are presented at a later stage when they speak to particular matters of significance for female initiation. Below are three light initiation songs included for illustrative purposes.[55]

Ha yona (There at *that* place)

Ha yona e soka jwang? Monna Tanyane, e Tanyane Tanka bodiba setlopo E kang bolele metsing Bolele ba metsi ba ha Motnayane Sehleke-hleke se hara noka Se tshelwa ke ngwale e telele.	How does the new initiate steer the stick when she makes her food? How does she do it before her man – the feared Tanka of the river? Before the growth like the green water weed in its wide.	Daar by dié plek, hoe word die pap geroer? Die man Tanyane, ja Tanyane Die tenk is diep soos die waterkuil Soos die wier in die water Die wier van die water by Motanyane Die eiland in die rivier Word net deur die lang inisiant oorgegaan.

Kgokotole (Someone's power or value is put to the test)

Kgokotole o ha Motanyane Robeha, bakisa basadi Basadi ba mathisa.	Kgokotole, you are at Motanyane's place Break to disappointment and shame they Who have not gone the ritual way, the uninitiated.	Kgokotole is by Motanyane Breek en stel die vrouens teleur Die vrouens wat nie geinisiëer is nie.

Thimo-thimo (Doubt-doubt)

Thimo-thimo ngwale Ka hura ke hore ke le dikobo Ngwale ka hura ke le dikobo.	Oh the newly initiate coughed Disappearing from home Covered with blankets The new initiate from home and departed.	Die meisie-inisiant twyfel-twyfel Ek het in die kombers gehoereer Ek, die meisie-inisiant, het in die kombers gehoereer.

Sources: Zietsman K 1972 *Inisiasie by die Sotho-sprekende plattelandse bantoebevolking van Clocolan*. Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation. Fakulteit Lettere en wysbegeerte (Departement Volkekunde). Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat. Bloemfontein. Light initiation songs (dipina tsa hae or dipina tsa ka lapeng) no. 1, 5 & 11, pp. xxxvii, xxxviii & xli.
Bereng PM Translation of Sesotho female initiation songs into English. December 2005. Personal communication. Maseru. Lesotho.

Two important edicts (melao) are emphasised during the initiation process. The first is that initiates should respect older people (ho hlompa batho). To fully achieve this, initiates are taught how their kinship relationships work; how each member is to be addressed; and precisely who should be respected. Additionally, the history of the country and the deeds of exceptional characters are emphasised. The second is that

[55] Take note that the Afrikaans translations of the initiation songs presented both here and elsewhere differ from the English versions. The author of the English versions does not deny the use of crude language in the original songs but opines that no respectable Mosotho would under 'normal' circumstances use such profanity. In keeping with etiquette, for the purpose of this study, the more modest venacular is accepted yet guarding that the essential meaning (both symbolic and other) is retained throughout.

boys should not be pestered and above all, that initiates should avoid pregnancy before marriage. In Basotho culture, no direct sex education is imparted, so aspects relating to menstruation, childbirth, keeping house, etc. are not directly taught here (cf. Buys 1981:73, 144). The perception is that her mother would teach the girl all these things at home. Therefore, most of these things are conveyed indirectly to the girl by means of different songs during the initiation period.

As an institution of learning, discipline is applied throughout. Zietsman (1972:246) opines that punishment is minimal. When, however, it is necessary, the instructress administers it with a strap or a switch. On occasion, the accompanying initiated girls may also mete out punishment. Initiates are punished when unable to master the songs and dances; while insolence, disobedience and disrespect are more severely punished by the primary instructress. Informants explain that initiates are collectively punished, even for the transgression of a single girl. One informant laments that although it is said that Basotho culture is taught during initiation, she has yet to see it. According to her, the only thing she sees them teaching, "*is the stick*". She continues by saying, "*they believe that you will be hit until you are submissive and break down. I haven't seen that they say 'you see, this is your culture'*."

Friend or foe

During the preparatory and black periods, men and uninitiated women and girls are sworn at or driven away with switches if encountered. The warning goes that if encountered, uninitiated women or girls will be taken and forced to complete the initiation with those they come across. The intruder's family would be notified so that they can provide the new initiate with all the necessities. My informants assure me that this is no longer the case, although they concede that falling upon such vulnerable persons would in the past have elicited great wrath and possibly retribution.

Known visitors during the day or at night do not have to offer a password of sorts. Strangers, on the other hand, must sing a certain song to prove that they have been initiated before they are admitted to the secret place in the veld or initiation compound. According to Zietsman (1972:250), it is the great initiation song, Batlisisa lekoko, only known to initiates. My informants however, do not know this song, perhaps indicating

that there is no standardised song of admission. Again, regional and totemic differences exist.

Initiated women and girls who visit the initiation school during the day or night, do so out of interest to hear secret and other songs, or they go to instruct the initiates in these. Alternatively, this visit may simply be as support to a candidate. Once candidates have made the transition to the white phase, men may visit the initiation compound in the evenings, requesting that initiates (bale) sing initiation songs, recite songs of praise, as well as perform the dances associated with each. Typically, the initiates readily accept such requests.

The Pied Piper

After eating and completing their duties at the initiation lodge, initiates are seldom permitted to retire early. The evenings are times when song and dance receive much attention. The activities of the day known as ho rwalla, are contrasted with those of the evenings referred to as ho dika. Nightly activities consist mainly of the singing of light initiation songs (dipina tsa hae) and praise songs (mangae). These take place within the secluded courtyard around the fire and are accompanied by dances, clapping of the hide skirts and the playing of the initiation drum (moropa). The initiation drum is a round, empty tin that is covered with taut cowhide that is hung around the percussionist's neck from a thong and is then played on both sides with two sticks. The drum may also be placed on the ground and played by hand, mainly at night, with the singing and dancing following the rhythm set by the drummer. According to Moitse (1994:92), the initiation drum is a way of communicating with the ancestral spirits.

The songs of praise (mangae) (refer to Table 5.3) should always be sung while sitting or more specifically, when on hands and knees (rea hoba). Some songs are sung while crouching or huddling close to trap the sound of the initiates' throaty singing without the accompaniment of clapping or drumming (cf. also Moitse 1994:67, 70). According to Zietsman (1972:248), they are not secret and may be requested by anyone visiting the initiation. This means that they may be sung out in the veld; however, according to other reports they are permitted only in the seclusion of the initiation courtyard. Some informants' descriptions contradict the above when they say songs of praise are the secret songs of boys' initiation; therefore, they are the equivalent of secret songs, sung

at the girls' initiation. Because songs of praise were originally associated with male initiation, a comment such as that made above, may be understood. For the purposes of this study, I therefore treat them as songs restricted to the initiation courtyard.

Included below are two songs of praise in which the mothers and Malobe are spoken of:

Helang bomme (Oh my mothers)

Helang bo-'me

Helang bo-'me, basadi ba pelo di thata Helang, ba ke ke ba bolotsa motho Helang bo-'me, helang ba ka bolotsa kgutsanyane Helang wena, o se beng Helang bo-'me, basei e kaba kgongwana Ba e apesa Motanyane A kene metsing ka wena.	Oh the mothers – they the women! Their hearts are dry and hard Nay could they a being initiate Initiate into womanhood but an orphan sacrificed to a beast For the lord of the deep stream Who would with you into the deepest waters sojourn.	O moeders, vrouens met die harde harte O, hulle sal nie 'n mens kan inisiëer nie O moeders, o hulle kan 'n weeskind inisiëer O, jy wat sonder ouers is O moeders, die besnyers kan 'n klein bees wees Hulle kan dit vir Motanyane aantrek En met jou daarmee in die water gaan.

Kgokgoba (Walk bent)

Kgokgoba, e kgokgoba Molobe a kgokgoba Ngwale ngwajana kgokgoba	Bend your body low go down to your knees Molobe did slowly walk with the head and body down to the knees The young initiate, go down As you proceed in the process of your walking and your search.	Loop krom, ja, loop krom Laat Molobe (senior inisiant) ook krom loop Die inisiant en die inisiantjie loop krom.

Sources: Zietsman K 1972 *Inisiasie by die Sotho-sprekende plattelandse bantoebevolking van Clocolan*. Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation. Fakulteit Lettere en wysbegeerte (Departement Volkekunde). Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat. Bloemfontein. Songs of praise (mangae) no. 3 & 6, pp. xxxi & xxxiii.
Bereng PM Translation of Sesotho female initiation songs into English. December 2005. Personal communication. Maseru. Lesotho.

If candidates have difficulty mastering the songs or the steps that accompany them, punishment is duly dealt out. According to an informant, at these occasions, the person meting out punishment is a person whom you know. Although the punishment is not exactly light, it is minor in comparison with what is to come.

Laws (melao) are not taught at night at the initiation compound, nor are secret songs sung here. The initiation compound is usually too close to the other huts of the village and the danger remains that uninitiated persons will learn the Basotho's *secrets*. As soon

as all the visitors have departed and all requests have been obliged, the initiates, instructress and the initiated girls retire to the initiation hut to sleep (approximately 22:00). I was unable to determine whether special behavioural rules apply within the hut, but I do know that initiates and other people do not sleep according to a particular order. Differentiating this period from those to come, initiates sleep within the courtyard enclosure under a canopy of stars, but not inside the initiation hut. The only rule consistently reported is that Molobe is always the first to enter and leave the hut. Zietsman (1972:251) however, states that not all schools follow this procedure.

Thwarting vulnerability

The belief is that while a girl is undergoing initiation, she is very vulnerable to all kinds of influences. Her susceptibility increases the chances that something may happen to her or her training might go awry, with disastrous consequences. The medicines with which initiates are inoculated are but a precaution and by no means all-powerful. For this reason, the girl's close relatives and those directly or indirectly coming into contact with her must follow certain behavioural rules and abstain from certain things. These restrictions help to make the girl's training a success and to protect evil influences from harming her.

For the duration of the initiation period, therefore, the girl's parents, the promoter, instructress and traditional healer(s) may not have sexual relations with their spouses or anyone else; nor may the initiated girls who act as assistants in the course of the initiation, involve themselves in sexual activities. Even casual visitors are subject to this restriction, at least for the night that they visit the initiation lodge.

Another restriction is that no people named above may eat eggs (mahe) or the crust (bohoho or bokhokho) that forms in the pap pot for the duration of the initiation. Additionally, any wild animal, for example, hare, porcupine or springbok, is prohibited during this time. Over and above these, the instructress may decide if other food restrictions are to apply. The Bakubung, for example, believe that only home-cooked food may be consumed during this time and that the initiate's mother may not go visiting during this time.

A further rule is that the initiate's parents, instructress, doctor, promoter and initiated aides may not cut their hair or shave their beards before the school is over. According to some informants, such taboos are no longer strictly adhered to. Related to this, the hair of the girl's siblings is not to be cut beforehand. The dwellings of the above-mentioned people, if of a traditional kind, may also not be plastered before the initiation has run its course (Zietsman 1972:194). Another tenet is that the girl's parents may not greet someone by the hand during the initiation period.

If one of these rules is broken, the transgressor will be punished the next time s/he visits the initiation compound. Alternatively, s/he will be banned from the initiation lodge. It is believed that if one of the girl's relatives breaks these rules, she will go mad or become feeble-minded.

After the preparatory period is thoroughly completed, a day is set aside for initiates to enter officially (beya letsatsi ba tla kena).

The inclusion of the following piece of oral history strikingly demonstrates the importance of the protective rituals associated with initiation and the ever-present threat from malevolent forces.

All that remain are shadows

Throughout the research area, a legend is recited, demonstrating the forces at play during female initiation. One version is, 'the chief's daughter was taken to initiation without his permission. He was furious about this, so he sent his warriors to fetch her. Since unwarranted persons are not permitted to enter the 'sacred' initiation area, the dingaka concocted powerful potions to ward off the intruders. In an instant, the chief's soldiers were turned to stone – visible from below the mountain, they have yet to return.'

Another rendition goes that 'the figures one sees from below the mountain are in fact initiates. Apparently, while a female initiation was underway, the doctor (ngaka) and the owner, or promoter of the school (monga mophato) had a disagreement. The doctor contrived to get the owner back. Therefore, he sent lighting to destroy the school. The lightning came and killed the initiates in an unnatural death, leaving their *shadows* (diriti) permanently imprinted in the sandstone wall. Sometimes when people pass the place where the girls died, they can hear them singing.'

Not satisfied with these accounts I (the researcher) travelled to the mountain to see for myself. It was mid-morning when we arrived, but despite my guide's pointing to a place on the western side of the sandstone face, I could not see anything. Apparently, the distinct figures perpetually watching over the valley may best be seen in the late afternoon rays when the sun lights the hidden place.

Obviously disappointed, we were going to head home, but on rounding the mountain, we saw a village at its foot. This would be an opportunity to find out the real story behind the legend. We

slowed down, asking directions to the chief's residence. Announcing oneself to the chief is good etiquette. Besides, who better to ask, than the custodian of the area's oral history.

Morena Rampai was in residence, dressed in informal work clothes and gumboots; he was overseeing the work in his gardens when we arrived. His aid greeted us, enquiring about our purpose. Seating us, he disappeared around the back of the house and some minutes later reported that the chief would see us.

The Morena said that this village was called ha Rampai. He continued: "*because most of us are Bataung, they call the village Taung ha Rampai*." About the legend he said, "*the place that you want to know about: yes, it's true that there is a legend about it*." Refuting the above accounts, he explained, "*No, that is not true. For example, people that are in that car who do not know about the history of this village, are just going to drive past and make up all sorts of stories. They make up all kinds of stories. But the people of here know the real story*." Briefly, he recounted the story of the place known as Stibing, by the locals. "*Now, there were girls being initiated … girls, young girls, while they are bale when letŝholo (lightning) hit them. When it hit them, that seriti (shadow) of theirs remained behind until now. When you arrive there, you can see their shadows – they are imprinted there at the mouth of the cave. Hence, when that lightning hit, all that was left was their shadow. It is a thing of long, long ago. Because of that, it has started fading bit by bit. However, it does still exist. You can see about eight or nine of them. In the beginning, it was said that there were about fifteen of them. This lightning killed them completely, dead, dead. That is where their path ended. I mean you can see them; that is where they will remain for all time.*

When you climb up there, you do not see anything, but when you are down below you see them. You will be able to see from the bottom, but if you arrive up there, you can't see anything. Some of the tourists even try to go up there, but when they get there, they see nothing then they take some photos. This is where the bit of history (knowledge) that I know, ends, because this is an old thing. It took place about 1910, from 1910 or a couple of years preceding it, perhaps 1908.

Presently, during the initiation for girls they do not take them there anymore; they are afraid to. They take them a bit nearer – not there. They are afraid of that thing, lightning."

Adding to what the Morena was saying, another informant said that the initiates were struck down because the traditional doctor's medicines could not withstand the hex of the witchcraft specialists.

- Compiled from interviews conducted with a number of informants during August 2005 -

5.4 THREE COLOURS: BLACK

The end of the preparatory period and the beginning of the black phase must coincide with the full moon. Sekese (1962:17-18) maintains that traditionally, when the new moon appears for the first time, the man/woman who sees it first shouts out loudly: Ha o ae bonele tlung! (You did not see it while you were in the hut). All the girls who have prepared for initiation and hear the words immediately come forward and then they quickly run to the veld (cf. also Moitse 1994:66, 69). The women of the village who follow them, then join them and sing for some hours. Then all the women return to the village while yodelling and reciting praise songs. At the village, they break up and go to their respective homes. At this time, an idiomatic song is sung in which the women who

stayed behind are mocked and ridiculed (cf. Zietsman 1972:151, for this song). Nowadays, the rising of the full moon is monitored (see 4.2.6), but no ceremony or special conduct is associated with it. Furthermore, women do not habitually go around the village singing all kinds of songs. These days, this might offend, because there might be factions in the village who do not agree with initiation. Presently, in contrast with earlier times, there is talk that ceremonies and actions are kept to a minimum. Possible reasons for this shift include: that people do not have as much time, so unnecessary ceremonies and prolixity are for convenience' sake excluded. Additionally, Zietsman (1972:152) contends that the precise meanings of all the traditional ceremonies are not always known to all present, so for safety's sake, they are excluded.

Depending on where the initiation is held, this stage may last from two weeks to two months, which according to hearsay, was until the circumcision wounds had healed.

The official opening

Women enjoy freedom at opening ceremonies, making girls' initiation ceremonies a woman's matter of great importance (Ashton 1952:57). Girls' initiation ceremonies are well attended and initiated women participate enthusiastically, which is in line with remarks, for example, by Sechefo (1909:9). Contrary to the present, traditional opening ceremonies would take place at the 'ditches' (lengopeng) and would last as long as three days. Men were only authorised to participate in the beer drinking and the slaughter of the sheep, which happened on the last day of the feast (cf. Zietsman 1972:161).

After the preparatory period of rwalla and dika, the initiates formally enter initiation (ba ya kena). The official opening ceremony begins on a Friday evening. Family, friends and neighbours expectantly gather at the host's residence. Certain groups are present to simply enjoy the events, others are busily occupying themselves with the many details to be finalised. As it becomes dark, the fires are lit creating an atmosphere more festive than urgent. Both the men and women attendees begin unwinding as the song and dance, perhaps aided by traditional beer, become rich. This is an occasion to socialise and be joyful, but serious too, as initiates silently await the events of their initiation to unfold. At a certain stage, the initiates (mathisa), already initiated girls and older women go to the maralo, where the women sing while the initiates (mathisa) remain silent. The

singing and actions here are collectively referred to as lidingwane. Fittingly, the songs are dipina tsa lidingwana.

During these opening festivities, men may observe some of the proceedings from a distance, but may never come close to the initiates. For the rest of the night, those present eat, drink beer, sing traditional songs and perform the customary dances, but of cardinal importance is that no-one may sleep. The initiation is now regarded as officially open. The girls themselves are expected to be quiet, not seen, nor may they sleep that night. Moitse (1994:69) confirms this, but hints at the activities of the next day when she says that the initiates "on whom the physical operation is to be performed early the next morning, remain seated in their *khoadi*." Hardly a paragraph later, while analysing a song sung at the opening, Moitse mentions "their physical initiation" (Moitse 1994:70). To my mind, this is a clear illustration of the type of concept-confusion that plagues sources purporting to shed light on the institution of female initiation.

Unravelling the events that follow was frequently met with resistance. Categorically stating that she could never divulge the 'secrets', an informant cut me short by conceding that all she would say is: "*Here they are going to cut the tail of the lethisa … so that she can be like the others that have experienced the custom of lebollo*." The previous citation from an interview only modestly conveys the resolve I encountered when trying to ascertain the exact sequence of events happening in two days, referred to as madibeng and mapumelo. Furthermore, some informants swap the practices of these days around, which I believe is partially their attempt at not divulging the information they were admonished never to share. Moreover, some informants use madibeng and mapumelo[56] as synonyms, not clearly differentiating the practices of each.[57] I am confident, however, that subtly pursuing answers has allowed me to discover, at least partial 'truths', which when pieced together, form a coherent picture.

[56] The words madibeng and mapumelo are explained later, at the appropriate place.

[57] I found the following quote by Rakotsoane (2001:28) reassuring and helpful in understanding and dealing with informants who were obviously withholding information. "The fact of the matter is that their apparent inability, or reticence to explain these has more to do with the nature of their etiquette which does not allow young people to ask the question 'why?' when they are told to either do or omit something by their elders than their ability to think. If they ask such a question, they are simply told that it is the custom (ke meetlo). This has always been the attitude of the elders towards young people's curiosity regarding the rationale behind many of the customs that they find in existence. When one tries to persuade them to explain such customs, the kind of explanations they offer vary so much that one ends up being more confused than enlightened".

Largely agreeing that Madibeng comes before Mapumelo, regional differences again direct the length of time that elapses between these two significant days. According to some, for example in the Clocolan, Ficksburg and Mphosong areas, one immediately follows the other. In this case, the official opening commences on the Friday, Madibeng is on Saturday, and Mapumelo is on Sunday. In my judgement then, the opening festivities of some contemporary female initiations do last three days, as stipulated by authors like Sechefo (1909:8), in contrast with Zietsman's (1972:167) proposed one day. Also, as will be seen, certain parts take place at the initiation compound and others down at the 'ditches', which is in some measure in line with propositions that the opening ceremonies of old, took place down at the lengopeng. Other informants from a farm I visited and at Ha Rampai (near Butha-Buthe) explain that either a week or two following the official opening of the initiation, the significant day of Mapumelo arrives.

Marked: private and confidential

During the weekend of the official opening of the initiation and before the candidates are smeared with the first black defining mixture, a day is set aside for important practices; a day idiomatically referred to as Madibeng. Madiba means place of water and in this context, it is another name for donga, ditch or gully (cf. also Moitse 1994:67).

On the following, my informants agree. Very early on the Saturday morning, when it is still dark and to all accounts whilst the revelry of the opening festivities is still in full swing, a song known as: ho kgokgobisa tshewene, is sung. It is intended to chase away the men who may be present; alternatively, to dupe them. Under the presumption of going to relieve themselves, the girls (mathisa), concealed from view by the instructress and the entourage of other young initiated girls, gather to one side. As soon as they are out of sight, they depart to the nearest river/dam or any other place of water (lengopeng). The older women remain at the initiation fires. When the revellers, particularly the men, awake in the morning, they find that the initiates "*are no longer at home. The girls have been taken. They think there are still girls inside here, but they are not here. The men did not see them. They were hidden. That is kgokgobisa tshwene.*" From responses, it is evident that variations occur regarding this custom. Such a deviation of practice occurs on the Friday evening of the official opening. In this case,

initiates are taken outside on three occasions: at around 18:00, 21:00 and midnight, when they are sprayed with medicinal water. That the initiates are taken down to the river, after this, is accepted. At the river, important ceremonies take place and only initiated women are permitted there.

If I were to show you

An informant explains that since it is still early, the expectant initiates may busy themselves by stretching their labia minora (malebe). In anticipation of the older women's arrival just after sunrise, the initiates meekly sit while the others sing secret initiation songs. When all the functionaries are present, if customary, the circumcision would have immediately been performed. The closest I got, besides denials of such operations, are the accounts by two old grandmothers, included in the box below. The third voice towards the end of the piece vehemently denies the practice now or at any time in the past.

Turning down the heat

When girls were circumcised, they said they were going to mapumelong. That was when the pilo was smeared. Long ago, when they used to circumcise, disappearing from the initiation compound under the cover of night, candidates were taken down to the water – down to the river, to the water far away, over *there*. That is where they did those things. During the merriment they said, ba kgokgobisa tshwene, indicating that the time to leave the initiation lodge had arrived. Down at the gully, while awaiting sunrise and the functionaries, the initiates would stretch their labial minora.

For the circumcision, they would cut part of the clitoris (mosono). Merely the protruding part of the clitoris was sliced off. The harder part, below the looser skin was left, while the skin that could be held firm was removed in one fell stroke. The grounds for the operation were rooted in the belief that it would reduce her heat (so that the girl is not so 'hot').

Like any lesion, it took a long time to heal, usually about a month. Therefore, when they saw it was healing, it was about time for the white clay. A day was then set for them to smear the white clay. The initiates had to be sufficiently healed so that they could walk without letting on that there was reason to wince. Keep in mind, during the black phase, all that initiates really do is go to the veld. Over there, at their place in the veld, they sit (licking their wounds, so to speak) and receive instruction. In the late afternoon, they return home. In the morning, they go to the veld and in the evening, they return home. Throughout this time, contact with 'outsiders' is minimal. When again they were publicly seen, community members should have no reason to guess about lebollo practices.

These days, however, they no longer do this. They only do sephatsa, the incisions into which medicines are rubbed. Nevertheless, they still say, 'we are going to mapumelong'. We talk about the day, but we would not do that. It would be insane to cut, in whatever form, on such a sensitive part of a woman's genitals. This *big secret*, however, needs to be kept from the men. They do not know that women have abandoned the practice. They are under the impression that we do it, believing we do the same as they do.

"*I am telling you this because everyone, even the men think that it [circumcision] is still customary*".

Another informant explains that on the Saturday morning, the girls are taken to a secret place where the circumcision custom is to take place. The ngaka, or specifically appointed functionary, performs the operation. Each girl has a little of her lelebe (labia minora) cut off with a lehare ('snymes' or minora blade), supplied by the initiate's mother. The operation would entail the removal of a piece about the size of a woman's pinkie nail. It is said that initiation (lebollo) terminates a girl's desire for too many boys – ho tlosa bohale (to get rid of the wild). The conviction is, after the operation, that a girl is marriageable.

Shooting down any reports of a circumcision operation performed on Basotho initiates, an informant pronounces "*if I showed you, you'd find it [clitoris] still intact. A person saying such things is clutching at straws. That person is definitely not one who has been to lebollo. You can't rely on what such a person tells you*."

- Compiled from interviews conducted with informants during December 1998, April 1999 & August 2005 -

Zietsman (1972:238-239) explains that where a circumcision was routine, a group of women encircle the girls. According to ranked seniority, they are blindfolded and lead to the place where the primary initiator (mobolli/Motanyane; person that initiates/circumcises) awaits their arrival. Such a practitioner may be any elderly woman who understands the art of circumcising. Each initiate is brought to the circumciser, where she sits with her legs spread-eagled. She may apparently also kneel with her legs apart so that the circumciser may approach her from behind. The circumciser now removes the girl's clitoris with the blade or simply nicks it. He however, contradicts himself some pages later, by saying that the labia minora are cut (Zietsman 1972:255).

The reason for the operation, is apparently to facilitate intercourse – the girl must be 'fixed' so that she does not make the man battle when they are married. Immediately after the operation, the girl stands half-emerged in the water so that the bleeding can abate. During the rite, the women sing certain secret songs (dikoma). After all the girls have been circumcised, according to rank, they remain together in the water for a while longer. After this, they come out and sleep for the rest of the day. According to Zietsman (1972:239), circumcision and the manipulation of female genitals still occurred in rural Clocolan, but it was no longer very common. He goes on to say that in most initiation schools, the women, singing, chase the initiates (mathisa) into the water where they are splashed. When they emerge, the girls are hit on the back with a little stick/cane. This is regarded as initiating (ho bolotsa) the initiate. Having undergone these practices, the initiate is now known as ngwale (plural: bale).

Laydevant (s.a.:63) in *The Basoto*, states that it appeared that the women were drowning the initiate immersed in the water, but in reality the removal of the clitoris was

taking place. The labia minora were also cut and then each candidate was marked on the arm or other body part with a recognised clan mark. Furthermore, the water was said to 'wash the child away'. Interestingly, the initiates were then carried home on the backs of the older women and according to custom, smeared with the black emulsion (pilo).

Ellenberger (1992:288-290) does not specifically describe the operation that the girls undergo, but does write: "the effect of it was to strengthen a woman's power of resistance against violation. It is not improbable that this was the object of the institution, and one of the reasons why men, even married men, were so rigidly excluded from any share of the secret". According to him, the tattooing of the face and shoulders also took place (Ellenberger 1992:289).

In the above paragraphs, Laydevant (s.a.) and Ellenberger (1992) talk about marking the body with a clan mark and tattooing. Nowhere else have I come across similar findings. It is my opinion that both the authors are in fact referring to the incisions into which medicines are rubbed as part of the protective and strengthening rituals.

All that Ashton (1952: 57) reports is that together with sex instruction, initiates "undergo some physical operation, the hymen perhaps being broken either by the insertion of a horn or of a woman's finger".

Buys (1981:143-144) states that at the time of her research, the practice of circumcision among the Tlokwa of Qwaqwa was absent. She does, however, concede that the practice was customary (Buys 1981:72, 144). Very closely related to this, although occurring only in individual cases, a highly sex-driven Motlokwa girl would be taken to a river where a cut would be made on the genitals (pudenda). According to tradition, the blood from the incision must be washed away by the water flow, thus symbolising that her sex-drive will diminish.

I am changed

Not having conclusively determined whether a 'real circumcision' operation takes place, I vigorously pursued the line of questioning. I was eager to know why women talked about candidates going to mapumelong. Literally, the word puma means to cut off. Mapumelo would then mean, the day of cutting-off. Informants admit that boys are circumcised

during their initiation, but refute that girls are cut in any way. Some say, that the day might have included some form of genital cutting in the past, but nothing of the sort still occurs. However, the day is still called Mapumelo.

When questioning informants about Mapumelo, the common reaction was initial laughter. Met with retorts like "*Oh man, you are killing me. Where did you hear of this? Who told you about this?*" I have however, been able to ascertain that the deeds that ensue are momentous. It is now that they say they are 'initiating' the girls (ho bolotsa bana). According to an informant, ho bolotsa means, "*to hit with a stick all over the body. If they used to cut, they don't do so anymore. It used to be so, but no longer. It is a big secret (lekunutu). These days, girls are made to lie down and are hit with sticks*." Emphasising the secrecy associated with these activities, another informant shares: "*I may not tell you this, but only males are circumcised during the initiation process*." Philosophically, yet another summarises 'bolotsa', as meaning "*I am changed*."

In accordance with, for example, Laydevant's (s.a.) testimony, once down at the river, a visit by an enormous snake is hailed. The mysterious river snake is called Motanyane [(a.k.a. mangobe; kokoi (equivalent of the bogeyman, used to scare); phiri (secret)]. In his pursuit of uncovering the Basotho's ultimate object of worship: sky-divinity or water-divinity, Rakotsoane (2001:23) explains that the water snake notion is a "cultural element imported from the Nguni people of Southern Africa". Motanyane is regularly alluded to in the initiation songs and one story relates that if a girl returns from initiation and happens to be pregnant, it is ascribed to the water snake, Motanyane. According to most of my informants, Motanyane wa madiba is an older women who, dressed in tattered clothes and painted face to disguise her identity, shows herself down at the 'ditches' and is primarily responsible for 'initiating' (ho bolotsa) the candidates.

The admission that this figure is not a fictitious person or being, but a real presence and an important functionary during the initiation, was a cardinal breakthrough. It however, intrigued me that the male title 'Ntate' (mister or father) is often used when referring to this mysterious character. Overwhelmingly, informants propose that it is simply a form of respect assigned to this important dignitary of the female initiation institution. Arguing further, a large contingent of my informants fervidly deny that a male person would ever be permitted at this intimate event, never mind be expected to perform a ritualised act of

any kind. Pragmatically, a wise old informant proposes that the male title is used as a scare-tactic. She says, when you say "*'your father', it carries far more weight and has a greater impact than saying, 'your mother'*." As to why, Motanyane is disguised, the same woman adds to the comment above: "*Initiates' heads are even swathed. If something bad were to happen, this prevents the blame being pinned on the individual*." Additionally, this is part of the *secret* that will be revealed when initiates return to 'learn the laws'. Moitse (1994:67) seems to accept the explanation of a number of sources which suggest that Motanyane is "actually a male of middle to old age selected for purposes of providing sex education to all female initiates … *Motanyane* is said to live within the confines of the *madiba* where all the essential teachings embodied in *koma* are introduced and sex education provided."

If this is the case, as most of my informants claim, and no male person is admitted to this very secretive occasion, I wondered how the proposed 'teachings' were to take place. There is talk that initiates are *shown* significant practices, often alluded to as sex education. In addition, many of the songs refer to certain sex acts that occur down at the river with this mysterious figure. The following exposition by a young informant sheds some light on the matter.

Not a water snake

After we have been ritually protected and completed the preparatory (rwalla) period, borne the activities coupled with the day referred to as Madibeng, the day known as Mapumelo and its unknown deeds await us.

You see to us they say, Motanyane is monga lengope (master of the ditches and dongas) of the women. They speak of Ntate Motanyane. It is not some story about a phantom snake that inhabits the water pools and miraculously impregnates some initiates. That is not Motanyane. It is a person like yourself, who has painted his/her face with different colours and circular shapes and wears torn, tattered clothes. Motanyane is in reality, two people. It is a woman and a man. The woman has smeared herself with different colours. And the male person too smears himself with colours to try and disguise who he really is. Ntate Motanyane comes when we have been smeared with the white clay and when we have been smeared with the black oily mixture - twice. The first time, when we are smeared pilo, the male Motanyane comes; when we are smeared phepa, the female Motanyane comes. There are two of them.

When mapumelo is spoken of, on that day we are not cut. We are made to lie down. Before we officially smear our bodies with the black substance, male Ntate Motanyane comes. He comes on one occasion; the day of mapumelo.

We do not have little loincloths; we are naked under our blankets. When we get to the lengopeng the blankets are discarded and we stand in a line (standing front-to-back) with our arms placed on the arms of the girl in front of us, forming something that looks like a millipede. But before the man enters the scene, so the initiates do not hear him coming, an action is performed with a bottle filled with water. We are instructed to lie down. We follow the instructress's example; we imitate her and lie facedown on the bare ground. Besides the ululating women, also present is the female doctor. The male doctor, however, may not attend this practice. He was there when we were inoculated and then later again he will be present. A bottle, filled with water is taken,

wrapped in net or a cloth, then they tjhôfela ka dibonong. They spray us with water. They put that bottle in your bum. It does not enter fully. No, it does not penetrate fully, but it is done to squirt us with water. When they shower us with water, that man comes. When he arrives, the older women, the grandmothers, push him forward, saying we have to do *that* business.

It is said that a man must come to the female initiation – a real man has to come to the female initiation - to do the business that he has to do. This male Motanyane comes from the mountains – a young initiated man (abuthi). How he is chosen, I do not know, because when I entered, when I first began initiation, I did not know that person. I just saw that this person does this horrible work. When I came to 'learn the law' (ithuta melao), to conclude my initiation, then I saw them properly – the male and female Motanyane. However, I do not know how they chose them, or when.

We are lying prostrate, not facing him. They make us lie like that so that we cannot look them (both the male and female Motanyane) in the face. Moreover, while this is happening, the women are singing. They are watching and singing. They do that so that we cannot hear who it is. The older people (tjhôphola batho ba baholo) can decipher these things. When we are lying down there, the male Motanyane hits us. He hits us with the hide thong. On the day of mapumelo he hit us three times: in the morning, at lunch and later in the afternoon. After lunch, he hit us and then did his business. This Motanyane hit more than the female one. Why and what exactly is supposed to be taught by this, I ask myself. They say it is the Basotho culture; we do not know what it is.

He does his business, his ugly work. I mean he is 'sleeping', 'sleeping' like boyfriends and girlfriends. He is having sex, with all of us – all of us in the line. He mounts all the girls (mathisa). He literally, finishes his business with each initiate. Let me explain it like this: they talk about lebollo la hosêng, la motshehare, le la mantsiboya (initiation of the morning, of midday and late afternoon). He starts with some in the morning, continues with some in the afternoon and some in the late afternoon. It has to be dispersed because a man needs time to recuperate. He starts and finishes with us all. He goes round with all the girls. And you must know we were ten initiates that time. That is why I said, that we are hit three times. This does not only refer to the number of times that this male Motanyane comes to do his business; we are beaten with sticks as well. When he is finished then we are hit, and hit, and hit. That is said to be mapumelo. When he is finished there, the women go around again – repeating the action with the water bottle. You do not clean yourself when you are lying there. No matter what, you just lie as still as you can. When you are finished there, you may not look around. The women then help us to stand. You do not get up yourself. When we are all standing, they "train" (a pumping action) our hands and feet – as if to get the blood flowing again. Then we make a line again and go away; we just walk straight as they instruct us.

After some time, after we have eaten lunch he hits us again. We are made to lie down while the women sing that song of his. You *have* to lie down. By then they have taught us that when we sing that song we must lie down hiding our face, closing our eyes. They even wrap blankets around our heads and eyes so that we cannot see. We do not see the person that is 'hitting' us. You will see that person the day you come and ho ithuta melao. When you come to repeat, that is when you will see that person. Then they show you the person. Only then do you know it was 'Ntate who' and 'Mme who'. Now you see with your eyes who they were.

The third time is around four or five in the afternoon – we arrive, and we are told that it is late; we are going to return home. However, he comes and hits us again. He only hits us then, he does not repeat *that* business of his. The women are there; they encircle us and hit us. They are helping Ntate Motanyane.

There is not even a blanket; we are completely naked. There is no person that is going to ask what is going on there. It is not a nice/good thing that. It is not a nice thing to happen. What I do not understand is *why* it is done. All the while, the women are happy; they are didietsa-ing (ululating). They are singing while that man is doing that.

They would not allow my mother there at that time. They said '*no go … go home!*' I wanted to run away right there and then, away from the lengopeng, away from these evil things. '*Do you understand now when I say initiation is boloi?*'

- Compiled from a series of interviews conducted with the informant during August - September 2005 -

Partly corresponding to the informant's experience above, only one other informant admits that the Motanyane character presents twice during the initiation process: once during the black and then again during the white stages. She, however, categorically refutes that at any time, is one of them a male person. Moreover, she denies that a man sleeps or has sex with the initiates.

Late that afternoon, whether circumcised, beaten and/or violated by Motanyane, a sombre group of initiates head back to the initiation lodge.

Included below are three secret initiation songs[58] that speak of the Motanyane in much the same way as the extract from the life history above.

He! We! He! We! O mo je a utlwe
He! Jo! Ka ntoto e maseka
Ho ya, ho wa, a tsole ngwana
Ka madi a Motanyane ntate lona, ha a hloname
He! We! He! We! O mo je a utlwe
O thabeste dinnyo tsa bana ba rona
He! We! O mo je a utlwe
O e kenye feela
O mo je a utlwe
O e ise hare
Ha e hana ho kena kappa e hana ho tswa
Mo je feela
He-wa! He-wa! Mokeisa
Wena o utlwe monate eena ha a na taba.

Swallow her to the full
Consume her with your manliness
Out of her beget the spring
With the blood of Motanyane
Your father would never be sorry
He enjoys the womanliness
Our children his desires fulfil
Oh swallow her to the full
And she will fill
Rejoicing in womanhood
And if she has not a
Passion it does not matter.

O, o eet haar dat sy penis kan voel
O, laat haar uittrek, o laat haar uittrek
Met die bloed van jou vader
Motanyane as hy ernstig is
O, eet haar dat sy voel
Hy geniet ons kinders se vaginas
O, eet haar dat sy voel
Jammer vir dié wat swak is
Want hy sal hulle gate skeur
O, eet haar dat sy voel
Forseer dit in, jy moet dit diep instoot
As dit nie kan ingaan of uitkom nie, forseer dit
Self as sy huil sal jy dit geniet
Moenie vir haar omgee nie.

He rona mona, mona ka rona
Le tlile, re tlile ho le ruta bosadi
He mo je a utlwe
Re tla le tlisetse monna ya tla le satha
A tjhentjhane ka lona
He mokote a utlwe
Re batla a se ka ba a sokodisa monna
E re ha monna a tla a be a se e inganola feela
Monna a fihle a e Kenya,
Monna e tla re ha a e mona
Jo! Monate, o tla fihla e se e rarile methap
Jo! Monate, e se e ntse e bona mokoti
Ntoto e ilo kena le teng
Jo! Monate.

We are here – you are here
You have come – we come to teach you about womanhood.
There is a man forward we shall bring unto you
Who in a line would take one and another
We wish she should not trouble a man
Have her body in the waiting
The man in the readiness and open – for him to come forward in power and strength in attraction of her body.

Hier by ons plek het julle gekom
Ons kom om julle die dinge van vrouwees te leer
Hou met haar gemeenskap dat sy dit voel
Ons sal vir julle 'n man bring
Wat om die beurt met julle gemeenskap sal hê
Hou met haar gemeenskap dat sy dit voel
Ons wil nie hê dat sy vir haar man 'n moeilike tyd moet gee nie
Dat wanneer hy kom sy die vagina net kan oopmaak
Dat die man dit net lekker kan insteek
Wanneer die man dit voel
Kom die genieting wanneer dit reeds styf is
Dit gaan reguit na die gat waar dit ingaan
O, wat 'n groot genieting.

[58] Cf. footnote 17 (p. 15).

Banana ba kae Ntata bona o re tsohetse matla O batla ho re ja Jo! Re mahlomoleng Tlohong le leketlisa malebe Le fihle le robale Jo! Re mahlomoleng Le inganole a tla a thabe Hobane rona re fedile ke banna ba rona Re ne re qalwe ho sothwa ke ntata lona Motanyane Jo! Re se re fedile.	Where are the girls? Their father so cross with us all He wants to swallow us To devour us with his anger In trouble we sojourn Come on with your womanliness pointing down – facing the earth in sorrow and then go you down to sleep and your thighs you might open wide For us tedious remain We were first seduced into that deep sex by your father Motanyane. So us, the women are finished and tired.	Waar is die meisies waarvan die vaders sê: Dat julle angstig is om gemeenskap te hê Ons is in die moeilikheid Kom en bring julle labia minora, ons is in die moeilikheid Ja moet net jou geslagsdele oopmaak sodat hy gelukkig kan wees Want ons vrouens is klaar a.g.v. ons mans O, ons is gedaan.

Sources: Zietsman K 1972 *Inisiasie by die Sotho-sprekende plattelandse bantoebevolking van Clocolan*. Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation. Fakulteit Lettere en wysbegeerte (Departement Volkekunde). Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat. Bloemfontein. Secret initiation songs (koma) no. 13, 17 & 18, pp. lix, lxii & lxiii.
Bereng PM Translation of Sesotho female initiation songs into English. December 2005. Personal communication. Maseru. Lesotho.

No short-cut to pick-up sticks

Heading down to the river for a second day in a row is daunting, especially since initiates do not know what the activities of the day include. Once there, an interesting custom involves initiates having to remove corn on the cob (mealies) from a pot of boiling water (tshola dikgobe). According to informants, a fire is made on which a three-legged black pot is put to boil. The mealies are placed in the pot to cook, following which, initiates according to rank, are tasked to jump over this big fire. On the other side of the fire is the pot of mealies. Each initiate has to remove a mealie, inserting both hands into the boiling water. "*They do this as fast as possible, so that they do not burn too badly*." If seeking to take a short-cut by using only one hand, the initiate is sent to the back of the row to repeat the action with admonishments of failure. An informant opines that "*this is done so that girls too, should experience some pain as they are not circumcised like the boys*."

Hereafter, another trial, referred to as setsolla molomo is put to initiates. In some areas, this variation of the requisite takes place on the Friday evening of the opening. During this occasion, an older initiated man slaughters a sheep. In some instances, only the liver (sebete) is of importance to the initiates. If a sheep cannot be acquired, a piece of liver may be bought from a butcher-shop. It is grilled on a fire, treated by the traditional healer with black powder, cut into pieces and then taken to the girls who may be waiting in the hut, or somewhere in front of the hut, by an older initiated woman (often the instructress) (cf. Zietsman 1972:157). Here they sit in a row, ranked according to tribal seniority; each

girl is given a piece of the liver, the initiate must take it, place it in her mouth, let it fall to the ground and then pick it up and eat it. From informants' responses, it is clear this action may vary somewhat in form. Alternatively, the women clean the entrails (hama malana) of the slaughtered sheep. On bent knee and with cupped hands (kgaketso) initiates receive, eat, "*spit or let some fall to the ground, and then the following day, you will receive and eat a little of it*". It is said, "*while you were avoiding, you were given and you received*". Eggs too are 'given' on this occasion. Initiates literally now have permission, because they have ritually received these items and may eat them at any time they wish.

Another variation of this action, actually taking place on the Sunday of the opening weekend, involves a number of small sticks that each initiate picks up from the ground, using only her mouth. Picking up six or seven sticks, while kneeling with one's hands behind the back, requires quite some athleticism. For example, a Letebelle la Mthimkhulu's totem requires her to perform this not from a kneeling, but a standing position, while those initiates from Letebelle la Ha Hlalele squat. As if this is not difficult enough, initiates are hit on the back all the while. Sometimes a single stick is used, at other times, two pliable sticks are twisted, forming a rope-like whip to add extra punch. Following this, they are inoculated, their hair is shaved in a circular pate around their head and the festivities commence. This fortification and protection ritual follows similar lines to that previously described (see 5.3 *Darkness overcomes witchcraft*).

As remuneration for his/her help, the traditional doctor is given the rest of the sheep after the liver is removed. According to tradition, nobody else may be given of the meat, but using his/her own discretion, the practitioner may decide to give a portion of the meat to others who are present. Sometimes more than one sheep is slaughtered and then this functionary does not have to share his/her meat. Prescriptions, however, dictate that the doctor may not receive more than one sheep (Zietsman 1972:157).

Ashes, ashes …

Generally, the initiates may now sleep, while the women hold their own small feast. Chickens are slaughtered and items like beer and bread are always available. In the afternoon, sometimes earlier, the initiates' faces and bodies are smeared with pilo, the mixture of grass ash and old, dirty motor oil. This is apparently done to make the initiate unrecognisable to other people (Zietsman 1972:239, 244). Initiates should not even be noticed in this black, bleak and colourless stage, perhaps "signifying humble silence on their part", as Moitse (1994:70) says.

The initiates, their teacher(s) and a few young initiated girls whose task it is to help during the initiation, retire to the initiation hut to sleep. It is customary for some totem groups not to smear the initiates with the black mixture at the river and the initiates are not presented with their initiation outfits here. In such cases, at the dam, plaited reed ropes (mabodulela or malodi) are hung around them and only the next day (Sunday), at the initiation lodge, are the initiates smeared with the black mixture. This custom is practised for example among the Bataung.

Interestingly, the initiation outfits of different totems vary, thus distinguishing groups from one another. The girls now wear small tanned cowhide skirts (ditea). These skirts are slapped during dances or when songs are sung. Some of my informants are adamant that they wear nothing under their blanket, except two woven grass rings (dikgolokwane or mabodulela) around the waist (if custom prescribes) and a woven veil, covering their face. The blanket, which is fastened with a big safety pin, covers them from shoulder to ankle when venturing from the initiation enclosure (see Photo 7). However, when secluded by the courtyard, initiates go about their activities in the nude. An informant relates, as substantiation of the above: even if they have their period, nothing is brought to them (no pads or tampons). The attitude is that initiation is the place of menstruation – it is its home.

The wearing of these hoops have two objectives: the ring is a symbol of the girl's purity, and it is worn to protect the girl against malevolent influences that may invade her. It is for this reason that the beginning and end of the bands are interwoven so that evil spirits will not know where to enter this protective circle. Each initiate (ngwale) is also given an undecorated reed/rush veil (lesira) to cover her face from strangers (see Photo 7). The denseness of the weave is so that initiates can see through the grass, but outsiders, particularly men, should not see the girl's eyes. She further receives a (forked) staff (lere) that is treated with medicines to deter lightning, natural disasters and magical forces/sorcery (tibella maru). These sticks are carried around in an upright position throughout the initiation period, but may be applied to drive away intruders as well (see Photo 7). Besides being treated with medicines, these sticks are coloured black during this phase, but when initiates enter the white phase, they too are smeared with the white clay. The belief is that it is impossible to step over it and cause an initiate harm if it is placed in front of the girl (Zietsman 1972:245).

Photo 7: Initiates in the black stage, wearing veils and dull blankets

Differentiating Bakubung and Bahlakwana candidates from those of other groups, from the onset, they smear their bodies with white clay (phepa) (see Photo 8). This means that they skip the "black stage", as conceptualised in this work. The duration of their initiation is the same as that of other initiates; however, they go through only two primary phases, namely the white (phepa) and red (letsoku) stages. Moreover, this means that they do not have a blanket to keep warm or dry, if the weather requires it. Determining the reason for the said difference was met with retorts such as: "*I do not know why it is like that. It just is. It is their culture*." The Bakubung, Bafokeng and some Bataung do not usually wear hide

skirts or reed rings around the waist. They have cane skirts (maklakana) and two reed-strings that are worn criss-cross over the breasts. Their skirts, unlike those of other initiates in the white phase, are created from small cane or bamboo pieces that are strung together (see Photo 11).

Photo 8: Abiding with totem prescriptions some candidates do not smear their bodies black, but white just after the official opening (Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972)

Photo 9: At their secluded place in the veld, initiates performing a dance (Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972)

The Batlokwa, differing again from all those already mentioned, do not wear small tanned cowhide skirts (setae), nor do they wear woven veils. On their head, they wear a fur cap (kuwane) and a stringy veil (tibi) made from a fibrous bulbous plant (leshoma, or more commonly known as tuwane). Once dug up, flecked open and dried, the soft brush-like fibres are sown together. The strands hang over the eyes like a long fringe. Additionally,

they wear a sheepskin shawl (thatsana ya nku). The Basia too have an interesting custom, distinguishing them from other initiates when returning from the river. If there is a Mosia girl among the initiates, her father will wait to one side of the initiation compound with a sheep. As soon as the group passes him, he slits the sheep's throat and the other women immediately throw water over the girl. These actions are performed so that the girl does not forget her totem affiliation (seboko), reminding her to respect Basia rules during the initiation period. After the sheep's throat is slit, the sheep is donated to the instructress and the initiates.

Assisting the girls with their preparation are their mothers. The initiates now begin with their "black stage" where they are totally unadorned. All men and strangers must be avoided and the girl may not present herself in public. At about 16:00 or sometimes after sunset, the girls return to the initiation lodge while singing light initiation songs (dipina tsa hae). At the lodge, the old women 'show' (perhaps symbolically), the initiates how to prepare the food and then there is more singing, dances, slapping of the hide skirts and playing of initiation drums (moropa). This continues until about 22:00 at which time most of the women and other interested parties have returned to their respective homes.

The instructress, previously initiated girls and other visitors generally do not have particular clothing or outfits. The teacher sometimes wears beads in her hair and around her neck, but she has no prescribed dress.

Little ears to big ears

Associated with initiation, Moitse (1994:46) and Buys (1981:72, 143-144) also mention the stretching and lengthening of the labia minora (malebe). In the literature, the resultant change to the labia minora is referred to as the '*Hottentot's apron'*. Buys's informants said that this practice is not restricted to the initiation process, but may commence once a girl has had her first menstruation (1981:144). This information concurs with reports from my informants. Buys (1981:72) contradicts herself though, when she concludes that the above-mentioned practice is a visible sign of having completed initiation. The accepted reason offered for this practice is that a woman with enlarged labia minora may more successfully satisfy a man during the sex act, thus being able to keep his attention for longer (Buys 1981:144). Moitse (1994:46) expresses this reason as follows: "This is believed to increase the area of sexual sensitivity around the vagina, also bringing overwhelming excitement during sexual intercourse to both man and woman". She further

adds the belief that the lengthening process loosens "the muscles of the birth canal, thus facilitating easy passage of the child during birth".

The house is pretty because of its curtains

All my informants confirm that the lengthening of the labia minora (malebe) is a practice that is still customary in some areas, notably those in which my informants live. Sometimes girls of a pre-pubescent and pubescent age actively engage in 'radical' conduct to facilitate the elongation of their labia minora. A concoction of dried, ground bat (mmankgane) and fat is routinely used to lubricate and aid the milking, lengthening action. Stones are also tied to the labia minora with lengths of string or wool and the girls jump from trees, eager that the jerking weighted strings and the pull of gravity will sooner facilitate stretching. An elderly informant humorously sketched a picture of young Basotho girls sitting in the trees like monkeys. Making a game of this, they would occupy themselves for hours – jumping and climbing. Reminiscing, she cringes and laughs at their antics, specifically emphasising how it burnt when she urinated after these activities. Demonstrating the desirability of the Hottentot's apron, another younger informant relates what they would do to girls without lengthened malebe. They would tie frayed orange-bag strings to the unstretched labia minora "*and pull and pull them*."

It was also customary for pubescent girls to sleep in a specially designated hut. Inevitably, living in such close confines, girls without enlarged malebe would notice that they are different. Be it peer pressure, or a sincere desire to follow Basotho custom, girls enlarged their labia minora to varying degrees. Some even elongated the one and not the other.

When asked why Basotho women stretch their labia, a weathered grandmother anecdotally narrated the following: She addressed me by my Sotho name. "*Mathabo*", she began, "*they say, the house is pretty because of its curtains … In the old days, we Basotho girls used to wear traditional tasselled dithetana; you know those short little skirts and you know how icy-cold the wind can blow here in Lesotho. Well, let me ask you: What do you hang in front of your windows? A curtain – right. So too, we have to do something to prevent the wind from coming in, so we make our own curtain. We pull those little ears down there*."

Additionally, the notion that Basotho men prefer women with enlarged malebe prevails. It is said: "*This makes men really hot!*" In recent times in the foothills of Lesotho, certain men, under the auspices of teaching Basotho culture to all, were emphasising this very private, women's matter at public gatherings. Angered women hope they have nipped such 'fly-by-night' sensationalist seekers in the bud, before a spectacle was made of their customary practices.

- Compiled from interviews conducted with informants 1998-2006 -

5.5 THREE COLOURS: WHITE

Goatskins and hoola-hoops

The stage following the "black stage" is the "white stage". This period of the initiation rite is the longest, lasting roughly three weeks in the Free State, while according to informants, in Lesotho, this stage lasts a month, making it shorter than both the preparatory period and the black (pilo) stage. When the previous stage is drawing to a close, the initiates again go down to the 'ditches' (lengopeng), to wash. Now they are smeared from head to toe with a kind of white clay (phepa) (see Photo 10). After

the oily mixture of the previous stage, the white clay is dry on the skin. Their new veils (masira) are decorated with colourful bead patterns. If the desired beads are unavailable, wool is used these days to decorate the veils. The old blankets and hessian bags may now be discarded – blankets may be kept, depending on the weather. Initiates' hair is now washed and combed. Around their abdomen, initiates wear a softly tanned, smooth leather skirt (setea) and a hairy goatskin apron (kibana). For whatever reason, if the leather for the skirt is unobtainable, then substitutes like canvas or fertilizer bags may be used (see Photo 10b). That most initiates wear grass or reed hoops (dikgolokwane) during this phase, is accepted. The point of disagreement is that, some say, the hoops worn during the previous stage are removed, kept, broken and burnt during the second to last stage of the initiation and replaced by four to seven new hoops. Totem affiliation again influences the number of hoops worn. Some, for example, wear many to lift the breasts. Such reasoning is in line with a remark that the hoops worn during the black phase are different from those worn during this stage. In addition, the argument is they are stained black from the black mixture and one would not want the black to rub off onto the white of this stage. Still others state that extra hoops are simply added to those already worn. Initiated persons, usually the initiates' mothers, weave the hoops from lodi, a local grass-like plant that grows near water and is used mainly for religious purposes. As the day they officially enter draws near, the as yet uninitiated girls (mathisa), accompanied by initiated women and the instructress, go down to the river to cut the grass. The bundles of materials are taken to the initiation courtyard where they will be woven. One informant shared with me that some old men of the community, who no longer have any inclination to talk about secret matters to their fellows, enter the enclosure and assist in the weaving.

From my observations, it also seems that the more western the initiate and setting, the more variations on the traditional materials are used (see Photo 10b). It can therefore be said that although there are certain prescriptions concerning the initiation outfit, none is cast in stone.

Photo 10a: Candidates of the white stage, wearing goatskin aprons, woven hoops and decorated veils

Photo 10b: Note the fertilizer bag used as substitute for the traditional outfit (Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972)

Photo 11: A good example of the mahlakana skirts the Bakubung, Bafokeng, Bataung & Bahlakwana wear (Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972)

Drawing attention to themselves

As the initiates make the transition from the black to the white phase, some interesting practices are noted. Before this however, the blankets that the initiates wore throughout the black stage are washed. The belief is that they must be cleaned of any substances or materials. To avoid witchcraft, the blankets are washed in the river. It is said: ba tswafa tsila (they don't like the dirt) and it must be swept away by the water. At this time too, wheat chaff (moroko) is mixed with 'Rama' (margarine). About two spoonfuls of this mixture are placed on the stones for each initiate to eat and lick off using only her mouth, while crouched down on her haunches. This is called the 'initiates' potato' and according to an informant, done to protect initiates.

After the initiates are completely smeared white, dressed in their pale finery and have completed the customs down at the river, they return to the initiation compound. In comparison to the previous solemn procession, initiates now run through the veld. When arriving at the periphery of the village and an open space, perhaps used for

soccer, the initiates run in a circle, as if at play, singing and raucously announcing themselves (see Photo 12). The previously initiated girls have joined in the games as well, all the while blowing on their whistles. Suddenly, as if running away from something, they charge towards the initiation enclosure. Upon arriving, those belonging to certain totem groups (e.g. the Batebele[59]) run in tight circles (thinta) spraying one another and themselves with loose soil picked up from the ground. Others perform a dance characterised by a rhythmic moving of the shoulders from a kneeling position accompanied by song (kgiba).

Photo 12: Initiates accompanied by barwetsana drawing attention to themselves

The initiates then enter the initiation enclosure and return after some time with covered breasts. By now, a large crowed has gathered to watch as the initiates perform a number of dances. The atmosphere is jubilant and lively. I also had occasion to witness how the initiates and accompanying women chased away voyeurs who had not 'paid their tshwedi', a fee, if you will, of sweets, money or any other item. Not only are verbal chastisements dealt out, but also the free-swinging whips regularly meet their mark.

[59] According to one informant from Lesotho, the Batebele are not initiated with the Basotho. She argues that they each have their own 'culture', with distinct initiation practices, therefore warranting separate initiations. Although initiating a similar number of candidates at a time and running for a similar length of time, she maintains that the initiates are initiated 'inside'. The first time that they are seen, according to her, is the day they graduate.

The routine activities are the same as before. When however, the initiates (bale) go to the veld, the previously initiated girls lead the way, blowing loudly on their whistles. That initiates may now be seen is clearly evidenced by this. When the "white stage" (phepa) commences, during the day, the initiates may move around more freely (ba tsamaya hohle) and do not have to cover their faces at all times. However, men and uninitiated women should still not see their faces. They may now visit other initiation schools and often move along public roads so that they may draw attention to themselves. "*People stop them so that they can sing – we buy them (rea ba reka) – for money*." They are also more mobile within the village, where they annoy men and uninitiated women and girls. Moitse (1994:72) eloquently summarises this emancipated behaviour with the following words: "[t]he white colour of *phepa* is particularly significant because it signifies the end to humble silence and the beginning of more interaction with members of the community".

When coming across a male person in particular, they will encircle him. This intruder must pay a sacrifice of atonement or toll fee (tshwedi) before s/he may continue on her/his way. Such a tshwedi may be anything small like sweets, money or even a safety pin. Initiates often make a game out of such an occasion. An informant remembers how they, as initiates in the white stage, used to chase the men in order to get a gift. "*If they refused, we'd hit them with whips (dipafa). We, from before, used to hit them, today they just try to frighten them. Men knew that they had to walk far away from us. We'd ask: 'What are they looking for, here close to the girls?'*" The received token gift is given to the instructress and it is later used to the initiates' benefit. This form of extortion is only meant as a game, as well as to focus attention on the initiates. Zietsman (1972:250) contends that girls' initiation is dependent on public interest and something must be done to make people aware of it and that a school nearby is in progress.

Groundwork for the final day

During the week before the closing ceremony, which begins on the Friday and eventually leads to the closing of the initiation on the Saturday, wood is again amassed in the courtyard so that there is enough fuel for fires during the closing festivities. Girls will pay particular attention to all the initiation songs, secret songs and songs of praise (see Table 5.3) to ensure that they know them thoroughly. All

persons who must be present at the closing ceremonies are summoned during the final week.

The last few days often see the girls' parents frenziedly preparing their daughters' coming-out outfits. These include: beads, flannel skirts, new blankets, as well as red-ochre (letsoku) and finely ground ilmenite (sekama). The promoter must ensure that the beer, possible slaughter animals and other food are ready for the closing ceremonies. Further, not much happens at the school, it simply continues as before.

Destroying evidence

The Thursday before the initiation-closing feast, the girls and instructress get up as usual, cook, eat and go out to their place in the veld. During the day, they will continue with their routine activities such as collecting wood, singing songs and playing all sorts of games.

At about 16:00 the initiates sweep the place in the veld that they have used as a gathering place during the initiation, collecting together all remnants and evidence of their stay such as loose objects, branches, pieces of material and so on. While the initiates observe from a distance, the instructress sets the gathered materials alight. In reality, it is only the grass in and around the hideaway (leqhalo), as well as the objects in the middle that burn. The function of this action is to destroy all prints and trails the initiates might have left and in so doing, prevent malevolent persons from getting their hands on these remains and possibly using them to harm the girls. The burning of their hideaway proceeds without much ceremony. After having watched this 'disposal ceremony', they return to the initiation compound at the usual time. This night is also spent in the same way as previously, viz. the singing of songs, dancing and the playing of the drum.

The stick remains when it gets grease

The initiates awaken and get up at sunrise on the Friday, cook and eat well, as they will not eat again until the next day. Accompanied by their mothers, the instructress, other initiated women and girls, the initiates go to a nearby dam or other place of water (lengopeng). The initiate's initiation outfit worn during this period is taken away from them, i.e. the hessian bags or blankets, sheepskin skirts and goat-skin aprons, woven waist bands, veils and the small forked stick (lere). At the water, their mothers

and other initiated women and girls, remove the white clay by washing the girls. It is said: ba ya phepeng. Only another old blanket is given, with which the initiate then covers herself.

One gets the impression from Zietsman's narration (1972:288) that not much is made of this washing ceremony. Paraphrasing him, the rest of the day is spent sitting around at the river, initiation songs are no longer sung and the girls' mothers keep busy by washing the blankets that the initiates wore during the initiation period. These blankets are later given to the younger uninitiated girls of the village. It is however an important ceremony, because it symbolically signifies the end of the "white stage". All initiation dress is removed, the white clay is washed off and the initiates now stand at the beginning of a new phase.

From my informants' accounts, the proceedings are far more intricate than simply the washing off the clay and the return to the initiation compound. Agreeing that the white phase is concluded at the river, as stated above, some informants' explanations diverge at this point. Initiates are instructed to undress and to sit in a circle, facing one another, with their feet stretched out in front of them. Present at this event, according to one informant's rendition, is Motanyane.

Presently, similar to before, at the place of water, a large fire is made within the circle created by the initiates' feet (see Photo 13). It is here that some informants state that the grass hoops are broken up using stones to crush them, burnt and the ashes strewn in the running river water. The fire is positioned so that when jumping over it, the initiates land in the water. Now, according to rank, they each leap over the flames, landing and submerging themselves in the water by rolling around. For some candidates this is terrifying, since they cannot swim. An informant explains, "*the bad thing is, that when you have to jump over the fire and into the water, it is inevitably so deep that it covers your head*."

Photo 13 :The circle created by initiates' feet (Photo by: Peter Magubane – used with permission)

Furthermore, another row is formed and the women present splash the initiates with water. Once all have had a turn and the white clay is completely removed, the initiates' entire bodies are smeared with melted butter. "*On the occasion of these practices, we, like previously, are blind-folded and have to lie prostrate at the designated gathering place down at the ditches (lengopeng). Again, the women are practically chanting – drowning out the noises from this place and being swept up into a frenzy. The female Motanyane comes and she gives us a good lashing*." Another says it is the instructress who 'initiates' (bolotsa, in this instance, hits) them. As long as an hour may pass, during which time they are hit on their sun-heated and butter-smeared bodies, before the blankets wrapped around their heads are removed. The saying goes "*the stick remains when it gets grease"*, an informant explains. It is expected of initiates not to respond to the blows, for if they cringe, the women swear at them. Late that afternoon, the 'ditches' are left for the last time. Singing secret songs, the initiates are guarded from view by the accompanying women – forming a tunnel-like shield of blankets, as the procession heads for the initiation compound.

Some informants report that at around sunset on the final Friday afternoon, the girls and women return to the initiation lodge. Subsequent to cooking and eating, a big fire is made at the initiation lodge. The girls' mothers now stomp, break the grass hoops, veils and switches and throw them in the fire whilst singing the whole time. This ceremony is known as ho tulela, to break. The breaking and disposal ceremony, whether it occurs at the river (as stated previously), or back at the initiation lodge, is

significant for a number of reasons. It is an action indicating the end of the initiation period, as well as ensuring that no outsider will get her/his hands on any initiation item, using it for evil intents. Adding to this, Dutton (1923:88) explains that this symbolises the leaving behind of the actions and thoughts of childhood. The hide skirts, beads and bead waistbands are regarded as too valuable to be destroyed and thus they are put away for later use.

After the completion of the above-mentioned burning ceremony (if customary here), the initiates and initiated women and girls have much to do in preparation for the night's activities.

In anticipation of the coming-out and while not directed specifically at the initiates, Zietsman (1972:289) adds that if necessary, the initiation hut may be replastered. Using a mixture of ground and fresh cow dung, the older women would have been responsible for this task. Although he concedes that this may also have taken place earlier, he goes on to say that the plastering of the initiation hut is a custom that not all Basotho follow. Even though none of my informants reported anything about replastering huts after the white clay is washed off, I do however feel it warrants a mention.

5.6 THREE COLOURS: RED

The red stage begins toward the end of the initiation with the closing of the initiation. The white clay is washed off and the initiates' faces and bodies are now rubbed with a mixture of red-ochre (letsoku) and fat; hair is smeared with a black substance (sekama); and the previous initiation dress is discarded, to be replaced by cow-hide skirts (mose wa kgomo) – long at the back and short in front (see Photo 14). With regard to the other skirts worn during the coming-out ceremony, my informants reveal that the graduates wear four, very short flannel skirts (setota) to make their hips appear wider and over this a traditional tasselled (thetana) skirt.

Photo 14: Initiates with their ochre smeared bodies (Photo by: Kobus Zietsman 1972)

Closing feast and ceremonies

Paying no attention to the night's length

Upon arrival back at the initiation lodge on the Friday, after having completed the practices down at the river, two main streams of conduct are observed. These will subsequently become clear. Candidates from a number of totem groups follow a set of specific prescriptions, while those from, for example the Bahlakwana, Bakwena and Bataung keep to others.

Upon the arrival of the elders, the initiate's hair is shaven (ho kuta klopo). The remaining area of the round pate is rubbed with a shiny black substance (sekama) that is mixed with fat and the hair is rolled into mini-dreadlocks (ho forwa). The shaven part of the head, the face and body are smeared with a mixture of red-ochre and fat (mofura a lefehlo). A rudimentary purpose of the red-ochre and fat mixture is to treat the roughness of the skin after wearing the clay mixture for an extended time. The initiates now receive the inner-items of their new outfits, viz. small tasselled skirt (thetana) and beaded waistbands and married women, their longer flannel skirts. In Basotho culture, a married woman should dress modestly. For example, her skirts or dresses should always come below the knee and baring her breasts in public is

frowned upon. Respecting this edict, for the coming-out, instead of short skirts they wear a flannel skirt and blouse.

Later that afternoon, the ochre is reapplied and the initiates receive their elegant cowhide skirts (mosi wa kgomo). Already initiated girls dress in much the same fashion as the initiates: pleated flannel skirts, beads, red-ochre and the ilmenite mixture in their hair. In order to distinguish them from the initiates, they wear a bra or small, tight-fitting top. Since these young girls have already been initiated, they do not receive new blankets at the public coming-out.

After this is completed, around dusk (sholane) the initiates and other women and girls go to one side, *to go and catch the doves* (ba ya maebeng) (cf. also Zietsman 1972:289; Sekese 1962:18-20). They walk in circles and pretend to grab at imaginary doves, all the while imitating the birds' calls and flight. Alternatively, initiates pick up little stones (not a particular kind, just whatever small stones are lying around). According to informants, the stones represent doves and are then put in a dish, securely closing the container so that they do not fly away. A designated person (whoever is appointed by the older women) carries the container to the lodge where it is then thrown to the floor. This custom is brief and according to informants, signals that the initiates will not go inside again that evening and that the time for thojane has arrived. No-one was able to explain the exact meaning of the *catching of the doves* custom; they simply said that it seems as if today it does not have a particular function and is performed as a game. Zietsman (1972:289) speculates that maybe the girls and women make use of this opportunity to go and relieve themselves. Although not explaining the meaning of the ceremony, Sekese (1962:18-20) adds an interesting fact: the sheep and goats slaughtered for the particular ceremonial and coming-out festivity, were referred to as the doves (maeba).

After this ceremony, initiates who belong to certain totem groups return to the initiation hut where they have to stay awake the whole night in a sitting position. Some groups of the Batebele, for example, follow this custom which is known as ba ya thintha. They sit with their legs straight in front of them and any smearing of the ilmenite mixture or red-ochre will indicate whether they had laid a head on the shoulder of the girl sitting next to her or whether the legs or arms were bent. Such a transgression is regarded as very unlucky and it is believed that it may result in a failed initiation. To prevent accidental smearing of the thickly (ho sêhlwa) applied ochre mixture, a clay water pot (nkgo ya letsopa) is placed under the legs so that

they do not touch the ground. The instructress may keep the girls awake with a stick or when nature calls, initiates are helped to a standing position by pulling them up by the hands – "*the tricky part, is urinating without bending the knees.*"

According to one informant, on this night, initiates remain naked, a statement substantiated by Sekese (1962:18-20). He argues that even if it has rained all night, the candidates are not even given a blanket. Other informants report that they at least wear their traditional tasselled skirts. After eating, the initiates sing. Forming a line outside the courtyard enclosure, again shielded from view by the blanket-tunnel, the initiates undergo another ritual. Three times that night, a mixture of cold water and special medicines are poured, starting from the top of the head, down the initiate's back. Upon their return to the courtyard, these initiates join the singing of those that follow the thojane practice (explained below). An informant explains that this is done to strengthen the initiate, particularly so that she "*will not have problems once home*." Pertinently, she adds that this aims at promoting fertility, as once graduated, the initiate is marriageable.

The girls, who from the beginning took their places outside the initiation hut, like the members of the Bataung, Bakubung, Bahlakawana and some Bakwena, are subject to the same rules as those girls inside the hut (cf. Sekese 1962:18-20; Zietsman 1972:290). Members of the afore-mentioned groups put their hands on the shoulders of the girl in front of her, snaking among the revellers in order to stay awake. When a girl realises that the one behind her is beginning to succumb to the ever-weightier appeal of sleep, she repeatedly turns her head, blowing in the face of the one behind her and in song discourages such weakness. It is said of those who perform this practice: ba leta thojane. The girl's maternal uncle (malome) is also nearby to encourage that she not stumble into the tempting arms of sleep. If she were to fall asleep, she would have spoilt her initiation (o sentse lebollo) and would have to repeat it at a later stage. The girl's mother's brother's interest is motivated not only by his responsibility to protect his sister's off-spring, but ultimately to deter such a girl from having to undergo the process all over again because of a slip at such a late stage. One of these men may even piggyback exhausted initiates offering them a momentary reprieve. Besides spoiling the initiation, Ellenberger (1992:289) sheds some light on why all these measures are taken to keep the girl from sleep. He proposes that they are rooted in the belief that the candidate will become barren if she falls asleep during this event.

All the others present, usually initiated persons of both sexes, entertain themselves with song and wild dancing, as well as beer drinking. At this occasion, not much is eaten, but regardless, the festivities last the whole night and nobody may sleep. On a lighter note, an informant laughingly recounts how ashen they were from the large bonfire and shuffling feet after this all-night dance session. This song and dance all-night vigil of the Friday night of the closing ceremony, known as thojane[60], is a final test of the initiates' ability to endure hardship, but is also juxtaposed with that of the opening feasts and songs called ledingwana.

A public tribute

On the Saturday morning, die-hard revellers of the previous night's successful festivities sit in scattered groups wearily awaiting the formal and public presentation of the graduates. Having briefly been taken around to meet important persons, I was banished from the promoter's yard until much later. The ritual slaughter of the sheep and goats was to take place. The goat's gallbladder and the fat encasing the insides of the slaughtered sheep (mohlehlo) are particularly significant to, for example, the Bataung. The rest of the meat is then cooked for after the formal coming-out and introductions.

At around midday the time for the formal presentation of the graduates to the community at large takes place. Until now, the initiates have been busying themselves within the confines of the courtyard. As the moment draws near a colourful and animated crowd gathers, including children and uninitiated persons. Interestingly, large numbers of the spectators are young bachelors. Nonchalantly and feigning boredom they begin drawing nearer. A tight group of women congregate around the entrance of the courtyard. Beginning to ululate the crowd expectantly steps forward. Unpredictably a very low-pitched continuous hum silences the crowd. Molobe, dressed in a traditional tasselled skirt (thetana) and a cowhide skirt appears, leading the earnest procession of graduates. If customary, initiates also wear a goat's gallbladder pinned to their hair and the fat encasing the insides of the slaughtered sheep (mohlehlo), twisted like a necklace around their necks (see Photos 15b & 15c). The Makgolokwe, for example, do not follow this practice, but the Bataung do. In contrast to my observations, Sekese (1962:18-20) purports that the gallbladder from the goat (or sheep) supplied by the initiate's father or mother's brother, was fastened to the girl's hair during the thojane dances of the previous night.

[60] Ellenberger (1992:66) says that thojane only signifies the closing feast, the coming-out feast at which a chief's daughter is present.

With their left hand covering their navels, they walk with a straight-legged gate, swaying, snaking through the village (ba kolokile) until they are out of sight. During the procession, known as tebuka (see Photo 15a), a young man may have his mother drape a scarf around a graduating girl's neck, indicating that he wishes to marry her. If the girl likes him too, she catches the scarf, not allowing it to fall to the ground. Conversely, if she does not wish to pursue a relationship with him, she lets it fall to the ground and he knows that she does not reciprocate his feelings. In good Sesotho, it is then said: "*o kgaotswe bomena*", meaning that the girl has rejected the young man's advances during the tebuka slow walk through and among the spectators. These days, the suitor may give a gift of a watch or bangles, instead of a scarf.

On their return and within the confines of the courtyard, for the final coming-out, the graduate further receives a new blanket which is worn around the shoulders, while the torso remains bare and she is adorned with beaded necklaces, earrings (masale) and bangles. Other accessories include sunglasses, belts (mabanta) and sometimes towels decorated with mirrors and ribbons. The Batlokwa further adorn their graduates with a headband made of coloured beads and decorated with mirrors, known as kolo. All these articles are intended to further beautify (ho kgabisa) the graduate. The "red stage" introduces a new period in the life of the initiate and for this reason, everything she now wears must be new.

Photo 15 a: The tebuka ritual

Photo 15b: The public presentation of the graduates

Again the girls emerge now dressed in their full coming-out splendour. Family and friends swarm around the graduates, congratulating them with kisses and excited chatter. The young men too try to kiss the girls, all the time commenting on their attractive appearance. Freely mingling with those present, posing for group and individual photographs now becomes the focal point for some time (see Photos 16a & 16b).

Those initiates, now known as ditswejane, who live far away, may depart for home (with their parents and family members). Before this, though, they enter the seclusion courtyard for official purposes a final time. The traditional healer presents the graduates with medicines. Custom prescribes that at least one sheep be slaughtered so that all those present may eat before leaving for their respective homes. The other girls may continue talking to the men and participate in all kinds of games. By afternoon, everyone disperses and the initiation has now run its course.

When initiates depart from the initiation compound, they have not washed off the ochre. They go to their respective homes, still dressed in the traditional coming-out dress of the cowhide skirt, adorned with their new blankets and a variety of beautifying items.

Photo 15c: Note the gallbladder pinned to the hair and the twisted fat necklaces

Photo 16a: A group photo of the graduated initiates after receiving their new blankets

Photo 16b: The new graduates with their coming-out finery. The candidate on the right is married, therefore she wears a flannel skirt and blouse becoming of her status

5.7 POST INITIATION PERIOD

That girl, knows the cows

On her return home, a sheep is slaughtered and everyone who lives nearby is invited to celebrate her homecoming (cf. also Postma 1954:134-135). Beer is also often brewed for the occasion. This is a time of great happiness as the initiate is soon to be regarded as a fully-fledged graduate of initiation (morwetsana). Girls will, upon request, sing the songs or perform the dances. This feast is purely to demonstrate delight for the girl's return. For those who do not live too far away, their peers (thaka) who have just graduated with them will accompany them to their respective parties (moketi).

After a period lasting from a day to three weeks, the ochre and fat mixture is washed off amidst great happiness, as the initiate is now regarded as standing on the threshold of womanhood. On this occasion, the *released* candidate ideally wears new clothes. If a graduate washes off the red-ochre mixture early, "*she may soon come to realise she is no longer unique, and 'pretty' like those that have not washed it off yet*." According to an informant, even the boys find a girl wearing her traditional coming-out outfit appealing. For example, they might say: "*Wow, that girl knows the cows, hey!"* (atsh, waai wotla kgomo wannana ae).

For the first few days after their return, girls perform various household activities such as cooking, sweeping, plastering, grinding dried grains, etc. It is also common for them to sleep on their sleeping mats (moseme) to prevent the ochre mixture from marking and staining their bedding. When the ochre and powdered ilmenite is washed off, former initiates receive new dresses to wear. Informants explain that graduates receive a number of small pleated skirts (thebeta), which are worn under the traditional seshweshwe dresses. The beads and other adornments are taken off and put away. The ochre-smeared blankets are washed by the girls themselves and then worn again. At this stage, they are now ready to resume their various tasks and possible work responsibilities.

These after-initiation actions mentioned are applicable to most Basotho groups. In some cases, however, they may deviate somewhat. For example, no welcoming feast is held and the week-long activities at their homes may be shortened drastically (or fall away altogether). The totem customs will determine what is done, while a

number of factors (e.g. farming activities, school or work responsibilities, and degree of Westernisation) may also result in any extended ceremonies being phased out.

Entering the adult ranks

After graduating from initiation, girls are meant to be physically and spiritually much stronger, while the training and instruction is intended to toughen as well as strengthen them for life. Having gained greater personal strength, changes of a spiritual or psychological nature are particularly lauded. The initiated girl with a heart now of a young woman, as a fully-fledged member of the community, demonstrates her maturity by keeping herself busy with adult matters. Just the privilege of sitting and eating with adults and participating in discussions of actual importance, with both men and women, demonstrates this point. All the hardships, particularly those that were psychologically taxing, are believed ultimately to better equip the graduated girl to deal with crises that may arise.

Tasks, responsibilities and taboos

Special duties are not delegated to initiated girls, simply because they are newly graduated. Girls should help enthusiastically with household activities, the care and instruction of younger children and exhibit more interest in important women's issues, since initiated girls ought to exhibit such qualities. Of greater importance and often out of necessity, girls should seek employment so that they may contribute to the household income.

Certain taboos exist to which initiated girls should adhere. They are sometimes very broad and complicated in nature and may differ from group to group, as well as from family to family (Zietsman 1972:300). It may happen that newly initiated girls may not attend other initiation schools for a year. This is to test whether they can remember what they learned during the initiation period. After the year, they are permitted to visit initiation rites and here they are asked many questions regarding all aspects surrounding initiation. If they, in the mean time, have forgotten these things, their memory is jolted with fresh beatings.

Yet others are not viewed as fully-fledged graduates of initiation until they return to the initiation lodge to 'learn the laws' (thuta melao), thus to receive further instruction in the laws of the Basotho and learn the full 'secret' of initiation. Concerning this, the

identity of Motanyane (both the male and female, where applicable) are divulged. Additionally, this event serves as a refresher period during which songs and dances are revisited. Approximately six months to a year normally elapses before this event. One informant was adamant that after graduating from initiation, the community views one as a graduate of initiation, but one has to go through the process a second time, with different emphases, if one desires to become an instructress.

Group formation

Since some girls who attend the same initiation come from far and wide, the formation of groups is difficult and often impossible for them. Where possible, such contemporaries (thaka) ideally help where they can and visit back and forth. As friends in any society, they might bring along small token gifts. Contemporaries have much in common, often sharing secrets and usually preferring one another's friendship. However, because of changed attitudes within the communities, few restrictions are placed on with whom friendships are established these days. Persons who were initiated together should ideally not insult each other or fight (Zietsman 1972:302). If one of them is involved in a dispute with an outsider, it is customary that her peer will defend her. Conversely, interfering with conjugal matters is strongly discouraged, as these are clearly issues for the family. To the contrary, accompanying one another on love-excursions or mediating with a prospective partner, is deemed acceptable. Cohorts usually form close bonds and where they live in close proximity, they will habitually seek out one another's company. The reality of the matter, though, is that the jealousies that develop during the initiation period often prevent even civil interaction.

I have to agree with Zietsman (1972:308) who laments that little is said in the literature about the post-initiation period of the girls, making it difficult to compare findings.

5.8 SUMMARY

The ethnographic data, as gleaned from informants and presented in this chapter only partially adheres to Van Gennep's tripartite scheme. The essentials of separation, transition and reincorporation are present in the female initiation institution among the Basotho. The margins or boundaries of Van Gennep's three

stages do, however, not clearly fit the distinction that the Basotho make of the phases of female initiation.

One may argue that from the time the initiates report to the village for initiation their segregation from the larger community comes into effect. A distinct separation is maintained until the initiates enter the white phase, at which time the degree of their marginality is reduced. Simultaneous to their separation, the actions and teachings in the preparatory period are a definite prelude for the introduction to the black phase, together with the trials and hardships that initiates endure. In the preparatory period alone, one may speak of a separation, as well as a transition. The transitional stage however, continues into the black, white and red phases, at which time the reintroduction is manifested in a public inauguration of the candidates.

The black stage broadly adheres to Van Gennep's criteria for transition. It is clearly a period of marginality, of darkness and of symbolic death. The dark, ash-burnt mixture with which their entire bodies are smeared immediately conveys initiates' non-existence. Their outfit that consists of a dull blanket and undecorated veil also signifies bleakness. The veil that prevents anyone seeing their faces immediately makes for a barrier, while the blanket is so worn that their whole bodies are covered. All their movements are slow and wherever they walk, their heads are submissively bent. Down at the ditches, when initiates encounter the initiation 'mystery' named Motanyane, the end of childhood, the ritual death is brought about either by a circumcision, sexual degradation or a beating. The fact that these acts (whichever they may be) all take place down in the ditches in close proximity to the water, is also significant. The water pools, ditches and gullies, those crevices created by water eroding the stone or soil may be indicative of the female genitalia and their depth and folds.

The white phase with its lightness of colour, elaborate outfits and colourfully decorated veils, together with a significant freedom of movement and attracting of attention, may be interpreted as a partial acknowledgement of existence. Although initiates' faces are still covered, their cocky and taunting attitude towards 'outsiders' signifies a birth of a kind. These individuals however, are still very much regarded as being between states, perhaps why such boisterous behaviour is permitted during this time. Additionally, just to keep initiates in check, they are subjected to another beating, shall we say, for old times' sake, as a reminder.

Once the red phase is entered, it is obvious that the candidate is being welcomed back into the world of the present. Her demeanour is controlled (as called for by Basotho culture) and her dress is elegant, befitting of the new status and role the initiate is expected to fulfil in society. This period of reincorporation is gradual, although acknowledged in a public event, it continues for some weeks upon the graduate's arrival home. The attention and feasts are clearly in line with the prescriptions set out by Van Gennep. However, one cannot say that the reincorporation is complete with the washing off of the ochre. Rather, only after some six months or more, after returning to the initiation school to learn the laws and full secrets of initiation, is it really viewed as concluded. Only at this time, is the candidate seen as marriageable and standing on the threshold of womanhood. Before this, even if she had graduated from the official closing, she is still viewed as somewhat of a minor.

The other very significant issue that warrants reflection is the so-called *secret*. What exactly is the secret that is so conscientiously kept? Is it that women no longer perform a circumcision operation but let on to their men-folk that they do? Is it that initiation teachings are emphasised to an extent punishable by law? Is it that a male person has sexual relations with the initiates under the auspices of a mysterious figure?

Concerning circumcision, the question is: does it occur or not? Throughout this chapter, I purposefully included references to circumcision from the literature, but also from my informants because, based on my ethnographic findings and to the best of my knowledge, I cannot say with certainty whether it occurs or not. It is very possible that, as a practice, it was once customary and widespread. However, because of a number of reasons, it has disappeared and only the symbolic remnants remain. On the other hand, it may be a practice. Because of a deep-seated trepidation and recognition that this prised cultural tradition is not in line with the barrage of talk pertaining to women's and children's rights, messages of stopping abuse and the equality of women, the custodians of the culture are remaining tight-lipped. Fearing most likely that the authorities will blindly close every initiation school in sight, forces the custodians of the culture to take that knowledge underground, refuting it when asked. A problem with this reasoning is that in fact, the women guarding the *secret* purport that they for example, no longer perform circumcision operations but leave the men particularly, thinking that they do. This makes me consider that perhaps in the early missionary accounts and ethnographies where

reference is made to circumcision operations during the female initiation of the Basotho, the information was obtained from male informants. Returning to the proposition by women that this is a secret kept from men, I doubt whether in the tight-knit societies where initiation is still common that the elders (men) are truly oblivious to circumcision practices, if they do occur.

Accepted is the fact that a revered character known as Motanyane is an important functionary of the female initiation institution. Accepted is that this mysterious figure's primary function is 'to initiate' (ho bolotsa) candidates. What is disputed are the practices or procedures that occur. One may argue that the variation in response is due to regional or specific institutional differences. That over a period of time, for example, at the initiations hosted at one locale, particular practices evolve as new hosts, teachers and other functionaries interpret and reinterpret the teachings and practices of old. Accordingly, new variations of a previous practice become the norm. This is in line with the accepted argument surrounding the matter of how culture changes. From the analysis of the data, I cannot say with certainty which of the descriptions is older and more true to the original and which are newer reinventions.

At least the following conclusions drawn from this chapter are irrefutable. Female initiation among the Basotho is a revered cultural practice. The broad patterns remain true to the original. Before candidates are officially admitted to initiation, a significant preparatory period is completed during which time candidates are strengthened and toughened by the manual labour of collecting large amounts of wood. They are instructed in the secrets of initiation by means of a number of kinds of songs, notably secret songs, while light initiation songs and songs of praise too, broaden their knowledge about the institution, as well as a number of other significant issues.

The restriction on their movement and contact with outsiders is governed by strict rules and an itinerary that is full of planned activities. Further protection from malevolent influences are afforded by rituals and specially prepared medicines, as well as a number of behavioural rules that apply to significant persons in the life of the initiates, mainly her parents and immediate family.

During the official opening of the initiation, age-old practices like eating liver (or a substitute thereof) purported to further strengthen the candidate and very important rituals that take place down at the ditches, remain. That a mysterious figure named Motanyane exists and serves as functionary for significant rituals is unchallenged.

Water remains an important feature of the entire initiation process. This becomes evident from the repeated rituals that take place down at the river; Motanyane who is inextricably bound to the water; the number of smaller practices involving water (such as pouring water over the initiates' heads and backs); washing and disposing of ash-remnants in the water; that many of the materials from which characteristic initiation articles are made, for example, the lodi used to make the grass hoops, grow near to the water, etc. Additionally, that initiates' bodies are smeared and painted with a black mixture, followed by a white water-thinned clay mixture, markedly corresponds with the traditional.

The actions such as shaving off the hair, the smearing of ochre and ilmenite, the plastering of the initiation hut, the giving of new skirts and beads, as well as all the festivities in anticipation of the closing of the initiation, indicate that the initiate is embarking on a new stage in her life. It is where everything is new and different. This is an important occasion and must be ratified by a kind of public assembly with many to witness the changes that have occurred in the girl. It is a happy occasion in the girl's life and that is why beer is enjoyed, songs sung and dances performed, as well as much celebrating.

Even once home, graduates are (most times) gradually reintroduced into society, allowing them time to adjust to their new status and the requirements of that station. Having to return after a time to the initiation school to learn the *full secrets and laws* of initiation before they are formally released with the accompanying status change, demonstrates in my opinion, the wish that initiation should be understood and respected as a moulding institution which instils values and attitudes that the Basotho wish to emphasise and perpetuate.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this study was to investigate and report on female initiation as it pertains to the Basotho of the Free State and Lesotho. Spanning a number of years (1998-2006), significant and detailed ethnographic material was systematically collected, triangulating a number of research methods and techniques and this dissertation is the fruit of that labour. The time has passed when research could be pursued purely for academic purposes, for the attainment, for example, of a degree. Academic products are measured by, among other things, their utilitarian applicability. In the real world, the issue of initiation is presently enjoying and has for some time, enjoyed much attention. Globally, female genital mutilation/cutting, and nationally, the circumcision of boys, often associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, particularly direct attention to the health of candidates in transition. In the Free State for example, legislation has been passed to address these matters particularly. It is tempting to deliberate on the pragmatic value of this study, given these circumstances. That this study contributes answers to questions surrounding initiation, particularly the female initiation of the Basotho, is a certainty. However, as it was not an explicit objective, coupled with the sensitivity of the topic, this is not the time or the place to do so.

That this study has an academic, scientific and particularly anthropological value may be highlighted in a number of ways. Firstly, this study significantly addresses the hiatus in the literature by contributing to the body of scientific evidence an ethnography that details the initiation process, but also gives voice to the personal experiences of Basotho women who have undergone initiation. Emanating from this, attitudes towards life in general become evident, but so too does the interplay between societal attitudes and the self. Multiple stories, including personal reflections abound, giving credence to the postmodern edict that impersonal presentation denies a major portion of the research process and experience. Not only is there relief from the 35-year drought since the previous contribution in South African literature, but this study also traces female initiation over a period of a century, providing an important historical overview.

Secondly, this study addresses the importance of clearly conceptualising and distinguishing related concepts applied during the data collection and analysis process. Pertinently, a concept-confusion, previously lacking, was identified in the Southern African literature. Researchers (and the lay public, alike) fail to discern clearly the difference between the process of initiation and the two actions 'to initiate' and 'to circumcise', often using the latter as synonymous with the other. The summative statements that they subsequently make should not be taken as authoritative.

Thirdly, this study speaks critically to the paucity of theoretical underpinnings with which investigations of this nature were commonly approached and presented. Addressing this lacuna, it was originally decided to apply Van Gennep's (1909) tripartite scheme for rites of passage in the presentation and analysis of the empirical data. The ethnographic material however, spoke of delineated phases that did not coherently fit the tripartite scheme and for that reason, the presentation followed the phases as outlined by the Basotho and not Van Gennep. The analysis did, however, take into account the component parts of separation, transition and reincorporation.

That there was not a neat fit between the tripartite scheme and the ethnographic material was not indicative of a failed study; rather, it made room for theoretical verification and elaboration. Based on the empirical evidence, female initiation as it is found among the Basotho, points to a five-phase logical progression. Arguably, some groups skip, if you will, the black stage (as conceptualised in this study), directly painting their initiates' bodies with the white clay. Regardless of the colour representation here, the nature of these candidates' instruction and the sequencing of events follow the same lines as other initiates, making it legitimate to question the validity of Van Gennep's tripartite scheme.

Additionally, one gets the impression from Van Gennep and others who reworked his propositions that a definite and noticeable distinction occurs as candidates move from and through the stages of separation, transition and reincorporation; from the profane to the sacred and back to the profane. My findings are indicative that this is not the case among the Basotho. Rather, it appears that there are elements of separation, transition and reincorporation contained within each of the phases delineated in the female initiation process of the Basotho.

The argument therefore, is that Van Gennep's three-stage scheme, which he and others propose as a universal structure of initiation from childhood to adulthood and perhaps other rites of passage, is firstly, not universal and secondly, does not satisfactorily account for the structuring of the process. The sequence of events is culture-specific and contained within these are elements of separation, transition and reincorporation. However, that these three stages irrefutably structure the passage from one phase to another, seems to be a misapprehension.

Fourthly, this study has methodological value. It substantiates the necessity of building rapport, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues. The establishment of relationships and in this case, a protracted socialisation process was paramount to the success of the investigation. It offered an opportunity to develop an elementary knowledge of the topic, in this case, female initiation among the Basotho, which could be elaborated with in-depth questioning. Additionally, it afforded a solid foundation upon which sound judgements could be made regarding the validity of the findings. That the interviews were all personally conducted in the local language of Sesotho considerably enhanced the type of relationships that were established, as well as the depth of the information obtained from informants. Methodologically this is significant, since it reduced the additional biases created by a third-person interviewer. Being personally present allowed the researcher the opportunity to observe in addition to purely interviewing, again laying the foundation from which to make appropriate deductions.

The research design, with the accompanying methods and techniques applied were sufficiently compliant to accommodate a variety of informants in a number of settings. The intrinsic value of individual methods and techniques was enhanced by the combination applied in this investigation. Each enriched the other, elevating the bar and foundation upon which the next could be applied and with which information could be verified. They became closely intertwined, flowing from one, to and through the other in a logical progression.

None of the research methods and techniques placed limitations on the pursuit of understanding the initiation process or its complexities. Rather, they afforded a greater insight in the light of their informality and flexibility. Therefore, this study verifies the applicability of participant observation, the use of key informants, together with in-depth and life history interviewing. If, however, access was limited to the very secret cultural information of the female initiation institution among the Basotho, it

had to do with the researcher herself not having undergone initiation. Albeit having access to all the events and the accompanying knowledge, the restriction placed on divulging the said intricacies of the intimate and private practices would apply to her as well.

The resultant empirical data gleaned from this investigation and the true depth and quality of the ethnography emphasise that snowball sampling is acceptable and when applied to sensitive topics, its limitations do not necessarily detract from the worth of the findings. It may even be argued that because of the sensitivity of the topic, it enhanced the quality of the data, as it allowed for the continuous pursuit of information. Had another method of identifying respondents been applied, the data would in all likelihood have yielded very different results.

Fifthly, this study points to the importance of the enculturation process. In the communities where initiation is commonplace and among peoples who have a high regard for initiation, the inescapable fact is that initiation is an important vehicle for the transmission of culture. This at once brings to light the value initiation has for the Basotho.

Before such a line of argument is elaborated, it is necessary to qualify the stance taken here. The content of this ethnography is often provocative, easily warranting a judgemental, anti-initiation stance. What is at stake then, is opposing an ideology by applying feminist, western standards. Rather, the judgement is from a cultural relativist position. When asking the question what the value is of initiation for the Basotho, a very different set of answers becomes apparent. Although initiation is not valued by all, for those that appreciate it, it is an important means by which traditional culture is maintained and even promoted. Not only are things of old taught (implicitly and explicitly), current virtues and values are imparted along a number of avenues.

Throughout the initiation process, initiates do not have the luxury of freewill or choice. They are under the control of their instructress and the super-teacher, Motanyane, as they are under the authority of their father, and later their husband and ultimately that of society. The institution impresses these societal virtues upon initiates by breaking the heart of the girl/woman into that of service. Arguably, this could be taught in a simpler manner, but within the institution of initiation, other women take the girls/women to discipline and to train. The conditioning process is what is important. The notion for the Basotho is that initiates should be broken down to be of value to

the society. Whether all graduates in actuality experience it favourably, is challenged in the frank case-study where initiation is viewed as essentially evil. Being submissive, with the softness of a young girl is not desired, but rather she should be moulded into a young woman with the heart of lions and of a man. This is the fundamental outcome initiation wishes to bring about. This must not be confused with the promotion of hot-headed and opinionated young women; rather, it is the silent acknowledgement that life is tough and the challenges and hardships it offers must be dealt with, with a combination of tenacity and acquiescence. That the graduate, be she young and unmarried or already married, is perceived as possessing the characteristics required of a true Mosotho woman, able to endure and cope with hardship in a stoic manner, is evident. Initiation means getting out from under the covers of youth and childishness and into the new role corresponding with the status that was acquired by successfully completing all the tests and trials.

Certainly, ‘cutting the tail’ may have definite connotations with the cutting of the clitoris (I could not say with certainty, because when I had the opportunity to look, I did not!!!). It is possible however, that it is synonymous to cutting the apron strings, inherently leaving behind a period of life and embarking on a new path with unique challenges and demands. For those who attend during their teens, it is a passage from childhood to adulthood, the outcome of which is expressed in the candidate’s marriageable status. For those who attend later on in life, after marriage or for the express purpose of becoming a traditional healer themselves, it is also a passage to social adulthood. Initiation serves as a transition from childhood, as well as a preparation for adulthood.

Essential to this idea is that the nubility value contained within initiation is further advanced by a number of teachings specifically contained within the songs sung during initiation, as well as in the sex education overtly or covertly conveyed (by the instructress and/or Motanyane). That notions of fertility are important, are suggested by the full moon announcing initiation, certain food restrictions (e.g. eggs), or not falling asleep during the thojane activities the night before the official coming-out and the special medicines imparted by the traditional healer just before graduates depart for home to promote fertility.

As a rite of passage, the institution of female initiation among the Basotho has other outcomes worth mentioning. In areas where initiation is still commonly practised, the public events are the focus of attention for graduated women (and to a lesser extent

the men) and a gathering place to have fun. This implicit outcome of initiation speaks to the eminent entertainment value of such events. With the exception of a few, informants spoke of the festive atmosphere and the enjoyment they derived from singing songs and dancing at the initiation compound. Even for initiates, the song and dance performed for others is for purely recreational purposes. In addition, during the weeks or months that the initiation is under way, it is also a setting where friendships are formed among the regular visitors to the initiation compound. Family ties may even be forged, as an attending woman recommends to her son or relative a particularly eligible wife.

All the Basotho women consulted during this investigation recognised the significance of their ancestors and traditional healers in their everyday lives. Their belief system is not exclusively traditional, but may rather be seen as a combination of traditional and Christian. During the initiation period, ancestors and traditional healers are acknowledged in a number of ways. Emphasising totem seniority especially and abiding by the specific requisites prescribed by their different totem affiliation regarding certain practices, together with the traditional healer functionary and his/his medicines are at least indications of a religiosity.

Inherently appreciating the secrecy of the custom and that such precautions are taken to protect the information from becoming public knowledge, begets the question of obligations. Having gained access to an inner society, so to speak, what obligations and considerations apply? Primarily, there is an obligation to protect the identity of the informants. It is the opinion of the researcher that this has been satisfactorily executed and maintained throughout the study. Having asked what the value of initiation is for the Basotho, it is worth asking what the value of this study is to them. In recognition of the contribution that the significant informants made, it is fitting to give something back. The notion is, on an individual basis as the interviews were conducted, that this finished product be handed over to them. It is accepted that some are illiterate and will not *per se* read the contents; nevertheless, it will serve as a token gift of appreciation. For those who do read it, it may broaden their knowledge or perhaps draw attention to practices that may be adjusted to reduce the negative attitude with which ‘outsiders’ view them. It may even make them aware that regulatory bodies exist to whom they are accountable.

The thoroughness of the study and depth of empirical evidence offers the opportunity to speculate broadly on female initiation among the Basotho. It is appropriate to

come back to Van Gennep's processual structure. He and others emphasise the significance of the central, liminal stage. Whether it is more contained or fluid, as is argued above, it is worthwhile contemplating some aspects of the transitional phase. Being not here-nor-there, or betwixt-and-between states, Basotho initiates are essentially dead to the world. Their death is primarily symbolised by being painted black. Perhaps letting their hair and nails grow is a reversion back to nature. Their non-existence may be physically manifested by the veils and by the total covering of the body with a blanket which obliterates them from view, particularly from the eyes of men. The pivoting or displacement of this stage is particularly evident in their being given male names and according to some informants, being totally naked. Other than that, being stripped of any status previously held, further illustrates the displacement of candidates. Conversely, on one occasion some candidates are carried home on the backs of the women, signalling a return to infancy, re-enacting how mothers carried their young. Similarly, emerging from the water and being hit may suggest the birthing process. Emerging from the womb with its fluids and being hit on the backside to cause the newborn to cry, may facilitate breath and life. The reference to cutting the tail may mean severing the umbilical cord, at once indicating the separation of mother from child and the child from childhood and its immature ways, again another indication of rebirth. What we have here is a clear dichotomy: death and birth, dead and living, perhaps even the contrast between human and animal. Not wearing any clothes or even being denied sanitary pads or tampons, if by chance they are having their period, are indicative of animal-like beings. The conditioning process in which the heart of the girl is broken to bring back a stronger and more resilient young woman, is realised by trials. Such trials for the Basotho, are possible circumcision, beatings, enduring heat (when initiates must remove a mealie from a boiling pot of water, or even jumping over the fire) or impossible physical tests (picking up the liver or sticks from the ground with hands held behind the back or sitting all night with outstretched limbs).

Simultaneous to the breaking down, initiates are rebuilt by means of teachings of a number of kinds. Secret songs and the instruction in history and kinship are noteworthy in this regard. The introduction of the obscure and mysterious Motanyane down at the consecrated place at the river challenges initiates not only physically, but also mentally. Who and what is this character? Is it man; is it snake? Possibly, the relationship between culture and nature is challenged: culture being the creator or generator of this 'mystery' and nature that brings forth the snake. Perhaps Motanyane symbolises male dominance. Already inferences were made that

Motanyane is the controller of the river and thus holds authority over women. It is possible that the link between Motanyane and the snake is significant as well. If the Freudian view that snakes represent the male penis is applied here, it can be deduced that the symbolism of male dominance is not too far-fetched. Motanyane, the snake, the penis, the man, is the authority over women. It is already established that Motanyane elicits terror, fear and awe making the personified form an instrument of intimidation and oppression – the oppression of women by men. Besides this, the initiation mystery is an instructive device.

It is likely that the reasoning was on track up to and including the association of snakes with the penis, together with the assumption that the initiation mystery is a man. Motanyane as an authority over women may symbolise something entirely different. Consider Motanyane with its bizarre combination of fictional, personified and reptilian characteristics as in itself liminal, not here not there, not man (human) and not beast. Because of the inverted quality of this liminal stage, the initiation mystery which is a man is pivoted, and therefore becomes Motanyane the woman, controller of the river and the authority over other women. Following this line of argument, in a patriarchal society where men have control over women, initiation is an institution where subordinate women finally have a sanctified space where they can wield total authority. They cannot execute this power in everyday life (their men will not allow that), but they may exercise total power over their subordinates in this environment that is neither-here-nor-there, where normal societal rules do not apply.

It is important here, to draw another parallel. Some acknowledge the researcher's experience during the research process as important. Sometimes just as important as the experience of informants, in this case, that of graduated Basotho women reflecting on initiation as a hallmark cultural institution. Initiation has not been the only rite of passage at issue. Another rite of passage has been taking place: my own.

At the conclusion of the research process, I realise that it is not a journey from which I walk away unchanged. The challenges posed by this study, which at the times seemed insurmountable, were in fact both necessary academic maturation hurdles and personal stepping-stones on a much larger journey.

As I reflect on the wonderful people I have met during this investigation, I realise that for a moment they permitted me to enter their lives. Fleetingly glimpsing an existence totally removed from mine – so different. I might have been in pursuit of information

for an academic purpose, but the life-lessons gleaned from these remarkable women, and the entire experience, are humbling. If only one thing remains with me, it is the incredible sense of humour that permeates all aspects of their lives and being. I am blessed to have encountered on my path, this experience and these people. Quite simply, in the words of an informant "*I am changed*!"

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APPENDIX 1: List of Sesotho[61] words and phrases

Abuti	Term used to refer to older males, e.g. older brother
Ba (re) ya maebeng / kola maeba	"To go and catch the doves" (dove-catching ceremony). This custom takes place during the closing ceremony of the initiation school, at about sunset or early evening (sholane), just before the initiates enter thojaneng. They remove themselves from all the festivities, walk in circles and pretend to grab at doves. [Doves are regarded as very lucky birds. If one were to enter your home, you may expect good fortune.]
Ba kena	They enter. In this regard, they enter or begin initiation.
Ba kolokile	Walking single file in an orderly fashion.
Bafokeng	Totem identified with the hare ('mutla). The Bafokeng are the most senior ranked group in initiation.
Bakubung	Totem identified with the hippopotamus (kubu)
Bakwena	See Mokwena. Ranked second in seniority after Bafokeng. Totem identified with the crocodile (kwena).
Bale	Young female initiates. Singular: ngwale.
Baloi	Sorcerers. "People who use, or alleged to use medicines for anti-social purposes and to cause harm. They either use special medicines or reverse the effects of ordinary medicines normally used for beneficial purposes" (Ashton 1952:289-294). Singular: moloi
Barwa	San (Bushmen) – the little yellow people from long ago. Cf. Makhomokholo or people 'great at cattle'.
Barwetsana	Initiated marriageable girls. Singular: morwetsana.
Basia	Totem identified with the wild cat (siea, phaha, katse).
Basotho	The South Sotho division of the main Sotho ethnic grouping in South Africa, and the people who chiefly inhabit Lesotho. Singular: Mosotho.
Bataung	See Motaung. Totem identified with the lion (tau).
Batlisisa lekoko	A very important initiation song that is also sung by visitors as a kind of password for admittance to the mophato (initiation enclosure).
Bohadi	Bride price / bride wealth.
Bohoho (bokhokho)	Crumbs (the eating of which is prohibited during initiation; it is a food taboo). The porridge that has been burnt on the bottom of a pot, is also not eaten.
Bolotsa (ho)	To initiate or to circumcise. Ho bolotsa means to hit with a stick all over the body.
Butha-butha	Rest a little while.
Di kobo tse tokwa	Dull blankets. During the pilo stage, initiates wear dull blankets.
Diboko	Totem group. See seboko.
Didietsa (ho)	Ululate. Didietsana is to applaud with shrieking voices.
Difaha	Beads.
Dika (ho). ho dikiswa / Modikong	During the preparatory period before initiation officially commences (four days to three months depending on where the initiation is held),

[61] The lexigraphy applied to Lesotho Sesotho differs from that used in South Africa. For the purposes of this study the South African version is applied.

	prospective initiates are taught dances (metjeko) and songs (dipina), (but not dikoma) in the late afternoon and early evenings, after a day spent collecting wood (rwalla). The day that the pilo is smeared after the official opening of the initiation is known as modikiswo. Modikong is the place where mathisa dika and are hit by a person whom they can see – unlike Motanyane who is unseen.
Dikgibana	Goatskin aprons worn by initiates in the phepa phase covering the front of their abdomens.
Dikgobe	Cooked maize on the cob. Just as initiates are about to enter the black (pilo) stage, it is required that they, using both hands, remove corn on the cob from a pot of hot water.
Dikgolokwane	Woven or plaited grass or reed rings worn by initiates around the waist during the first two stages of the initiation. Singular: kgolokwane. See Rakotsoane (2001:218). Members of the Bakubung and Bafokeng do not wear dikgolokwane. Cf. mabudulela.
Dikobo tse tokwa	The dull blankets.
Dikoma	Secret initiation songs sung by initiates and initiated women. Some of these are sung while kneeling on the ground. Singular: koma – "a highly guarded secret teaching of the institution and as such, viewed as the 'soul' of the institution, is not easily accessible [to] outsiders" (Moitse 1994:45).
Dingaka	Plural of ngaka.
Dintilila	The outfit worn by barwetsana when they return to the initiation school about six months later for the tribal law refresher course (thuta molao).
Diphalana	Whistles (made from sorghum stalks).
Dipina	Songs.
Dipina tsa hae/dipina tsa ka lapeng/dipina tsa bale cf. *dipina tsa tantsi* (songs for which there is dancing).	Light songs that initiates sing. As they are not secret, they may be sung at the mophato while visitors are present. Visitors may even request that the girls sing these songs for them.
Ditea/dithasana	Cowhide skirts worn by initiates after being smeared with the black mixture of burnt grass and motor oil (pilo) on the Sunday when the initiation formally begins. See setea.
Dithaka	Peers /contemporaries.
Dithoko	Poems of praise recited by initiates.
Ditswejane	The form of addressing an initiated girl, after the closing ceremony is completed.
Ha o ae bonele tlung!	'You did not see it while you were in the hut.'
Hlaka	Reed. See lehlakana.
Hlalosa	To explain.
Ho foka	Spray protective medicines on homestead posts and roofs.
Ho fora	Smearing the hair with a black substance (sekema) mixed with fat.
Ho hela	To cut wood.
Ho hlompa batho	To respect people.
Ho ila	Literally, to avoid. The taboos during the initiation period that the initiate's mother and father adhere to, for example, do not cut hair, beard or nails. Initiates themselves, have certain taboos that must be adhered to during initiation, e.g. the eating of eggs, domesticated animal entrails or greeting by the hand. The Bakukung for example, are restricted from engaging in sexual intercourse or going to visit and they may eat only home-prepared foods.
Ho ithuta melao /thuta melao	The return of initiates to the initiation school after about six months for a refresher course in tribal law and to learn the full 'secret' of lebollo. Thereafter a woman may become a mosuwe. The argument is that if you

	do not return for at least a second time, you will not know all the secrets. It is also only after this event that a girl is referred to as a morwetsana.
Ho kgabisa (kgabiso)/O kgabiswe	To decorate. To make pretty (beautify), for example, attaching mirrors and ribbons to initiates' coming-out outfits.
Ho kuta klopo	Shaving initiates hair in a circular pate.
Ho ritela	To brew beer.
Ho sidila / ho pikitla / ho hōhla	To rub.
Ho titimela	To leave home without permission from parents to enter initiation i.e. to run away. Ae titimelang – one who goes to initiation without parental permission.
Ho tlosa bohale	To get rid of the wild.
Ho tulela	The ceremony either on the Thursday down at the river (or on the last evening of the initiation period), at which time the initiates' mothers and older initiated women break, stamp on and throw in the lengopeng fire the grass waist bands, veils and switches the initiates wore during the initiation period. This ceremony, among other things, signifies the end of the initiation period. It further ensures that none of the initiation items used and worn by the initiates will fall into the hands of possible evil doers.
Ke kopa lengope	I ask for the use of the dirches.
Kgahleha	Pretty.
Kgiba/ kgibo/ kgibis/ mokgibo/ mekgibo	Basotho women's dance characterised by a rhythmic moving of the shoulders from a kneeling position/on bended knee, also performed to a song.
Kgibana	Apron of tanned goat skin (without hair), worn by initiates.
Kgokgoba	Walking humpbacked or round-shouldered.
Kgokgobisa tshwene (ho/ba)	The action in which the initiates sing a song intended to chase away any men who may be present at the mophato. This is usually done (between 3 and 6am) before the activities down at the 'ditches' (lengopeng) commence (before the pilo is smeared). During the closing ceremonies, while some initiates are performing thojane, those initiates who remained inside the mophato hut are taken outside three times and water is poured down the back of their head and backs.
Kgolokwane	Woven or plaited grass or reed rings worn by initiates around the waist during the first two stages of the initiation. Plural: dikgolokwane.
Kibana	The skin of a sheep (lekoko ya nku) worn by initiates round the back during the phepa phase. When an initiate is unable to acquire a tanned sheepskin, a sale-like material is used. Plural: dikibana.
Koko (lekoko) ya kgômo	Cow-hide skirt.
Kolo	Headband made with coloured beads and decorated with small mirrors, only worn by Batlokwa initiates.
Kuwane /tuane	Literally a fur cap. Batlokwa initiates wear these headdresses on their heads.
Lebollo	Initiation.
Laela	To command.
Lebollo la bale	Girls' initiation.
Ledingwana / dipina tsa ledingwana [i.e. *ledingwaneng* = the songs]	a) The opening feast and ceremony of the girls' initiation school – the first 'official' day of initiation. b) The first stage of initiation, where initiates are phatsa-ed and smeared with pilo. [Sung by boys the night before they graduate (same as the thojane ceremony of the girls)]. Plural: medingwana.
Lefehlo (mafura a)	Milk fat/ cream is mixed with letsoku.
Lehare	Minora blade, or draw-knife/carver
Lehlakana	See hlaka, a reed. Motaung and Bokubung wear strings of reed-pieces

	criss-crossed over their shoulders and breast (not around the waist). Plural: mahlakana
Lehlatso	Menstruation
Lekoko la nku	Sheep skin skirt (made by mother), worn over setea
Lekoko la kgômo	Cow-hide skirt worn by initiates during their graduation
Lekoko la podi	Goatskin. See dikgibana
Lekokwana	Cow-hide and goatskin covering worn around the abdomen during the "white stage"
Lekunutu	Secret. Plural: makunutu
Lelebe	Labia minora. Plural: malebe
Lelodi/ lodi	A kind of grass, used to weave dikgolokwane. Cf. Rakotoane (2001:200, 207) who states, "it is a local grass used mainly for religious purposes".
Lenaka	A black medicine that initiates are phatsa-ed with
Lengae	Song of praise, sung during the initiation period. Plural: mangae
Lengopeng / lengope	The ditches, dongas or gullies where important female initiation rites take place; a place away from people and close to water
Lentswe	Totem affinity; according to which initiates are arranged and consequently, totem seniority
Lephepeng	A section of the initiation lodge, outside the hut itself, but inside the protection of the seotlwana, where initiates' sleep during the rwalla preparatory phase; and during the phepa stage, if they want to
Leqhalo	The initiates' day-quarters in the veld
Lere	Forked stick/switch given to newly initiated girls to keep lightning away and to ward off magical power. See Rakotoane (2001:214) Plural: mare.
Lesetedi	Hottentot, or 'bushman' (Barwa)
Leshoma / towane	A plant that is dug up and sown into a hat-like object, used to make the tibi that Batlokwa and Mohlakwana initiates wear instead of a veil (lesira). It covers their eyes in a similar way to the veil that other initiates wear.
Lesiba	Feather. The scarf that a boy or his mother drapes around the shoulders of the graduating girl he wishes to marry, during the tebuka custom
Lesira	Loosely woven bulrush or reed veil / mask worn by initiates during the black and white stages of the initiation period. Plural: masira
Leta thojane (ho)	Part of the closing ceremonies, performed on the night before the graduation, Bataung and Makgolokwe girls have to stay awake all night while not bending any of their specially letsoku smeared extremities in fear of spoiling their initiation, while the revellers sing and dance the night away.
Letamo / molatswane	Dam or spring where important rites transpire. See lengopeng
Lethisa	Uninitiated girl or woman. Plural: mathisa
Lethisa le ema ka morepo lapeng	'Uninitiated girls (young girls) stand with their sheepskin blanket at the huts'
Letshollo/ maru	Thunder – leru, seaduma, duma, kiriêtsa; Lighting – lehadima
Letsoku	Red-ochre; that is mixed with fat and rubbed/smeared on the face and body of initiates, marking the beginning of the third stage of initiation just before the official closing of the initiation school
Lidingwaneng	The songs sung on the first day of initiation
Lokolla	Release
Mabanta	Belts
Mabodulela/ malodi	Woven/plaited ropes that are hung around the initiates neck and shoulders at the dam after the mapumelo observances, immediately before the "black stage" is signified by smearing the initiates with pilo
Madibeng	Literally, water pools. It is the first day of the official initiation period when initiates' important rites take place

Maeba	Pigeons / doves. Singular: leeba
Mahe	Eggs (one of the food taboos). Singular: lehe
Mahlakana	Reed skirts which make up the initiation outfit of the Bakubung, Bafokeng, Bataung and Bahlakwana groups. It looks like little sticks that are threaded together and then sewn into a skirt
Malebe	Labia minora. Singular: lelebe
Malome	Mother's brother (younger or older)
Mangae	Songs of praise, only sung in the seclusion of the seotlwana and only sung while sitting or kneeling without clapping or drumming or crouching in a tight arc to trap the sound of the initiates' low-pitched voices. Singular: lengae
Mapumelo	The first stage, viz. the black stage of initiation, where pilo is smeared all over the body. Before mathisa become bale, a particular day is allocated called mapumelo. Women and initiated girls go and visit the girls away from the motse, at the lengopeng where important rites are performed. They say: bana ba bolla. Ho bolotsa means to hit with a stick all over the body. The name of the day, however, has remained.
Maralo	It is the same as ho dika, but now this happens on the Sunday of the white stage.
Mare	Forked sticks/staffs given to newly initiated girls to keep lightning away and to ward off magic power. Singular: lere
Masale	Earrings
Masira	Loosely woven bulrush or reed veils worn by initiates during the black and white stages of the initiation period. Singular: lesira
Mathisa	Uninitiated girls or women. Singular: lethisa.
Matsale	Mother-in-law
Melao	Tribal rules /laws. Singular: molao
Mesuwe	Teachers of the initiation school. Singular: mosuwe
Mme	Literally, mother; term of respect for a woman
Mmankgane	A bat; after being dried, ground to a powder, and mixed with fat, the mixture is used to facilitate the stretching of the labia minora of Basotho girls – a custom not exclusively associated with initiation
Modimo	God -- the highest supernatural power (supreme being; the creator)
Moetlo (singular)*/ meetlo* (plural)*/ setho/ setso*	Culture(s)
Mofifi	Medicine sticks that are buried by the traditional doctor (ngaka) around the initiation enclosure (seotlwana) and initiation hut (mophato) to protect against malevolent influences
Mofokeng	Person from Bafokeng totem group identified with the hare ('mutla). Most senior ranked group
Mofuta	Type, kind, specie
Mohlajweng / motsjana	Oldest daughter from a family to visit her mother's brother (malome) before initiation
Mohlehlo	The fat surrounding sheep (or goat's) entrails, worn by initiates draped around the neck during the tebuka practice of the final stage of initiation.
Mohlomafatshe/ mokgoro	Hut (built for initiates), with a distinctive low tunnel-like doorway around which a seotlwana (courtyard seclusion) is built.
Mokete	Party
Mokwena	Person from Bakwena totem group – identified with crocodile (kwena); ranked second in seniority after Bafokeng
Molao	Tribal law / rule. Plural: melao
Molobe	Most senior female initiate according to tribal affinity
Molobenyana/Lelate	Female initiate ranked second with respect to seniority as determined by tribal affinity

Moloi	Evil forces brought about by the sorcerers evil influence. Compare baloi
Monga mophato	Promoter or presenter of the initiation school/ owner of the initiation school, tells mosuwe where, when to do things
Mophato	Initiation lodge
Moroho	Green vegetables
Moropa	The initiation drum
Morwetsana	Young, marriageable initiated girl. Plural: barwetsana
Moseme	a) Type of grass used to weave masira. b) Grass sleeping mat that is given as a graduation gift. Plural: meseme
Mosia	A person from the Basia totem group – identified with the wild cat (siea, phaha, katse)
Mosono	Clitoris
Mosotho	A single member of the Basotho people
Mosuwe	Teacher of the initiation school. Plural: mesuwe
Mosuwe wa bale	Teacher / instructress at female initiation
Motanyane wa Madiba/ Ntate Motanyane *Cf. "… mangobe refers to motanyane " (Moitse 1994:69).*	a) The mysterious water snake that lives in the water pools that is believed to impregnate girls during initiation. b) The man that initiates girls: he is responsible to build the houses; tells the initiates what to learn and instructs them during the initiation process. c) The personification of a terrifying ogre
Motaung	A member of the Bataung totem group – identified with the lion
Motoho	A sour porridge, mealie-meal drink
Motse	Classically, a Basotho village. Also used to refer to the villages in which farm workers live on the farms. Plural: metse.
Motsjana	The oldest girl from a family to visit the malome before entering initiation. This practice is not very common anymore.
Motswadi aka le ntate	My mother and father
Mphalane	October
Naheng	During initiation when the girls go to a place in the veld, away from the motse during the day, to collect wood
Nako ya metsi	Time of the water
Ngaka /nkgekge	Traditional healer
Ngwale	Young female initiate. Plural: bale
Nkga jwalo ka mamolangwane	'Smells like a secretary bird'
Ntate	Literally, father; term of respect for a mature man
Nyôôko	Gallbladder attached to the top of the head during the coming-out festival
O hlomphe batho	To respect people
O sentse lebollo	To have spoilt the initiation
O ya mohlwahlweng	The visit of a prospective initiation candidate to her malome before initiation commences. See mohlajweng & motsjana
Phatsa	To inoculate against evil (tibella moloi), thus to protect initiates. To cut, two little parallel cuts (head, back, shoulders, wrist, knees, etc.) into which black medicine (lenaka) is rubbed.
Phêkola	Treat, doctor, cure
Phepa	White clay normally mixed with water to make it adhesive on the body when smeared. This marks the white stage of the initiation except for example the Bakubung who begin by smearing with phepa
Pila	Animal – Batlokwa headdress made from leshoma.
Pilo	Ash from burnt grass that is mixed with oil (motor oil) that the initiates' faces and bodies are rubbed with on the first Sunday of the official initiation period, indicating the black stage of initiation
Pina ya mafube	The "day break" song
Pina ya naheng	Veld songs/ordinary songs

Radikokotwana	An important song, in which a person that resembles the devil, is praised
Rangwane	Father's younger brother(s)
Ragadi	Father's sister
Rwalla	Literally, to carry on the head; gather wood. The preparatory period before initiation officially begins when initiates gather wood and carry it on their head, unlike later when they carry the collected wood on their back as the veil worn during the pilo and phepa stages prohibits carrying objects on the head. It is also a period to strengthen initiates or in which to gain power
Sebete	Liver. Initiates are given a piece of liver that they are expected to drop on the ground and pick up with their mouth; an action known as setsolla ka molomo. Sebete, the word is also used to indicate someone is brave
Seboko	Clan (sib); totem: animal or plant species with particular association to a human clan name. See diboko
Sekama	Black substance, finely ground ilmenite (iron titanium oxide $FeTiO_3$) that is rubbed into the hair of initiates at the onset of the red stage of the initiation
Senkothi/Sehori/ Seqetello	Most junior ranked initiate as determined by totem affinity
Seotlwana	Courtyard enclosure in front of the initiation hut, made from reeds (mahlaka), thatch or sticks
Sesetsa	Apply medicines to cuts made with blade intended to protect (phatsa). Such medicines are applied with thumb and forefinger only
Sesotho	The language of the Basotho people
Setea	Softly tanned cowhide skirt [koko ya kgomo]. Initiates wear such garments during the black & whites phases. Singular: ditea.
Sethota	a) Four very short flannel skirts worn one over the other to make hips look wider during the coming-out ceremony. b) Short skirt girl wears before entering initiation and commencement of 'black stage'. See thebeta
Setswejane	Sing during thojane (Bakhakwana and Bakwena). Graduates of initiation
Setsolla melomo	Depending on totem affinity, either liver will be given to initiates who have to drop it on the ground, picking it up with their mouths while kneeling with their hands held behind their backs. Others have to pick up little sticks that are placed in front of initiates with their mouths. Takes place on the day of Mapumelo after the initiates have jumped over the fire and used their hands to remove a mealie from a boiling pot of water
Tebuka (ho)	Literally to walk slowly; to model. The practice during the final moments of initiation, where the girls walk/snake (ba kolokile) slowly among and in front of community members, through the village so that a boy might see a girl he may want to marry. Once decided, his mother drapes a scarf (lesiba) around the chosen girl's neck. If she does not want to marry him, she simply throws the cloth to the ground and proceeds with the activities. Bataung initiates wear mohlehlo (the fat surrounding the entrails of a sheep or a goat) around their neck like a necklace and the sheep's gallbladder (di kgalapa) on their head. Initiates from the Makgolokwe clan do not do this.
Thaka	Contemporaries; of an age; peers. Plural: dithaka
Thapiswa	To tame. It is said that girls are initiated to tame them by being hit
Thari	Sheepskin blanket given to a girl by her mother's brother (malome) on her visit to him, before she enters initiation school
Tharisa mophatong / upella / tarisitswe/ o hupella	Ngaka treats the mophato hut, seotlwana, naheng, and water source before the initiates arrive in order to protect them from possible malevolent influences and lightning (tibella maru)
Thatsana	Sheepskin shawl worn by Batlokwa

Thebeta	Small dresses worn under traditional seshweshwe after washing off the letsoku. See sethota
Thetana	Fringed or tasselled skirt. Worn under the coming-out cowhide skirt. Apparently, it can be bought these days.
Thinta	Batebele ba ya thinta (they sing and shower each other with ground) when arriving at the mophato after smearing phepa. Unlike the Bataung who leta thojane
Thojane	The closing feast of the initiation school, including all the happenings of the final day – the festivities, dances and songs (sethojane: closing ceremony). The following sibs do not perform the thojane (ha ba ya leta thojane): Matebelle, Batlokwa, Bafokeng, Bataung, and some Bakwena, while the Bahlakwana, Bataung & Bakwena do leta thojane
Tibi	Batlokwa wear this ruffled out plant as a veil instead of a lesira
Tjhelete ya ngaka	Payment due to ngaka for his/her/their services during the initiation period
Tshwedi	The expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice/sacrifice of atonement/toll payment that intruders must pay when having come across initiates in the "white stage"
Tsiebadimo	Grass-hopper/ locust
Tsimuing	The ploughed lands
Upella lephepeng	See tharisa mophatong
Wa bo fello/ Wa qetello	Last person in a row
Wa tserella, wa ba sehole	To become dim-witted or retarded
Wana a apare kobo ja malome hai mahetleng	The child wears her maternal uncle's blanket closest to her body