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New Silhouettes of African Women:
How Women in Botswana Juggle Work and Home-Based Roles

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Anthropology Honors Project

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May 2011

ABSTRACT

Global discourse on Africa largely fails to recognize the important and transformative roles of women working in professional careers. This thesis uses life history and ethnography to document the lives of women in Botswana who are juggling paid employment and raising children. The culturally-specific ways in which they negotiate work and home-based roles have much to contribute to larger understandings of women, work, and motherhood. I argue that a new faction of Botswana's middle class is emerging among women in Gaborone. The women in this case study exemplify this new group. Members of this class are characterized by their tertiary education and full-time careers that are driven by these women's aspirations and personal goals. This thesis charts their path to their current middle-class status. The roles of motherhood and heading a household are sources of empowerment and remain key elements of the hybrid identities of Botswana women working careers in Gaborone.

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And, to the women of Botswana. Thank you for your honesty, your stories, your surrogate motherhood. To the ten women who are this project. To your successes, your strength, your humanity – I lift my glass.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	5
<i>Methodologies</i>	11
<i>Life Histories as Anthropology</i>	15
<i>Theoretical grounding</i>	19
<i>An overview of this paper</i>	28
Chapter Two: Precursors and Precipitators	32
<i>The people of Botswana</i>	35
<i>Gender roles and motherhood</i>	39
Chapter Three: Mechanisms of social mobility	47
<i>Gendered migration</i>	49
<i>Female-headed households</i>	51
<i>Policy shifts in Botswana</i>	53
<i>Education in Botswana</i>	55
<i>Mothers and other influences beyond schooling</i>	63
Chapter Four: Culturally-Specific Strategies for Balancing Roles and Priorities	66
<i>“I am still mosadi:” Continuing cultural gender roles</i>	68
<i>Reaching the top: Careers and further education</i>	72
<i>Incorporating home-based responsibilities with full-time careers</i>	79
<i>Marriage and male partnership</i>	83
<i>The juggling act</i>	89
Chapter Five Contextualization and Conclusions	93
REFERENCES	101
APPENDIX A: Table of Informants	107
APPENDIX B: Consent Form	108

Chapter One

Who is the Motswana woman? Where does she come from? What does she do? She may be Lesedi, an archaeologist, a mother of two. She may be Ngwedi, a world traveler raising chickens just outside the city. Or maybe she's Dikeledi, running her own private law practice while raising a small child. To be sure, the Motswana woman is many things.

Many women in Gaborone work full-time careers and are paving new paths for women in Botswana. About three out of ten women, or basadi, in Botswana are employed in non-agricultural wage-labor. This number has risen dramatically from 1994, when this was the case for less than 10 percent of women in Botswana.¹ But these women and others like them are rarely recognized in the global sphere of discourse on Africa. These women are, for now, silently successful to the world outside of the African continent. This project opens up an overdue discussion of women in the developing world who are challenging

¹ <http://www.indexmundi.com/botswana/share-of-women-in-wage-employment-in-the-non-agricultural-sector.html>

Western doubts and achieving professional as well as personal goals that render elite status.

This thesis is a case study of female career-workers in Botswana that contributes to a broader conversation about women and work, tradition and modernity, class status and roles. My analysis relies on theoretical discourse on gender and identity in practice and global feminism. This thesis provides important updates to the academic record on Botswana. As I describe in detail later, important cultural and economic shifts have been documented over the last century or so in Botswana, and this case study explores the factors that precipitate some of the more recent shifts and how they affect individuals' lives. Specifically, I look at how the increase in females in Botswana attending university and then working full-time careers impacts gendered roles and how middle-class status can be achieved by women in Botswana.

The women I interviewed are composing lives that incorporate some traditional Tswana roles for women, as well as their contemporary realities of working jobs that they have chosen and living in an urban setting. A noteworthy dimension of this experience is the way the women I interviewed grapple with the collisions between historical understandings of “what women should do” and the material conditions of their lives that dictate what these women must do in order to achieve their goals. Women working careers in Botswana are working toward professional and personal life goals. This thesis offers analysis of their influences and decisions and serves as a case study of gender in practice in Botswana.

Like all people assembling lives, career women in Botswana make use of opportunities available to them through access to education and other influences in order to achieve status as professionals alongside their other roles as mothers and householders, among others. Their stories are significant in part because these women did not, by and large, have role models for the kinds of lives they are living. While their parents supported and financed high-quality education for their daughters, the women I interviewed are using the new life ingredients of an urban residential setting and full-time careers to compose amalgam lives from a variety of roles. To the extent that a universal category of women might exist, lines of continuity form as a result of ground-up shared life material such as motherhood, the process of marriage, and in the case of the women I interviewed, urban residence and careers.

As anthropologist David Zeitlyn suggests, life histories highlight how people are both idiosyncratic and unexceptional, as these women do for the larger group of Botswana women. He suggests a framework for anthropological life writing that uses the concept of a silhouette to symbolize what life history material can tell an audience. “Such silhouettes have an empirical basis that, unlike photographs, do not disguise or dissemble their artefactuality and incompleteness” (Zeitlyn 2008:160). Silhouettes give clear outlines of form, creating a contrast with negative space that focuses the attention on a specific area. Zeitlyn’s concept is useful for the critical analysis of life history material like that included in this thesis, allowing for complexities that exist outside the perimeter of the available data.

I argue that a new faction of Botswana's middle class is emerging among women in Gaborone. The women in this case study exemplify this new group. Members of this class are characterized by their tertiary education and full-time careers that are driven by these women's aspirations and personal goals. This thesis charts their path to their current middle-class status. My informants all attended elite private schools where English was the medium of instruction, then went on to post-secondary schooling. Centralized in Gaborone, this education set them up to succeed professionally in the urban center of business and academia in Botswana. These women chose their career paths and prioritize doing work that aligns with their passions. They recognize the option to change career paths in order to meet their personal aspirations. While they have retained some traditional female Tswana roles, women like my informants are making empowering decisions as they juggle work and home-based roles. Many of these women are unmarried mothers and heads-of-household.

While the experiences documented in this thesis mimic those of women around the world juggling paid employment and raising children, career-working women in Gaborone exemplify culturally-specific ways of doing this. The culturally-specific ways in which they negotiate work and home-based roles have much to contribute to larger understandings of women, work, and motherhood. In particular, I argue that the roles of motherhood and heading a household are sources of empowerment and remain key elements of the hybrid identities of Botswana women working careers in Gaborone. My case study merits scrutiny both to update understandings of African women and to demonstrate human

varieties in terms of balancing multiple realms of one's life. Practice, or what people do with the materials available to them, from the grassroots of their life conditions, contribute in a significant way to their status and roles. This thesis uses the framework of role-based identities to illuminate an understudied population.

The perimeter of a silhouette attracts attention to the negative space that is not included in the portrait. My research stands alongside that of African professionals and academics that have left the continent to continue their study and careers elsewhere. Here is the familiar story. A young African scholar manages to make his or her way through primary and secondary education and receives a scholarship to attend university. He or she does exceptionally well, earning a medical degree from one of the best schools on the continent, perhaps Makerere University in Uganda or the University of Cape Town in South Africa. And then, because there are no opportunities in Africa, he or she leaves. He or she travels to the United States, or perhaps the United Kingdom, to continue his or her studies and begin his or her medical practice, leaving behind his or her natal community. As a result, African communities lose their best, brightest, and most privileged to the Western world.

This is the story of the African brain drain. The most prevalent topic of study regarding African professionals is the emigration of highly skilled men and women who leave the continent for professional positions in North America, Europe, and Asia. More commonly referred to as the African brain drain, this phenomenon has continued to increase in recent decades and has been the subject

of social scientific study since the 1960s (Hatten 2003; Clemens 2006; Cobbe 1982). Compared to the literature on the brain drain, little attention has been paid to the lives of those Africans who are working professionally in their home continent. This thesis contributes personal accounts and analysis of the phenomenon of middle-class female career workers in Gaborone to the academic record of this sparsely studied population. There are, in fact, Africans staying to work in their desired fields in Botswana, and more women are joining this group. They represent the growing female faction of the Gaborone middle class, and their status is driven by a desire to succeed in fields they choose.

I wanted to hear from some of these women, and they were not hard to find. In fact, in the capital city of Gaborone, public spaces frequented by professionals are abundant. The Desert Oasis Hotel is where businesspeople from South Africa stay. It's close to Gaborone's downtown business and government enclave, just past a dusty vacant lot where food vendors park their cars and boys play soccer after school. The building is shielded from the highway, tucked behind a concrete wall, and like many buildings in Botswana, the front doors are kept wide open. On my first visit to the Oasis Hotel, I found the concierge near the entrance to the casino room and asked, "Where can I find the pool?"

Directed to an outdoor patio lined with green potted plants, I took a seat near the corner of the bar area and ordered an Appletiser, a South African apple-flavored soft drink. I was waiting to meet one of my informants for the first time. We had spoken briefly on the phone, and she had agreed to see me between meetings. I was the only white female on the patio, so we quickly made eye

contact when Snapdragon walked in.² Snapdragon works in marketing promotions at the Oasis Hotel. She greeted the bartenders by name, then apologized for keeping me waiting. She is invested in her workplace and engages in social interactions with her coworkers from different departments.

I quickly noticed that Snapdragon's accent was somewhat different from most I'd heard around Gaborone. She would later explain that this is the result of her international English-medium education, where she learned from English-speaking teachers from all around the world. Snapdragon started working in the marketing business after obtaining her diploma and now coordinates special events at this major hotel in Gaborone. After our first conversation, Snapdragon picked up the tab and walked me out to the main entrance. "I have one more meeting for the day, and then the mommy shift begins!" she said, and showed me photos of her baby on her cell phone. Snapdragon and I would meet together two more times. Then, about a month later, we would sit at the same table (at Snapdragon's insistence, for old time's sake) with her mother, Ngwedi, another career-working³ woman in Botswana.

Methodologies

On January 3rd, 2010, I got off a plane at the Gaborone airport. It was over 90 degrees, Fahrenheit. Before 36 climate-controlled hours in airports and planes,

² All names of people have been replaced with pseudonyms. Snapdragon chose her own pseudonym in honor of the flowers grown in her mother's garden.

³ For the sake of this paper, I use the following definition of *career*, taken from the Merriam-Webster dictionary: a field for pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life; a profession for which one trains and which is undertaken as a permanent calling. All of my informants receive salaries for their work.

I had spent New Year's at home in Iowa in single-digit weather. Walking around campus on my first day at the University of Botswana, I sweated past women carrying umbrellas to block the sun. Catapulted into a place with an opposite seasonal schedule than I was used to, I commenced my semester abroad. I traveled to Botswana with a group of eleven other college students from the United States as part of a study away program sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. We were enrolled at the University of Botswana for a full semester. I took courses taught by both Botswana and American professors, including an independent study seminar designed to support our semester-long research projects.

As an anthropology student with a strong interest in women's life histories and construction of female identity, I chose to interview women living in Gaborone. My previous knowledge as an American consumer of media with a limited amount of personal experience in Africa shaped my journey toward discovering just what I wanted to ask these women about. Any student of Africa is familiar with the predominant image of the continent as war-torn, diseased, and struggling. In the wake of dire portrayals of suffering in Africa, I was intrigued by Botswana's billing as a success story. Who was successful in Botswana, the country I had chosen for my study abroad experience? Who were the women of Botswana, and what did they do? These questions catalyzed my research. I decided to conduct a series of ethnographic interviews with Botswana women who worked full-time careers. I chose this unifying characteristic hoping to learn not only about these women's professional lives, but also about the other elements

that compose their selves. Where did they live? What forces helped guide them toward their current positions? What were their aspirations? How did they tell their stories? These questions seeded my process of discovery from the outset of this project.

I interviewed ten women in Gaborone, all of whom hold full-time careers in or around the city. I met with each woman between one and four times over the course of the semester, each time for one to two hours. We met in either public coffee shops or my informants' personal offices. I relied on a snowball sampling technique, and I used the established ethnographic interviewing method developed by James P. Spradley and outlined in his book *The Ethnographic Interview*. As Spradley says, "Field work involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different. Rather than *studying* people, ethnography means *learning from people*" (Spradley 1979:3). I remain eternally grateful to my informants for answering open-ended questions about their lives and guiding me toward helpful areas of inquiry.

These meetings were also something more casual: women getting together to talk about their lives over coffee. I was the primary listener and facilitator of an ethnographic interview, but I was also a social date, and I was always a fellow woman. Because of the intimacy of our conversations and the complexity of my informants' lives, an understanding of each woman individually is crucial to the understanding of the greater themes that can be sifted out from this research.

I took several steps to preserve the anonymity of my informants and to comply with the institutional review board of Macalester College and the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics.⁴ Before beginning my first interview with an informant, I distributed a consent form that detailed the objectives and methods of this project, which gave the informant a chance to ask questions and to signify her willingness to participate.⁵ All names of people, places, or other potentially identifying information have been substituted with pseudonyms throughout this paper. Each of my informants was given the opportunity to choose her own pseudonym, many of whom took me up on the opportunity.⁶

In spite of the tremendous amount of support I received for this project from many sources, there remain limitations of this study that must be noted. Most significantly, readers must be aware that the scope of my fieldwork did not necessarily yield a representative sample of career workers in Botswana. They are, again, silhouettes that indicate form but disguise some levels of complexity. I interviewed ten women, who shared personal experiences and do not speak on behalf of entire population of female professionals in Botswana. This study is limited to women from Botswana's capital city, which undoubtedly influenced a good amount of my data (but is also a trait that is inherent to their lives as career-

⁴ This document can be found at <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>.

⁵ A copy of the consent form is attached as an appendix.

⁶ Every interview was audio-recorded using a Pulse Smartpen, a device that captures audio and records notes written by the ethnographer. I transcribed each interview in entirety with the assistance of ExpressScribe, a free transcription program that offers keystrokes for controlling audio playback. These files were stored on my password-protected personal computer and backed up on an external hard drive under file names using pseudonyms. At the end of the project, the collected data remains stored using pseudonyms on a private external hard drive.

workers). Also, the voices exposed in this paper are those of women only. The male perspective on career-women in Botswana, or on the broader subject of careers, elites, and families in a sub-Saharan context, is entirely absent from this project. Moreover, logistical matters such as the intricate process of obtaining research approval from the Government of Botswana and the constraint on my time in Botswana limited the number of participants and interviews that could be included in this study.

Life Histories as Anthropology

This project has methodological and theoretical grounding in the academic endeavor of life history work. Much can be learned from the work of life history scholars like Marjorie Shostak, whose *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* helped pave the way for life histories as anthropology. While oral and narrative histories have certainly been studied and generated in many capacities, in her description of !Kung San culture (identified later in this thesis as Basarwa) through the perspective and life story of one primary informant, Shostak showed what this method could add to the field of anthropology. In a later essay (1989), Shostak explains that personal narrative is useful for eliciting specific incidents rather than generalized statements, which was one of the aims of my interviews with Botswana women. I opted to study multiple women as a way to pinpoint shared influences, characteristics, and goals in their lives that were indicators of shared culture. Some researchers also argue that life histories have the additional

role of restoring understudied and underrepresented populations to history (Robertson 2000: xi). By learning about the lives of my informants through multiple lengthy, open-ended interviews, I was part of a process of discovering meaningful experiences and generating life history material in a collaborative process. The life history material from this case study warrants attention because the lives of career-working women in Botswana have gone unnoticed in African Studies literature.

Critics of the life history method tend to bring up two significant challenges: the question of representativeness and the question of subjectivity. What can a single individual's life tell us about a culture? How do we know when knowledge is shared, as culture is understood to be, and not unique to the individual? These questions address valid concerns about life history methods. There are limits to the scope of what individual interviews can tell us about larger groups and the contexts within which they live. But rebuttals from life history writers like Shostak and historian Claire Robertson in fact see these 'challenges' as assets to the method, as pointing precisely to what the method has to offer. Personal narratives illuminate a specificity that can often be lost in attempts to capture only the most general, the most shared elements of a culture. According to Robertson, life histories are an especially helpful way to reveal and understand change within a culture. Anthropologist Gelya Frank explains how essentialized representations can obscure crucial cultural understanding that comes from diversity and specificity (Frank 2009: 145). James Clifford argues that *Nisa* is an example of how one individual's story can imply local cultural meaning as well as

a more general story of those who share cultural knowledge. Similarly, the women I interviewed and who are featured in this thesis illuminate important contemporary realities of life for elite women in Gaborone. By hearing the details of how they make decisions and how they live their lives, we can better understand this emergence of Batswana women with status achieved through tertiary education and careers.

Anthropologist Laura Nader makes a point about the benefits of studying specific populations that is analogous to that of studying individual representatives from a culture. She shows that studying any one element of a society has the potential to illuminate the rest, just as the process of interviewing one or a handful of representatives from a culture has the potential to illuminate not only diversities but also shared elements of cultural knowledge. In an article explaining and justifying the academic project of “studying up,” or studying elite or upper- and middle-class cultures, she states: “There is a certain urgency to this kind of anthropology concerned with power, for the quality of life and our lives themselves may depend upon the extent to which citizens understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures” (Nader 1972:1).

Clearly the women I interviewed in Gaborone come from a privileged background. They have been supported through high-end, expensive educations in a country where girls have historically not been sent to private schools, and often not any school beyond secondary school. While several anthropologists have documented the indigenous and now subjugated population of the !Kung San or Basarwa people of the Kalahari in Botswana, anthropological work on the

Botswana elite has been slim.⁷ My work, along with other work studying people in positions of leadership and power, has the advantage of illuminating the influences, ambitions, and strategies of people with the power to influence and guide their nation.

In addition to the academic merit of life histories, this kind of qualitative, individual-focused research is also ethically conscientious in a notable way. Shostak concludes her 1989 piece with an argument for the practice of generating life histories, suggesting that it is most human to learn about a culture by valuing individuals' lives and perspectives:

It is for Schmucl and Nisa, and the silent others they represent, as well as for ourselves, that we should continue to record these lives and memories. The ethical and methodological problems may be formidable, but they are small compared to the goal. Indeed, the most important ethical message regarding life histories is not a restriction but an obligation: we should make every effort to overcome obstacles, to go out and record the memories of people whose ways of life often are preserved only in those memories... No more elegant tool exists to describe the human condition than the personal narrative. (Shostak 1989:239)⁸

Narrative material from the lives of the women I interviewed is woven throughout the body of this thesis. For reference, a condensed guide to their specific situations is included as Appendix A at the end of this document. This thesis adheres to the philosophies outlined here that promote life history work as a valuable method for cultural understanding.

⁷ Notable exceptions include Samatar 2002; Robinson 2006; Werbner 2004.

⁸ In this citation Shostak links her work with Nisa to that of Barbara Myerhoff, who conducted personal narrative work among aging Jewish immigrants in California. One of Myerhoff's key informants was named Schmucl.

Theoretical grounding

This research rests on and is in conversation with important theoretical work that has been done on roles within a society, how roles contribute to status, as well as how gender is conceptualized in a non-Western context. I explain how elite career-women in Botswana compose their lives from the materials and resources they have available to them now and have had throughout their lives and deploy culturally-specific strategies for juggling multiple roles.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss famously used the French term *bricoleur*, or one who works with his or her hands and is adept at performing a multitude of diverse tasks to make sense of how people interact with materials and resources in their lives.

While the concept of *bricolage* is universally relevant, as actions and decisions are always dependent on resources and influences, the term is particularly helpful for understanding how people balance multiple roles. In this thesis I describe the process that my informants go through of assembling their roles from their resources, experiences and materials like high-end, expensive education, supportive role-models, and an urban setting that provides access to careers in the fields in which they desire to work. Their situations are a case study of how roles contribute to status. According to Lévi-Strauss, while an engineer tries to go beyond or break free of constraints imposed by the state of civilization, the *bricoleur* stays within these constraints, and rearranges the materials at hand to compose a life according to their priorities and desires (Lévi-Strauss 1966:19-

20). The women in this study are redeploying traditional elements of Motswana⁹ roles and reorganizing them in concert with their contemporary realities of education and careers.

In the introduction to the 2007 volume *Africa After Gender?*, the editors describe the recent increase of gender as a dynamic issue in Africanist research (Miescher, et al. 2007:2). The literature documents a complex debate about the relevance of Western-dominated feminist discourse to the study of gender-related issues in Africa and other non-Western settings. Both Western and African writers have grappled with questions of gender universals. In the literature, Western understandings of gender dynamics in Africa are often characterized as an effort to place African cultural systems and values into Western categories. According to 'Zulu Sofola, a historical process of "dewomanization" continues to press African women into Western categories and corner them into the challenges that Western women face (Sofola 1998:61-2). For example, Nfah-Abbenyi argues that for many African women, caring for a family and building a home are in fact sources of empowerment, not limitation, as these actions are commonly perceived by feminist women in the West (Nfah-Abbenyi 2005:266).

Gwendolyn Mikell also addresses what she calls the hegemony exercised by Western academics when they impose culturally-bound ideals where they are not appropriate (Mikell 1995:406). In her research, which she conducted in West Africa (Ghana and Nigeria) in the 1980s and 1990s, Mikell found that the women she encountered were just beginning to embrace an idea of feminism (405). She

⁹ The term "Motswana" is the singular adjective that describes a person or idea from Botswana. "Batswana" is the plural adjective.

goes on to explain how she framed the issue of an emerging feminism and how she was careful to avoid making assumptions about which woman would hold “feminist” values. “I was resisting the projection of a dichotomy on to this continuum, with educated and elite women seen as ideologically far more advanced (and therefore feminist) and rural/ordinary African women seen as parochial and prefeminist” (Mikell 2005:407). Her close attention to women’s decision-making processes and actions highlights moments of cultural change. She notes that she has witnessed the cultural change of “the birth of feminism on the African continent,” just as the women I interviewed in Botswana represent an emerging class of females who have achieved professional status.

The notion of African feminism as something different from Western feminism has gained considerable attention in the literature, and yet it remains a point of contention among Africanist scholars. In my own research, I found that women in Botswana do not embrace the concepts they associate with feminism. And yet, in my work, I grapple with these concerns with feminist discourse in mind. While this paper could, for example, interpret the phenomenon of female heads of household managing full-time careers as analogous to the Western feminist ideal of career-working women outside the home, I refrain from falsely using the words of my informants to represent a broader group of Botswana or African women and forcing them into conversation with the Western feminist discourse that is rooted in different cultural and historical context.

African studies scholar Filomina Chioma Steady provides a somewhat more nuanced alternative: a theory of African feminism. She reiterates the fact

that while feminist discourse is fed by many schools of thought, the conversation has been dominated by the voice of the white female, punctuated by a tokenism of the “upwardly mobile black woman.” She offers her definition of African feminism, along with an explanation of its helpfulness:

African feminism combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as *human*, rather than sexual beings... It is more inclusive than other forms of feminist ideologies and is largely a product of polarizations and conflicts that represent some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering. (Steady 1996:4)

She notes African societies wherein a woman’s status changes over the course of a life cycle, with her reproductive years yielding her greatest power. Steady notes the historical shift from self-provisional agriculture and husbandry toward an increase in wage labor, often imposed by resource discovery.¹⁰ Steady’s perspective is useful for understanding gender issues in Botswana, where many of the African trends she points out hold true.

One particularly helpful concept that has emerged from Africanist gender discourse is the idea that individuals are agents in constructing gender norms. Instead of pushing to force non-Western people into Western categories, a more appropriate strategy is to witness the organic production of identity-related categories. Helen Mugambi situates gender as fluid and socially constructed: “Gender in Africa cannot be frozen in time. As a socially constructed mark of identity, it is particularly vulnerable to transformation when socioeconomic forces are intensified by internal migrations, militarization, and cultural globalization.

¹⁰ Barbara Moss also charts the shift from subsistence to consumer-oriented economies in Africa and argues that as men have become more involved with wage labor, African women have played the crucial role in cultural preservation: “To determine the scale of wants of the community”: gender and African consumption,” 1997.

Such forces serve to intensify gender's fluidity as a mark of identity" (Mugambi 2007:289). This thesis addresses many of these factors that contribute to changing gender roles in Botswana.

In his essay "Women's Roles and Existential Identities," anthropologist Igor Kopytoff discusses multicultural methods of understanding identity. He explores the idea that not all people cling to the same elements of their humanity as their essential identity. He posits that identity is a combination of what people *are* and what people *do*. He thus separates the elements of identity into two categories: existential identity and role-based identity. For Kopytoff, existential roles are those that are immanent—elements of one's being that she or he considers to be part of a foundation of self. Other elements of identity are based on existential identities. For example, in some cultures, the category of "woman" is understood as an existential identity. This is irrevocable, and in some societies existential identities are exhibited in public ceremony, through rites of passage. Not only does an individual understand and conceptualize her own existential identity – in some cases it is proclaimed to the entirety of her society, creating a greater sense of accountability for these identities (Kopytoff 2005:129-30). An interesting example of the cultural distinctions between existential and role-based identities focuses on stereotypically feminine attributes of marriage and motherhood. While in the West, the role of raising children has become an immanent or existential identity (i.e. it is part and parcel of being a mother), in other societies, the role of child-rearing is more negotiable and it is instead simply the action of bearing children that is crucial to the conception of mother (135).

My work adheres to this understanding of gender as practice, an identity that is created and molded by cultural factors and that both guide and are guided by agents.

Anthropologist Sherry Ortner's argument that the subordination of women is universal provides a helpful framework for situating my case study within gender discourse. She identifies three levels of the understanding of universal patriarchy: the universal fact of second-class status of women in every society, specific ideologies and socio-structural arrangements, and thirdly, "observable on-the-ground details of women's activities, contributions, powers, influence, etc., often at variance with cultural ideology" (Ortner 1998:22-3).¹¹ It is this third level that I investigate through the case study of career women in Gaborone, with attention to my informants' influences and social roles at work and home.

Beyond the diagnoses of the worldwide female condition, political theory conversations on the implications of gender on leadership and power are relevant to my research. In his book *The state in Africa: the politics of the belly*, Jean-François Bayart discusses class polarization in the African state. He states that the struggle for wealth can be equated with the struggle for power, a framework which is relevant to my informants' career trajectories. Bayart points out that access to state resources and services is vital for what he calls domination or financial success. The women I interviewed all had exceptional access to educational and other resources, which facilitated their professional success.

¹¹ See also Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," 1988, and Bonnie Honig's "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," 1998).

Furthermore, providing a Botswana-specific analysis of the state, class, and power, geographer Abdi Samatar adds that globalization offers the key to the success of a “Botswana bourgeoisie” (Samatar 2002). My informants had premier opportunities for international travel and international education, which helped catapult them toward their current professional and economic statuses.

In his analysis of the exceptionality of the Botswana state, Abdi Samatar argues that globalization is the key framework for understanding the formation of the Botswana bourgeoisie (Samatar 2002). In my research, the international study and travel opportunities available to the women I interviewed clearly impact their status in Botswana. Access to international schools within Botswana as well is a marker of economic success, setting those with access to expensive private schooling apart from those without. Access to the services of the state and the ingredients necessary for elite status is most conveniently achieved in Botswana’s urban center of Gaborone. Wendy Izzard’s 1985 article “Migrants and Mothers: Case-Studies from Botswana” charts her research on the role of migration in Botswana, for both men and women. She studies the trend of rural-to-urban migration in a Botswana context, and the economic motivations for the trend, considering the country’s longstanding male migrant labor system. In her conclusion, Izzard states that “the long-term security of female wage-earners does not lie at the centres of employment but in the rural areas and dependence on their children” (Izzard 1985:280). Researching in Botswana twenty-five years later, I instead found that women working in Gaborone were financially independent and were instead often providing financial assistance to relatives in their natal

villages. The genealogy of gender study in Botswana documents a fascinating yet slow change over recent decades.

Cultural change provides a focus for much of anthropologist David Suggs's own work in Botswana. During the 1980s, he situated himself as a member of a group of researchers studying the to-date understudied population of post-menopausal women (Suggs 1987:107) in Botswana. Suggs helpfully outlines the stages of the female Tswana life span, and the crucial events that comprise the transitions between stages. A Tswana female begins as *mosetsana*, and the onset of menarche signifies her becoming *lekgaribe*, the next step in the life cycle of a woman. And yet it is not until first pregnancy that a girl becomes *mosadi*, the closest translation of woman. *Basadi* (plural of *mosadi*) are mothers and caretakers of the household. The final stage in the development of a woman is *mosadi mogolo*, signified by the end of childbearing years and the decrease in independence (Suggs 1987:110).

Suggs carefully points out the marked decrease in the importance of marriage for the attainment of *mosadi* status since the time of Isaac Schapera's research during the 1930s. My work likewise cites this shift away from a perception of marriage as necessary for women in Botswana. Most of the women I interviewed remain unmarried, while still raising children and holding careers. My informants noted the same primary distinguishing factors of an adult woman that Suggs documented in his work. In the Botswana context, a female must be a mother, and she must make independent decisions, especially regarding household affairs. This cultural definition of womanhood provides a vantage point

for understanding the impact of the added role of working a career on Botswana women's identities.¹² The roles implied by Tswana understandings of womanhood have remained, and they support and serve as a base for the added role of working a career.

As the other crucial defining factor of womanhood, heading a household in Botswana has received considerable attention in the literature. As Pauline Peters explained in the 1980s, much of the literature about female-headed households has indicated that they are more economically vulnerable than those of married couples (1983). Henry Akinsola of Gaborone later re-examined this correlation along with Judith Popovich, noting similar findings. Together they argued for an increase in services to female heads of household (2002). My research adds texture to this issue by focusing on a group of women, some of whom are heads of household, who are economically successful. This conversation aims to broaden current understanding of Botswana's women's realities.

Much of the gender-related research that has been carried out in Botswana has focused on issues surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Sheila Shaibu, a nursing lecturer at the University of Botswana, has studied the variety of care practices and how HIV/AIDS has impacted women's roles in the country (Shaibu 2006), and Olagoke Akintola, psychology professor at the University of KwaZuluNatal has specifically focused on this care as unpaid labor done

¹² Rebecca Upton addresses the importance of childbearing for Botswana women by studying the unique cases of its absence. She notes that marriage and childbearing have become increasingly separate domains of life, while childbearing remains crucial to female identity formation, and considers the ramifications of this development (Upton 2001).

primarily by women (Akintola 2008). Rebecca Upton also points out the ways that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana has affected women's roles as caregivers. She reminds us that while Botswana men's trend of migrating for labor to other parts of southern Botswana or South Africa has been crucial in forming male adult identities, so too has women's role as those who remain to bear children in forming female identities (Upton 2003:318). As my informants expressed, these roles have grown apart, exhibited by the decrease in marriage and females relying on one another for women's educational and career success in Botswana.

Anthropologist Nicholas W. Townsend questions the focus of female-headed households without addressing men in these families. He states that while nuclear families in Botswana do not necessarily share residences, men still sometimes play a significant role in children's well-being. Some of my informants did mention that they had supportive father figures in their lives while also noting these men's exceptional characteristic of supporting education for girls. A clear limitation of my own study is that all the people I interviewed were women, and it is only through their female voices that I can interpret the relative roles of men in Botswana.

An overview of this paper

The next chapter serves as an introduction to the relevant historical and cultural information that composes a contextual basis for this paper. Specifically,

Chapter Two provides a timeline of important demographic and political shifts that have occurred in what is now Botswana. Starting with pre-colonial times, this chapter charts how the country changed under British colonization, and then how Botswana has evolved as an independent African nation. In addition to these political shifts, Chapter Two introduces the people of Botswana and explains the region's ethnic makeup. This chapter describes some of the key cultural knowledge that has influenced, in particular, Botswana women's opportunities and life decisions.

Chapter Three continues with an identification and analysis of the specific conditions that have precipitated the increase in the number of female professionals in Botswana. This chapter charts the primary structural forces that have impacted girls and women in Botswana: demographic shifts and urbanization impacted by labor migration, policy shifts regarding education and employment in Botswana, and a growing social movement concerned with the support of women in the personal, professional, and political realms. The goal of Chapter Three is to chart the path of how my informants and other women like them have gotten where they are today. They are adult females working full-time careers, and several of them are also mothers and heads-of-household. This chapter also includes the specific and personal factors that my informants identified as formative for their current life paths.

After this outline of the factors that helped lead my informants to where they are now, Chapter Four takes a look at what these women's lives are like now, as shaped by the influences identified in Chapter Three. This chapter seeks to

answer the question of what gender in practice looks like in the lives of the women I interviewed in order to better understand how gender identity is role-based and culturally-specific. I address in depth some of the key issues that illustrate their lives, including the challenge of balancing careers alongside families and households, the strategy of hiring house help, and the aspiration to work for greater opportunities for both my informants and for their children. With a focus on my informants' life goals and how they achieve them, Chapter Four tells the stories of ten women working careers in Gaborone and how they bring together their multiple roles and relationships.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of Botswana as a case study of gender in practice and of how analysis of individual life decisions via life history work illuminates the precipitating factors of cultural change. This chapter explains that the case of women in Botswana is significant for the study of women and gender on the continent of Africa and other parts of the non-Western world. Gaborone's career women are grafting a new role onto a longstanding cultural definition of womanhood, with the result of hybrid identities made up of elements that support one another. In this chapter I guide this case back into conversation with the global discourse on feminism and gender identity. While each of the stories my ten informants shared with me are uniquely relevant as life history material, these women also each have something to share with the world about gender roles and composing lives that are amalgamations of multiple roles in the specific context of Gaborone, Botswana. The stories of these women must be heard in order to

better understand the diversity of strategies people around the world use to meet their needs and desires.

Chapter Two

Precursors and Precipitators

For Women in Botswana's Professional Arena

On the hot patio of the Equatorial Coffee Company café, I ordered a double espresso. The coffee shop sits at the entrance to one of Gaborone's main shopping malls, which are less different from those in America than I had expected before my semester in Botswana. The free Wi-Fi at Equatorial draws students and travelers along with anyone in search of drip coffee in the Southern African heat. I had come early to study for a Setswana quiz the next day. "Leina la me ke Joey... Ke tswa kwa United States of America... O tsogile jang?" My cell phone buzzed and lit up green on the table—Ngwedi was going to be a few minutes late for our second interview. When she arrived, Ngwedi ordered a rooibos tea. She'd just been back to her home village to visit her mother. "I'm actually proud to be from Botswana," she said. "We come from good people, and

we have a great country.” Excited to be experiencing a new country, I was eager to understand how she would describe Botswana.

This chapter provides an introduction to the country of Botswana and its people. The stories of the ten women I interviewed rest on a unique cultural and political history—information that is necessary in order to contextualize their words. In order to understand the lives of the women I interviewed, we must first appreciate key historical and contemporary realities of Botswana. This chapter tells a short version of the story of Botswana, noting geographical, cultural, and political histories of the landlocked country.

Botswana shares borders with South Africa on the south and east, Zimbabwe on the east, Zambia along a small strip on the north, and Namibia on the north and west. Botswana’s total land area is comparable to the size of the state of Texas. The country’s climate is classified as semiarid; in fact, less than one percent of Botswana’s land is arable. Instead, mineral industry has dominated the national economy since the discovery of diamonds in 1967.¹³ Today, Botswana’s total population hovers just above two million people, and with the Kalahari Desert comprising the southwest portion of the country, Botswana’s residents are concentrated along its eastern side. As of 2008, 60 percent of Botswana’s total population lived in urban areas, all of which are located in the strip along the country’s eastern border (in particular, Gaborone, Mahalapye, Selebi-Phikwe, and Francistown). This statistic also hints at a trend of urbanization that is discussed at length later in this paper.

¹³ The cultural, economic, and political significance of this discovery is addressed later in this chapter.

While Botswana's political history is addressed later in this chapter, it is important here to point out that Botswana gained independence in 1966, and diamonds were discovered in Botswana in 1967. Following independence Botswana enjoyed significant economic growth, and yet the last two decades have ushered in HIV/AIDS, now a ubiquitous epidemic in Botswana. Currently Botswana has the second highest adult HIV/AIDS rate in the world, behind geographically nearby Swaziland.¹⁴ As of 2008, life expectancy for Botswana residents was 54 years. The last forty years have brought dramatic shifts in this measurement: in 1990 the life expectancy was 64 years, and in 1970 it was 55 years. This progression reflects the economic success and increased quality of life following Botswana's independence subsequent growth; the decline in life expectancy between 1990 and 2008 indicates the devastation incurred by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

This snapshot is merely a starting point. The following sections of this chapter address in more depth the nuances of Botswana's cultural makeup, as well as chart the political history that is relevant to the lives of people living in the country today.

¹⁴ This statistic is measured as percentage of adults aged 15-49 affected (UNICEF).

The people of Botswana

Southern Africa is home to several groups of Bantu peoples, or people who speak Bantu languages. The Tswana are one of these peoples. Tswana can refer to the people, the culture, or the language of those belonging to this group. More conventionally, the prefix “Se-” is added to denote the language, Setswana, and the prefix “Bo-” denotes “place of,” so the place of the Tswana is Botswana. “Mo-” is the prefix for a single Tswana person, or Motswana, and also the singular adjective form. The plural version is Batswana, which refers to Tswana people. Likewise, the same prefix is used in other Southern African Bantu languages. For example, “Sesotho” is the predominant language of the Sesotho people, who primarily live in Lesotho. Setswana is Botswana’s national language and is spoken by 78 percent of the population. English, on the other hand, is the official language of Botswana, though it is spoken by 2.1 percent of the population.

The people of Botswana, or Batswana, can be described as a group of Bantu-speaking people who belong to individual local chiefdoms. The Bakgatla people, for example, are also Tswana people, and they comprise the Kgatla chiefdom studied by anthropologists Isaac Schapera and David Suggs. The Bakgatla’s chiefdom is concentrated in Mochudi, a town of roughly 50,000 residents just outside of Gaborone. While chiefdoms and their lineages differ slightly across the country in dialect or other ways, the term Setswana is an adjective that effectively describes cultural knowledge shared by speakers of the language of the same name. While the term Batswana can refer to all the people

of the nation of Botswana, not all people are classified as belonging to the Setswana culture and Tswana lineages. There do remain non-Tswana groups of people living within the current Botswana borders, including the Basarwa, Kalanga, and Kalagadi. This study, however, focuses on culturally Setswana people living in Botswana.

Tswana ancestors moved into Southern Africa in the early eighteenth century from the north and east.¹⁵ They incorporated a small portion of the indigenous people already living in the area, and pushed many of them to the western desert portion of what is now Botswana. The Batswana set up a local system of governance comprised of village chiefs and village elders. Royal patrilineage determined succession of power. Admission to a chiefdom was defined by allegiance to a given chief. This allowed for migratory inclusion and political unity in a given community. Today, the indigenous governing system now referred to as “common law” operates alongside Botswana’s customary law, based on its 1966 Constitution. According to the government of Botswana, “The general presumption in Botswana as regards the applicable law is that the common law is applicable unless the relevant personal law, agreement, or intention suggests the application of customary law.”¹⁶

British traders and missionaries entered the Tswana region in the early nineteenth century with economic and religious initiatives. Traders brought guns, ammunition, ivory, and furs, among other things. Missionaries from the London

¹⁵ Today, most ethnic Tswana people actually live in South Africa (close to four million), where Setswana is one of the eleven official languages. Smaller groups live in present day Namibia and Zimbabwe.

¹⁶ <http://www.gov.bw>

Missionary Society set up Christian mission camps and schools, many of which are still in use today. Notably, the renowned missionary David Livingstone set up camp in the Tswana region and built a hospital about forty kilometers west of present-day Gaborone. The discovery of valuable resources (gold and diamonds) in South Africa in the 1860s led to an outpouring of migrant labor to the south and east from Botswana. Capitalizing on the region's booming mining industry, Britain established its political presence by creating the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, shortly after German colonization of southwest Africa, or present-day Namibia.

When Britain established the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the British government had little interest in maintaining a presence there. Instead, the protectorate was established as a strategic move to secure the route from the mines in Cape Colony to central African territories held by Britain. A statement from the British High Commissioner reads that Britain would do "as little in the way of administration and settlement as possible" (qtd. in Harvey and Lewis 1990:15). Instead, the Protectorate was operated under mostly African rule, which had important consequences for its economy. This situation of limited colonial influence led Bechuanaland to achieve above-average rates of education and economic success than other sub-Saharan African colonies and new independent nations. For example, in 1965, over 50 percent of children in Bechuanaland were attending primary school, compared to an average of 37 percent of the children in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (Harvey and Lewis 1990:19). During the decades following independence in 1966, Botswana experienced rapid economic growth.

In fact, modern sector employment increased by 300 percent in the ten years following Botswana's independence (Bell 1981:261).

In 1966 Botswana held its first presidential election. Holding free elections every five years since then, Botswana is Africa's oldest multi-party democracy. Botswana's history of "good governance" is credited with the success of the country's post-colonial democratic success (Hjort 2010). Yet the Botswana Democratic Party has held power for the duration of the country's independence. Seretse Khama was the first elected president of Botswana, and now the presidency has returned to the family with current President Ian Khama. In preparation for independence, the Tswana capital was moved from Mafeking, South Africa, to Gaborone, within the new official national borders. This city was named after Kgosi Gaborone, a chief from the area in the early twentieth century. This relatively young city is now home to most of the country's business and governmental sectors. Notably, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is also headquartered in Gaborone.

As noted before diamonds were discovered in the new independent Botswana in 1967. This discovery shifted a significant amount of wage labor back within the borders of the country. "By 1976, fully two-thirds of the country's labor migrants were working internally, with one-third going to South Africa" (Brown 1989:258). As an independent nation, Botswana was able to maintain control over this resource, unlike former European colonies whose mineral resources were discovered before or during colonization. Currently, Botswana's mining industry is operated by Debswana, the joint partnership of South African

mining company De Beers and the government of Botswana. The two entities share equal ownership of the company—another crucial element of Botswana’s economic stability.

Gender roles and motherhood

In order to fully grasp the long-standing cultural practices and belief systems currently at work for women in Botswana, it is first necessary to address the classic anthropological work done in the country on the issue of gender roles by Isaac Schapera and David Suggs. Schapera, who did fieldwork from 1929 to 1934, focused much of his work on gender, family, and the changing cultural norms of the Bakgatla people of Botswana, in addition to his research on Bakgatla law and governance. For instance, he noted that “premarital sex relations, formerly severely condemned, have become almost a matter of course, and many girls bear children out of wedlock” (Schapera 1940:19). This trend has withstood the several decades since Schapera’s fieldwork; today the average age at first birth for women in Botswana is 18, and a majority of these births occur outside marriage (International Encyclopedia of Sexuality). Africanist Barbara Brown describes marriage in Botswana as a process, parts of which are derivations of longer-standing Tswana customs that have been molded by British colonial influences (Brown 1989:260).

Some of Schapera's findings regarding cultural norms are no longer descriptive of contemporary culture in Botswana, particularly in the capital city of Gaborone. Significantly, his discovery that marriage was "an essential step for every normal person to take" in order to gain social respect is no longer the case in Botswana (Schapera 1940:38). In fact, David Suggs, an anthropologist who lived among the Bakgatla in the early 1980s, was already noticing a shift in this cultural norm during his fieldwork. He explicitly underscores this change since the time of Schapera's fieldwork. Suggs documents an "ambivalence" among Batswana women toward the idea of marriage. Instead, the roles of mother and care-taker are expressed as the crucial defining factors of womanhood. Suggs highlights the prevalence of labor migration among Bakgatla men as a factor in the "decreasing significance of marriage as a definitional criterion for female adulthood" (Suggs 2002:28-9). The consequences of this shift are apparent today in Botswana, where approximately half of all households are headed by single women (Walter 2003). My research confirms and addresses the implications of these shifts.

The Batswana can be classified as patrilineal and patrilocal (Schapera 1963:160). Although marriage is no longer essential to personhood in the way that Schapera noticed, marriage is still commonplace. Upon marriage, the couple typically lives near the groom's family, and their children are adopted into his extended family. And, if the father is present and in some cases even if he is not, a child is named after his father's family, in the event that cattle have been transferred as *lobola* or bride price.

Writing on gender roles in sub-Saharan Africa, anthropologist Robert A. LeVine of Harvard University points out some basic elements of patrilineal Southern African gender roles.

There are some conspicuous uniformities throughout the agricultural societies of sub-Saharan Africa in the traditional division of labor by sex and the husband-wife relationship. Among most of these peoples, men clear the bush and do other annual heavy tasks, while women have the larger share of routine cultivation. Women carry the heavy burdens, usually on their heads, while men occupy their leisure with a variety of prestigious and important activities: cattle transactions (where there are cattle), government, and litigation. Thus women contribute very heavily to the basic economy, but male activities are much more prestigious and require less routine physical labor. (LeVine 1966:186-7)

Botswana's men have historically participated in migratory labor, "both internal and transnational to other parts of Southern Africa" (Upton 2003:318). Whether occupied at their cattle posts or in South Africa and parts of Botswana participating in the diamond, copper, and coal mining industries, men have traditionally lived at least part of the time at a distance from the mothers of their children, or their permanent households. The absence of a cultural expectation for married partners to consistently live in the same house is a point that makes this case study culturally unique from studies of women balancing careers and families in other places. The related abundance of female-headed households will be addressed more fully later in Chapter Three.

The decades since Botswana's independence have seen an urbanization trend from Botswana's villages to cities, and in particular, to Gaborone. "In Botswana, the wage-migration of women is directed towards the urban centres

and has contributed to the massive redistribution of the population from the rural villages to the towns which has taken place over the last twenty years” (Izzard 1985:258). This trend has continued since the 1980s: in 2008, 60 percent of the population was reported as “urbanized,” and the average annual growth rate of Botswana’s urban population has consistently been higher than the overall annual population growth rate since at least 1970 (UNICEF 2010). The urban population has grown beyond what was expected when the city of Gaborone was originally planned and built in the 1960s. And, according to Botswana’s Central Statistics Office’s 2006 report, females outnumber males by about 6,000 in Gaborone. Anita Larsson argues that female migration to Gaborone has led to increasing cultural matrifocality (Larsson 1990). She provides a fascinating angle on the composition and significance of female-headed households like the ones in this study.

Botswana’s trend of urbanization is a crucial demographic factor that supports professional women in Gaborone today. One important element of this trend over the last four or so decades is that women migrating to Gaborone have not always brought their children along. Instead, many women give birth to children and leave them in the care of grandparents or other female relatives in their home villages. The mothers have remained in, or moved to, the city in order to be close to job opportunities that support their nuclear families as well as, in some cases, parents and other extended relatives (Akinsola and Popovich 2002:767). This is typically the case for families struggling financially. Most of

the women I interviewed were born in a village, and then moved to Gaborone from these natal villages for education and career opportunities.

One important factor that must be considered when trying to understand how Batswana compose their identities is the lingering effects of British colonization. While the people of Botswana have traditionally operated within patrilineal systems of lineage, these systems were made more rigid and delineations between gender roles were made more strict by the imposition of Western cultural values.

The dominant masculine ideology underwent important structural transformations because of the advent of Christianity and colonialism with major consequences for traditional patriarchy, governance, education and economic self-sufficiency. The Christian missionaries brought to Botswana, Victorian-based ideas of gender reflecting the Western woman's role in nineteenth-century industrial Europe. In these European societies women's domesticity was crucial to the creation of a particular moral order which catered for the requirements of discipline and social order. (Mannathoko 1999:12)

These historical roots to the Batswana sense of gender identity must be considered when exploring the implications for the ways in which people categorize themselves.

There have certainly been efforts made by women in Botswana to challenge the condemnations implicit in traditional and colonial gender roles, and many of these efforts have seen success. But while Batswana women's status is progressive in African terms, they do have some specific disadvantages within their country (Walter 2003:23). The population in Botswana is 52 percent female, and in 1996, 43.6 percent of the population was within the 0-14 year age group, creating an overwhelmingly large dependent population among a depleting

population of adults capable of caregiving (Mannathoko 1999:9). Since caring for children is a predominantly female role in Botswana as it is in many places, this burden brought on by the HIV/AIDS epidemic falls largely on the shoulders of women.

While the government has worked to disseminate information about the spread of HIV/AIDS, pieces of the educational methodology are less effective because of cultural understandings of both the disease and the implications of sexual activity itself. For example, the common acronym ABC is used widely in Botswana, which stands for Abstain, Be safe, Condomize. The “ABC” solution is not culturally sensitive to the imperatives for reproduction that will be discussed at length later in this paper (Upton 2003:320). For women (and to a lesser degree, men) there is a strong expectation to bear children. This undermines the effectiveness of promoting condom usage, because even if condom use is understood in a contraceptive sense, it is simultaneously restricting a woman from having a child, therefore robbing her of agency in reproductive decision making (in the case of the woman desiring to conceive). Another factor that precludes condom usage is a belief that regular use of contraceptives leads eventually to infertility, a condition understood to be nearly exclusively female. There are other beliefs that insinuate that HIV is a female virus, transmitted by females to males, and that men infected with the virus can be cured if they have sexual intercourse with a virgin woman (Upton 2003:320). Clearly these beliefs facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS as a communicable virus.

Alcoholism is another factor that has affected the lives and roles of men and women in Botswana. While I was in Botswana, I was struck by a newspaper article addressing alcoholism in Botswana. The article quotes a chief, or “Kgosi,” addressing a concern about the impact of alcoholism on the local community: “Parents need to be cautious of the impact of their drinking behavior on their children. They need to behave responsibly as role models and shining examples for the benefit of their children” (Mmegi 2010). Alcohol consumption is a traditional element of Tswana culture, but has progressed to a degree that has public health and government officials concerned. According to research from the World Health Organization (in addition to my own personal perceptions and those shared with me by my informants), alcohol consumption is a primarily male activity in Botswana. Recent data indicates that 70 percent of women in Botswana abstain completely from alcohol, while only 37 percent of men do the same (World Health Organization 2004). Child neglect and domestic violence have both been linked to alcohol consumption in Botswana. One study revealed a relationship between alcohol abuse and gender-based violence in Botswana, which makes victims vulnerable to HIV infection (Phorano 2005:189).¹⁷

Now that the framework of female and child vulnerability has been established, this paper will continue on to analyze the education and labor situations for women in Botswana, then address the cultural expectation for women to bear children and the expectation for men to migrate for work. Then the phenomenon of female-headed-households will be addressed at length, and the

¹⁷ For more on alcohol and gender in Botswana, see David Suggs’s *A Bagful of Locusts and the Baboon Woman: Constructions of Gender, Change, and Continuity in Botswana* (2002).

paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications of gender identifications and roles among Batswana women.

While this thesis makes note of the minority category of women with careers in Gaborone as a case worthy of study, it is crucial to remember that women in Botswana have always worked, just as the Batswana have always educated their children, before the introduction of British-style schooling. What this thesis offers is an analysis of the specific changes that have occurred in recent years and of the ways Batswana women's careers intersect with the other parts of their lives as they forge a new faction of the middle-class.

Chapter Three

Mechanisms of social mobility

In order to contextualize the current situations of professional women in Botswana, an understanding of how they got to their current middle-class status is necessary. The previous chapter provided background information about Botswana that serves as a backdrop to understanding the culture of change within which the women featured in this research live. This chapter explains the crucial factors that have made it possible for women in Botswana to achieve high levels of education and to forge careers of their choosing in Gaborone. An understanding of how these women got where they are provides the basis of a discussion of the factors involved in the increasing prevalence of women obtaining post-secondary degrees and working full-time careers in their fields.

While the previous chapter provided background information about Botswana's political and cultural history, this section places a few of the

country's more recent trends in conversation with the lived experiences of career-working women in Gaborone. What has created the current educational climate in Gaborone, where many women are earning post-secondary degrees, forging full-time careers, and managing households and raising children? What has helped catapult these women into their current positions, where they serve as leaders and role models in a changing society? This section addresses primary mechanisms that have significantly influenced the opportunities available to women in Botswana, and which have thus played a role in their life decisions. The three primary factors addressed here are migration and urbanization trends, education access for females, and women's rights initiatives in Botswana. The increase in female-headed households in Botswana highlights the women who are part of the middle class by nature of their careers, and who are financially independent householders and mothers.

Interwoven with these are the concurrent personal and familial influences that my ten informants identified which also impacted their life choices. The factors addressed in this chapter reflect something more than personal life trajectories and specific influences—they are in fact illuminative of a new pathway for women in Botswana toward middle-class status. The material in this chapter supports the claim that opportunities and pathways for women are changing in Botswana. The cultural phenomena of gendered migration and stratified education access are working to propel a select group of women, who have also received extensive familial support, into successful careers they desire and lives composed of hybrid roles.

Gendered migration

As discussed in the previous chapter from a historical perspective, many Tswana practice migratory labor in both the cattle and mining industries. Cattle herding is a fundamental element of most Batswana's livelihoods. As noted previously, this work is primarily reserved for males. Most Tswana families maintain a permanent home in the village, as well as a house at their cattle post or grazing land, and a third home on their "lands," where their crops are raised, and where the mother and kids stay during planting and harvesting seasons. Mining, another male-dominated industry in Southern Africa, mimics Tswana cattle-herding practices in that it requires males to work at a distance from their permanent homes, and therefore, their families. While during the colonial period men migrated to mines in South Africa, the discovery of diamonds in Botswana in 1967 elevated the rate of labor-migration within the country above the rates of transnational migratory labor (Van Allen 2000). This trend predicated the rural-to-urban migration of men and women seeking work and school opportunities.

These trends are significant to the current status of professional women in Gaborone in two ways. First, since Gaborone is the primary locale for formal sector employment in Botswana, the site of most secondary schools in the country, and home to the only University of Botswana campus, a physical migration to the city has proven necessary for both men and women to earn university degrees and continue in careers in the fields in which they were trained.

Gaborone is simply the hub in Botswana for the country's best formal education, and much of its formal job market.¹⁸ Secondly, the fact that women are participating in urbanization means they are performing an act (internal migration for labor) that has historically been a male act. The Botswana's history of internal migration greases the wheels of rural-to-urban movement because the concept of migration has been culturally established in other contexts, and now women are taking part.

Botswana's urbanization clearly has a gendered significance. Since cattle and mining were attractions for males away from village homes for work, urban centers (and Gaborone in particular) offer opportunities for both men and women. Consequently, new domestic patterns of household composition and practices have merged as both men and women have reasons to uproot and relocate to the city. These trends have signified new options for women, including giving birth to children in their natal villages and leaving them in the care of female relatives, moving to the city and heading their own urban households as unmarried women, and raising their children in an urban context rather than a rural one, with or without a male partner. One direct consequence of female migration to the country's industrial and political center and obtaining university degrees is an increase in the numbers of females that occupy positions that require post-secondary degrees, and thus, more women in more visible, leadership positions. To be clear, these women still represent a minority in Gaborone—many female

¹⁸ A notable exception to this is the country's mining industry. Debswana operates four primary diamond mines in Botswana, located in Jwaneng, Orapa, Damtshaa, and Letlhakane, and one coal mine in Palapye.

migrants to the capital city participate in the wage-labor available there without necessarily obtaining higher education.

Female-headed households

The migrant labor system that emerged following the modernization after the discovery of diamonds and gold in Southern Africa had a significant influence in changing the picture of labor in Botswana. Specifically, the phenomenon coupled with the withstanding role of women as childbearers and caregivers led to the emergence and increased prevalence of households headed by single women. In 1999, female-headed households made up 52 percent of all households in Botswana (Walter 2003:32). The number of single-parent families is increasing, and the vast majority of these new single-parent households are headed by women (Akinsola and Popovich 2002:761).

Many of these female-headed households are grandmothers in rural villages who care for their grandchildren when their daughters move to urban areas for education, employment, or both. In situations like these, women commonly care for children of several mothers. These rural households often experience food insecurity and other forms of health concerns. For example, many of these homes use indoor cooking methods, which means babies strapped to their grandmother's backs are directly exposed to smoke from indoor cooking. Upper respiratory tract infections are particularly prevalent in these rural populations as a result (Akinsola and Popovich 2002 763). At least 50 percent of

female-headed households run by elderly women are in poverty, and only 55 percent of all female-headed households in Botswana have income-earning mothers, compared with 74 percent of male-headed households. Related health risks of these situations include improper sanitation, soil contamination due to limited latrines, poor ventilation, unsafe drinking water, and the disposal of refuse.

It used to be the case that migrating fathers would send remittances to women caring for children, but due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the crisis of care for orphans, remittances from fathers are more and more uncommon, as these fathers are either dead or are afflicted with disease. The issue of alcoholism brought up in Chapter Two is another factor that has limited remittances sent home by laboring fathers. This represents the cutting off of one of the few ties maintained by fathers working away from the home. Thus, more mothers are becoming the primary unpaid caregivers for children of AIDS victims. When a woman has children, she must now consider how they will be cared for in the event that she might have to move to urban areas to make money, or in the event that she orphans her children due to AIDS-related health issues, financial struggle, or other challenges. Brown notes in her 1989 work that female-headed households are generally financially insecure (Brown 1989:261).

Today's picture of female-headed households in Gaborone, however, is much different. Many female-headed households no longer fall under Brown's category of "peasantariat," (259), or those women who work the land but do not work wage-paying jobs. According to Botswana's Annual Poverty Monitoring

Report of 2006-2007, Botswana's urban areas have lower poverty rates than its rural areas, and Gaborone has the lowest rates in the country. This is explained by greater wage-earning opportunities in the capital city. My informants are all making salaries and consider themselves to be financially independent and successful—I argue that they are a new faction of Botswana's middle-class.

Policy shifts in Botswana

Men in Botswana still maintain a majority of the country's political power and economic capital. Cattle remain a significant source of income, at least 86 percent of which are held by men (Chilisa 2002:26). Women make up 11 percent of Botswana's parliamentary seats (Ditshwanelo 2007). Women comprise an increasingly significant portion of Botswana's wage-earning workforce. In 1995, women constituted 45 percent of the formal labor force, up from 34 percent in 1991 (Siphambe 2000:108). In 2002, 40 percent of all cash income-earners in Botswana were women (Chilisa 2002:26). Women are still, however only earning 60 percent of the wages earned by men for the same positions (UNICEF 2010). Therefore, men in Botswana are still in control of a solid majority of the country's capital, but women are gaining increasing presence and power in both governmental and other formal labor environments.

Notable shifts have occurred in Botswana's policies regarding marriage, motherhood and the workplace. For example, Unity Dow, the renowned Motswana judge and human rights activist, successfully fought in 1990 for the

right for a woman with a non-Motswana husband to pass her citizenship to her children. According to Ditshwanelo, the Botswana Center for Human Rights, “In 1997 a Government-commissioned comprehensive review of legislation to identify gender-based discrimination was carried out. In the past ten years, Botswana has amended several of its statutes, largely successfully removing their gender biases.” In fact, in 2005, women constituted 53 percent of professional and technical workers in Botswana, and 31 percent of administrators and managers (Ditshwanelo 2007).

As discussed in Chapter Two, there remains a cultural expectation for all women to bear children in Botswana, not excepting those in the workforce. Groups like Ditshwanelo have worked to legally mandate structures in the workplace that facilitate the dual role of mother and employee. For example, nearly all employers offer partially paid maternal leave, which is typically granted for six weeks before and six weeks following childbirth, with pay of at least 25 percent of the regular wage (Walter 2003:30). However, there is still a significant pay differential for men and women doing the same job. There is also a skewed representation of men in top jobs, or ones in managerial positions. Again, women’s average pay was 60 percent that of men in 2002.¹⁹

This pay differential undermines women’s capability to meet societal expectations for childbearing. Only the top 35 percent of female employees can afford childcare; most others send their children to live with grandmothers and other relatives living in rural villages. Because of this, groups including

¹⁹ Women, on average, earned \$5,418 annually, while men earned \$9,025.

Ditshwanelo have pushed for the provision of on-site childcare services for government employees, although these efforts have been limited, and there are few examples of efforts like this coming to fruition.

Education in Botswana

Another crucial structural mechanism that has enabled Botswana women to reach high levels of education and full-time careers is the exceptional state of education in Botswana. While education has certainly always been a part of Tswana culture, formal classroom-based learning was instituted in Botswana with the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1817. Schools were established in villages, near homes. The cultural expectation for boys and men to tend each family's cattle at a distance from the home created an environment in which more girls were present near these schools more of the time. The literature concurs that because of this situation, Botswana reports some of the highest rates of female primary school attendance in sub-Saharan Africa, a fact that has remained true since colonization. As expressed by my informants, access to educational opportunities is a prime determining factor in the professional success of women in Botswana. Because of continued gendered cultural practices in Botswana, girls have historically comprised at least an equal presence in primary schools (Suggs 2002).

The education system in Botswana is based on that of the United Kingdom. Students in Botswana qualify for free access to a basic education that

consists of seven years of primary school and three years of what is called junior secondary school, which earns a student a Junior Certificate qualification.

Roughly 50 percent of the students who receive their Junior Certificate continue on for two more years of senior secondary school, which is neither free nor compulsory.

According to the Forum for African Women Educationalists, a smaller percentage of girls than boys complete primary school in sub-Saharan Africa overall (Chilisa 2002:21). However, in Botswana, girls are attending primary school on a day-to-day-basis in higher numbers than boys. In 2008, the ratio of females as a percentage of males enrolled in primary schools from 2003-2008 was 103. For secondary school enrolment, that number was 114 (UNICEF 2010). The number of girls who attend primary school in comparison to boys has contributed to a higher literacy rate for women in Botswana than the male literacy rate. It is interesting to compare the literacy rates of urban versus rural women. For urban women who make up more than 50 percent of all Botswana women, literacy rates hover around 90 percent. Nationwide, the rate is 79 percent for all women over the age of fifteen. In fact, the male literacy rate typically lags 5 percent behind the female rate. This is a lingering result of the higher rates of young girls in school than boys.

The discovery of diamonds in Botswana following its 1966 independence fueled a dramatic influx of federal funding and, subsequently, more widespread provision of government schooling nationwide. In 1977, Botswana adopted its National Policy on Education. This policy was adopted with a philosophy of

Education for Kagisano, or social harmony. “Based on the four national principles of democracy, development, self-reliance and unity, social harmony is an important outcome for the society of Botswana” (UNESCO). Botswana’s national goal of *kagisano* serves as a guiding principle for the provision of government-funded education.

In 1994 Botswana conducted a significant update of its education policy, renamed the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE). The explicit goals of this revised policy were to prepare Botswana’s workforce for an increasingly global industrial economy (a transition from an agricultural-based economy), and also to make education more accessible to persons with disabilities, low incomes, or other barriers. The specific goal of the RNPE is to provide ten years of education for all people in Botswana. This revised education policy has the potential to continue to elevate the presence of females obtaining higher education, as more years of free education might keep young women in school longer and bring them closer to connections to university and skilled-labor opportunities.

While this factor is not addressed at length in this paper, a unique element of women’s education in Botswana is the now expired national service program, Tirelo Setshaba, which was in place from 1980 until 2000. This program required men and women to complete one year of service following their completion of secondary school. During Tirelo Setshaba’s lifespan, this year of service was required for entrance in a tertiary institution (Mmegi 2009). This program provided various kinds of experience in workplace environments for young

women and men exiting secondary school. My informants happen to fall into the age group that was finishing secondary school while the program was in place. According to Keneilwe, “What they do is they try to give you exposure to something that is related to your career, so that you can get experience in that field.” Keneilwe, who is now starting her own private counseling practice, served in a guidance counseling office at a school, where she was later hired after completing her university degree in psychology. She identifies Tirelo Setshaba as a factor that gave her experience that solidified her desire to work in the counseling field.

Dikeledi, who now runs her own private law practice, suggests that one of the goals of Tirelo Setshaba was to familiarize young Batswana with their culture and the rest of their country. “Well, we were just taken to communities and you had to sort of mingle with the communities. And work at the kgotla, the kgotla is the customary court, and then you teach, and then you do a bit of their culture... You learn about the culture of Botswana.” She says this experience “inspired her into the legal field.” I speculate that the experiences provided by Tirelo Setshaba played a role in encouraging women to remain active in service and other careers in Botswana after they finished secondary school. And, since participation in the government program was mandatory for admission to tertiary institutions, Tirelo Setshaba served as a transitional stepping stone from the more general secondary school curriculum to specific university program that catapult students into careers upon graduation.

The language or medium of instruction is an important factor that determines future opportunities for Botswana's students. While both English and Setswana are the official languages of Botswana, English is the language of the business world in Botswana as well as the language of higher education instruction. Fluency is crucial to obtaining careers in Gaborone-based fields. Government-funded primary education in Botswana has been largely taught using Setswana. The 1977 NPE instituted the use of Setswana in schools through Primary Standard Four, after which English was to be the predominant medium of instruction. However, the 2002 curriculum revision also brought about a recommendation that government schools begin teaching using the English medium at Primary Standard Two. This policy shift indicates an institutional desire to foster learning that can lead to success in higher education and the business and service sectors of employment in Botswana. Equity in English-language proficiency is a step toward gender equity in opportunities in the realms of education and employment. As noted earlier in the chapter, female students constitute a majority of primary school attendees (when Setswana is the primary language of instruction), but the ratio shifts in secondary school statistics. Therefore, as a result of the 2002 curriculum revision, more girls will have the opportunity to achieve English proficiency—a skill that determines success down the road.

That said, English language access still drives a wedge between students in Botswana. As identified by my informants, the discrepancy of teaching medium between government schools and private schools is a factor that

stringently divides students based on economic access to different kinds of education. Those who can afford to attend private schools are taught exclusively in English throughout the levels, and those who attend government schools are typically introduced to English in Standard Two. The consequences of this division are made clear when students completing secondary school take national exams for spots at the University of Botswana, which is administered in English. Furthermore, eight of the nine private or “independent” schools in Botswana are located in the greater Gaborone area. This perpetuates the concentration of highly educated, English-speaking residents in what is already the hub of business and academia in Botswana.

Consequently, access to English education, which requires more expensive private education, is another factor that determines how far a woman might be able to get in education and in her field of choice. Again, since English is the primary medium for the business and professional sector in Botswana, it is the only language taught past the Standard Two level of primary school. “This gives middle-class children an academic edge in schools because English is spoken in everyday life in the home” (Mannathoko 11). The English language continues to perpetuate the separation of social classes and opportunity. This provides one more barrier to women interested in pursuing professional careers. If a woman is not accustomed to the English language in her childhood home, she is unlikely to be academically competitive past Standard Two.

Reflective of their exceptional upbringing, nine of my ten informants attended private schools that taught English from Primary Standard One. Several

of them discussed at length the differences between government-funded, or public, schools, and privately funded ones in Botswana. Reginah, for example, attended Broadhurst Primary School, a private school in Gaborone. When she was nine years old, her mother, herself a secondary school teacher in Gaborone, sent Reginah to a renowned all-girls boarding school in neighboring Zimbabwe. She explained to me some of the schooling options parents in Botswana have for their kids:

All over Botswana, you can spot government schools from a mile away. The government schools are all Setswana medium, yes. And English medium are the private schools. And then you've got the disgustingly expensive private schools and you get good government schools in South Africa, and then you have the government schools that we have down here.

She explained four tiers of schools as options for Botswana parents: government schools in Botswana, private schools in Botswana, government schools in South Africa, and private schools in South Africa. She described her boarding school in Zimbabwe as "better than what we could get in Gabs, but not as expensive as those castles in South Africa."

Reginah also explained that attending "good" schools means being around other students with above-average academic motivation. In other words, these schools play a role in establishing an elite class that has specific access and training. Reginah now works in international affairs and wants to get her Master's degree in the near future, as several of her friends are doing:

The one quit her job to do her Master's now. The other one is finishing her Master's. The other one is working, but she's doing her CFA's. The other one is doing her honor's. She couldn't work so she's doing her honor's. So everybody is studying, still. We are similar in that aspect. Everybody is

like, “We need to do school guys, because we all want to be rich one day!” We all want top jobs, and the only way to get top jobs is education.

Most of Reginah’s friends now live in Johannesburg, which is regarded as desirable because of its job opportunities and urban prestige.

Keneilwe, a former high school guidance counselor who is now starting her own private counseling practice, explains that she was fortunate to have had the opportunity to go to high-quality schools. Her grandfather was a mineworker near Selebi-Phikwe, and his position came with the benefit of reduced tuition for his family at the local private school, which was built especially for families of mineworkers. In fact, her mother, who lived in Gaborone, sent her to live with her grandparents just so she could attend this private school, which they would not have been able to afford without the mining scholarship. Here Kenilwe talks about her grandfather’s background and describes how education has changed since Botswana’s independence:

He just works hard, and he managed to get up there without very much education. Well you know, our first ministers here, we only got our independence in the 1960s, so some of the people who are really doing well didn’t really get lots of schooling. You know? I mean they went to school, but they didn’t achieve a master’s level or Ph. D. They just do well, and they get up in the ranks. Of course, now it’s different. Now so much education is required. Oh my, yes. And I was at UB and I’m saying if I work here I think I’m going to be inspired to do my Ph.D.

Keneilwe’s mother is a lecturer of marketing at Tlokweng, which she described as “the other university.” Her father is “a traditional Motswana man! But you know what, he’s been exposed though. He actually works, he’s an engineer, he works on airplanes at AirBotswana. And he’s been to the US in school.” Her dad does not know about all her mom’s business ventures. “She doesn’t listen to my dad.

It's funny! Sometimes, my dad will try to advise her, and she'll be like, 'whatever!'" Keneilwe demonstrated how her family provided exceptional role models for obtaining education and venturing into business fields. Her mother stands out as a female entrepreneur who impacted Keneilwe's perception of her opportunities. Keneilwe's family is representative of the women I spoke with in that her mother and other family members reached higher-than-average education levels, and while her father is "traditional" in many ways, her mother made independent decisions about her professional endeavors and both supported Keneilwe's education.

Mothers and other influences beyond schooling

In addition to Reginah and Keneilwe, each of my informants talked at length about the role their mothers played in encouraging them to pursue educational opportunities and to have high expectations of themselves. In particular, my informants brought up the success with which their mothers juggled managing a household, raising kids, and, in several cases, maintaining a job outside the home as well. In some cases, these mothers worked as professionals and served as stepping stones for their daughters' careers. When asked what she expected her life to be like when she was younger, Naledi responded: "I expected my life to be like my mom. My mom, she juggled everything. She had four kids, she wasn't married, but she did it all."

Many of my informants did not have consistent father figures in their lives while growing up, which means both that their mothers were breadwinners and

that their mothers had more agency to make decisions for their daughters. Snapdragon mentioned that if her mother had been married, she likely would not have attended private school because many Batswana men do not value girls' education enough to invest monetarily in expensive private schooling. Those informants who did have father figures growing up emphasized that their fathers were, in their words, "liberalized." They were exceptional Batswana men in that they shared with their wives a willingness to make financial investments in order to provide excellent educational opportunities for their daughters.

The informants who did grow up with father figures expressed their characteristics of exceptionality. Dikeledi, whose mother was married, noted the exceptionality of her father's attitude toward women: "Growing up, I saw my mother being a married woman and yet she was so liberalized because her husband allowed her to be such a liberal woman. I could tell the difference between the kind of life she leads, it's different from other women." While men were not the focus of this study, conversations with my informants illuminated the perception that mothers in Botswana are more likely to invest in their daughters' education, and the men who invest in girls' education are exceptions to a cultural norm.

Cultural continuities like girls attending primary school in high numbers and women caring for children in female-headed households work alongside contemporary factors like stratified access to education to create a subsector of elite women in Botswana who have benefited exceptional opportunities that have guided them toward successful career lives. The rise of this sector has catalyzed

political shifts that support women active in professional sectors in Gaborone. This combination of cultural continuities, alongside economic (and therefore educational) stratification and urbanization collide with personal support from my informants' families and their own perseverance to set them up to successfully carry out careers as well as home and family-based roles.

Chapter Four

Culturally-Specific Strategies for Balancing Roles and Priorities

“As a woman, in the Botswana context, you have to juggle a lot. You need to juggle in the sense that you need to be a mother, I am head of department, I am a mother, I am a wife, I am an aunt, I am a daughter, yeah, I am everything.” – Esther

What does gender in practice look like for women working careers in Botswana? How do they describe their defining qualities, and what are the pieces that comprise their lives as middle-class women? The women I interviewed in Gaborone grapple with the collisions between historical and cultural understandings of “what women should do” and the material conditions of their lives that dictate what these women must do in order to achieve their expressed goals. Chapter Three discussed some of the cultural and familial expectations that they must navigate alongside, though not necessarily in opposition to, their

personal desires. They are creating self-narratives that address conflicts between expectation and reality, doubt and aspiration, duty and desire. My informants expressed the need to be happy, the need for one to feel successful in her job, and this aspiration fueled initially by privilege but later by interest, passion, and desire continues to drive their decisions. Many working women in Gaborone are executing strategies that permit full-time careers in tandem with bearing and rearing children as well as maintaining a household, oftentimes as a single parent. The goals of these women in Botswana are worthy of study because they are engaging in career wage labor in a way that is still new to Botswana. In particular, the fact that women have always performed the roles of childbearing, rearing, and household work but have *not* long been a significant portion of Botswana's wage-earning workforce makes for a cultural shift that is impacting gendered expectations. The case in this thesis documents the additional element of this shift toward wage-labor that is the fuel of aspiration for these women to contribute to fields that align with their passions.

As professionally successful women, my informants expressed several important goals for their lives that guide their decisions and their actions. For the sake of organization, I break down these goals into four primary categories in this chapter: maternal and family-based goals, professional career goals, goals for a male partner or husband, and the goal of balancing the elements of their lives gracefully. In this chapter I use stories that highlight some of the main themes brought up by my informants as they navigate careers, motherhood, and other life decisions. My discussion of my informants' goals and the ways they reach them

supports my argument that women in Botswana are incorporating a relatively new life situation, that of full-time employment outside the home in fields of their choosing, while not entirely reworking their other life elements and expectations. Their roles in fact support one another—the Tswana understanding of womanhood, particularly the necessity for women to be independent decision makers, facilitates the cohesive integration of careers into the lives of adult women in Botswana. These women are capitalizing on their high-end educations and the confidence instilled in them by their parents and other role models in order to actualize their desired lives. Their influences have led them to elite professional status, which is unique to a group of women in Gaborone, of which my informants are a part.

“I am still mosadi:” Continuing cultural gender roles

In the wake of the recent trend of more and more women obtaining university degrees and holding full-time careers outside the home, cultural expectations for women have remained consistent in important ways. As discussed in Chapter Two, household work and childcare largely remain the responsibility of women. Women are still expected to have children—none of my informants were explicitly waiting to have children until they had established their careers, for example. And yet Chapter Three demonstrated how the specific influences in my informants’ lives allowed for a new range of opportunities. They want to have children, and they want to work, to excel at their jobs, and they want

to maintain their households. This chapter looks at the stories of my informants and illuminates how these women are incorporating their careers alongside other elements of their lives.

Esther, who is married and was also my oldest informant, shared how cultural expectations of her as a woman, mother, and wife must be incorporated with her career:

You have all these family obligations that you have to deal with. You also have your work that you have to deal with. And my thinking is that nothing should affect the other detrimentally. There are days that yes, I will leave the office at eight. But I cannot do that every day. There are times when I would have to just say, today I am done. At four or at one o'clock. I have to go home. I need to go to a funeral, I need to do this, I need to do this. And at times, you have to carry work home. And you carry work home, and people are to sleep, you want to be sitting on the table now doing some stuff. You cannot do that every day. Because obviously along the way, your husband, who is not an academic, is going to get mad.

My conversations with Esther were often reflective on what her life was like when her kids were still in the house. Both her son and her daughter went to university in the United States. Her son returned to work in Gaborone, and her daughter still lives in the United States, where she works as a lawyer. Unlike most of my informants, Esther describes life with a husband and how having a career affects their relationship. However, her explanation of how she must be attentive to a variety of needs and expectations is consistent with what I heard from all ten women I interviewed, and illuminates a generation negotiating cultural consistency as well as change.

Amid this cultural continuity of gender roles is also a shift, slow though it may be, of gendered expectations for working women. Snapdragon, for example, explained how her mother, Ngwedi, refused to ever accept lobola, or bride price,

for her. “‘My daughter isn’t a cash cow!’ she would always say. And you know, I would like to have something to live on once I marry. There’s no point in giving you all our money. But people are still doing it you know, paying for the wife. Mostly in the villages.” Here Snapdragon represents her mother’s refusal to accept lobola as a matter of principle and also one of practicality. She also alludes to a cultural dynamic identified by several of my informants: the cultural divide between rural Botswana, or the villages, and urban life, particularly in Gaborone. My informants’ mothers’ expectations for them mark a cultural upbringing of Batswana children that, in some ways, differs from the traditional expectations of Batswana women in terms of marriage. While this anecdote does not necessarily represent a sweeping rejection of the bride wealth system in Botswana, it does highlight that women in financially-independent, middle-class situations are making decisions according to their desires for themselves and for their children. Urban migration among the generation I interviewed has also likely played a role in enabling them to make decisions independent from certain longer standing traditions among their older relatives in rural Botswana.

Reginah explains that there are still culturally-dictated roles for women, but they are more flexible now that many women are working.

There’s roles that are delegated to the woman. Around the household, the kids, you know? All that stuff. A lady does this. That’s just what it is. You should know how to clean, you should know how to cook. And sometimes my mom would bring, like my nephews would come over and you know, there’s training for looking after kiddies. I guess in that way, but it’s also a new day. The Motswana woman isn’t restricted to the home, the house. She’s out there. And people are going to school, they go to work, so that traditional type Motswana woman, yes she’s still got those things that are assigned to you, but people are not so traditional in the cities. Because you

don't have to fetch water. You do have a lot of other things. People are more liberated in terms of the way they think in the city.

Reginah attributes changing expectations for women to the education available in the cities, as well as the exposure to other ways of life in urban settings. She says these environments foster a greater freedom for decision-making. "You don't do things because other people do them; you do them because of you." Dikeledi expressed a similar sentiment and added a historical perspective. With more women becoming educated, she has noticed a shift in male expectations for women: "Botswana men have had to learn to contend with women, as peers and colleagues." While in our interviews we did dedicate attention to male-female dynamics in the workplace, my informants also did not indicate that these relationships were a notable challenge in their professional lives. Upon further study, it is possible that this theme could arise as an indicator of an increasingly tolerant culture regarding women in what have long been male-dominated professions.

Esther echoed Reginah's observation, claiming that her gender does not adversely affect her professional position at the university.

Honest to god, in my department, I don't feel my gender being an issue. Because honestly, most of them, everybody is supportive. And I think here they are supporting *me*, not a woman. They look at me as me. Of course problems arise here and there, but I don't think it's anything to try to put you down because you are a woman, you are going to fail or anything like that.

According to my interviews, career-working women do not seem to be fighting to be respected within their fields. They are successfully working in the professions they have chosen, or actively studying and working to reach those positions they

desire. And although most professional arenas remain dominated by male workers, my informants noted that as long as they perform well and meet professional expectations, they are welcomed in their fields. My informants' descriptions indicate that this may not be a moment of cultural revolution regarding women in certain workplaces. I instead witnessed women in cultural settings that have, at this point, already adjusted to some extent to a greater female presence in their chosen career arenas. It is entirely possible, however, that my informants did not always disclose a complete picture of their workplace dynamics, as all interviews elicit a select amount of information. In particular, the desire to portray a positive situation might have affected the information that I received. Nonetheless, the depiction described here is meaningful. At the least, my informants' consistent positive report about the lack of gender-based discrimination in the workplace is congruent with their narrative of success. This thesis tells the stories of women who report their successful balance of work and other responsibilities.

Reaching the top: Careers and further education

All of the women I interviewed expressed a desire to excel within their professional fields. They are, in many cases, charting new ground in their families, achieving higher levels of education and opening new career doors that were not available to previous generations, or in some cases, even older siblings. However, their families all prioritized education ideologically and financially, and

women working careers are making the most of these opportunities. Reginah expressed it like this: “We all want top jobs, and the only way to get top jobs is education.” These women strive for jobs that hold a degree of prestige and offer a good salary. Most importantly, they desire to do work that aligns with their passions.

Several of the women I interviewed are engaged in continuing education in order to be competitive candidates for the jobs they desire. At the very least, they are putting significant amounts of energy into their careers as personal endeavors in addition to others in their lives. Because of the cultural expectation for women to bear children and care for them, women also want jobs that are flexible, provide maternity leave surrounding the birth of their children, and allow them time to raise their children. And yet I did not pick up on a willingness to compromise career success for benefits that support raising a family. These benefits were expressed as desirable, but much of our conversations in fact centered on strategies these women use in order to achieve a difficult balance between their work and other obligations. The following in-depth look at a few of my informants’ career lives illuminates the shared themes embedded in these individuals’ particular situations. To begin, Dikeledi’s story of starting and running her own law firm while raising two children as a single mom is useful for appreciating how professional success drives the women I met in Gaborone.

In the pristine lobby of a law office in Gaborone, a man pushed buttons on his touch-screen cell phone. The receptionist told me to take a seat, and after a few minutes, Dikeledi stepped out to greet me. She showed a traditional sign of

respect by holding her right arm gently with her left hand as we shook hands and introduced ourselves. We sat down in her large, naturally-lit office, and while her secretary served us coffee, Dikeledi told me that her baby was sick. They might not make it to her cousin's wedding the next day. Instead, she might leave her baby with the helper and take care of some extra work at the office. Dikeledi is one of many women in Gaborone forging a full-time, professional career while raising a young child as a single mother. She is navigating the professional and domestic realms concurrently. She is at once a lawyer, a mother, and a head-of-household. She is mosadi.

Dikeledi is the mother of two children. Her older daughter Latoya is ten years old, and her son Modise is nine months old. She employs a nanny, who comes in from outside of town each day to care for the baby and help out around the house. The nanny comes around six o'clock in the morning, and stays until Dikeledi can get home from work, often not until seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Her office primarily handles criminal cases, accident claims, and intellectual property disputes. A few short months before we first met, Dikeledi argued for a declaration of insanity for a woman who was accused of murdering her husband. She told me that as the founding partner of her law firm, she works to promote human rights and humane treatment in difficult situations.

Dikeledi told me about another case she recently argued that involved a young mother who was accused of infanticide. This story yields insight into how gender impacts her approach to cases she argues as well as how she is perceived as a lawyer.

This was her third child, because she had two before. And having grown up in the remote of the remote areas, she didn't even know how old her children were. That's how bad you feel. She doesn't know how old she herself is. It was estimated to be around early twenties. And then she was staying with this man, this man. Well he wasn't even a man, he was a young boy. And when she fell pregnant, she was neglected right from the beginning. And she had nowhere to go, her mother had died, she doesn't know who her father is, whether her father is alive and all of that. She had nothing else to do, you see. She couldn't care for three children. The case was interesting, because every time a man picked up the file, they would push it and really fight. And then if it's a woman, she will be calm and she will say, "Oh, I think we could talk about this a bit longer here." Of course the judge sees me as a woman. I'm known to be in the women's liberation thing. And what do you call it, a sort of feminist.

Dikeledi said she often takes up cases pro bono if she feels a particular interest in the implications of a case's outcome. In this example, she highlights how she does what she can to support struggling young mothers in Botswana. "I can relate to single motherhood, of course. But I want all those girls to be able to get an education like I did." Her reputation within the legal community coupled with her success running her own private law firm infuses Botswana courts with not only a female presence, but one that actively fights for female empowerment and opportunity in the country.

Keneilwe shares a similar desire to use her work to enhance education and opportunity for young women in Botswana. Chapter Three told the story of her private school education, which she obtained through her grandfather's mining benefits. She attended school in the mining town of Selebi-Phikwe until she entered university in Gaborone. She says she got her first taste of service when she worked at a clinic that tested patients for HIV, and then went on to be a guidance counselor in high schools:

Well actually when I was a teenager, I knew I wanted to work with people. I knew I had a passion to help. Yeah. But I looked at the different helping professions, and I did a psychometric test through [the University of Botswana] actually. My guidance counselor at the time encouraged me. And yeah, I figured out what would match my personality and my desire to help. And there was a shortage in the country of counselors, so I was one of the first to get sponsored by the Botswana government to go to [the University of Botswana] for counseling. Everything got paid for. And now I help people. At least I hope I do!

Now Keneilwe is starting up her own private counseling practice, while still assisting with the HIV education program at the high school where she was a counselor. She says she likes the idea of a private practice because “you have so much more flexibility to be there for people. Now I don’t have to worry too much about what the school wants, just what my clients need.” Already, she has taken up a few pro bono cases for people in need of service without the resources to pay for it. “Sometimes I’ll do outreach work, where I go out to the villages to talk to people. How would they ever get counseling help if we didn’t go out there to them? They don’t have that kind of money to come into Gabs just to talk to someone, you know?” Keneilwe’s current job situation has given her time and space to focus on the service aspect of her career:

Okay what because I’m getting started, I’m doing a lot of market research. I’m finding out what the schools need right now. I’ve been visiting different schools to find out what exactly, how I can help in schools because I still want that to be part of what I do. And, because I haven’t gotten my license, typically I would, of course, see my clients. But I haven’t seen my clients yet, but I do get pro bono work.

Keneilwe explained that her career is extremely important to her, so she is taking her time doing “market research” and composing the elements of her private counseling firm. Although she is only thirty years old, she is working to

incorporate the elements of her psychology career thus far that she wants to continue in a more independent manner: working in schools, counseling those with health issues, and serving fellow community members. Though Keneilwe is now personally invested in the work that she does, it is important to note that she might not have gotten here without government support for her education. The scholarship she received to go into counseling at the University of Botswana undoubtedly played an important guiding role in her following career path.

Dikeledi and Keneilwe's stories exhibit examples of women taking the initiative required to achieve the kinds of careers they desire. They have studied uncountable long hours, worked as apprentices in their chosen fields, and are both now creating businesses that both accomplish their personal career goals and incorporate an ideology of serving their fellow Botswana residents with the work that they do. The following story is of Naledi, a married mother of one who teaches at the University of Botswana. She stands out from my group of informants in that she expressed serious discontent with her current job. However, she is actively working to improve her situation, prioritizing her own happiness in concert with family responsibilities.

Naledi holds the title of Senior Lecturer at the University of Botswana. She wakes up at 5:15am each morning and cycles on her stationary bicycle for thirty minutes before waking her three-year-old son, Neo. She bathes him and gets him ready for the day, then drops him off at preschool on her way to her office. She teaches at the university, where she typically teaches two or three courses a term. She is an alumna of the university; she received her Bachelor of Arts and

humanities degree, and then was immediately employed at the university after graduation. Because of Naledi's academic excellence, she was recruited to be a staff development fellow, where she served as teaching assistant and assisted with administrative tasks in the department. After two years, she came to the United States and completed a Master's degree in California. When she returned to Botswana, she was hired for her current position as lecturer.

But Naledi is not satisfied. She does not feel challenged by her job, and she does not feel passionate about what she does. "I thought I would love it, but I don't. And so, although I am in a good place professionally, I am not passionate about it." Also, she wants to do something with a better salary to support her family. She is currently studying finance on her own, and hopes to eventually go to finance school and become a financial manager for a big company. She felt she was cornered into pursuing languages because her math scores were not high enough to be competitive with other business students in university. Now, Naledi builds extra hours into her day to pursue her desired career. After making dinner and cleaning up the kitchen, she plays with her son and puts him to bed around 7:30pm. Then she pulls out her books, and follows syllabi of finance classes being taught at the University of Botswana. "I make sure that at least I look at my studies for one hour every single day of the week."

Naledi's story represents the women in Gaborone who attend private schools, attend university, and strive for the careers they desire. While raising a child, Naledi aspires to do whatever it takes to reach her desired career. She manages to build in time for her studying, and expects to be successful in creating

her preferred reality. Her work ethic, self-confidence, and hopeful outlook make all the work she does possible.

Incorporating home-based responsibilities with full-time careers

While the importance of motherhood remains central to the role of women in Botswana, many women are, as demonstrated, grafting onto this identity that of a professional career-woman. Maintaining a household, and the independence it requires (as described by Suggs 2002) remains a keystone of Botswana women's identity. The importance of a woman taking care of her home and children both establishes an important part of her womanhood and grounds her within Botswana's culture.

In order to help achieve their expressed goal of effectively balancing these two realms of home and work, women are deploying the strategy of hiring helpers to assist with household tasks. Of course this strategy is focused on the domestic realm, and women in Botswana adopt strategies in other realms of their lives as well. Many rely significantly on family members, and some share childcare roles with a male partner. The decision to hire household help is simply one example of the many ways women in Botswana are creating new narratives of success. The use of hired domestic labor was something that came up organically in interviews, and was not the primary focus of my study. However, the example illuminates how career-women in Gaborone negotiate cultural expectation for housework to

be done by the woman of the house, and the obligations that arise from working full-time jobs.

The practice of hiring domestic help is commonplace for households across socio-economic statuses in Botswana. Esther described the situation like this:

You see we have the issue of maids. You know in Africa, we believe in maids. I think that in itself really is a blessing, because I did realize how much I needed a maid when was in the U.S. Somebody to clean, do the laundry, do this and that. And the kids are there too. And you couldn't leave them. You know the laws [in the United States]. If you are under twelve you can't leave your child. But here in Botswana you can, because there are neighbors, you can send them to neighbors or something. So I think maybe the other very important person in our lives is our maid. Because when it comes to childcare, when it comes to doing laundry, cleaning the house, or most of the household chores, are done by the maid. We are a family because of our maid.

Here Esther describes the practice of using hired help in the home as a culturally African strategy. For her, this issue is an example of how a cultural norm becomes a necessity for those who participate. She also makes the interesting connection between hiring domestic help to assist with childcare and the longstanding tradition of family members or neighbors participating with childrearing, particularly in Botswana's villages. Botswana women have always been expected to be mothers, and mothers have always been expected to be primary caregivers for their children. Many women receive voluntary assistance from family and community members—the women I interviewed instead employ hired helpers or nannies as the secondary childcare-givers for their kids. In neither of these situations are fathers necessarily expected to be involved with childcare on a regular basis.

Naledi echoed Esther's explanation of the perception of hired domestic help in Botswana, pointedly noting the multiple realms in which many Africans work:

I would say, I feel sorry for the women in the United States because they don't have house helps in their home. Because I can't imagine having a child, having to take that child to the day care every single morning. That one, I think it must be tough. I think the perception is that women don't work here in Africa, we are housewives. But that is not always true. We work, and we find ways of taking care of everything else.

All ten of my informants have some form of hired help for their household. Some employ and house a live-in helper or nanny, while others employ a helper or nanny who comes to the house but stays on her own. These helpers are important to working women's lives in a few ways. Of course, them doing work reduces the amount of household work or childcare that the woman needs to do herself. This liberates her schedule to a certain extent, in some cases making the option of working outside the home a possibility. Secondly, it is interesting that the types of work hired out to a helper have traditionally been roles that are very much ingrained in the Setswana conception of female identity. With more time and background research, it would be intriguing to investigate the implications of women in Gaborone not only obtaining new roles as professional women, but also relinquishing roles that have long been culturally important for women.

Esther explained to me that her position as head of an academic department at a university did not change her expectations for the sharing of household jobs with her husband: "As a traditional Motswana woman, I will at some points cook. And I think that creates a balance. Because you know, men don't do anything in the Setswana culture." Interestingly, there remain certain

household responsibilities that are rarely passed over to a helper. While cooking has remained a cultural obligation for many female heads-of-household, the employment of hired domestic help for other tasks at home is widespread among professional women in Botswana.

These domestic workers are crucial to working women's lives. They reduce the amount of household work or childcare for their employers, allowing them to focus more energy on working outside the home. Domestic helpers complete specific tasks at the discretion of the women that employ them, and my informants noted that even when married, women are generally the ones who manage the hired help. In this way, household upkeep remains the responsibility of the woman of the house, but new strategies like hiring outside help shift some of the actual labor so the employer is freed up to devote more of her time and energy to other responsibilities.

Women who employ help in Botswana have strong notions of what roles they are willing to relinquish to hired help. These notions were not completely consistent across my ten informants. However, clear cultural obligations guide the ways women divide their own roles from those they delegate to hired help. Although they are interpreted somewhat differently, these obligations guide their employment relationships and their own work at the house. Dikeledi described her helper as a co-parent of sorts. "You have to have a nanny that's more about the kids than the house. If my house is messy, that can be dealt with later. But my kids must always be looked after." Hired help assists with children so they have

the opportunities, education, and care their mothers desire for them, even when their mothers must devote significant amounts of time to their careers.

Hired domestic help is an indicator of the importance of childcare in the lives of the women I interviewed. Batswana women's goals for their children were brought up regularly during interviews. They want their children to go to high-quality private or international schools, and obtain university degrees. "It's got to be a private school" Keneilwe said. "How else will they be able to go to university? How else will they get scholarships? How else will they study abroad?" Beyond academic goals, my informants also want their kids to be independent and be able to get good jobs. Snapdragon said of her daughter, "I hope my little girl is smart enough to be her own person. With our helper, we make sure her needs are met so she knows she can always succeed, no matter what struggles come before her."

Marriage and male partnership

The picture of Batswana women working careers would be incomplete without a discussion of their desires and expectations for romantic relationships and domestic partnerships. My informants had various relationship statuses and backgrounds. Six of my informants are single, never married. Two are divorced and now single, and two are married. All but one have children.

As described in Chapter One, my research presented me with the opportunity to interview a mother and her daughter, both of whom are working

careers in Gaborone. I had conversations with these women both together and individually, and the ways they influenced one another were striking. Their attitudes toward male partnership in particular illuminate not only the mutual influences between mother and daughter, but also perhaps a culturally significant theme. Ngwedi has never married, and she explains that she made that choice in order to ensure her ability to provide specific opportunities for her daughters, Snapdragon (whom I interviewed), and Ngwedi's twelve-year-old daughter Boitumelo.

Ngwedi explained that giving her daughters a good education was part of the reason she had not married a Motswana man. "I wouldn't be able to raise my kids the way I have, couldn't have sent them to good schools, live in the countryside and do whatever I like." She indicated that many Batswana men do not support sending their daughters to expensive private schooling or sending them to study abroad. Also, she expressed men's desire to make family decisions, which would conflict with Ngwedi's independent spirit as well as her priorities.

Instead of marrying a Motswana man, she has recently had serial relationships with two European men that she has met while traveling abroad. After these experiences, she stated that any future partner would need to be "Western." And now, her daughter lives and has a young baby with who she calls her "unofficial husband." He is from Scotland, and they have been together for seven years. "I'm not sure what the law is exactly, but I think we might be common law married by now!" Describing her partner, Snapdragon says, "He's a Western boy. The guys here just wouldn't be as understanding as he is. We both

take care of [the baby], and he doesn't have hang-ups about that." Other desirable characteristics my informants identified included a man who does not drink too much, who stays home on the weekends, and who is loving and expressive.²⁰

As mentioned before, two of my informants are married, both to men from Southern Africa (one is from Botswana, the other an Ndebele man from Zimbabwe). Naledi has a somewhat different perspective on her partnership than Ngwedi and Snapdragon: "I cannot expect my husband to be watching my son all the time, with my feet up on the couch. You agree on certain things. But I cannot expect my husband to, when he's working so hard, you know, to always take care of the son. I'd rather take my work home and be with my son. You just have to work it out." While Naledi's path looks slightly different than that of some of my other informants, she expresses that no matter what a woman's relationships look like, no matter what her family looks like, she must find ways to make these relationships work with a full-time career.

Sometimes a woman's commitments simply could not sustain a romantic relationship. Two of my informants divorced from their husbands after having children together and establishing their careers. In fact, Lesedi and her husband divorced while she was going to graduate school in Scotland. She had the kids with her, and her husband was living back in Botswana. "He wasn't really a part of our family, and didn't really want to be. It was me, I did everything for the kids. It was just us, and that's how it will always be now. It's better."

²⁰ While women's perceptions of Botswana were not the focus of this study, the issue of (primarily) male alcoholism in the country was brought up by multiple informants as a factor in seeking or selecting male partnership, marriage dynamics, and influences on young women in Botswana. See background research on alcohol in Botswana by David Suggs in Chapter Two.

Lesedi is a professional archaeologist in Botswana. She works as a consultant and collaborates with the university, teaching courses there as well. She has two children: a fourteen-year-old son and an eleven-year-old daughter. Explaining their daily routine, Lesedi said they wake up at five o'clock in the morning, and she drops the kids off at an international school about fifteen kilometers away from their home, just outside of Gaborone. Then Lesedi drives to work, and picks the kids up after school. For her job, she works on excavation projects in Botswana. She consults on the mapping and excavating, and sometimes she oversees archaeology students from around the world who come to do excavation in Southern Africa. "We run international field sites. We actually collaborate with the University of Texas on a lot of our projects, so we have students coming from outside. Not just Texas, but we get a lot from Dar es Salaam as well. It's really professional research, that's what I do."

Like the other women I interviewed, Lesedi employs a helper, though hers only comes in twice a week to help with cleaning the house, ironing, and washing. "The uniforms always need to be ironed, and the kitchen is always so messy. The children are old enough to help more now, but they were still very young when we were married. Back when the kids were still young we had a full-time helper." Lesedi studied in London for her Master's degree, where she met her ex-husband, another Motswana studying in England. When they had both completed their Master's programs, they returned to Gaborone to be married. They had their two children, and then a few years later Lesedi went to Edinburgh, Scotland for her

Ph. D. She took the children with her; by that point, she was unhappy with her marriage.

The reason I went to Edinburgh is I wanted to be as far as possible from him. Things were not really working well at that time. My husband had both legs—one on one side, one the other side. Whatever happened, he would use his leverage as a man. He was just as educated. He had Ph.D. in education. He was doing well. We were both doing well. He taught, and now he works in government. I was at home, and he had his legs in two places. As a woman we are expected that our husbands will have their legs in two places. He was living another life. I mean his conduct was really really not what I wanted. For many years we actually tried to resolve several issues that weren't working. They weren't good for our relationship or for bringing up the children. I had problems with his conduct and his behavior. This man-like behavior. At some point, when I felt that enough is enough, he really liked partying, drinking, doing lots of other things out there, probably. And then when you try to talk about it, say "This is not right, how can we raise kids like this, when you come in late, come in in the morning?" And he would just, he would just say who cares. That was when I said this is it.

On top of her dissatisfaction with her husband's behavior, Lesedi explained that he did not support her and the child financially while they were in Edinburgh. He was earning a salary, and she was only living on a study stipend from her university, while also raising their two children.

When she discusses her marriage and gender roles in Botswana, Lesedi makes a fascinating point about the continuity of cultural expectations for men and women, and their implications for a changing society. She explains that before the upsurge in wage-labor participation in Botswana, spurred by the birth of the country's mining industry and subsequent urbanization, men had more specific roles to play regarding the maintenance of a family:

But now, the kind of life that we live today, the roles that were performed by women are still there. You still have to take care of the house. But for men, they no longer collect firewood. He no longer goes to the cattle post. They don't really have anything to do. When we were growing up, you

knew that if your mother was cooking, your father must have had to slash that wood, he had his part that he did.

Of course, Lesedi comes from a specific perspective, living in Gaborone and working a full-time career herself. Her experiences do not represent much of Botswana, where rural village life still includes cattle raising and maintaining fields. But what she describes here is an important piece of understanding the complexity of marriage and gender among career-working urban Botswana today. This story highlights the significance of upholding more traditional, cultural expectations in the wake of new practical circumstances.

Dikeledi, the lawyer who also got divorced after having children, boiled the issue down to maintaining practical expectations for the relationships in one's life. "You just can't expect some Romeo and Juliet thing, you know?" She shows how she had been able to allocate her energy based on her two main priorities in her life: her career, and her children. The following passage also demonstrates how her divorce has impacted how she wants to influence her daughter:

I stayed in the marriage for ten years, and then the marriage didn't work and then it was me and my daughter. And you know, it is quite a challenge but she would stay at home whenever, when she was young that time. And she said, "Mommy I don't think you can live without help! I think we need a man in this house!" And I was like, "No, no, no, no, no! We need to think!" We didn't need a man, we needed to think! And in the end, she stopped saying that. She'd find a way of doing something.

Dikeledi wanted to show her daughter that a male figure in the house was not necessary for the maintenance of a stable, happy household or family. Just like Lesedi, Dikeledi expressed that a family can be fully functional with a single mother as head-of-household. She now manages her career at the law firm and

children with the assistance of a hired helper. And at this point, she has no plans of remarrying.

The juggling act

Lesedi's life is full. Her story of marriage, divorce, and raising children alongside working a full-time career highlights the plethora of demands she faces in her life from multiple angles. According to her, there is no way to do it all, all the time:

Sometimes I find that you just can't juggle everything, so I have to decide to do some things not as well. To keep my job and to be a good archaeologist, I have to do so many publications. But it's not always coming out the way that you wanted it to. Because I just haven't had the time. And by the time I publish, I feel my work will be outdated!

She, like people everywhere and like all the women I interviewed, has had to find ways to divide her time that suit her priorities and desires for her life. These women have the unique situation of working careers in Botswana, a minority circumstance. Also, many of them are unmarried, and navigating these career responsibilities without a partner with whom to share home and family-based responsibilities. They are forging a new path, as many are the first women in their families to attend university and hold full-time careers. They are assembling their lives, with ideological role models and support but not necessarily examples of practical strategies to successfully pull together the realms of their lives.

Given the emphasis on having both careers and children, not surprisingly, perhaps, the women I interviewed noted that their primary goal in life was to

strike a balance between their professional and personal lives. Esther described the situation in this way:

It brings in this element of multi-tasking. It does really affect a lot of women. And that is why I believe that one has to find a balance. Because if you don't, you are going to be more challenged. You will be in the academic arena, but not acting like an academic. So I think that is one of the contributing factors to why there are no women professors, or if there are, they are few. And again, why there are no women leaders. Because they believe that this is going to be another burden weighing over your plate. What is working for me right now is just my time management. It can be very hard. But I think it's something that you just have to do.

All the women I spoke with echoed this need to balance the range of expectations and priorities they have in their lives. They identified this as a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. All people balance different elements of their lives. These women are simply in a relatively new position for females in Botswana. They are working full-time and have professional degrees. They are elites working in the public sector. And they are also moms and householders.

One common thread that has led these women to success in this balancing act is prioritizing their needs in juxtaposition with others in their lives. Reginah, who does not yet have children, but plans to, said:

I just feel I need to achieve things that I have always wanted for me, first before I settle down. I feel like this is my time to be selfish. Let me do what I want for me first before I have to start compromising and considering other people's feelings too much.

To be clear, Reginah is the only one who explicitly mentioned waiting to have kids until she has "done what she wants to do." Only one of my other informants, Keneilwe, does not yet have children. As my two youngest informants, Reginah and Keneilwe's decision to pursue their careers before having children might be an indicator of an emerging trend among younger generations of Botswana

women who obtain high-end education and are faced with career opportunities. The others all focused on how they meet their own personal needs alongside motherhood. In some societies, including the United States, a strategy for some women in the workforce is to sequence work and family. As is suggested by the difference in average age at first birth between the United States and Botswana (25 in the U.S., 18 in Botswana), this sequencing is not a strategy Botswana women pursue. In fact, childbearing is so crucial to the definition of Botswana womanhood that sequencing is not a culturally appropriate option. Powerful cultural norms prohibit the option of waiting until their careers are established before women focus on starting a family. Instead, just as working women everywhere use multiple techniques to balance their lives, women in Botswana use other strategies to make their hybrid identities as professionals and mothers function on a daily basis.

My informants identified many strategies and life priorities that help them get what they desire from life as individuals. While they noted that free time can be hard to come by, doing things alone or with friends for enjoyment can be rejuvenating and fulfilling, in addition to the hard work demanded by their families and careers. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Naledi prioritizes time in each day for both exercise and her own independent studying for her desired career. Ngwedi and Snapdragon love to travel and visit friends who live outside of Botswana. Several of these women identified spirituality as an important element in their lives, and also described the social networks that often overlap with their spiritual communities.

Elite women in Botswana are assembling lives that incorporate traditional Tswana roles for women and the experiences they have gained through high-end education and career training. They are mothers, employers, and role models. They are agents who exemplify the female face of Botswana's elite.

Chapter Five

Contextualization and Conclusions

This final chapter situates the case study of this thesis within the global conversation on gender, roles and status. The advantages of life history work are significant for understanding cultural change and dynamic roles in society. The stories of then ten professional women I interviewed in Gaborone move African Studies forward in the process of identifying cultural universals and specificities. In particular, these silhouettes answer part of the feminist theory question about how gender is practiced in different ways in different settings. The women featured in this thesis showcase instances where African women are achieving new levels of class status via education and opportunity, while simultaneously practicing reproductive roles as mothers and householders. The decline in the necessity of marriage for female status in Botswana over the last several decades points to a crucial shift in what womanhood means to Botswana women. New strategies for balancing multiple roles are becoming norms for career-working women in Gaborone.

As discussed in Chapter One, Western feminist discourse has been challenged for the generalization that all women in the world belong in a single category as the subordinated gender. Instead of pushing African women into Western ideals of womanhood, some Western feminists instead separated all “Third World women” into a monolithic category of their own. While this trend recognized at the very least a difference in cultural constructions of gender, postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty points out how inaccurate and inappropriate it is to associate women worldwide as belonging together in any category:

Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. This results in an assumption of women as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labeled ‘powerless’, ‘exploited’, ‘sexually harassed’, etc. by feminist scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses. (Mohanty 2003:53)

Many Western feminists have continued to incorporate all people they define as female into a community of women, while many women who do not identify with these Western feminists have resisted this incorporation and have argued against monolithic understandings of gender categories (hooks 2003:208).

Attempts to incorporate cultural specificity to global feminist conversations have suggested alternative possible categorizations including the concepts of “Third World Women,” “African Womanism,” and, later, “African Feminism.” Again, while my informants did not explicitly identify with the term feminism, work that has been done by scholars who ascribe to these categories is helpful for illuminating the significance of this case study in Botswana. In the

introduction to her book *African Feminism*, for instance, Gwendolyn Mikell identifies two very important traits common to African gender conceptions that are unique from those of the West. First, she discusses what she calls “pro-natal” societies, meaning those in which the reproductive role of women is prioritized, even alongside other roles women play in these societies. “Western feminists are often troubled that African women take their reproductive tasks seriously, celebrate their ability to give birth, and refuse to subordinate their biological roles to other ones within society” (Mikell 1997:8). This observation illuminates one of the hidden complexities within a universal category of women. Neither feminist nor anti-feminist, the Batswana women I interviewed and others on the African continent defy Western assumptions about how women can go about increasing their status or practicing new roles like full-time careers. This reiterates my argument that the case of career-working women in Gaborone teaches the world about culturally-specific practices of gendered roles.

Secondly, Mikell argues that African societies in fact operate under a different cultural model than that of the West, which allows for a better understanding of this case study that avoids the over-use of Western definitions of concepts like “family” and “marriage.”

The primary cultural model in traditional African societies, states, and gender relations is here termed a *corporate* one. This ideological model acknowledges that individuals are part of many interdependent human relations (including family and community) in a supernaturally ordained fashion. The goal of these relationships is to maintain the harmony and well-being of the social group rather than that of individuals. This group, or corporate, focus is common to all African societies... (Mikell 1997:10)

The life histories in this thesis can be analyzed using this understanding of an African framework of community and family. While Western women have emphasized female autonomy as necessary for achieving equal status to men, African women including those in Botswana prioritize their child-bearing abilities and make use of community support and hired help alongside demanding careers.

All of these points lead back to Kopytoff's description of role-based identity. The women in this study are acting out their lives, making decisions based on influences, opportunities, and priorities. As all people do, they live their lives in a dynamic world that requires culturally-specific practices and strategies. But through an intimate process of discovery, the stories of career-working women in Botswana become particularly instructive about how cultural knowledge shapes people's lives and guides groups toward similar decisions.

This thesis analyzes cultural and other historical and political factors that have precipitated the professional or elite status of some women in Gaborone. Botswana's cattle culture helped define both family and household in local terms. As the task of tending to cattle was a predominantly male role, and cattle posts are located at a distance from one's permanent home, men's place in a family developed at a distance from women and children. Though colonized by Britain, Botswana's colonial government was run primarily by Africans, which allowed for a continuation of elements of Tswana common law practices. Furthermore, Botswana's primary resource, diamonds, were not discovered in the country until 1967, a year after independence, which allowed for the current arrangement where the Botswana government splits the diamond industry's profits with private

diamond company De Beers. This timeline of events guided Botswana toward an especially strong economy compared to its fellow post-independence sub-Saharan African nations.

Even since independence there has, however, remained a discrepancy between the opportunities for boys and those for girls. Cultural, economic, and political factors maintained this discrepancy—female roles were understood to be at the home, and so sending them for education beyond primary school has not always been a cultural priority (although again, more girl students have historically attended primary school than boys because of male duties at their families' cattle posts). Therefore men continue to occupy a majority of the professional positions, which tend to require high levels of education and experience. Significantly, the cultural obligation for females to bear children in order to be considered adult women divides male and female gender roles and has fed a notion that girls do not need to be educated if their primary responsibility is to bear and care for children and a household. The fact that male labor has consistently been located at a distance from women's homes, either at cattle posts or in mines in South Africa and, later, Botswana, has meant that neither marriage nor co-parenting of children have persisted as cultural norms for women in Botswana. Instead, Botswana relationships and communities model the corporate cultural model described by Mikell, where neighborhood and community support is especially important, alongside extended relations. Women in Botswana fit this model especially well because their roles have historically not including seeking autonomy or personal achievements.

These elements of Botswana's cultural and economic history have perpetuated a society stratified based on gender. Distinct roles and expectations for men and women have resulted in a concentration of earned social status belonging to men. However, this thesis documents ways that some women in Botswana are vying for more social status by obtaining high-end primary and secondary schooling as well as university educations that prepare them for careers of their choosing. They are maintaining their female reproductive roles and managing households and now, also, working careers alongside male professionals in Gaborone. Jean-Francois Bayart discusses the African state from a political standpoint, noting how the state "manufactures inequality." He counters what he perceives to be a disillusion of African natives as lazy or backwards by identifying an African elite that is engaged with and influential in national politics and affairs. He argues that the dominant class in an African context is the one with economic supremacy, and he equates the struggle for wealth with the struggle for power.

The women interviewed in this study are part of the African elite. They are striving for economic supremacy, along with which comes power. They comprise part of Botswana's bourgeoisie, to share Bayart's analysis, where solid financial sectors provide citizens with the capacity they need to be leaders in the country (Bayart 2009:89-91). Elite women in Botswana exist outside the private domestic space commonly understood to be reserved for females (Ortner 1972), and their economic status and access to the state, by virtue of living in Gaborone and being active in public and private business and government sectors. As Bayart states,

access to the realm of the state, including participation in legal, political, and economic decisions and services, is vital for “domination” (Bayart 2009:94).

As noted earlier in the thesis, my informants identified access to private education for primary and secondary school that is taught in English is a major factor that stratifies Botswana citizens based on class. Access to high-quality English education is crucial for the success of both men and women in higher education as well as the government or private business sectors centered in Gaborone, where nearly all business is conducted in English. The women I interviewed for this thesis came from families that were exceptional in that they prioritized as well as were able to finance sending their daughters to expensive private schools in Botswana or neighboring Zimbabwe or South Africa, which provided them with career opportunities that paved the way for them to obtain elite status as lawyers, professors, marketing managers, and other professionals.

Women working careers in Gaborone are maintaining their roles as mothers. They have children or plan to have children concurrently alongside their careers. Many of them choose not to marry Motswana men for reasons that stem both from historical trends like male migrant labor decreasing the role of men in the household with their children, as well as the newer factors of professional women wanting to be able to fulfill their own priorities for their children, like making the financial investment to send their children to private schools. Career-working women are redeploying their Tswana cultural roles in ways that accommodate an urban lifestyle as well as full-time jobs, and in many cases, continuing education. While people everywhere juggle multiple elements of their

role-based identities, and the challenge of balancing home and work in particular has been documented in the case of Western women working full-time careers, the case of Batswana women in Gaborone doing this contributes a newer instance of a similar challenge that highlights culturally-specific influences and strategies for making it all work. The life histories in this thesis of Ngwedi, Snapdragon, Dikeledi, Keneilwe, Dimpho, Naledi, Reginah, Nnana, Lesedi, and Esther are silhouettes. As David Zeitlyn states, “Such silhouettes... have an empirical basis that do not disguise or dissemble their artefactuality and incompleteness” (Zeitlyn 2008:158). Their stories are products of guided yet open-ended interviews which were part of a process of discovery about roles and gender in Botswana that merits close attention as an example of cultural specificity in the wake of challenge shared across the world. These women are part of an emerging female middle class, and they are continuously designing and actualizing the lives they desire.

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APPENDIX A:

Table of Informants

Profession		Children	Marital status	Household members	Level of education	Experience abroad
Ngwedi	Administrative assistant	2 daughters	Single	Ngwedi + younger daughter	Bachelor's degree	Travels in Europe yearly
Snapdragon	Marketing and promotions manager	1 daughter	Single	Snapdragon + boyfriend and daughter	Bachelor's degree	Studied in United States
Reginah	International Affairs	None	Single	Reginah + sister, brother-in-law, 2 nephews	Bachelor's degree	Studied in United States
Dikeledi	Lawyer	2 daughters	Single (divorced)	Dikeledi + daughter	J. D.	Studied in United States
Naledi	Lecturer	1 son	Married	Naledi + husband and son	Master's degree	Studied in United States
Lesedi	Archaeologist	1 son, 1 daughter	Single (divorced)	Lesedi + daughter and son	Ph. D.	Studied in Scotland and London
Nnana	Teacher	1 son, 1 daughter	Single	Nnana + 2 children, brother, sister	Master's degree	Studied in UK
Esther	Professor	1 son, 1 daughter	Married	Esther + husband	Ph. D.	Studied in United States
Dimpho	Legal assistant	1 son	Single	Dimpho + son and nephew	Bachelor's degree	None
Keneilwe	Counselor	None	Single	Keneilwe + parents	Bachelor's degree	Studied in United States

APPENDIX B:

CONSENT FORM

I am conducting a study of successful women who are working in Gaborone. I am seeking to tell the story of professional women living and thriving in Africa, a story that often goes untold in much of the world. You were selected as a possible participant because somebody identified you as a successful professional woman. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Joanna Dobson (75996620). I am a third-year student at Macalester College in the U.S.A. This semester I am an exchange student at the University of Botswana.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in a series of three to five one-hour long interviews with me. These interviews could be scheduled weekly, or at another frequency that suits your schedule.
- Agree to the fact that these interviews will be audio recorded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not hinder your employment position or your relationship with the University of Botswana. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has a few potential risks: First, there is a small risk that the questions involved in the interviews will involve personal information that might be uncomfortable to share. In this case, you are free to not answer. Second, there is a risk of exposing sensitive, personal information. I commit to doing everything in my capability to preserve your privacy, but there is always the chance of accidental exposure.

The benefits to participation are a greater understanding of identity and an open space to discuss challenges and successes you face as part of your work and life

as a woman. These stories will be shared among fellow scholars in the United States to insure that the reality of success in Africa is more fully understood.

Anonymity:

The records of this study will be kept private. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject in any paper or presentation I make based on this research. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Audio files and transcription files will be saved on my personal computer using pseudonyms.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me or my faculty advisor. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Macalester College Institutional Review Board at 1600 Grand Avenue, Saint Paul MN 55105 or by phone at 001-651-696-6153.

Joanna Dobson

75 99 66 20 mobile

joannakdobson@gmail.com

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____
