

**BASOTHO AND THE MINES: TOWARDS
A HISTORY OF LABOUR MIGRANCY,
c. 1890-1940**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Lesotho came to depend on the export of its men to South African mines; what the experiences of these men were; and how all this impacted on Basotho society during the years between c.1890 and 1940.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on the context and dynamics of labour migration and recruitment in Lesotho during the late 1880s to the late 1930s. This Part lays the basis for subsequent sections by showing which sections of Basotho opted for labour migrancy; and why it was men and not women who, initially at least, became migrants. In discussing the decline of the Basotho economy in the 1920s and 1930s, this section also shows how this was characterised not only by dependence on migrants' earnings, but also by the orientation to and concentration of Basotho labour on the Witwatersrand gold mines.

Part II discusses various themes relating to life and conditions on the mines and in the compounds during the period up to c.1940. While specific note is taken of the African miners' death and accident rate, most attention is devoted to the various ways which Basotho miners developed for dealing with the sickness, death and destitution befalling their compatriots in the compounds and on the mines. Conversion to Christianity was an important part of some miners' experience, as church forums and the bible could be used for recreational purposes, while literacy classes imparted many with essential skills which could lead to promotion on the mine. But competition for promotion and favours, as well as conflicting survival strategies, often resulted in violent conflict among African miners. Although some scholars have mistakenly attributed such conflict to ethnic factors alone, this thesis argues for an approach which is simultaneously historically and materially grounded.

Part III, by using the case of infectious and occupational diseases, and prostitution and commercial beer-brewing, traces

and analyses the impact of the migrant labour system on Lesotho. The thesis shows how the spread to Lesotho of such diseases as syphilis and tuberculosis was directly linked to contact with South African towns and mining centres through wage labour. Beer canteens and brothels emerged and flourished in colonial Lesotho not only because of the decline of the country's economy and the breakdown of Basotho social structures, but also because these establishments serviced the migrant labour traffic itself.

The significance of this study lies in two areas. Historiographically, this study seeks to contribute to migrant labour studies in Lesotho in particular and Southern Africa in general. Its approach stands between economism which attributes the causes of labour migrancy solely to economic factors, and those paradigms which privilege ideas and culture over material factors. There is a dialectical interplay between material factors and ideas, although the former ultimately determines the latter.

Secondly, the significance of this study lies in the fact that many of the issues raised, especially those in Part III, continue to pose serious problems for Basotho people and their government to this day. Knowing something about the origins and history of these problems may contribute to finding lasting solutions. This study, therefore, is about Lesotho, Basotho, and the mines.

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My research and visits to Lesotho were facilitated by several individuals. Phillip Phamotse guided me to remote parts of Lesotho to locate old miners. Motlatsi Thabane and David Coplan put their experience with oral interviews at my disposal. David Ambrose and Stephen Gill were of great help in locating some scattered material. The staff of the Lesotho National Archives and the National University of Lesotho gave all that they could despite the problems that face their institutions.

I also wish to thank the staff of the University of Cape Town African Studies Library for their patience and assistance. Maureen Gallon and Sheila Neumann, the secretaries in the History Department at the University of Cape Town, were equally helpful. Susan Sayers drew my four maps.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the History Department Post-Graduate Fund and the Oppenheimer Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town. The Mellon Research Fellowship at the University of Cape Town made it possible for me to concentrate on my research. Most of my writing was done in London, thanks to the Ernest Oppenheimer Fellowship I was offered by the Centre of African Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I also acknowledge the assistance of the CSD by incorporating the following declaration as required: "The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions

expressed in this work, or conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development".

SOURCES

Most historians are acutely aware of the limitations of their source material, but in the case of this thesis, critical comment about its sources is particularly necessary. Firstly and most importantly, the extremely poor state of the government archives housed at the National University of Lesotho in Roma is a matter of grave concern, not least because they lack a trained archivist. Most of the files for the 1920s and subsequent years are missing, except for those of Leribe which were found by chance in the 1970s by David Ambrose. Researchers have to work in these archives without any professional assistance whatsoever. Furthermore, large parts of the archives are not well referenced, and files mentioned in the catalogue are missing on the shelves. Where files do exist, their contents are often damaged and already incomplete. On some documents dates are missing, while on others, reference tags have been removed. It is for these reasons that in the bibliography I have file names without their codes, and some references which are unavoidably incomplete.

Missionary sources have been preserved in journals as well as in archives, and have proved to be extremely useful for migrant labour studies. Chapter Five of this thesis, on religion and conversion in the compounds, is based on such material, especially on the microfilmed records of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. Pretoria and Orange Free State Archives have been particularly useful. One key archival source remained closed to this study, however. Several attempts to gain access to the Chamber of Mines Archives went unanswered. In this, my experience was no different than that of several other mining and labour historians, all of us victims of the South African mining houses' obsession with secrecy. It is to be hoped that the day will dawn when they are compelled to open their archives to scholarly scrutiny.

Oral sources provide one way around company obduracy, and they have indeed been put to great use by Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane. I also conducted interviews in Basotho villages, meeting old miners. An insurmountable obstacle, however, is the fact that most men who are still alive, only began their migrant careers in the 1930s, by which time the system had been standardised and the majority of Basotho men were going to the mines now of necessity rather than discretion. Most Basotho old men are also notoriously suspicious, always concerned about their nationalist "image", and tend to be protective especially of their chiefs. Others who had suffered from mine accidents and had never been compensated, saw an interviewer's presence as an opportunity to make their case for claiming money owed to them. All too often, they tend to glorify mine work, pretending that they had no problems prior to the accident in question. One also met men who had fought in the Second World War and were never compensated. On more than one occasion, I found a group of veterans, often with the wives of deceased ex-soldiers, waiting for me, thinking that I was there to investigate their cases. And finally, I must emphasise, especially with Chapter Seven in mind, that I was unable to find female informants for the period covered by this thesis. This was probably because almost all of the women who were the subjects of this study had left Lesotho to settle permanently in South African towns.

Letters, advertisements, reports, and articles in Sesotho newspapers were very useful. Leselinyana la Lesotho ("Little Light of Lesotho") was established in 1863, from its inception being owned by the French missionaries.¹ The letters' section is full of reports by miners about various events and themes in the compounds and elsewhere. Naledi ea Lesotho ("The Star of Lesotho") and Mochochonono ("The Comet") which were owned by middle-class Basotho, balance the views

¹. On the importance of this newspaper in the study of other aspects of Basotho history, see D.P. Kunene, "Leselinyana La Lesotho and Sotho Historiography", History in Africa, vol.4, 1977.

expressed in Leselinyana which tended to be used as an evangelising tool by the missionaries. Unfortunately, though, unlike Leselinyana which was bound and kept in the Morija Archives, most issues of Naledi and Mochochonono are missing, and I was unable to locate complete sets. The Chamber of Mines newspaper Umteteli wa Bantu ("The Voice of the People") established in 1922, also published a number of letters from Basotho workers. It should be kept in mind, of course, that all of the newspapers tended to reflect the view-point of literate Basotho, though in some instances miners commissioned their literate mates to write letters on issues that affected them, and in this way reached the attention of the colonial authorities and chiefs.

The Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council of chiefs, or Litaba tsa Lekhotla la Sechaba, are also a valuable source. The report for the 1903 BNC, that is, the very first one, is in the archives, and one or two gaps aside, the series is complete. All of them were published in Sesotho, with some sections in English. Up to 1927, however, the reports are extremely time-consuming to read because they have neither a table of contents nor an index. Nonetheless, they repay careful study. People would approach their chiefs with the issues they wanted raised at the BNC, and these were sent to the Resident Commissioner before the sitting of the Council. These grievances are preserved, as are the debates among the chiefs, all of which provide some sense of how issues were taking shape in villages.

GLOSSARY

Basotho (sing: Mosotho) refers to the people; **Lesotho**, their country. "Basotho" and "Sotho" are used as adjectives interchangeably, depending on the context. "Sesotho" refers to the language spoken by Basotho, but can also be used to refer to the Basotho culture. "Basutoland" was the name applied to colonial Lesotho, but for reasons of stylistic variation "Lesotho" is occasionally used in the text.

I also use L to represent a pound, because the computer I am using has no sign for British currency.

INTRODUCTION

No country in the whole of southern Africa is more dependent than Lesotho on the export of labour to South Africa. Hundreds of thousands of Basotho men oscillate between their homes and South African mines for work. By the 1980s, the earnings of migrant workers were estimated at \$3 for every \$4 produced in Lesotho. The centrality of labour migration for Lesotho is reflected in the amount of attention which this subject has attracted since independence in 1966. Development economists, sociologists and anthropologists, are among those who have studied this phenomenon. The main focus has been on the possibilities for Lesotho's independent development and consequent escape from its labour reserve position; but other areas of study have included the social impact of oscillating migration on Basotho society, and especially women.¹ Remarkably, however, there has never been an in-depth historical study of this phenomenon. The one partial exception to this general rule is the much-cited introduction to Colin Murray's Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho, the body of which is devoted to an anthropological, field-work based study of labour migrancy and marital relations in Lesotho during the 1970s.²

1. See, for example, J.E. Bardill, and J.H. Cobbe, Lesotho: Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa, (Westview Press, London, 1985); J. Gay, "Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women: A Case Study", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.6, no.4, 1980; E. Gordon, "An Analysis of the Impact of Labor Migration on the Lives of Women in Lesotho", Journal of Development Studies, vol.17, no.3, 1981; R. Leys, "Lesotho: Non-Development or Underdevelopment: Towards an Analysis of the Political Economy of the Labour Reserve", in T. Shaw, and K. Heard, (eds.), The Politics of Africa: Dependence and Development, (Halifax, N.S., African Studies Series, 1978); C. Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981); A.D. Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation and the Diffusion of Migrant Labour Remittances in Lesotho", in P. Mayer, (ed.), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980).

2. Murray, Families Divided.

Murray's book marked a major advance on most previous accounts. During the period of colonial rule no critical study of migrant labour emerged. Although the missionaries were concerned about the "vices" to which they believed Basotho men were exposed at the labour centres, they saw the acquisition of cash through the sale of labour as inseparable from their "civilising" mission.³ Migrant labour per se was not criticised, because through it their converts were socialised into the industrial work ethic, the wearing of European clothes, the use of ploughs, and the consumption of manufactured products. The first serious study of migrant labour had to wait until 1935, when Sir Allan Pim produced his report on the financial and economic position of Basutoland. While the benefits of migrant labour for the colony were celebrated, some concerns were raised and proposals made on how to avoid certain of its negative social effects.⁴ But these modest gains did not survive World War II. In 1952, Hugh Ashton's detailed anthropological study based on field-work conducted in 1935-36 was published. Disappointingly, it dedicated only some five pages to the subject of migrant labour, and even they were suspect. Working from a functionalist perspective, Ashton treated the phenomenon unproblematically without providing either analysis or history.⁵

The first historical study of Basotho labour migration was undertaken by Judy Kimble. Her Masters thesis focused on the period 1830s-1870s, parts of which she published in the form

3. R.C. Germont, (ed.), Chronicles of Basutoland: A running commentary on the events of the years 1830-1902 by the French protestant missionaries in Southern Africa, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1967), p.541; V. Ellenberger, A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland, 1833-1933, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1938), pp.352-57.

4. A. Pim, Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, January 1935, cmd.4907.

5. H. Ashton, The Basuto, (Oxford University Press, London, 1952), pp.162-65.

of chapters in edited collections.⁶ Subsequently, her doctoral thesis attempted to tackle the period 1890-1930.⁷ The importance of Kimble in the historiography of Lesotho lies not only in relation to migrant labour studies, but also extends to the study of chieftaincy and the colonial state. Kimble moved beyond those studies which had looked at the rise of the Basotho nation-state in the 19th century by focusing on the personality of Chief Moshoeshe. Instead, she tried to apply the Marxist model developed by, in particular, French anthropologists to developing an understanding of pre-capitalist African socio-economic formations. Instead of celebrating the ingenuity of Moshoeshe and his statesmanship as had hitherto been the tendency,⁸ Kimble located Basotho ruling lineages within the context of exploitation and surplus appropriation. Arguably, though, her study of migrant labour was handicapped by a reductionist approach which treated the movement of Basotho men to the Kimberley mines and their

⁶ J. Kimble, "Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho: The Origins of Commodity Production and Migrant Labour, 1830-1885", (M.A, National University of Lesotho, 1978); idem, "Labour Migration in Basutoland, c.1870-1885", in S. Marks, and R. Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa, (Longman, London, 1982); idem, "'Clinging to the Chiefs': Some Contradictions of Colonial Rule in Basutoland, c.1890-1930", in H. Bernstein, and B.K. Campbell, (eds.), Contradictions of Accumulation in Africa: Studies in Economy and Society, (Sage Publications, London, 1985). See also her unpublished "Aspects of the Economic History of Lesotho, 1830-85", History Workshop Paper, National University of Lesotho, July 1976.

⁷ Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Southern Africa: the case of colonial Lesotho, 1890-1930", (Ph.D, University of Essex, 1985).

⁸ See especially, P. Sanders, Moshoeshe: Chief of the Sotho, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1975); L. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshe of Lesotho, 1786-1870, (Oxford University Press, London, 1975); J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa, (Longman, Essex, 1966); W.F. Lye, and C. Murray, Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and the Southern Sotho, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1980). Several influential Basotho historians are still working from this personality-cult perspective; see, for example, L.B.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change in Lesotho: 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions, (Macmillan, London, 1990); and M. Damane, Historia Lesotho, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1986).

accumulation of guns as simply a conspiracy on the part of the Koena dominant lineage. She paid most attention to structure, leaving little place for agency. In part, this grew out of her reliance on a limited range of sources, most obviously annual colonial reports and the proceedings of the 1903 Transvaal Labour Commission.

Elizabeth Eldredge's recently published A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho addresses some of the shortcomings in Kimble's study. But there is a powerful sense in which Eldredge's reliance on a "pursuit of security" model and "rational choice" theory leads her back to precisely the problem of personality from which Kimble had saved us. And her short chapter on migrant labour is weakened by its reliance on the proceedings of the 1903-05 South African Native Commission.⁹

These developments in the academic study of Lesotho's past are part of several historiographical shifts in southern African studies in the course of the last three decades. So far as labour history is concerned, the publication in 1976 of Charles van Onselen's Chibaro was a watershed. In the course of tracing the history of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry, van Onselen not only analysed strategies for capital accumulation in the context of colonial political economy, but also the African miners' creative and militant responses. His argument, however, was weakened by a tendency to subordinate miners' experiences to a repression/control/resistance model which failed to capture the full complexity of workers' lives.¹⁰ Just how complex these could be was underscored by

⁹. E. Eldredge, A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁰. C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, (Pluto Press, London, 1976). See also, C.W. Gutkind, and R. Cohen, et al, (eds.), African Labor History, (Sage Publications, London, 1978); R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, (eds.), The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1975). This political economy tradition still

the popular uprisings in South Africa in the 1980s, themselves sustained by close links between labour and community politics. All of this pushed the masses to the centre-stage of history and compelled historians and other social scientists to revisit their paradigms. One response was the move to "history from below" which was subsequently spearheaded by the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop. Studies of squatter movements, women and their protests, gangs, townships and culture, flourished.¹¹

Recently Dunbar Moodie and Patrick Harries have produced studies which show the worth of entering the Witwatersrand goldmine compounds to attempt to reconstruct the lives that African miners built for themselves.¹² Moodie's historical sociological study extends its scope into the 1980s and is "about character, about the practical integrity of black South African migrant miners".¹³ His six chapters explore various themes linked to life in the compounds. These include social networks and solidarities, control and resistance, sexuality, and "faction fights". Though acknowledging the role of

has its adherents. Its most recent example is V.L. Allen's The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa, Volume I. The Techniques of Resistance, 1871-1948, (The Moor Press, Keighly, 1993), a book which has many of the weaknesses and few of the strengths of the studies which preceded it.

11. To date, five History Workshop collections have been published. See, B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Labour, Township and Protest Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1979); idem, (ed.), Town and Countryside in the Transvaal, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983); idem, (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987); P. Bonner, et al, (eds.), Holding their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1989); P. Bonner et al, (eds.), Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1993).

12. T.D. Moodie, (with V. Ndatshe), Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1994); P. Harries, Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860-1910, (James Currey, London, 1994).

13. Moodie, Going for Gold, p.2.

structural factors, Moodie, however, focuses on "experiences" without systematically relating them to material and historical factors.

Harries' Work, Culture and Identity, is, as he points out in his introduction, inspired by developments in labour history in Europe and North America towards cultural history.¹⁴ The latter "new" school brings together postmodernism and symbolic-interpretative anthropology (as espoused by Clifford Geertz). Historicism and "grand narratives" are renounced. It is argued that the external world is accessible to us only in a discursive form; and that rather than trying to establish a law and pattern in history, historians should study the genealogy of these discourses. Culture is seen as a system of symbols with little regard to material factors; focus is on interpreting these symbols to reach to the "meanings" that are entangled in them. "Local knowledge", or the meaning that a particular people make out of the world, can be accessed through the "reading" of these symbols.¹⁵

Harries' study is historiographically an important development beyond the works of Allan Jeeves and others whose approach to labour migrancy was institutional, focusing on personalities

¹⁴. See also his "Histories New and Old", South African Historical Journal, vol.30, 1994.

¹⁵. For a discussion of cultural history, see L. Hunt, (ed), The New Cultural History, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1989); R. Chartier, Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations, (Polity Press, Oxford, 1988). For a critique of the implications of discourse theory for historical studies, see B.D. Palmer, Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990); and G.M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages", Speculum, vol.65, 1990. For a critical discussion of postmodernism as a social theory, see R. Boynes, and A. Rattansi, (eds.), Postmodernism and Society, (Macmillan, London, 1990); and Theory, Culture and Society, vol.5, 1988, which was dedicated to the discussion of this subject.

and the infrastructure of labour recruitment and mining.¹⁶ His work is also macroscopic in focus, dealing not only with the Shangaan people in southern Mozambique and Portuguese colonial encroachment there, but also with the emigration of Shangaan labour to Natal, Kimberley and the Witwatersrand. Harries also unpacks the struggles around the making of Shangaan labour central to goldmining. And while privileging culture, Harries also pays attention to processes and changes over time, and accords a significant role to material factors.

In their turn, migrant labour studies in Lesotho have been variously affected. Phil Bonner focused his attention on Basotho in the Witwatersrand townships, with particular reference to those women who made a living from prostitution and beer-brewing, and Basotho participation in gang violence.¹⁷ Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, working from oral interviews, paid attention to the interplay between labour migrancy and mine work, and Basotho ethnic identity.¹⁸ David Coplan's collection of and anthropological-textual analysis of Basotho migrants' songs (called lifela tsa liparola naha: "songs of travellers) also

¹⁶. A.H. Jeeves, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890-1920, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1985); J. Crush, et al, South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1991).

¹⁷. P. Bonner, "The Russians on the Reef, 1947-1957: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilisation", in Bonner et al, (ed.), Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962; idem, "Desirable or undesirable Basotho women?: Liquor, prostitution and the migration of Basotho women to the Rand, 1920-1945", in C. Walker, (ed.), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1990); idem, "Backs to the Fence: Law, Liquor, and the Search for Social Control in an East Rand Town, 1929-1942", in J. Crush, and C. Ambler, (eds.), Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa, (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1992).

¹⁸. J. Guy, and M. Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.14, no.2, 1988; idem, "Basotho Miners, Oral History and Workers' Strategies", in P. Kaarsholm, (ed.), Cultural Struggle and Development in Southern Africa, (Baobab Books, Harare, 1991).

provide migrant labour historians with another perspective to the question. These lifela reveal Basotho migrants' interpretation of their own experiences and sense of identity.¹⁹ My study intends to build on the works of these social historians, as well as on those by Kimble, Eldredge, Moodie and Harries.

However, the importance of the rapprochement between history and anthropology has long been noted.²⁰ Anthropological knowledge is obviously important in understanding the impact of labour migrancy on kinship structures and marital relations, the significance of the use of charms, symbols and certain ritual performances, as well as the formation of various forms of social consciousness and identity. But the approach in my study is informed by a materialist conception of culture; in particular I do not privilege witches, zombies and ghosts. Culture is best understood when located within material and social structures, and especially historical processes. Rather than seeing the rural background of African migrants as fixed and static as Moodie tends to do, I emphasise the flexibility and sophistication of such men. Their rural heritage was not only made up of aspects of their pre-industrial society, but was also marked by years of colonial and missionary encounters. There was no one-way, linear relation between their rural and urban "worlds". Not only were Basotho migrants aware of the dynamics of the "whiteman's world" and its difference with their own, but they developed a whole variety of ways of dealing with them.

¹⁹. See D.B. Coplan, In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994).

²⁰. See, for example, E.P. Thompson, "History and Anthropology", in his Making History: Writings on History and Culture, (The New Press, New York, 1994); R. Rosaldo, "Celebrating Thompson's Heroes: Social Analysis in History and Anthropology", in H.J. Kaye, and K. McClelland, (eds.), E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990); and K. Thomas, "History and Anthropology", Past and Present, no.24, 1963. See also the special issue of Journal of Interdisciplinary History, vol.12, no.2, 1981.

In this conceptual context, my thesis examines how Lesotho came to depend on the export of its men to South African mines; what the experiences of these men were; and how all of this impacted on Basotho society. This period c.1890-1940 was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, the thesis builds on the works of Judy Kimble and Elizabeth Eldredge whose study of the preceding decades provides insight into Basotho's migrancy to South Africa. Secondly, it was during this period, especially the 1920s-1930s, that Lesotho degenerated from being a granary of South Africa to becoming a labour reserve. And finally, the Second World War and the opening of the Orange Free State gold mines from the 1950s impacted on the pattern of Basotho's migrancy to South Africa and their distribution on the mines, therefore making the post-1940s more complex.

Part I, that is, Chapters One, Two and Three, traces the process whereby Lesotho gradually became a labour reserve. However, because not all Basotho became labour migrants, (indeed some Basotho continued to produce agricultural exports even as the economy generally declined) the commoditisation of agricultural production and the differential penetration of capitalist relations are noted. Attempts are made to show how the latter, together with wars, ecological factors and colonial rule, affected different social groups in Lesotho. This Part lays the basis for subsequent sections by showing which sections of Basotho opted for labour migrancy; and why it was men, and not the women, who were the ones who initially at least, became migrants. In discussing the decline of the Basotho economy in the 1920s and 1930s, this section also shows how this was characterised not only by dependence on migrants' earnings, but also by the orientation to and concentration of Basotho labour on the Witwatersrand gold mines. Basotho migrants, for their part, developed various strategies and cultural responses to accommodate and reshape their experiences. The significance of road, bridge and railway-line construction to and in colonial Lesotho for the mobilisation of migrant labour is discussed in Appendix II.

Part II, that is, Chapters Four, Five and Six, discusses

various themes relating to life and conditions on the mines and in the compounds during the period up to c.1940s. While specific note is taken of the African miners' death and accident rate, most attention is devoted to the various ways which Basotho miners developed for dealing with the sickness, death and destitution befalling their compatriots in the compounds and on the mines. Conversion to Christianity was an important part of some miners' experience, as church forums and the bible could be used for recreational purposes, while literacy classes imparted many with essential skills which could lead to promotion on the mine. The thesis shows that the missionary societies were not the only factor in the propagation of this religion in the mine compounds, and that the efforts of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society among Basotho miners were not without difficulties and frustrations. But competition for promotion and favours, as well as conflicting survival strategies, often resulted in violent conflict among African miners. Although some scholars have mistakenly attributed such conflict to ethnic factors alone, this thesis argues for an approach which is simultaneously historical and materially grounded.

Part III, that is, Chapter Seven, discusses the social impact of labour migrancy and the encounter with the mines, with specific reference to the introduction of infectious and occupational diseases in colonial Lesotho and the fate of Basotho women. Appendix III uses the case of two Basotho women prostitutes to illustrate points discussed in Section Two of the chapter in question.

This thesis, therefore, examines not only the migrant labour system in colonial Lesotho and South Africa, but also various aspects of the economic and social history of Basutoland.

CHAPTER ONE

COLONIALISM, CHIEFTAINCY AND LABOUR MIGRATION, 1884-1940

Lesotho became a British Protectorate in 1868 but was handed over to the Cape Colonial government in 1871. However, it was later taken back by the Imperial government in 1884 after the failure of the Cape's direct rule policies. Basutoland, as the British called it, was divided into seven districts ultimately controlled by a Resident Commissioner (himself answerable to the High Commissioner based in Cape Town). Central to this British system of government was the use made of the structures of chieftaincy. This involved dissolving, conserving and reconstructing certain elements of key Basotho institutions. But Basutoland was run as an appendage of South Africa, with little attention paid to the development of the colony. It was under British rule that Lesotho lost her position as the granary of South Africa and became a labour reserve.

Any study of labour migrancy requires an understanding of the political, social and economic context within which the system operated. In this particular case, it is important to pay due regard to the pre-colonial Basotho socio-economic formation; missionary influences; the penetration of merchant capital; the colonial encounter and the nature of the colonial state; the contradictory role of the chiefs; and the limits imposed by natural disasters and the environment. This approach is necessary in order to account for the pattern that labour migrancy took in Lesotho. Additionally, as Bozzoli and Walker argued,¹ it cannot be taken for granted that it was men - and

1. B. Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.9, no.2, 1983; C. Walker, "Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System, c.1850-1930", in idem, (ed.), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1990).

not women - who opted for migration. On the contrary, it was the subordination of women in Basotho precolonial society which made male migrancy possible. Nor can the "underdevelopment" of Lesotho be explained only by reference to external factors as the dependency and world-system schools have tended to do. There is a need for a dialectical approach that has as a starting point the internal dynamics of Lesotho to show how its people contested and negotiated the terms of their integration into the world capitalist system. This approach helps us to see how stratification within Basotho society shaped capitalism's uneven impact.

Pre-colonial Lesotho

The geographical unit which was to become British Basutoland in 1868 was a product of the 1850s-1860s struggles over land in the Transoragia between the indigenous people and trek Boers from the Cape Colony. In the process, the borders of Lesotho were defined and finally fixed in the 1860s, with the Basotho losing 70% of their arable land to the Orange Free State Boers.

Lesotho has two major topological zones - the Lowlands and the Highlands. About two-thirds of the country is in the latter zone which is the eastern mountainous part - the Maluti - with an altitude of over 6 000 feet. The remaining one third is the Lowlands zone, lying in the western part of the country and it is here that most people were settled (see Map 2 in Appendix I).

Pre-colonial Lesotho as a political and an economic unit, was a product of the upheavals in the Transoragia in the 1820s which led to the disruption of normal life and the migration of populations.² In the course of this, Moshoeshoe of the

2. There has been much debate around the cause and nature of these upheavals - the so-called Mfecane period. See especially, J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", Journal of African History, vol.29,

Mokoteli lineage - from his mountain fortress at Thaba Bosiu near modern Maseru - attracted people around himself and subjugated his neighbours, thus laying the basis for the emergence of a Basotho nation-state.

Pre-colonial Lesotho had three principal branches of production - namely: cultivation, pastoralism, and hunting and food gathering. The primary agricultural crop and staple was sorghum - even though maize was also an important dietary item - which was sown around August and harvested in winter (April-July). However, pastoralism was more important than cultivation for a number of reasons. These included the vulnerability of the region to drought; the low level of the development of the productive forces; and the lack of long-term grain storage facilities. Nor could agricultural surpluses be readily disposed of. Cattle assumed a central position in such a system because of their use-value (being a source of meat and dairy products, the skin used for clothes, and the bones for making various tools and kitchen utensils) and exchange-value. They could be easily moved in the case of wars or drought, and were also used in bohali (bridewealth) transactions. As the most valued item, cattle could be acquired through war, cattle-raiding, inheritance, bohali, or the mafisa loan from the chiefs or other wealthier commoners.³

Land was owned communally with each married man having the right to a residential site, grazing and farming land. The basic unit of production was a homestead or household made up of a male head, his wife or wives, offspring, and, in many cases, sons' wives and grandchildren. Agricultural work was performed by women, and they were not allowed to handle cattle

no.3, 1988; and E. Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, ca.1800-30: The 'Mfecane' Reconsidered", Journal of African History, vol.33, no.3, 1992.

³. E. Eldredge, A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), pp.58-81; H. Ashton, The Basuto, (Oxford University Press, London, 1952), pp.120-157.

which were the preserve of homestead heads. Young and unmarried men (the cadets) passed their time herding cattle and other livestock. They, like women, did not own any property. But, unlike women, their position improved after lebollo (their initiation into manhood) which paved the way for them to marry and set up their own homesteads. It was, however, their fathers who chose wives for them and provided bohali cattle for marriage.⁴

Homestead heads lived from the proceeds of the labour power of their wives, daughters and sons, while occupying themselves with local and national politics as well as issues of war and cattle-raiding, and tasks such as hunting, skin-tanning and preparation for clothes-making, and other crafts like iron-working. Arguably, their labour power was quantitatively underutilised.⁵

The bohali transaction involved the transfer of female productive and reproductive functions from one homestead to another. Unlike the cadets, women could not significantly improve their status with the passage of time. They were treated as minors, and laboured in the fields, or performed household chores and other productive services. They were important not only for the reproduction of the Basotho society but also of the homesteads themselves. The children they bore increased the labour power available in the homestead; and daughters brought bohali cattle. Hence the failure to bear children could result in the woman being scorned, or even the demand for the return of the bohali cattle (that is, divorce).⁶

4. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.126-46; Ashton, Basuto, p.178.

5. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.82-111; Ashton, Basuto, pp.88-99.

6. See, J. Guy, "Gender Oppression in Southern Africa's Precapitalist Societies", in Walker, (ed), Women and Gender; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.101-16, 126-46; Ashton, Basuto, pp.62-99.

But the low level of the development of the productive forces meant that the labour power of both men and women was underutilised as more time was spent, for example, hoeing a farm to produce what could be produced in lesser time had the technology used been more advanced.⁷ This factor, combined with the communal ownership of land, limited the amount of surplus that could be produced in agriculture. The amount of agricultural output was tightly linked to the number of women and cadets under the command of a household head. Hence the "accumulation" of women and children was crucial to the Basotho socio-economic formation. But frequent droughts made agriculture unreliable; and wars often resulted in people fleeing and villages being abandoned. These factors led people to prefer cultivating small gardens and keep their value in cattle. On the other hand, hunting was used as an important supplement to the diet, while food gathering, by women, assumed importance during times of distress.⁸

Chiefs in pre-colonial Basotho society had political, judicial, military and ritual powers. They ran and governed the polity, tried criminal and civil cases, declared wars, opened ploughing seasons, and led rain-making ceremonies. They also had a right to tribute labour - letsema - from all adult males for four days on the fields of their senior wives. But they did not have absolute power. At the village level, homestead heads congregated daily at the khotla (chief's court), to talk, exchange views on important questions, participate in court hearings, weave and prepare skins, while drinking joala (beer) prepared by women. The chief had his own lekhotla (council of counsellors) which advised him in taking decisions. A pitsa (popular assembly) of all able-bodied men, could be convened to take decisions on issues of greater significance. The chief spoke last during the proceedings of the pitsa, his role being to summarise view

7. Two to three days of ploughing on a small farm was equivalent to one-week of hoeing by two people; see Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.104.

⁸. Ibid, pp.101-16.

points and establish a consensus. It was not uncommon for the chief to be criticised during such proceedings. Though Basotho chiefs could not be instructed to take poison like in other parts of Africa, their power was checked and circumscribed through these structures. Dissatisfied subjects could always break away to attach themselves to another chief. This ensured that chiefs remained sensitive to popular views.⁹

But chiefs were able to accumulate wealth because of their power and right to letsema. Cattle raids and external trade were also key areas of accumulation. The organisation of big feasts, providing the poor with mafisa cattle, and serving food and beer during letsema on their farms, all further legitimised chiefs' position. Besides chiefs, counsellors, high-ranking military officers, the official medicine-man and rain-maker, craftsmen, and well-placed members of the ruling lineage (that is, chief's uncle, brothers, cousins, and so forth), all comprised the better-off sections of Basotho society.¹⁰

The upheavals of the 1820s in the Transorangia disrupted cultivation and pastoralism as people fled from their villages. Many Basotho went to the Cape Colony and Griqualand (near modern Kimberley) as refugees. When order was restored to the region - and with the first missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arriving in 1833 - people relied primarily on cultivating small fields, because they had lost many of their cattle. Labour migration to the Cape Colony was used to acquire and rebuild the cattle stock. So effective was this strategy that by the 1850s cattle were being exported from Basutoland.¹¹

⁹. Ashton, Basuto, pp.186-248; L.B.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change in Lesotho: 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions, (Macmillan, London, 1990), pp.1-28.

¹⁰. Ibid.

¹¹. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.59, 184.

Christianity, Commerce and Colonialism

Encounters first with missionaries and then with Cape colonial rule from 1872, had contradictory effects on the Basotho. Colonial rule brought intra-African wars and cattle raiding under partial control, and therefore removed some of the major occupations of Basotho men. The introduction of guns and horses, and Boer encroachment into the region for hunting purposes, also depleted herds of wild game. "By 1880", writes Eldredge, "eland, reebok, and hartebeast were scarce in the mountains, and each year hunters had to go into the 'innermost reaches' of the mountains to find game ... by 1900 only a few kinds of antelope, monkeys and birds remained".¹²

The relative peace in the region also encouraged permanent settlement and population growth. Land dispossession and anti-colonial struggles beyond Lesotho's borders led to an influx of refugees between the 1850s and 1890s. Notwithstanding problems with the census figures, the population in the country increased by some 70 percent between 1875 and 1891, and some 60 percent between the latter year and 1904. As early as the 1870s, signs of pressure on the land were accumulating as people began to settle in the Highlands. This move to the Maluti accelerated in the 1880s, and in 1890 the Paramount Chief placed his son as ruler over the area. Two years later the Resident Commissioner established the Qachas Nek district. As the cultivation of sorghum and maize at above 6 000 feet put those crops at the risk of being attacked by early frosts, Basotho in the Maluti turned to the cultivation of wheat (which had been introduced by the missionaries) as this crop required a shorter growing period than maize and sorghum.¹³

12. Ibid., p.65.

13. J. Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Southern Africa: the case of Colonial Lesotho, 1890-1930", (Ph.D, University of Essex, 1985), p.262; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.62; Ashton, Basuto, pp.144-57.

It was the ox-drawn plough, also introduced by the missionaries, which revolutionised Basotho agriculture, as this increased output and integrated cattle with cultivation.¹⁴ According to Hugh Ashton, "these new implements [ploughs] soon came to be regarded as such essential articles of domestic equipment that a girl could justifiably refuse to marry a man who did not possess one".¹⁵ But the adoption of and access to ploughs was mediated by the differentiation already existent within Basotho society. Well-off groups were the only ones who could buy this new implement. Christian converts, also adopted ploughs.¹⁶

The commoditisation of production was not, however, due to this technological development, but to the existence of a market for the realisation of value. One missionary observed in 1855 that: "A great part of their [Basotho] time is devoted to agriculture and, as it is only exceptionally [sic] that they employ the plough, and they are still reduced to turning the sod with the hoe, they have a great deal of labour to perform".¹⁷ The Basotho adopted ploughs in larger numbers in response to an increased demand for grain.

Grain exports from Lesotho were reaching the markets of the Cape Colony as early as the 1840s, and by the 1860s Orange Free State farmers were said to be dependent on Basotho wheat and maize as their economy was based on hunting and pastoralism. The discovery of diamonds near Kimberley in the late 1860s expanded the Basotho grain export market. Grain

¹⁴. Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", p.261; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.104.

¹⁵. Ashton, Basuto, p.124.

¹⁶. C-H. Perrot, "Premier années de l'implantation du christianisme au Lesotho, 1833-1847", Cahiers d'études Africaines, vol.4, no.13-16, 1964, pp.106-09.

¹⁷. R.C. Germond, (ed.), Chronicles of Basutoland: A running commentary on the events of the years 1830-1902 by the French Protestant missionaries in Southern Africa, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1967), p.453.

exports increased from some 72 000 bags in 1871 to 100 000 in 1873, as wagons full of grain left Lesotho for the Free State and Kimberley. Some Basotho men, and especially the Rolong in Thaba Nchu, purchased wagons - some also working for white traders - to transport this grain. The dramatic increase in the number of ploughs and wagons between 1875 and 1904 (Table 1.1) shows the extent of this booming grain trade, as what were formerly small gardens were transformed into big fields. In this way, a section of Basotho society was able to resist proletarianisation as it paid the imposed 10s tax from the proceeds of the grain exports, rather than having to turn to labour migration.¹⁸

Table 1.1: Number of Ploughs and Wagons in Lesotho for Selected Years

Year	Ploughs	Wagons
1875	2 770	302
1904	14 388	1 320
1911	22 848	1 722
1921	29 645	2 537

Source: Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", p.261.

Although the introduction of ploughs transformed cultivation and integrated this branch of production with pastoralism, the labour process and the division of labour did not change to the favour of women. Because the latter were not supposed to handle cattle, men assumed responsibility for ploughing, leaving weeding, bird-scaring, and most of the harvesting and threshing to women. This meant that men became occupied between August and December with ploughing and sowing.¹⁹

¹⁸. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.147-53; J. Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland, c.1870-1885", in S. Marks, and R. Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930, (Longman, London, 1982); T. Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.12, no.2, 1986.

¹⁹. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.104-06.

The ploughing process involved, according to a mid-1930s account, the use of two to eight oxen (depending on the weight of the plough and one's wealth) and a human team made up of a small boy who led the team, a youth who drove the oxen, and an older and experienced man who handled the plough.²⁰

Basotho's participation in the regional economy through commodity production radically increased the amount of cash circulating in the country. Though this did not totally replace the system of barter and the use of grain, beads, copper and cattle as currencies, the arrival and presence of traders - and the introduction of credit - made money an increasingly important factor in Basotho society. Traders would buy grain from Basotho producers and trade it in the export market. Often these traders would buy grain from Basotho and keep it to resell during a drought at higher prices. But as the government paid 2s.6d for a bag of grain in the 1870s to discourage Basotho from paying their tax in kind in order to promote migrant labour, Basotho preferred going to traders who paid 12s for a bag.²¹

Traders introduced Basotho to manufactured goods which had a contradictory impact on the country. On the one hand, the introduction of clothes, wooden and iron implements and utensils, saved Basotho from the arduous tasks of skin-, iron-, clay- and wood-working in order to make clothes, spoons, pots, spears, hoes, baskets, and bowls. The 24 work-days normally spent in preparing and tailoring skin for clothing could now be used for other purpose as wool and cotton blankets could be purchased for between 10s and 30s. The digging by women of salt for seasoning food and red ochre for ointment and make-up, was also rendered redundant by cheaper ointments and salt available at trading stores. But this also threatened Basotho's indigenous crafts, as the demand for traditional goods and services related to these

²⁰. Ashton, Basuto, p.124.

²¹. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.97, 153; Ashton, Basuto, pp.166-67.

crafts declined. The purchasing of European manufactured goods became no longer discretionary but necessary, and people became more integrated into commercial networks where they bought what they previously made themselves. The number of traders increased from 20 in 1872 to 120 in 1891, 168 in 1907 and 200 in 1937. In the mid-1930s, 80 percent of the items sold at the trading stores were soft goods, 70 percent of which were blankets.²²

Basotho's adoption of European manufactured goods and participation in commodity production was not simply due to new "needs" and missionary influence as Kimble suggests,²³ but, as Eldredge also argues,²⁴ was primarily a strategy to rationalise the allocation of their labour time. By the turn of the century, the quantitative underutilisation of the labour power of Basotho men had increased due to the disappearance of hunting, intra-African war, cattle-raiding, and some Basotho specialised crafts. On the other hand, as we saw, the patriarchal subordination of Basotho women had freed men from performing productive functions. Hence some men were available to leave the homestead without significantly affecting production and the subsistence base.

But encounters with missionaries, colonialism and merchant capital - combined with natural disasters - negatively affected Lesotho in the long term. One factor was the shift of some Boer farmers to cultivation for the market after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. A year later,

22. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.87-89, 94-99, 155-58; H. Dieterlen, and F. Kohler, "Les Bassoutos D'Aujourd'hui", in Livre d'Or de la Mission du Lessouto, (Maison des Missions Evangeliques, Paris, 1912); Ashton, Basuto, pp.166-68; idem, "A Sociological Sketch of Sotho Diet", Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa, vol.17, 1940.

23. J. Kimble, "Lesotho and the Outside World, 1840-70: Prelude to Imperialism", International Conference on Southern African History Paper, National University of Lesotho, August 1977, p.9.

24. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.68-69, 149-50.

the South African Republic imposed a tariff on Basotho grain imported into the Transvaal, preventing peasants from reaping the fruits of the mushrooming goldmining industry. It was estimated in that year that this tariff wall cost Basotho about L20 000. In September 1892 the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce (formed in 1890 by traders) complained to the High Commissioner about this tariff. The arrival of the railway line in Johannesburg in 1893, for its part, flooded that market with Australian and American wheat and maize. It was reported in the 1893-94 Basutoland annual colonial report that trade had stagnated during the year due to both the tariff and the railway line. In 1894 the Orange Free State also imposed an import duty on Basotho wheat.²⁵

These efforts aimed at undermining the competitive position of Basotho peasants did not produce immediate results. The Free State farmers took time to turn to cultivation, and in the 1880s and early 1890s continued to rely on Basotho produce. Kimberley was still "largely supplied from Basutoland" in the late 1880s, as traders in Lesotho exported grain to that place and the Transvaal at high prices. There were also many Basotho who regularly crossed the border to exchange their grain for manufactured goods at the Free State borderline stores. Though the Free State grain could enter the Transvaal duty-free under the 1889 Potchetstroom Convention - with about 60 percent of the grain sold in the Transvaal in the 1890s coming from the Free State - much of this produce in fact came from Lesotho. Wagons were also moving from the Transvaal to purchase Basotho grain; in one instance in April 1889, 650 grain-loaded wagons were traversing through Senekal a week on their way from Lesotho to the Rand. It was for this reason that the Free State farmers opposed the 1893-94 proposal to construct a railway line-extension to the eastern part of the republic as this would benefit Basotho peasants. Many Free

²⁵. Basutoland, Colonial Report - Annual (henceforth CAR), 1892-93; J. Walton, Father of Kindness and Father of Horses: A History of Frasers Limited, (Morija Printing Works, Wepener, 1958), p.31; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.147-81.

State farmers also petitioned their government during this period against the selling of Basotho produce as Free State grain in the Transvaal.²⁶

Hence one trader based in Maseru was to testify to the 1903-05 South African Native Affairs Commission that "the principal source [of income for Basotho] is agriculture, but other sources are cattle-raising, horse-breeding, wool and mohair. They have a good many strings to their bow. They are not bound to one source".²⁷ One missionary described Lesotho in 1910: "Lesuto is perhaps an African country which in relation to its size, occupies the first place from the point of view of agriculture; this country not only feeds its population, but [also] exports each year to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State between 150 000 and 200 000 bags of grain".²⁸ This meant that by the turn of the century most Basotho still relied on the produce of their land for subsistence and tax payment. It is this factor that made the recruitment of Basotho for mine work and their subordination to the exigencies of migrant labour such a protracted struggle.

The capacity of some Basotho to resist capitalist penetration and proletarianisation also shaped British colonial policy towards the country. The turning of Lesotho into a "native reserve" was not the initial objective of colonial rule, but the result of the failure of the Cape government's attempts to disarm Basotho and to open Quthing (in the south) to white settlement. These attempts sparked the Gun War (1880-81) which forced the British government to take direct

²⁶. Great Britain, Her Majesty's Colonial Possession, no.31, Basutoland: Report of the Resident Commissioner for 1887, c.5249.-28; CAR, 1888-89; T. Keegan, Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986), p.17; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.159-76.

²⁷. South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-05: Minutes of Evidence, vol.4, p.399.

²⁸. A. Bertrand, En Afrique avec le missionnaire Coillard a travers l'Etat libre d'orange, le pays des ba-Souto, Boulouwayo, (C.H. Eggimann and Co., Geneva, 1913[?]), p.104.

responsibility for the running of the colony. Had Basotho given in to Cape, white settlement and the implementation of the provisions of the 1894 Glen Grey Act, would have been among future possibilities. This would have resulted in, among other things, land dispossession, the introduction of the individual land tenure system, and the undermining of the position of the chiefs.²⁹

The first British Resident Commissioner, Colonel Marshall Clark, and his successor, Godfrey Lagden, did not tamper with the Basotho communal land tenure system nor consider white settlement. This policy was supported by Alfred Milner who became High Commissioner in 1897. That same year, he was already clear in his mind that "I want to preserve the Basuto and the Bechuana, for the present at least, from the tender mercies of the [Cape Afrikaner] Bond and our friend Cecil J. Rhodes".³⁰ During his April 1898 visit to Lesotho, Milner was approached by the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce with a set of demands, one of which was the granting of land rights to traders, but he refused. The Chamber of Commerce applied again for land rights in 1906 and 1909, but was turned down.³¹

Basotho strength was also reflected in the failure of attempts to open Lesotho to mineral prospectors. As early as 1887, a number of applications for the prospecting of minerals were

²⁹. On the Glen Grey Act in the Transkei, see C. Bundy, "Mr Rhodes and the Poisoned Goods: Popular Opposition to the Glen Grey Council System, 1894-1906", in W. Beinart, and Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987.

³⁰. C. Headlam, (ed.), The Milner Papers: South Africa, 1897-1899, (Cassell, London, 1931), p.178.

³¹. Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette (henceforth Friend), 15 April 1898; R.P. Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana, & Swaziland: The Former High Commissioner Territories in Southern Africa, (Pall Mall Press, London, 1967), p.32.

being received and turned down by Clark.³² In January 1895 the then High Commissioner, Henry Loch, wrote a lengthy and confidential memorandum to the Resident Commissioner, Godfrey Lagden, indicating that "I have for some time had it in contemplation whether the time has not arrived when the policy of keeping mineral prospectors out of Basutoland should not be relaxed, as I am of opinion that such relaxation may be desirable alike in the interests of the people and to escape from the stigma that Basutoland is neither more or less than a mere Native Location".³³ But Lagden disagreed.³⁴ He addressed the Scottish Geographical Society in June 1901 on this question:

There are indications of iron, copper, and tin [in Basutoland]. It has been stated that traces of gold and diamonds have been discovered... Government has found it expedient to avoid active research, because of the intense national feeling against it. The Basuto believe that exploitation and discovery of precious minerals have, more than anything else, led to many of the troubles in South Africa, as well as to the political obliteration of those countries in which they were found. They know and often allude to the action of Paul Kruger [President of the Transvaal Republic], who, at one period of his life, made it a penal offence amongst his burghers to announce the existence of payable minerals in the Transvaal. Similarly it is reported of the late paramount chief Letsie that on one occasion when a man found and produced for the chief's inspection a stone believed to be of mineral value, the unfortunate creature was hurled over a precipice, in order that his secretes might perish with him... At times when a report maliciously circulated by the Boers gained ground that prospecting was to be forcibly permitted, the whole country has been convulsed with alarm amounting to madness. During any part of the last sixteen years it is probable that ill-advised attempts to prospect for minerals would have met with armed resistance - perhaps rebellion... Even now a mysterious traveller prowling about in quiet places with a kodak is regarded with

³². See Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, no. 31, 1887, p.5.

³³. University of Witwatersrand Manuscripts, (UWM), Lagden Papers, Loch to Lagden, 12 January 1895.

³⁴. UWM, Lagden Papers, Lagden to Loch, 3 February 1895.

suspicion and ill-disguised aversion.³⁵

But, ironically, the success of Basotho in keeping their arms, preventing white settlement and mineral prospecting, helped lay the basis for their country to be turned into a South African labour reserve.

Chieftaincy and the Colonial State

The Basotho maintained the powers of their chiefs more successfully than their counterparts in South Africa. Unlike South Africa where chiefly power was dismantled and reconstructed with the use of magistrates - be it in the form of the Shepstonian or the Transkeian Glen Grey systems³⁶ - after their defeat of the Cape government in the Gun War, Basotho chiefs were incorporated into the British indirect rule system. Even by comparison with other High Commission Territories, Basotho chiefs fared better. Chiefs in the Bechuanaland Protectorate were weakened by their number and the British recognition of more than one paramount chief. In Swaziland, dynastic squabbles, and the presence of white settlers and concessionaries, seriously undermined the monarchy.³⁷ But, paradoxically, Basotho chiefs' retention of most of their powers was their weakest point as the British modeled chieftainship according to the imperatives of colonial

³⁵. G. Lagden, "Basutoland and the Basutos", Scottish Geographical Magazine, vol.17, 1901, p.354.

³⁶. J. Guy, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of Zulu Society", in Marks and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change; H. Slater, "The changing pattern of economic relationships in rural Natal, 1838-1914", in S. marks and A. Atmore, (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, (Longman, London, 1980); P. Delius, "Sebatakomo: Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.15, no.4, 1989.

³⁷. J. Parson, Botswana: Liberal Democracy and the Labor Reserve in Southern Africa, (Westview Press, London, 1984); A.R. Booth, Swaziland: Tradition and Change in a Southern African Kingdom, (Westview Press, London, 1983).

rule.

The key to the reconstruction of chieftaincy in Basutoland was the emergence and consolidation of the position of the Paramount Chief. The Basotho nation-state emerged from the wars and disruptions of the mid-1820s, when Moshoeshe received and brought San, Sotho-Tswana and Nguni refugees and other displaced people, into his fold, giving them access to land and cattle (especially through the mafisa system), and protection. By 1833 when he received two young Paris Evangelical Society missionaries, Moshoeshe was in a stronger position, although the Tlokwa of Sekonyela (in the north) did not recognise him as their chief, and the Phuthi of Moorosi (in Quthing) regarded themselves only as his allies. His defeat and dispersal of the Tlokwa in 1853 and the crushing of the Phuthi by the Cape colonial government in 1879, opened a new phase in the process of Sotho state formation. Moshoeshe was assisted by the French missionaries in his struggle to assert Koena hegemony and himself as the central ruler in the Caledon region. The missionaries, on their side, supported the position of this particular Sotho chief, as they linked the success of their work to his fortunes. What they failed to understand was that Moshoeshe had invited them for political and strategic reasons. He placed them strategically; first, at Morija which was along the attacking route of the Griqua marauders, and later among the Taung of Moletsane (who had placed themselves under Moshoeshe in the mid-1830s), the Tlokwa, and the Phuthi. The missionaries were even seen as "baruti [missionaries] of Moshoeshe".

The missionaries even created a "Sesotho" language for this one chief by reducing a synthesis of Fokeng and Tlhaping dialects into a written language, at the expense of other local dialects. (The Tlhaping influence came from the London Society missionary Robert Moffat). This culminated in the translation of parts of the Bible, and in 1863 the missionary newspaper Leselinyana la Lesotho started to appear. "Sesotho" came to represent not only the language, but also became a source of national identity and prestige. The adjective

"Sesotho" came to be applied to music, culture, "customs", space and time. The category was used to order the world; compare what is and not of Basotho. Together with this development, was the missionaries' application of the European notion of "nations" to Moshoeshoe's subjects. The missionaries now spoke of and wrote about the "Basotho"; the notion of the history of "Basotho" began to emerge, and converts were socialised into seeing themselves as "Basotho" and "Christians". The emergence of Basotho intellectuals from mission schools at the turn of the century further gave legitimacy to this notion of "Basotho nation". In particular "Sesotho" literature began to appear. Though the 1850s were years of reaction against missionaries in Lesotho due to colonial pressure, the impact of missionaries in this respect could not be reversed.³⁸

Wars against the Boers in the 1850s and mid-1860s, and the Gun War against the Cape colonial government, were other factors which contributed to shaping the Basotho national identity. Wars against the Boers resulted in the loss of the western part of the Caledon River to the Orange Free State, and Moshoeshoe, by asking for British protection which he received on 12th March 1868, was able to keep Lesotho out of the reach

³⁸. This and the preceding paragraph based on P. Sanders, Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1975); L. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786-1870, (Oxford University Press, London, 1975); Perrot, C-H, "Premier annees"; idem, "Les missionnaires francais et la construction d'un Etat: Le Lesotho au temps d'Eugene Casalis, 1833-1855", in D. Bach, (ed.), La France et l'Afrique du Sud: Histoire, mythes et enjeux contemporaines, (Karthala, Paris, 1990); T. Holmes, "Missionnaires francais et traites britanniques en Afrique australe, 1830-1900", in Bach, La France; L. Vail, "Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History", in idem., (ed.) The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa, (James Currey, London, 1989); N.P. Maake, "A Survey of Trends in the Development of African Language Literature in South Africa: With Specific Reference to Written Southern Sotho Literature c.1900-1970", African Languages and Cultures, vol.5, no.2, 1992. On Sesotho language, see D.B. Coplan, In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994), pp.107-08; and idem, "History is Eaten Whole: Consuming Tropes in Sesotho Auraliture", History and Theory, vol.32, no.4, 1993.

of the Boers. But this in turn meant that the boundaries of Lesotho were finally fixed, and to Basotho's sense of themselves as a national unit, was added the sense of space defined by physical limits. The British later handed over Lesotho in 1871 to the Cape Colony which tried to apply its system of direct rule. The situation took a turn for the worse when the Cape government announced the doubling of the 10s tax and its intention of opening Quthing to white settlement. At the same time, the Basotho were required to give up their guns and spears. This, as we saw, sparked the Gun War which led the Cape government to return the colony to Britain.

The British reversed the Cape's system of rule. Chiefs were allowed greater space in the running of the country. Letsie I, Moshoeshoe's successor, was designated "Paramount Chief", and was protected against any force that threatened to assert its independence from him. At an ideological level, Basotho came to accept their position as subjects and "children" of the British monarchy. The name of Moshoeshoe, their "father", and the treaty he signed after "wise" consideration, were used to legitimise colonial rule. But this paternalism went together with force as the Paramount Chief came to accept that the word of the local representative of Her Majesty was final. He and other Basotho chiefs came to associate resistance to British colonial rule with the alternative of opening Lesotho to the Boers. Threats of reincorporation into the Union of South Africa from 1908 further reinforced this dependence on British protection.³⁹

The British, in harnessing Basotho chiefly structures of government, redefined their functions. The colonial administration was established in such a way that it corresponded with the chiefly structure laid down by Moshoeshoe. The Resident Commissioner in Maseru was at the

³⁹. Machobane, Government and Change, p.50; R.P. Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana, & Swaziland, p.30; J.E. Bardill and J.H. Cobbe, Lesotho: Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa, (Westview Press, London, 1985), pp.7-39.

level of the Paramount Chief, and the seven Assistant Commissioners worked with principal or "ward" chiefs in their respective districts. Legislative powers were in the hands of the High Commissioner in Cape Town.

The Cape government had convened the pitso each year from 1874 onwards, but only to announce new regulations and laws, and "correct public opinion". This practice was taken over by the British, the pitso being reduced to a forum for receiving colonial guests and making announcements. The Paramount Chief came to depend on his counsellors, who now included the Resident Commissioner, when taking decisions. As he gradually lost his sensitivity to popular opinion, so his dependence on the colonial government increased. In 1903 the system of pitso was replaced by the Basutoland National Council which was given statutory status in 1910 and transformed into a Legislative Council in 1960. The idea of establishing such a Council had first been raised in 1886 and approved in 1890, but its implementation was suspended due to opposition from some chiefs.

It was Letsie I's successor, Lerotholi, with the support of Lagden and Milner, who pushed forward with the idea of a council, because he wanted to strengthen his position as Paramount Chief. The National Council was made up of 100 members; five nominated by the Resident Commissioner who also chaired the proceedings, and the remainder by the Paramount Chief. During the Council's first sitting, eighteen "customary laws", Laws of Lerotholi, were adopted. However, the then Resident Commissioner, H.C. Sloley, made it clear that these had no legislative force; they were not "laws" but merely "customs". These laws mostly related to the powers and rights of the chiefs, including their right to letsema; the powers of chiefs's courts and their relation to the colonial courts to which people could appeal; and to land allocation and use. By defining the powers of the Resident Commissioner, Paramount Chief and colonial courts, these laws instead of being a codification of "customary laws", gave legitimacy to structures of authority which had their origin in the British

system of rule. Moreover, their prime focus was on entrenching the structure of chieftaincy as it then existed, without addressing the system of checks on the powers of the chiefs. The second sitting of the National Council in 1905 was followed by another in 1908, after which it was decided that the Council should sit annually.⁴⁰

The British indirect rule system essentially supported chiefs and the Paramount. In the process, chiefs came to rely on the colonial government rather than the people to remain in power. "Greater emphasis was now placed", argues Weisfelder, "on prescriptive dimensions such as hereditary rights to rule and the necessity of obedience to any legally established authority".⁴¹ Chiefs came to abuse letsema and their courts to amass wealth. Chiefs, even minor ones, now demanded tribute labour for work on the farms of each of their wives, the produce of which was destined for the export market. Many widows were dispossessed of their farms by the chiefs on the pretext that they were underutilising them. Chiefs also played a key role in the collection of taxes. About ten percent of the tax collected was given as an allowance to principal chiefs, with a big portion going to the Paramount Chief. In 1894 Lerotholi complained that his L1000 annual "salary" was not enough and wanted it increased.⁴²

The transformation of chieftaincy under indirect rule went through several stages. The Letsie I era (1870-1891) could be characterised as the formative stage. During this stage the

⁴⁰. This and the preceding paragraph based on Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana, pp.29-38; Machobane, Government and Change, pp.29-125; R.F. Weisfelder, The Basotho Monarchy: A Spent Force or a Dynamic Political Factor, (Ohio University Centre for International Studies, African Series No.16, 1972).

⁴¹. Weisfelder, Basotho Monarchy, p.38.

⁴². R.M. Cassidy, "Britain and Basutoland: A Study of Men and Policies from the Gun War to the Anglo-Boer War", (Ph.D, University of California, 1967), pp.165-66, 168-70; J. Kimble, "'Clinging to the Chiefs': Some Contradictions of Colonial Rule in Basutoland, c.1890-1930", in H. Bernstein and B.K, Campbell, (eds.), Contradictions of Accumulation in Africa: Studies in Economy and State, (Sage Publications, London, 1985), p.48.

British were not yet sure about the future of the colony, and experimented with their indirect rule, while asserting and strengthening the position of the Paramount Chief. Lerotholi's period (1891-1905) was the completion of the process already underway. Besides the rinderpest epidemic and the South African War, the greatest victory as far as British rule was concerned was the defeat of Chief Masupha in 1898 by Lerotholi with the active support of Lagden, which removed the last barrier to the consolidation of the position of the Paramount Chief and colonial rule itself. Masupha, one of Moshoeshoe's three sons by his senior wife (the other two were Molapo and Letsie), had been a problem for the Cape government and the British. He had led the most militant section of the population, even refusing to pay and collect tax until 1894. In 1899, Moorosi's grandson, Mocheko, tried to assert the independence of the Phuthi, but was imprisoned during the South Africa War. In 1902 he was tried, stripped of his powers and removed from Quthing. The establishment of the Basutoland National Council in 1903 was, therefore, a conclusion to the formative phase. Letsie II reigned briefly (1905-1913), and was succeeded by Griffith (1913-1939). This was the period of consolidation. It was during the reign of Griffith who had been converted to Catholicism in 1913, that the Catholic church gained prominence in Basutoland. By the end of his rule, the Catholics had overtaken the Paris Missionary Society in church membership.⁴³

To further legitimise themselves, in 1919 the chiefs declared the 12th of March (the day that Moshoeshoe accepted British protection in 1868) as "Moshoeshoe Day". This decision was prompted by World War I and Lesotho's involvement in it in terms of supplying men and raising money for the war effort. After the war, Griffith went to England to join in the victory celebrations. It was in this context that Moshoeshoe Day was declared, thereby consummating the alliance between the

⁴³. Weisfelder, Basotho Monarchy, pp.39-58; Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana, p.30; Machobane, Government and Change. p.40.

colonial government and the chiefs. In the 1920s this Moshoeshoe Festival came to be an important event for Basotho chiefs and the elite, and spread to the Witwatersrand.⁴⁴

Decline of the economy

The transformation of Lesotho into a labour reserve was made possible by the collapse of the Basotho economy. But it was not every Mosotho who resorted to nondiscretionary migration, as social differentiation within Basotho society mediated the process of the penetration of commodity production and relations.

The degeneration of Lesotho into a labour reserve can be traced to a number of factors. Firstly, natural disasters played a role in undermining Basotho self-sufficiency, especially from the 1890s. Locusts attacks in 1892, 1893, 1895 and 1898 affected Basotho grain production, while the country suffered a severe and prolonged drought between 1894 and 1898.⁴⁵ More critical, however, was the rinderpest epidemic which attacked the country between November 1896 and August 1897, killing 80 percent of Basotho cattle stock. As in other parts of southern Africa, this epidemic was a critical catalyst of proletarianisation. Political, social, religious and other creative responses by Africans to the loss of their cattle and their impoverishment varied according to the level of development of the productive forces, the nature of the political system, ecological conditions, and the impact of the epidemic itself.⁴⁶ Many Basotho resorted to the use of

⁴⁴. Umteteli wa Bantu, 22 March 1930; 15 March 1930; 16 March 1935; 23 March 1935; Mochochonono, 17 April 1935; 7 January 1939; Basutoland News, 12 March 1940.

⁴⁵. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.80-81.

⁴⁶. C. van Onselen, "Reaction to Rinderpest in South Africa, 1896-97", Journal of African History, vol.13, no.3, 1972; C. Ballard, "The Repercussions of Rinderpest: Cattle Plague and Peasant Decline in Colonial Natal", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, vol.19, no.3, 1986; P. Phoofolo, "Epidemics and Revolutions: The Rinderpest Epidemic in Late Nineteenth-Century Southern

stones in bohali transactions, postponing the payment of cattle. When the ploughing season arrived in 1897, Basotho returned to their iron hoes and made more use of family labour to work the fields. In some instances, donkeys and ponies were used in ploughing. But the absence of rain frustrated these efforts. The outbreak of a four-week civil war in January 1898 between Masupha, who was the principal chief in Berea, and the Paramount Chief Lerotholi, not only took 80 lives, but also disrupted life in many villages. Although this war coincided with the arrival of rain, people in the affected villages could not take advantage of this to begin sowing their crops. And, as if rinderpest and civil war were not enough, the population was then ravaged by smallpox, typhoid fever and dysentery.⁴⁷

The impact of rinderpest, diseases, war and drought, put colonial Lesotho in its worst crisis since the civil war that had followed the Gun War. These disasters would almost certainly have changed the course of Basotho history had the 1900-02 harvests not been good. But of crucial importance were Basotho strategies for restocking and rebuilding their economy. This involved releasing more men for labour migration; hence the number of passes issued for labour purposes increased from some 20 000 in 1895 to over 30 000 in 1898. In part, this was made possible by the changes already referred to which had freed men from many of their traditional responsibilities and activities. The number of labour recruiters in the country also increased dramatically (see Chapter Two). No less important, even as grain exports fell, Basotho were saved by the British demand for their horses and labour caused by the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902). The price per horse increased from L6 in 1899 to L19 in 1901 and L20 in 1903. The number of Basotho horse exports increased from 1 869 in 1899 to 4 419 in 1900 and 15 684 in

Africa", Past and Present, no.138, February 1993.

⁴⁷. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.80-81; Friend, 16 October 1896; 6 August 1897; 16 November 1897; 3 December 1897; 21 January 1898; Germond, Chronicles of Basutoland, pp.472-73.

1901.⁴⁸

The cessation of mining on the Rand and the disruption of agricultural production in other areas of South Africa during the war, was compensated by the employment of Africans in the British army. In November 1899 two labour depots were established by the British army - one in De Aar for recruits from the Ciskei and Transkei, and the other in Bloemfontein to cater for Basotho recruits. In March 1900 Lagden was then asked to send 2 000 Basotho recruits to the latter depot for work in the construction of a railway line to Sannah's Post. The Paramount Chief, however, told Lagden that his men were only willing to work for 60 shillings (s) (with rations) per month (like recruits at De Aar), instead of the 40s being offered. The army officials gave way, and Lagden was able to enlist the required number. Another 1 000 men were recruited by the Bloemfontein depot between April and May, while only 4 944 passes for work at other labour centres were issued during the 1899-1900 fiscal year. The following year 11 477 Basotho were recruited by the army, as opposed to 8 580 passes for other labour purposes. Basotho men were attracted to the army by the short (three-months') contracts and the high wages offered. Transport drivers, for example, could earn as much as L5.10s per month.⁴⁹ These strategies, selling horses and becoming migrant labourers, helped a significant number of Basotho to overcome the effects of the 1890s crisis. Many of them imported stock to rebuild the material base of their homesteads.⁵⁰ Hence by 1910, as already shown, some Basotho could still be described as net exporters of grain.

⁴⁸. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.161, 189.

⁴⁹. P. Warwick, "African Labour During the South African War, 1899-1902", Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Papers, October 1975 - June 1976; idem, Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), pp.52-74; CAR, 1899-1900, 1900-1901; Free State Archives Depot, (VAB), SORCO 557/02, CO 57, Paramount Chief (henceforth PC) to Resident Commissioner (henceforth RC), 12 March 1902.

⁵⁰. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.81.

Nonetheless, pressure on the Basotho economy intensified. A severe drought attacked the country again in 1903 and, for the first time, large quantities of food had to be imported. For the majority of Basotho, the response was to release more of their men again, hence the number of migrant workers leaving the country exceeded that of 1898. This drought continued until 1906, but another one attacked the country in 1912-13, killing stock, and large quantities of grain had to be imported again. These years were followed by a period of gradual recovery which culminated in 1928, for some Basotho a year of prosperity, as the total value of grain, mohair and wool exports had increased from L839 097 in 1927 to L1 013 392 in that year.⁵¹

The 1929 economic depression followed by a severe drought in 1932-33, radically reversed the situation. The depression affected the price of Basotho wool and mohair exports; and drought led to quantities of grain being imported. So serious was this crisis that many Basotho were obliged to sell their cattle. The number of cattle exported increased from 1 496 in 1929 to 8 337 in 1931 and 17 491 in 1933.⁵² Following these years of hardship and disaster, Lesotho was unable to return to her previous paradise as a granary of South Africa. Labour migrancy ceased to be a strategy for survival during times of distress but became a necessity for the subsistence of homesteads.

Even so, natural disasters were not the only factor that undermined the Basotho economy. Colonel Clark was given instructions that in running Basutoland, his expenditure should never exceed his revenue, and this became policy in subsequent years. One consequence of this policy was the

⁵¹. A. Pim, Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, January 1935, cmd.4907, pp.190-92. Fluctuations and changes in the economy are covered in CAR for the years 1905-06 to 1934; and Ashton, Basuto, p.173.

⁵². Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.190-92.

problem of soil erosion.⁵³

As schemes for white settlement and mineral prospecting were not implemented and Basutoland was increasingly seen as a "native reserve", it became the objective of the colonial government to transform the country into a labour-exporting economy. In 1898 Lagden made it clear when addressing the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce that "the government policy was to induce labour by all reasonable means".⁵⁴ It was his belief that more Basotho should rely on wage labour as this was important for the business of white traders:

The land should produce as much as possible, but if it were overstocked with cultivation [sic] the remedy was to teach the surplus population to be less dependent upon it (*applause*). Last year over 30 000 men received passes for labour only. If each returned safely with a few months' wages, the benefit to commerce must be considerable (*cheers*).⁵⁵

Lagden's commitment to this position can be seen from the hut tax increase (from 10s to L1) he announced at the November 1898 *pitso*, even though the country was going through a severe drought and the people were recovering from the effects of the Masupha civil war. When the Paramount Chief approached Lagden at the peak of drought in November 1898 about the fate of men who were unable to leave as migrant workers because of age and their health and disabilities, Lagden, according to the Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, "expressed himself as opposed to afford help to men who are able to work, and has announced that should it become necessary to assist such persons, he can only recommend that grain in small quantity be issued to them as wages for labour rendered on some kind of relief works".⁵⁶

⁵³. K.B. Showers, "Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho: Origins and Colonial Response, 1830s-1950s", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.15, no.2, 1989. See also Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.59-65, 167-94; Cassidy, "Britain and Basutoland", pp.165-70.

⁵⁴. Friend, 25 November 1898.

⁵⁵. Ibid., 25 November 1898.

⁵⁶. Ibid., 9 December 1898.

The colonial strategy involved more than simply increasing tax or obliging men to seek work. Although in the past essential food items were only imported during times of distress, in the 1920s the colonial government developed a tendency of importing maize and sorghum for the southern districts, while exporting some from the northern districts. This was justified in the following terms:

...but it may be asked why such articles of native food as kaffir corn and maize were exported to the value of L48 000 [during the fiscal year 1920-21], when it was necessary to import food of the same nature to the value of L78 000. The answer is that transportation from one district to another is not only costly, but generally unprocurable when most required, and it follows that it would cost more to convey grain from the northern district, where crops are usually more abundant than in the south, than to bring their requirement from farmers in the Union of South Africa living on the Southern boundary.⁵⁷

Such an argument was, of course, absurd if one considers the fact that no attempt was made by the colonial government to improve the road system inside the country. All efforts went instead on developing and improving communication lines with South Africa.⁵⁸

Yet economic decline did not affect everyone equally. At every stage its effects were mediated by social and economic differentiation. Social stratification was particularly influenced by the missionary presence. Missionary work had been accompanied by educational work as schools were regarded as an important weapon for evangelisation. The number of schools belonging to the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Catholic church and the Anglicans, increased significantly between the turn of the century and the 1930s (Table 1.2).

⁵⁷. CAR, 1920-21, p.4.

⁵⁸. See Appendix II.

Table 1.2: Number and Size of Missionary Schools, 1901 and 1933.

Year	PEMS		Roman		Anglican	
	sch.	no.	sch.	no.	sch.	no.
1901	146	10 000	12	600	17	1 000
1933	378	28 954	130	11 775	67*	4 831*

Source: Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.102.

* 1931

The 531 elementary schools in 1933 taught up to Standard III, the 38 "intermediate" schools (with 1 868 pupils in 1933) continuing to Standards IV, V and VI. There were in addition nine institutions for the training of various categories of teachers, one of which was the Leloaleng Industrial school where Basotho men were trained in various crafts.⁵⁹

The colonial government's participation was in the form of subsidy to missionaries. In 1909 a central Advisory Board for Education was set up, and this culminated in the establishment of the Educational Department in 1914 with a Director of Education. By 1933, 75 percent of Basotho children of school-going age were enrolled in schools. A survey of "some hundreds" of Basotho men leaving for the mines at about this time, found 25-30 percent of recruits to be literate. This proportion of literacy and the number of children in schools, compared favourably with Africans in South Africa.⁶⁰

Western education not only affected Basotho's world outlook but also facilitated the emergence of a petty bourgeois class. Lesotho did not have "mission reserves" as in colonial Natal where they were important for the emergence of the kholwa or "progressive" peasantry,⁶¹ but, as in other parts of

⁵⁹. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.102-04.

⁶⁰. Ibid., pp.104,106.

⁶¹. N. Etherington, "Christianity and African society in nineteenth-century Natal", in A. Duminy, and B. Guest, (eds.), Natal and Zululand From Earliest Times to 1910: A New History, (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1989).

Southern Africa,⁶² graduates of mission schools became proponents of tsoelopele (progress) and occupied important positions in the colonial hierarchy. Some were absorbed into the bureaucracy of the colonial administration, while others left the country in search of lucrative jobs on the mines and in the towns. Teachers and evangelists were the most highly qualified Basotho for most of the 20th century, and some of them invested their income in business. One example was Eben-Ezer Malakane who qualified as a teacher in 1909, and later opened a cafe and a butchery. By the time of his death in 1950, reported a missionary journal, "he had become a farmer with a farm in the Free State, a miller with a mill in Basutoland, a trader with trading stations in Basutoland, and an owner of a garage, a wheat thresher, omnibuses and other enterprises".⁶³ Thomas Mofolo, the first Mosotho novelist, was also trained as a teacher, but, as Chapter Two will show, ended up as a labour recruiter, trader, miller, omnibus owner, and a farmer.

Unlike Natal, relations between Basotho chiefs and missionaries were generally cordial, as Moshoeshe had invited these agents himself. Among the first generation of French mission converts were three of Moshoeshe's sons, two of his wives, some of his principal counsellors, his brother in-law, and some of his leading military officers and friends. It was only after the 1848 reaction against missionaries when many converts abandoned their new religion and some chiefs became hostile, that commoners became important in mission membership. The anti-mission hostility had subsided by the turn of the century. By 1904 about 15 percent of the total population was in the church.⁶⁴ As converts generally sent their children to mission schools, this suggests that the tsoelopele class was not drawn only from the ranks of the

⁶². For Southern Rhodesia, see T. Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study, (James Curry, London, 1985), pp.43-49.

⁶³. Basutoland Witness, vol.4, no.2, April-June 1951, p.25.

⁶⁴. Perrot, "Premieres annees", pp.100-04; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.93-95.

previously dominant groups. The church had created an opening for social upliftment for at least some ordinary people.

But the emergence and consolidation of the tsoelopele class was circumscribed by government policy and the labour reserve objective. This was particularly evident in the case of Basotho entrepreneurs. The procedure for granting a trading license perpetuated the domination of powerful traders. An applicant would submit his credentials to the Assistant Commissioner with his proposed project, and local traders would be consulted. A whites-only committee would then sit to look at the application and responses from the local traders, also considering the following: (a) economic conditions in the country; (b) the "needs" of Basotho; (c) "keeping up a clean balance in competition in trade"; and (d) personal factors relating to the applicant.⁶⁵ This procedure frequently led to Basotho applications being turned down. Basotho traders were also barred from dealing with wool and mohair exports which were reserved for whites. Also, Assistant Commissioners turned a blind eye to whites traders who used their licenses for multiple purposes, but prevented Basotho from doing the same. Basotho traders were not even allowed to transfer their license. In all of these ways, a check was kept on the growth of a Basotho entrepreneurial strata.⁶⁶

Not only was trade monopolised by whites but actually by a minority of the minority. In Mafeteng in 1926, trade was monopolised by three whites: one owned a hotel, butchery, bakery and a "native eating house"; J. Scott being a labour agent, also owned a bakery and a butchery, and ran a taxi service to Wepener; and F. Stratton, also a labour agent, had a postal contract with the government (for a remuneration of

⁶⁵. Lesotho National Archives (LNA), S3/26/1/10, Decision of the Mafeteng licensing board, 4 December 1928; Tlale to Resident Commissioner (henceforth RC), 12 December 1928; Kou to RC, 11 December 1928.

⁶⁶. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.60; Ashton, Basuto, p.167; LNA, S3/19/72, Acting Assistant Commissioner (henceforth AC) (Teyateyaneng) to Government Secretary (henceforth GS), 4 September 1929.

over L250 per year), and owned two taxi "cabs".⁶⁷ Pim estimated that two-thirds of 194 trading stores in Lesotho in 1933 were in the hands of two traders.⁶⁸

Reactions to this situation varied. In Leribe in the north, Chief Jonathan invited Indian traders in the 1890s to counter-balance white traders' domination and their manipulation of grain prices.⁶⁹ Aspirant Basotho traders also campaigned across the country with the support of some chiefs, demanding that priority be given to them as the natives of the country. But to a petition signed by 53 Basotho in the district in October 1926, the Assistant Commissioner of Mafeteng made it clear that "you must remember this [is] a Government Reserve, and that the Europeans referred to have taken out Licenses for the business in which they are interested in and that they have equal rights to make application for such licenses".⁷⁰ The government was of the opinion that Basotho did not understand "healthy competition".⁷¹ Of the 194 trading licenses issued in 1933, 175 were to whites, 16 to Indians and two to Basotho. Marginalised, Basotho entrepreneurs resorted to working as "touts" for white labour agents who also dominated the recruitment business, hawking and peddling, and the omnibus or "taxi" business.⁷²

The emergence of the tsoelopele class did not immediately pose a serious threat to the position of the chiefs and other previously dominant groups whose wealth had improved as a result of colonialism and commodity production. In 1934, one chief owned 200 cattle, 1 500 small stock, 90 horses, 31 large farms with an average annual yield of 300 bags of grain; his

⁶⁷. LNA, S3/19/59, AC (Mafeteng) to GS, 18 October 1926; Musi to AC (Mafeteng), 20 October 1926.

⁶⁸. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.60.

⁶⁹. L. Rantheba, "The History of the Indian Traders in Lesotho", (BA Dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1985), pp.10-25.

⁷⁰. LNA, S3/19/59, AC (Mafeteng) to GS, 2 November 1926.

⁷¹. Ibid., AC (Mafeteng) to GS, 18 October 1926.

⁷². Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.60; Ashton, Basuto, p.166.

other revenue were the L100 government allowance, and court fines which amounted to L20, 200 cattle and 225 small stock. The estate of Chief Jonathan was valued at L20 000.⁷³ Chiefs spent their money on manufactured goods, cattle and agricultural implements. And, wrote Ashton after his 1935-36 field-work in Lesotho, "now that [chiefs'] political power is largely independent of popularity, there is no need for them to do this [help the poor] and they and other wealthy people can, if they wish, expend their wealth on advanced education for their children and luxuries for themselves, such as expensive tailor-made suits, large houses built on European lines, motor cars, travel, liquor and race-horses".⁷⁴

Although Lesotho's economy was increasingly under threat, chiefs continued to multiply in numbers because of the placing system that Moshoeshoe had used to subjugate neighbouring groups. This system was now used even by minor chiefs to "place" their sons in areas within their jurisdiction. It was not until the Pim Commission, appointed by the Colonial Office to investigate the financial and economic position of Basutoland after the 1932-33 drought, that this issue was decisively addressed. The reform process recommended by this commission began in 1938, and the number of chiefs was decreased from 1 340 in 1939 to 117 in 1946. The number of chiefs' courts dropped from 1 300 in 1938 to 122 in 1946. The establishment of the Native Treasury in 1946 removed the "eating up" of people by the chiefs through their abuse of court fines and the confiscation of stray stock, as "recognised" chiefs were now going to earn salaries instead of getting commissions from the tax collected. Letsema was abolished in 1950. These reforms led to a lot of resistance, especially on the part of minor chiefs, and this resulted in medicine murders (liretlo) in the 1940s.⁷⁵

As early as the turn of the century, Basotho commoners had

⁷³. Ashton, Basuto, p.173.

⁷⁴. Ibid., p.175.

⁷⁵. Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana & Swaziland, pp.39-66; Machobane, Government and Change, pp.126-233.

begun complaining about the chiefs' strengthening position and abuse of their power. The tsoelopele class grouped itself in the Basutoland Progressive Association in 1908. Attacks were levelled not only at the abuse of chiefly power, but also at the lack of commoner representation in the Basutoland National Council, as this class felt that merit rather than heredity should be a primary consideration for political office. The missionary-ran Leselinyana, and Naledi ea Lesotho and Mochochonono were the important mouthpiece of this class. But the BPA never challenged the colonial authority, as the interests of the tsoelopele class were linked to colonial presence and to commodity production. It was Lekhotla la Bafo, formed in 1919, which came to attack missionaries and colonial rule. With its grassroots support and orientation, LLB supported chieftaincy but criticised the chiefs for being puppets of the colonial administration. This struggle climaxed in the 1920s. Between 1922 and 1926, BPA mounted its attacks, leading to the amendment of some clauses related to chief's courts in the Laws of Lerotholi. The colonial government tried to intervene to give the Resident Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners some powers over the running of the chiefs' courts. In 1927 the Resident Commissioner presented proposals aimed at increasing control over the chiefs, but the National Council rejected the proposals with the support of LLB which saw the move as an attack on chieftaincy. The proposal intended to put Basutoland's indirect rule system on the same line with other British colonies.⁷⁶

However, the elite, made up of chiefs and the tsoelopele class, was able to survive epidemics, droughts and famine, far better than most Basotho, and continued farming despite the declining of the economy. Some of them could even hire

⁷⁶. Paragraph based on Machobane, Government and Change, pp.126-233; Weisfelder, Basotho Monarchy; idem, "Early Voices of Protest in Basutoland: The Progressive Association and Lekhotla La Bafo", African Studies Review, vol.17, no.2, September 1974; R. Edgar, Prophets with Honour: A Documentary History of Lekhotla La Bafo, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1988), pp.3-41.

Basotho labour. Hence, during 1936-37 which was described as a "good year", the average output per acre of 2 bags of grain increased to 2.6 bags,⁷⁷ despite the fact that the 1932-33 drought had reduced the majority of Basotho homesteads to dependence on migrant labour. According to Ashton's description of the poor:

Most of them are adequately though simply housed, but a few live in hovels. They are poorly nourished and shabbily dressed, find difficulty in paying their tax, and can only afford one or two small cooking pots and implements such as hoes. Ploughs and other such things are beyond their means and only rarely can they buy minor articles such as salt and knives. Their income are often inadequate, even for their simple requirements, so that their women-folk have to supplement it by selling beer, or labouring in rich men's fields or on European farms. In bad seasons many actually go hungry and literally dress in sackcloth.⁷⁸

It was for this reason that Ashton concluded that "the reasons why Basuto seek work are mainly economic: they go to work to supplement an inadequate income. Sons of wealthy families rarely go to the mines... whereas the sons of poorer families frequently do so, and those who have adequate lands and stock go far less frequently than those who have not".⁷⁹

A Labour Reserve

As Lesotho's degeneration into a labour reserve intensified in the 1920s and 1930s due to the combined impact of ecological factors and colonial rule, many Basotho, as Ashton indicated above, lost their food self-sufficiency and labour migrancy became essential for the survival of their homesteads. The cost of living in 1933 was estimated at L1 per month for an individual Mosotho; L3 (or the equivalent of a monthly wage on the gold mines) for a married man; and L15 for a tsoelopele

77. Ashton, "Sociological Sketch of Sotho Diet", p.153.

78. Ashton, Basuto, p.175.

79. Ibid., p.164.

Mosotho.⁸⁰ Basotho responded to the decline of their economy in four ways, depending on the ownership and distribution of stock, land, wagons and agricultural implements.

One response was to try to increase agricultural output by increasing land under cultivation, farms expanding to the foot of the Maluti mountains. The problem with this was that, taken together with the problems of overpopulation and overstocking, it diminished land available for grazing. The practice of allocating land to every married man and the inheritance system which parcelled out land to male heirs, led to smaller and smaller farms and a shortage of land. Already by the 1890s, the effects of this was being felt, with disputes over land and grazing area becoming common.⁸¹ However, this was accompanied by the effective concentration of land and livestock in the hands of the tsoelopele class and the chiefs.

The other Basotho response was to try to diversify crop production for food and export. This was the case in the Lowlands in the 1920s as people began cultivating wheat as a winter crop primarily for export, while the people in the Highlands continued to cultivate this crop in summer. Judy Kimble's neglect of this factor caused her to generalise about the significance of wheat in the Basotho economy and commodity production, attributing it a centrality that it never occupied.⁸² The integration of wheat into the agricultural cycle of Basotho was, rather, a product of the weakening position of other crops in the case of the people in the Lowlands; and because of the difficulty of growing other crops in the Highlands. But this does not suggest that Basotho would not have adopted the crop had the situation been otherwise. What is important is to contextualise and historicise changes in the Basotho system of cultivation and their choice of crops.

⁸⁰. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.60.

⁸¹. Ibid., pp.161-65; Ashton, Basuto, pp.144-57; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, p.65.

⁸². Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", pp.266, 289; idem, "Lesotho and the Outside World", p.9.

As grain exports suffered a series of droughts and also from diminishing returns from the land, many Basotho gradually turned to wool and mohair as primary exports. Some Basotho had adopted merino sheep from the Orange Free State Boer farmers in the 1850s, and wool was exported from the 1870s. Mohair exports began in the 1890s as angora goats were introduced by the colonial government. By the 1930s merino sheep and angora goats had replaced the traditional types.⁸³

From 1902 wool and mohair began to feature as important export items, and by the 1920s had overtaken wheat, maize and sorghum as Lesotho's principal exports. By the 1930s, wheat, maize and sorghum, were no longer important sources of revenue for the majority of Basotho. Grain now supplemented income derived, firstly, from labour migration and, secondly, from wool and mohair exports.⁸⁴ It is for this reason that prohibiting Basotho traders from dealing with wool and mohair was so important. But wool-mohair's displacement of grain as the primary export had implications for Basotho's food security.

Migrant labour was the fourth response by an increasing number of Basotho to their weakening position as the country's economy declined. As this will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters, suffice it to single out two important points here. Basotho migrants at first resisted taking longer contracts, preferring three to four months' contracts in order to return home to help with ploughing and harvesting. But as the situation changed, in the 1920s and 1930s, the length of the absence of men increased. Also, most Basotho men used to refuse to go to the gold mines, preferring the diamond mines where they were able to control their earnings. But the numbers going to the gold mines increased from the 1920s because of the vulnerability of diamond mines to economic

⁸³. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, pp.148-61; Ashton, Basuto, pp.134-35; Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.70-71, 163.

⁸⁴. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, pp.191-92.

recession.

By the 1920s, it had become an accepted practice among many Basotho that each man should go to the mines at least once in his lifetime, and boys were socialised into going to the mines. David Coplan has recently suggested on the basis of his anthropological research in Lesotho, that lebollo (the initiation school), which was in decline in the 1930s, came to play the role of preparing young men for the mines.⁸⁵ Moreover, Ashton had observed that "curiosity, a spirit of adventure, and admiration for returned miners with their airy, glamorous stories and enviable successes with local girls, encouraged youngsters to go out to work, and a spell of work in the mines has almost come to be regarded as an essential part of education, as a sort of initiation to manhood".⁸⁶

This suggests that as Basotho's relations with labour migrancy became more complex, noneconomic factors also came to contribute in pushing men to the labour centres. Moreover, as Chapters Two and Four will show, the involvement of chiefs in migrant labour went beyond economic interests. Concerned at losing control over their men, chiefs, including the Paramount, regularly visited the labour centres. Often, they also sent their sons to accompany the men; and it was also not uncommon for chiefs themselves, especially minor ones, to accompany the men. On the mines, chiefs and their sons were given special treatment and supervisory positions, as a way of ensuring closer control of labour.

But migrant labour had a number of implications for Basotho society. In the beginning, homestead heads were able to use their position to release cadets from herding to send them off as labour migrants. But, by the turn of the century, the proportion of married men leaving as migrant workers had increased not only because of droughts, epidemics and the

⁸⁵. D.B. Coplan, "Eloquent knowledge: Lesotho migrants' songs and the anthropology of experience", American Ethnologist, vol.14, no.3, 1987, p.415.

⁸⁶. Ashton, Basuto, p.164.

increased need for cash, but also because of the changes in the allocation and distribution of labour time which had resulted in men being freed of most of their precolonial occupations. But even so, men were not leaving on long contracts of the sort which became common from the 1920s onwards, and they generally returned home and settled down when they had reestablished their stock and productive base. Cases collected and surveys conducted by Ashton and Pim in the mid-1930s are useful indicators of the extent of changes in the migrant labour system during the period under discussion. The absence of alternative case studies makes Ashton-Pim's examples invaluable.

Case A

A Headman - Age 45 [Pim cited a case collected by Ashton] - His father was rich and there was no need for him to work. However, he was adventurous and, attracted by the glamour of the mines, he went to Kimberley in 1909. He spent a year there and sent home L12 with which he later bought a horse. After a stay of two years at home, during which time he was married by his father, he wandered about the South West Free State and finally ended up again at Kimberley. During this time he sent a blanket to his wife and his mother and L3 to his father. After about a year he went home with three blankets, some trousers, shoes and a hat. After a short holiday he went to the Premier Mine, and then on to Johannesburg on a nine months' contract. During this time he sent or took home seven or eight blankets and a couple of pairs of trousers. When he went home again he abducted a girl, who became his second wife. Soon afterwards he went to the Rand again, and sent a blanket to each of his wives and his mother. This was his last trip, for his father now began to feel the effects of a riotous middle age... so he had to take on the duties of headman. To pay tax he had sold most of the stock his father left him. He also acts as [labour] tout for a nearby store, for which he gets paid 11s. a month. This helps him to meet his obligations. Later, his two half-brothers went out on a nine months' contract, and never sent a thing home. They went purely for the experience, and for the novelty of the thing. When they came back they got married and have since remained quietly in the village. One lives with his mother and wife and two children; between them they have five fields, which enables him to pay tax. The younger died last year - age 33... He has two younger brothers. The elder of them, about 27, has been twice to Johannesburg. The first time he spent two years, then nine months. During the time of his return he got married, with eight cattle, after first eloping with the girl. These eight cattle were given for his sister.

Later, he gave another three which he bought with his earnings on the mines... The second brother, about 23, is at present in Johannesburg, where he has gone for the third time. He spends most of his money in Johannesburg, but used to send some back to buy cattle for him. Two of these cattle have now calved, and with this small herd and a further instalment from his sister's husband ... he hopes to get married.⁸⁷

Case B

[He] ... has been up to the mines three times, being away about five years altogether. He has spent most of his money in buying cattle and has been able to marry two wives, eloping with both. He paid five cattle for the first ... but has paid nothing yet for his second wife as he eloped with her only a couple of months ago... Another man in the village, of the same age as the above, first went to the mines with him. He went on three nine months' contracts, sending back money and blankets to his father, and to his wife, whom he married on his second visit home. When he was away the third time, his father died; he came back to arrange his affairs and after a short stay returned to the mines. That was three years ago, and he has been there ever since. He occasionally sends money home, or a blanket to his wife, and then only after considerable pleading by his women folk. Last year during the famine [1932/33] he only sent back about L2, all of which was used to buy food.⁸⁸

Cases A and B show that - compared to the tsoelopele class and the chiefs - much of poorer Basotho migrants' earnings were commonly spent in purchasing soft goods rather than agricultural implements.⁸⁹ But more important was that much of migrants' earnings were invested in cattle and bohali. As late as 1933, according to Pim, "the Basuto prides himself on the numbers of his cattle. His constant endeavour is towards increase".⁹⁰ Samples of bohali transactions collected by Colin Murray in his study of migrancy and marital strategy in Lesotho, show that the use of cash in bohali began to feature

⁸⁷. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.38.

⁸⁸. Ibid., p.39.

⁸⁹. It was estimated in 1976 that Basotho migrants spent 83 percent of their total earnings on luxury goods and clothing; see A.D. Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation and the Diffusion of Migrant Labour Remittances in Lesotho", in P. Mayer, (ed.), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), p.8.

⁹⁰. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.146.

prominently only in the late 1950s.⁹¹ Even my informants who married in the 1930s, indicate that they used their wage-earnings to purchase bohali cattle instead of paying their in-laws directly in cash.⁹² Therefore, unlike southern Mozambique,⁹³ Basotho managed to maintain the value of their cattle and pastoralism at least until the outbreak of World War II, despite the monetisation of exchange in their society.⁹⁴

But the bohali price was rising at the same time that most Basotho were becoming increasingly impoverished, and averaged between ten to twenty cattle in the 1930s.⁹⁵ With income from grain sales and wool and mohair exports declining, especially from the 1920s, men had to sell their labour to afford bohali. This had two consequences. On the one hand, Basotho men without cattle resorted, as cases A and B show, to chobeliso (eloping with women). On the other hand, many men remained unmarried right into their thirties. This, inversely, led to the increase in the number of single women of marriageable age.⁹⁶

Case A shows that by the 1920s and 1930s, parental control over migrants' earnings had weakened. Sayce observed in 1924 that "until recent years, when a man returned home from the mines, his wages were handed over to his parents. Nowadays, he often contents himself by presenting them with one or two

⁹¹. C. Murray, "Marital Strategy in Lesotho: The Redistribution of Migrant Earnings", African Studies, vol.35, no.2, 1976, pp.106-07.

⁹². See for example, interviews with Phomolo Matsabisa, born 1914; Pitso Sonki, born 1918; Thaba-Tseka Mokokolo, born 1920.

⁹³. P. Harries, "Kinship, Ideology and the Nature of Pre-Colonial Labour Migration: Labour Migration from Delegoa Bay Hinterland to South Africa, up to 1895", in Marks and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change.

⁹⁴. Ashton, Basuto, p.172.

⁹⁵. Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981), pp.62-87; Ashton, Basuto, pp.64-73.

⁹⁶. Basutoland, Litaba tsa Lekhotla la Sechaba sa Lesotho, (henceforth Litaba), 1923, p.250.

blankets".⁹⁷ And, noted Ashton, "formerly bachelors and women... were regarded as minors and therefore were not entitled to own or administer any property other than a few personal effects... Popular opinion in this matter is changing and unmarried men and women are now often allowed by their parents to keep private earnings and even their wages from continuous employment as domestic servants, school-teachers or mine-workers".⁹⁸ But this practice had no legal sanction according to codified customary law, and some parents successfully gained access to the earnings of their sons through the courts. Consequently, more and more cadets preferred to remit their money, as Case A shows, to friends who would buy cattle for them while they were away.⁹⁹

Moreover, cadets' independent access to cattle affected the practice of arranged marriages. Gone were the days when fathers used to pay bohali for their sons. This point was made by Pim:

Any earnings obtained by a young man were given to his father, and in return the father was responsible for the son's debts and misdeeds, and for supplying the "boyali" cattle for his first wife.

The labour market has opened a wide field for young men out of parental control, where they can earn and spend money as they wish. The tendency to break away from home is a natural result, as is the related tendency to choose their own mates.¹⁰⁰

But the increase in Basotho men's length of stay on the mines did not, as cases A and B show, necessarily bring more cash into the homesteads.

⁹⁷. R.U. Sayce, "An Ethno-Geographical Essay on Basutoland", Geographical Teacher, vol.12, 1924, p.287.

⁹⁸. Ashton, Basuto, p.178.

⁹⁹. Ibid., p.179.

¹⁰⁰. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.42.

Table 1.3: Pim's Interview of Three Categories of 100 Taxpayers Each in Guthing¹⁰¹

	taxpayers of less than 5 years standing (i)	taxpayers of over 5 years and less than 10 (ii)	taxpayers of over 9 years standing (iii)
1. Number found at home	32	40	70
2. Number found absent at:			
(a) Gold mines	55	15	17
(b) Farms	1	14	2
(c) Miscellaneous labour in SA	3	2	2
(d) Unknown and wanderers	6	16	5
(e) Total number absentees	68	60	30
3. Number who never worked in SA	6	13	29
4. Number who worked in SA	87	62	61
5. Av. no. of yrs absent to SA to work	1.4	4.45	6.5
6. Av. no. of yrs absentees have been away	1.2	2	1.75
7. Average no. of stock owned:			
(a) Cattle	.27	1.67	5.93
(b) Equines	.08	1.12	2.04
(c) Small stock	.57	26.2	30
8. Number with no stock at all	80	32	17
9. Average number of lands	.22	1.25	3.12
10. Number with no land at all	84	30	9
11. Average number of dependents	.67	2.93	5.88

¹⁰¹. *Ibid.*, p.41.

Table 1.4: Interview of 84 Thembu and 120 Sotho Taxpayers in Quthing by Pim¹⁰²

	Thembu %	Sotho %
1. Always at home	10.7	5
2. Are at home at present	63	40.8
3. Are working on the mines	29.76	33.3
4. Are working on farms	6	6.6
5. Are away from home working	35.7	56.6
6. Are at home but normally to mine	33.3	12.5
7. Are regular mine workers	63.09	45.8
8. Are retired miners and now peasants	15.4	13.3
9. Are at home but usually go on farm work	2.3	-
10. Are retired farm workers	3.5	8.3
11. Away at work over 2 years	9.5	25
12. Number at work but not remitting money	20	22.5
13. Number at work and remitting money	80	77.5
14. Number away on mines who are married	56	57.5
15. Number on mines not married	44	42.5

Tables 1.3 and 1.4 serve as important indicators of the position of labour migrancy in Basotho society and the distribution of wealth in the 1930s. However, one problem with these tables needs to be acknowledged. These surveys were conducted in Quthing, situated in the Highlands. The Lowlands, where most of the people were settled, would have been a better choice. Nonetheless, (i), (ii) and (iii) in Table 1.3 represent different age groups, even though the 300 informants did not necessarily belong to those specific age categories. The Thembu-Sotho distinction in Table 1.4 is artificial because people now considered themselves as "Basotho".

As the tax-paying age was 21, it can be assumed that in Table 1.3 (i) refers to men in their early 20s; (ii) to those in their late 20s and the 30s; and (iii) to older and retired men. This illustration then suggests that the older a Mosotho man became, the more the migrant experience was acquired and

¹⁰². *Ibid.*, p.40.

wealth accumulated. Taken with cases A and B above, Table 1.3 suggests that the average length of absence of many men to the labour centres in a single contract exceeded a year. Case A above also showed that as years progressed, the returning migrants tended to stay for shorter periods at home, with the frequency of new contracts increasing on the other hand. This suggests that even in the case of men who returned home after the expiry of their contracts, the tendency was now to stay for short periods and quickly leave on a new contract.

Moreover, socio-economic and political changes in the country had increased the number of landless and stockless people. Unlike the case in South Africa, labour tenancy and share-cropping never emerged in Lesotho because, at least, of the absence of an individual land tenure system and the absence of white settlement. But a survey conducted in the Highlands in 1936 concluded that 11 percent of the people had more than 20 head of cattle and 50 smallstock, while 30 percent had no land or stock.¹⁰³ Table 1.3 not only suggests that male ownership of land and livestock increased with age, but also that the number of cadets acquiring land and livestock was on the increase while that of homestead heads with no land nor livestock was also increasing. Those without stock and agricultural implements would sometimes get assistance from their relatives. Others hired these means of production from the rich in return for their labour. The problem with the latter was that Basotho in that situation began their ploughing quite late as the better-off would insist on their farms being worked first.¹⁰⁴

The notion of "developmental cycle" or "domestic cycle" is useful as a model to understand this correlation for men between access to migrant earnings and access to land and

¹⁰³. Ashton, Basuto, p.175.

¹⁰⁴. Ibid, p.125. The relationship between access to migrant earnings and the possession of land and livestock in Lesotho was noted by anthropologists in the 1970s. It was also estimated that migrant earnings accounted for 71 percent of the total income of an average rural household; see Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation", p.2.

livestock in Lesotho. The first phase of the cycle is when bohali is paid and presents given to in-laws to acquire a wife. The man would then stay with his parents, contributing to the homestead income in various ways. The second phase is when the newly-wed man, after some years with his parents, leaves to establish his own household. He would then need land, livestock, access to ploughs and family labour, and to regularly give his chief, headman, and friends presents as a sign of loyalty and to maintain relations. The third phase is when the sons in this new homestead are now grown-up and begin their migrant career. The homestead head would then retire and live from the proceeds of his sons' earnings and the labour of his daughters and wife (or wives). The fourth phase is when the homestead now begins to decline as a result of the sons' departure to set up their own homesteads. The homestead head would then sell his livestock to subsist and pay his tax, or even resort to engagements like farm work.¹⁰⁵

The first phase required cattle for bohali, and a regular inflow of cash was also critical to the subsequent phases of the cycle. But Table 1.3 seems to suggest that, at least in the 1930s, many Basotho homesteads had not yet degenerated to the point where the third stage of the cycle was followed by the process of decline as was found to be the case in the 1970s. What appears to be the case was that many Basotho men became migrant labourers in order to acquire stock, and then retired in their middle-age to concentrate on farming.

While dependency on labour migrancy was the result of the deteriorating position of the economy, the prolonged absence of men in turn further undermined the Basotho material base. This absence of men was a source of serious concern. According to Ashton:

Owing to the dearth of males, due to labour migration, the most varied combinations [in ploughing] may be found. Sometimes there is no leader, at other times boys of

¹⁰⁵. Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation", p.9; Murray, Families Divided, pp.97-99, 104-07.

twelve or thirteen may have to take the plough and girls and women often have to be inspanned as drivers or ploughmen. The effect of this absence of men is serious and an important contributory cause of the low standard of Basuto agriculture.¹⁰⁶

The impact of Basotho men's extended absence on women was captured in Azael Makara's 1936 poem ("I, the mother of the children feel the pain"). The poem is about the cry of distress of a Mosotho mother whose three sons and husband had abandoned her for work on the mines and for staying with prostitutes in Lesotho:

I have nobody to plough for me, I am suffering!
 Poor women who are left alone in Lesotho,
 They are crying, their cry is a touching one!
 There is no food, there are no children at home!
 Who is [moreover] to give a woman a child
 While her husband lives with prostitutes?
 I, the mother of the children feel the pain!

The poem then continued:

I go out to milk the cow,
 Every drop goes to the ground,
 There are no kids [to breast-feed], this milk is burning
 my breasts!..

Our chief Letlama is done
 He is left alone with few men,
 Old men of old tunes,
 People who sit on their knees;
 Tsoalla, Sehlahlo and Maele, where have they gone
 to?

They live underground in the shafts,
 The Boer is stamping and kicking!
 I, the mother of the children feel the pain!¹⁰⁷

It can then be argued that the process fuelling the emergence of women-headed households in Lesotho - a factor that was to attract scholarly attention in the 1970s¹⁰⁸ - was almost

¹⁰⁶. Ashton, Basuto, p.2. See also, Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.46.

¹⁰⁷. A. Makara, Liphsamathe, (Mazenod Book Centre, Lesotho, 19?), pp.102-07.

¹⁰⁸. Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation"; Murray, Families Divided; S. Wallman, "Conditions of Non-Development: The Case of Lesotho", Journal of Development Studies, vol.8, no.2, 1972; J. Gray, et al, "Lesotho: A Strategy for Survival after the Golden Seventies", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.16, no.4, November 1980.

complete by the 1930s. As migrants' earnings were now critical to subsistence in the homesteads, migrants who abandoned their families - 20 percent in Table 1.3 - must, as Makara's poem also suggest, have created great difficulties, especially for the abandoned wives. Many of these women, as Chapter Seven will show, turned to commercial beer-brewing and prostitution to close the gap in the income for their homesteads.

Migrant labour also provided avenues for Basotho youngsters, thus weakening parental control and the stability of extended families. In March 1905 ten Basotho chiefs and one headman in Mokhotlong addressed a petition to the Assistant Commissioner regarding "our children" working in South Africa who refused to return when ordered to do so, and those who were running away to the labour centres.¹⁰⁹ By the 1920s this was a serious concern with Basotho parents and chiefs raising an outcry about boys of ages as low as 12 and 15 years, who were deserting heardboy duties in order to take farm work in South Africa. A law was subsequently passed which required young men under the age of 21 who wished to take a labour contract to produce letters from their parents and chiefs. But this was not effective as some labour agents helped the youngsters to forge such letters.¹¹⁰

Chiefly and patriarchal control over women was also weakening. As early as 1892 Basotho chiefs were complaining about the problem of Basotho women "absconding" with their lovers to the Orange Free State and the fact that they were hampered in efforts to "recover" them. In that year chiefs presented a petition to the Resident Commissioner, and one of the grievances was their inability to recover "absconding" wives. During the South African War, a number of Basotho women went to Bloemfontein to work as washerwomen and engaged in commercial beer-brewing and prostitution. In March 1904 an

¹⁰⁹. LNA, S7/1/4/16, petition to AC (Qacahs Nek), 3 March 1905.

¹¹⁰. *Litaba*, 1923, pp.263-71.

informal agreement was made with the Resident Magistrates of the Free State border towns of Ladybrand, Ficksburg, Fouriesburg, Wepener, Rouxville and Zastron, to help repatriate Basotho women who took refuge there. Bethlehem and Harrismith joined the arrangement in 1906 as the "problem" continued to spread. This arrangement was questioned in 1913 on legal grounds. In 1915 Proclamation No.3 was passed at the insistence of the chiefs. It required Basotho women wishing to leave the country to have a pass signed by their husbands or fathers.¹¹¹ Controlling women was essential to the homestead because of their reproductive and productive functions. But, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, these measures were not successful, and by the 1930s Basotho women were a significant feature of the Witwatersrand.

Conclusion

Labour migrancy in Lesotho was, therefore, not solely the result of "underdevelopment", as Basotho had been working in the Cape Colony and the Free State as a strategy to rebuild their material base some decades before their encounter with merchant capital, missionaries and colonial rule. But the transformed nature of a growing number of Basotho's dependency on labour migration was the result of the combined impact of their encounter with the latter forces on the one hand, and ecological disasters on the other. As migrants' earnings became critical to the income of Basotho household, men began to accept longer contracts, their bargaining power also weakening.

But the capitalist penetration of Lesotho and colonial rule had uneven impact on Basotho. Some sections, especially

¹¹¹. For cases of "absconding" women, see VAB, CSO 2364/06, CO 404, correspondences of the Orange River Colony Colonial Secretary, 1904 to 1910. CAR, 1898-99 and 1892-93; Friend, 17 May 1898; J. Kimble, "Runaway Wives? Basotho women, chiefs, and the colonial state, c.1890-1920", School of Oriental and African Studies Seminar Paper, University of London, June 1983.

members of the dominant lineage group and their political associates, benefited from commodity production. The tsoelopele class, formed in mission schools, also joined the latter section as the elite in Lesotho. These survived ecological disasters and continued farming with some success - even investing their income in other profitable fields. The majority of Basotho families, however, had to turn to labour migrancy to survive. The next six chapters largely focus on this section of Basotho society.

CHAPTER TWO

MIGRANTS AND MIGRANCY, c.1890-1930s

The migration of Basotho to labour centres in southern Africa began as early as the 1820s when many (mostly with their families) fled from their villages to take refuge in the Cape Colony at the height of the socio-political turmoil in the Transorangia. This was, however, a qualitatively different form of early migrancy as these Basotho were primarily refugees, and many returned to their homes in the 1830s and 1840s after peace had been restored to the Transorangia. A turning point came in the 1870s after the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley, which ultimately transformed the socio-political and economic map of southern Africa. By 1877, c.5 000 Basotho were employed at this new mining centre. Some were sent by their chiefs, in most cases to acquire guns for the defense of the Basotho polity; others were missionary converts seeking money to purchase European dress and other goods; still others were the victims of the 1860s wars of dispossession.¹

The Orange Free State and Cape Colony farms, and Kimberley diamond mines, established themselves as the leading employers of Basotho labour. It was, however, the discovery of gold in 1886 on the Witwatersrand which had long-term implications for Basotho. The number of Basotho migrants at other employment centres dwindled as the years progressed, while those heading to the gold mines increased. By the mid-1920s an average of 15 000 Basotho were employed annually on the Witwatersrand or Rand mines.

Because the gold mines still occupy a central position in

¹. Eldredge, South African Kingdom, pp.184-86; Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland, c.1870-1885", in Marks, and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change.

Lesotho today, this chapter will focus on the process towards and the dynamics of Basotho's shift to the gold mines. It will be argued that this shift to the gold mines was the result of Basotho's weakening position and growing dependence on migrant labour.

Gold Mines in the Early Years

The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand did not affect Basotho's migratory pattern until 1888. Moreover, the total number of migrants leaving Lesotho was insignificant in comparison with the years that were to follow. At this stage, migrants' remittances were merely a supplement to homestead income; only 398 migrants left Maseru during the fiscal year 1885-86, and only 1 840 "visiting" and "labour" passes were issued in Mhales Hoek during the same period. Between 1888 and 1889 labour agents representing the Rand gold mining companies began to arrive in Berea and Maseru districts, and managed to recruit "large parties of men".²

On the Rand itself, outcrop mining was initially conducted by hundreds of claimholders whose labour requirements were much smaller than those of deep-level mining some years later. The first major turning point was a crisis in 1889 which was sparked by the discovery that the pyritic rock in which the gold was embedded required sophisticated and expensive technology for maximum recovery. This led to the collapse of the share market as investors panicked. Wages for African workers were then reduced but, many of these miners, including Basotho, returned to their rural homes. The technological

². Great Britain, "Further Correspondence Respecting the Cape Colony and Adjacent Territories, 1884-85", c.4589, British Parliamentary Papers, (BPP), vol.17; "Further Correspondence Respecting the Cape Colony and Adjacent Territories, 1886", c.4838, BPP, vol.18; "Despatch from Sir Hercules Robinson, with Report of the Resident Commissioner, Basutoland, for the year ending 30th June 1887 and Secretary of State's Reply Thereto", c.5238, BPP, vol.47; CAR, 1888-89; 1890-91.

crisis was resolved by the introduction of the MacArthur-Forrest gold-recovery process in 1892. This, together with the shift to deep-level mining in the course of the 1890s, required heavy investment. Small claimholders gave way to conglomerates, especially the Rand Mines company (formed in 1893) and the Consolidated Gold Fields of South Africa.³

The first large batch of Basotho to the gold mines arrived in August 1889 in a manner that even attracted the attention of the Star:

The peaceful citizens of Johannesburg who went on marketing this morning must have been somewhat startled as a rather singular procession made its way across the market square. At the head of this small army rode three of the Mounted Police. Behind them, on a shaggy Basuto pony, rode a short stout gentleman of dusky and dusty appearance. This was Mama [Maama], son of Letsie, Paramount Chief of Basutoland. Mama was immediately followed by four lesser native dignitaries, also mounted, and behind them marched 150 Basutos in close order, with their polished kerries inclined at the same angle over their shoulders, with karosses or many-coloured blankets falling over their well-proportioned limbs, singing their marching song; while one finely-formed native executed the war-dance in front of them. The meaning of this cortege is speedily explained. Mama, the grandson of Moshesh, was bringing up 150 of his subjects to work in the mines.⁴

This was seen as a political move on the part of Paramount Chief Letsie who had sanctioned this expedition in order to dispel a rumour that was being spread by the Orange Free State Boers that war was imminent with Lesotho. With Maama as their overseer, the 150 men signed a three-months contract with the Jumpers Company. But the men refused to work when they discovered that they were going to be paid 15s per week

³. P. Richardson, and J.J. Van-Helten, "Labour in the South African gold mining industry, 1886-1914", in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation and Social Change; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860-1910, (James Currey, London, 1994), p.109. For the most recent account of the significance of deep-level mining, see E.N. Katz, "Outcrop and deep level mining in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War: re-examining the Blainey thesis", Economic History Review, vol.68, no.2, 1995.

⁴. Star, 10 August 1889.

instead of L1.5s, as promised by the labour agent who had recruited them in Lesotho. Maama wanted to leave immediately with his men, but was persuaded by the local landdrost to stay. However, he was later summoned to appear before the court for "breach" of contract, but he fled with his men to Lesotho.⁵ The following year Lesotho, the Free State and the Cape Colony, all put together, supplied only 937 black labourers to the gold mines. By comparison, 4 657 came from southern Mozambique alone.⁶

The shortage of labour on the Rand mines, together with the relative strength of most indigenous economies, as the case of Maama cited above demonstrates, strengthened the hand of African workers against employers and kept wages comparatively high. But, as Frederick Johnstone has noted, the cost structure of the mines was a matter of serious concern to the Randlords. Besides the costly overheads required, mines on the Rand contained ore of low average grade. And the fixed price of gold meant that production costs could not be passed on to consumers. It was only the cost of labour that could be significantly reduced.⁷ The Randlords resorted to two major strategies. Firstly, there were the attempts to cut wages, especially in 1890, 1896-97, and 1902. Parallel to this were the efforts made to expand the geographic area from which labour was to be recruited to deal with the shortage of labour and keep the price of the labour power of local recruits low. The Shangaan from southern Mozambique came to play a central role in this regard.⁸

A second strategy included attempts to reduce the costs incurred in securing labour. This involved trying to reduce competition among the Randlords by establishing a monopsony in

⁵. Ibid., 12 August 1889; 23 August 1889.

⁶. CAR, 1890-91.

⁷. F. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa, (University Press of America, New York, 1976), pp.13-49.

⁸. Richardson and Van-Helten, "Labour in the South African gold mining industry"; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.129-40.

labour recruitment for the gold mines. The formation of the Chamber of Mines in 1889 laid the basis for the coordination of the activities of the Randlords. But it was the establishment of the Native Labour Department in 1893 which aimed at reducing competitive labour recruitment. This Department was, however, weak in terms of resources and did not enjoy the support of the whole industry. The formation of the Rand Native Labour Association in 1896, with the support of most companies except those of J.B. Robinson, was another attempt. These early efforts eventually came to fruition with the formation of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association in 1901 and the Native Recruiting Corporation in 1912.⁹

Relations with the state were still more problematic. Most Randlords regarded Paul Kruger's government as unsupportive, especially with regard to its labour policies, railway rates, the high cost of dynamite, and taxation policy. Ironically, Kruger was unwilling to help the mines recruit labour, and was particularly unsympathetic to the use of "foreign" labour. The Randlords, however, saw the Shangaan as critical to the labour needs of the industry. Shangaan recruits stayed on the mines for up to three years (compared to local recruits whose contracts averaged three to six months); and were largely employed underground while local recruits preferred surface work. But Kruger was forced to intervene when the Chamber of Mines took the initiative in negotiating a labour deal with the Portuguese in 1893 to regulate the emigration of Shangaan labour. In this way a Luso-Transvaal ad hoc labour agreement was reached in December of that year. The agreement, however, had little practical significance as most of the Shangaan labourers came from areas outside Portuguese control. Moreover, the Luso-Gaza war of 1894-95 led to many Shangaan employees leaving the mines to take up arms at home. At the same time, the Gaza monarch took measures to prevent men from

⁹. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.145; A.H. Jeeves, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890-1920, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1985), pp.37-84.

leaving for the mines. This sudden drop in the Shangaan supply coincided with the labour crisis that had worsened in 1895 as more deep-level mining operations were pushed ahead. With some 40 000 Africans employed in January of that year, the Chamber indicated that there was need of another 20 000 recruits to rescue the situation. It was in this context that the abortive Jameson Raid of December 1895 took place, as attempts were made to overthrow the Kruger government to replace it with a government more sympathetic to the cause of the gold mines.¹⁰

Though the raid was a failure, Kruger realised that his government's position would not be secured unless at least some of the Randlords' grievances were addressed. Among the measures which followed was the 1896 Pass Law which aimed at curbing labour desertion and competitive recruiting on the Rand. Kruger also supported the 1896-97 wage cuts and the extension of the working month from 24 to 30 shifts. In November 1897, while African miners reacted to these wage cuts by withdrawing their labour, Kruger, together with the Chamber, successfully negotiated a new labour agreement (on the basis of the 1893 deal) with the Portuguese for a regular supply of the Shangaan labour. This step, together with the measures undertaken by the Portuguese (in the conquered territories) which included the imposition of hut tax and intensifying land alienation, increased the Shangaan labour supply.¹¹ The proportion of Shangaan workers on the gold mines increased from 50 percent of the total African force in 1890 to 75 percent in 1899.¹² Together with this phenomenal

¹⁰. P. Harries, "Capital, State, and Labour on the 19th century Witwatersrand: A Reassessment", South African Historical Journal, vol.18, 1986. See also Katz, "Outcrop and deep level mining".

¹¹. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.141-73; idem, "Capital, State, and Labour".

¹². According to Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.140: "The phenomenal success of management in bringing through and holding a wage reduction of well over 20 percent while at the same time increasing the work force by 21 percent, depended on the recruitment of cheap Mozambican labour".

increase in Shangaan labour went an increase in the overall African labour force,¹³ necessitated by the shift towards deep-level mining during 1890-95, while over much the same period expenditure on labour dropped from 25 percent of total working costs to about 20 percent.¹⁴

But continued dissatisfaction on the part of the mining industry, or at least, a section of it, with the Transvaal government was among the central factors that led to the South African War (1899-1902); and eventually an end to Kruger's regime.¹⁵ The post-war government of Lord Milner (1901-07) and the Het Volk government that followed, increased the state's efforts to support the cause of the Randlords. Of significance here was the importation and use of some 53 828 Chinese labourers between June 1904 and January 1907, to address the labour shortage that followed the South African War, and the establishment of the Government Native Labour Bureau in 1907 by the Het Volk government.¹⁶

These developments and struggles affected the Basotho and the recruitment of their labour in various ways. The Jameson Raid led to many Basotho fleeing home in panic, convinced that an Anglo-Boer war was about to take place.¹⁷ Some Basotho

13. The total number of African mine employees increased from 10 000 in 1889 to 90 000 in 1898.

14. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.145.

15. For differing perspectives on the causes of the South African War, see S. Marks and S. Trapido, "Lord Milner and the South African State", History Workshop, no.8, 1979; idem, "Lord Milner and the South African State reconsidered", in M. Twaddle, (ed.), Imperialism, the State and the Third World, (British Academic Press, London, 1992); A. Porter, "The South African War (1899-1902): Context and Motive Reconsidered", Journal of African History, vol.31, 1990; I. Phimister, "Unscrambling the Scramble for Southern Africa: The Jameson Raid and the South African War Revisited", South African Historical Journal, vol.28, 1993; Katz, "Outcrop and deep level mining".

16. P. Richardson, Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal, Macmillan, London, 1982; Jeeves, Migrant Labour, pp.37-58.

17. One correspondence wrote to the Friend of the Free State, 28 January 1896: "I have passed hundreds of [Basuto] natives on the road returning from Johannesburg, where they appear to have got a great fright, as bad as the Cornishmen who cleared from Johannesburg".

chiefs, including Paramount Chief Lerotholi, even prevented their men from going to the goldfields. Many of the Orange Free State farmers who were abandoning their farms to join their Boer compatriots across the Vaal River, spread a rumour to the effect that Basotho were preparing to attack their republic, and this led to many of Moshoeshoe's men being turned back at the Transvaal border.¹⁸

Before 1896 the Chamber of Mines had not regarded Basutoland as a key recruiting area. In 1895, Ernest Mabile, who had been dismissed from his service as a Paris Evangelical Society missionary, was commissioned by the Chamber to investigate labour recruitment possibilities in the country. But with the rumours of war circulating in the region in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid, labour for the gold mines became very scarce. At this point the Chamber appealed to Sloley, who was then the Acting Resident Commissioner, and appointed Mabile as the RNLA's agent in Basutoland in February 1896. Sloley indicated that his government was prepared to help the gold mines but that the number of agents operating in the country made labour recruitment very competitive and difficult.¹⁹ It was also during this time that an outcry against "unscrupulous" labour agents began to be heard. A certain Frantz Ferreira was even expelled from Lesotho as he had recruited some Basotho and later induced them to desert to enrol them with another employer.²⁰

Towards the end of 1896 the rinderpest epidemic reached southern Africa, killing cattle in Lesotho until around August 1897. This led to restrictions on the movement of people and livestock. Naturally, the number of migrants leaving Lesotho was affected; only 11 778 passes were issued for labour

¹⁸. Friend, 28 January 1896; 7 April 1896; CAR, 1895-96.

¹⁹. Chamber of Mines Annual Report, (CMAR) 1895, p.54; 1896, pp.54, 151-53. For an extended discussion of Mabile's significance for the evolution of the system of labour recruitment, see the section "Recruitment, Competition and Labour Agents" in this chapter.

²⁰. CAR, 1895-96; CMAR, 1896, pp.140, 151-53; Friend, 28 January 1896; 7 April 1896.

purposes during the fiscal year 1896-97, as compared to 28 115 for the previous year. During this crisis, Basotho recruits for the Rand, Free State and the Cape Colony, were required to leave from Aliwal North, via Quthing. One labour recruiter in the north in Peka, George Thorn - working with one prosperous trader, Charles Stevens - then negotiated a shorter route with the Free State authorities. By April 1897, Thorn was assembling his recruits at Steven's store, from where he intended to accompany them to Johannesburg by train from Winburg. Arriving in Johannesburg, the recruits were free to go to the mine of their own choice but arranged for the deduction of 15s from their wages to pay Thorn for his services. Those who needed Thorn at the expiry of their contracts contacted him through Ernest Mabile who was now working for the South African Compound and Interior Mission at the Simmer and Jack gold mine. So successful was Thorn's scheme that by July had employed three Basotho labour touts. Thorn now sent his men to the Robinson gold mine for surface work; and those who wished to choose their own mine now had to pay him L1. The RNLA itself only managed to obtain recruits from Lesotho after the lifting of the restrictions towards the end of 1897.²¹

1898 opened with a civil war between the followers of Masupha and the Paramount Chief Lerotholi and this coincided with a drought; their combined impact meant that Basutoland faced the worst crisis since the civil war of the mid-1880s. Towards the end of 1898 many Basotho started flocking to the labour centres on an unprecedented scale; 30 274 passes were issued for labour purposes in 1897-98 and 37 371 for 1898-99. This large exodus of Basotho reflected the hardship that most people had endured in the aftermath of rinderpest which had killed about 80 percent of their stock; drought; the outbreak of smallpox; and civil war that disrupted production in the country and destroyed many villages, especially in Berea. The exodus was so large that the mounted police in Ficksburg were

²¹. CAR, 1896-97; 1897-98; CMAR, 1897, p.117; Leselinyana la Lesotho, 1 April 1897; 15 July 1897.

unable to control the influx of Basotho into the district.²²

As large numbers of Basotho flocked to their offices, labour recruiters celebrated this "trade in what has been aptly termed - Basutoland ebony".²³ In Mochales Hoek, some labour agents encouraged Basotho to leave, even smuggling some out without acquiring passes and paying the hut tax. Traders and labour agents also "speculated" in Basotho men, as a recruit could be sold two to three times before finally settling to work.²⁴

But the gold mines fared badly in this competition for Basotho labour. This caused the Chamber of Mines, which blamed the scarcity of labour on recruiters who lied to recruits, to write to the governments of Basutoland, Natal, Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, to propose that laws be passed requiring labour agents to be supplied with accrediting letters by their employers. The Resident Commissioner in Basutoland agreed, but still nothing was done. Pressure to control the activities of labour agents also came from the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce, which passed a resolution at its November 1898 annual meeting, requesting that the government appoint a labour agent to monitor labour recruitment in the country. The following month, labour agents were required to carry certificates from their companies but, in the absence of any legislation, no effective control was achieved. The Chamber of Mines, still wanting to take hold of Basotho labour, continued to appeal for help until the outbreak of war in 1899 intervened.²⁵

During early stages of the war, production was suspended on

²². Friend, 30 September 1898; 17 August 1897; 9 August 1898; 30 September 1898; 18 October 1898; 9 December 1898; 23 December 1898; CAR, 1897-98; CMAR, 1898, pp.57, 68, 70, 446; 1899, p.58.

²³. Friend, 23 December 1898.

²⁴. Ibid.

²⁵. Ibid., 30 September 1898; 17 August 1897; 9 August 1898; 30 September 1898; 18 October 1898; 9 December 1898; 23 December 1898; CAR, 1897-98; CMAR, 1898, pp.57, 68.

the mines, and problems of the mines' labour supply and labour agents were left largely to the future. Many Basotho instead found alternative employment in the army and on railway construction.²⁶ In July 1900 the Chamber of Mines attempted to resume production and labour recruitment, and obtained a few recruits from Lesotho. Around November 1901 the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) which replaced the RNLA, established agencies in Lesotho with Mabile as one of its operatives. But the Association was unable to find more than a handful of recruits due to the reduction of the wages on the gold mines, and was forced to suspend its operations.²⁷ Before the war African miners earned between 49s.9d and 53s.9d per month on gold mines, but this was reduced and fixed at the maximum average of 35s per month and the minimum of 30s by the Chamber in 1900. The maximum average wage was then reset at 50s per month in 1901, but this did not lead to an immediate improvement in the labour supply. By comparison, the British army offered very high wages. An agent recruiting for the De Aar military depot for L3 per month with clothing and food rations, was said to be accounting for 90 percent of recruits leaving Basutoland in March 1902.²⁸

The 1903 drought led to serious food shortages in Lesotho, and large quantities of staple foodstuffs had to be imported. A large number of migrants left the country on a scale bigger than that of 1898; in October 1903, 50 Basotho were passing through the Bethlehem district per day for work on railway

²⁶. Central Archives Depot (SAB), SNA 15, NA 274/02, Superintendent of Works (Johannesburg) to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 31 January 1902; SNA 10, NA 363/01, Provst Marshall telegram to Lagden, 12 December 1901; VAB, CO 57, 557/02, RC to Paramount Chief (henceforth PC), 10 February 1901; P. Warwick, Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), pp.52-74.

²⁷. SAB, SNA 7, NA 127, RC to High Commissioner (henceforth HC), 24 October 1901; WNLA to RC, 25 October 1901.

²⁸. CMAR, 1900; 1901; 1903; CAR, 1901-02; SAB, SNA 19, NA 494/02, Tulley to WNLA, 10 March 1902. See also, S. van der Horst, Native Labour in South Africa, (Jutas, Cape Town, 1942), pp.164-75.

construction.²⁹ In 1903-04, for the first time ever, the number of passes issued for labour purposes exceeded those issued for "visiting". By the end of the fiscal year 1902-03, 60-70 000 "labour" passes had been issued and the following year the figure climbed to 98 022.³⁰

In February 1903 WNLA resumed its operations in Lesotho. Charles Tulley, a trader in Maseru since the 1890s, was chosen to head the new operation on the recommendation of the former Resident Commissioner, Godfrey Lagden, who was the chief of the Native Affairs Department recently established by Milner's government. A letter was sent to Paramount Chief Lerotholi urging him to encourage his men to go to the gold mines and informing him about the new wage scale which was now 60s for underground work and 50s for surface work.³¹ In April WNLA proposed a scheme to the Resident Commissioner Sloley to facilitate the flow of labour and eliminate labour touts. WNLA would provide forms for chiefs to give to those Basotho men wishing to go to the Rand mines on six months contract. Such recruits would be received by WNLA agents in Winburg and Thaba Nchu who would then forward them to Johannesburg. The agents were then to stamp and return the forms to centres in Basutoland where they would serve as L1 tax for each recruit. But the proposal was not accepted.³²

With Tulley described as having no "time or, I suppose, the money to go into it [recruitment] on a large scale", WNLA announced two months later that it was employing two other traders, Douglas Fraser and Charles Stevens: "They have undertaken to work the country thoroughly, and will act as our sole agents in Basutoland, as we shall withdraw all recruiters, and only work through them and their employees".³³ Fraser was to work in the south, and was given

²⁹. VAB, CO 225, 7536/03, Orange River Colony, (ORC), Divisional Commandant to Colonial Secretary (henceforth Col. Sec.), 23 October 1903.

³⁰. CAR, 1902-03; 1903-04.

³¹. LNA, S7/730, WNLA to PC, 4 February 1903.

³². LNA, S7/7/30, WNLA to RC, 8 February 1903.

³³. Ibid., WNLA to RC, 24 April 1903.

a letter for Lerotholi; while Stevens was given the northern operation, and a letter to Chief Jonathan. WNLA's new organisation, combined with the effects of drought, increased the number of its recruits in Lesotho and the Orange Free State from 421 in 1902 to 2 037 in 1903. But this improvement was still below the gold mines' labour requirements, and Fraser later resigned, disillusioned by Basotho resistance to work on the gold mines. In fact, the continuing labour crisis on the gold mines led to the importation of Chinese workers in 1904. The imminence of the repatriation of this indentured labour led to the collapse of WNLA in South Africa and the British Protectorates in 1906, as some member-companies, panicking and foreseeing a crisis, had begun recruiting independently. WNLA's recruits from Lesotho, having increased dramatically after 1903 to reach 2 350 in 1905, then dropped to 939 in 1906 (see Table 2.1). There was a slight increase in 1908 when WNLA succeeded in recruiting 980 from Lesotho and the Free State; even so, nearly 5 000 were recruited independently by the Chamber's member-companies. The following year the Association's best efforts brought precisely nil recruits. This compared to 4 093 recruited independently by various mining companies.³⁴

Table 2.1: Numbers Recruited by WNLA in Lesotho and the Orange River Colony, 1901-06.

Year	No.
1901	91
1902	421
1903	2 037
1904	1 771
1905	2 350
1906	939

Source: CMAR, 1906, p.606.

The Chamber's attempts to turn Basutoland into a single, dependable recruiting ground had not been successful. Quite

³⁴. CMAR, 1908, p.xi; 1909, p.3.

apart from the problem of competition for labour, there was the fact, discussed in the previous chapter, that the combined impact of ecological factors and colonial conquest and rule had not affected the Basotho economy to the same extent as it had in southern Mozambique. Moreover, the colonial authorities in Basutoland had no stake in privileging one employer over the other, while the Portuguese by contrast, benefited from a deal in Shangaan labour by obtaining customs and railway rates concessions. And, as discussed in Chapter One, many Basotho were able to survive the crisis of the 1890s. Their economy was also less monetised than some of their neighbours, as cash had not yet supplanted cattle in crucial transactions like bohali as among the Shangaan.³⁵

Anarchy and Crisis

Until 1903, the colonial government made no serious effort to control the competition, or the "anarchy", in the system of labour recruitment in Lesotho. Although the 1898 boom in "Basutoland ebony" had demonstrated the necessity of controlling the activities of labour agents, the South African War had placed the problem on hold until 1901. When the British army applied to the Basutoland government for Basotho recruits in 1902, the Government Secretary pointed out that labour was not plentiful because of the number of agents competing for labour in the country. He suggested, however, that the army "should select some smart young fellow with experience in dealing with natives, and send him to me", in order that he might "explain to him our few simple 'Labour Regulation' and put him in the way of commencing his work".³⁶ The colonial government had not yet committed itself to regulating the system of labour recruitment. It was

³⁵. P. Harries, "Kinship, ideology and the nature of pre-colonial labour migration: labour migration from the Delegeo Bay hinterland to South Africa, up to 1895", in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation and Social Change; idem, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.141-73.

³⁶. VAB, CSO 5338/02, CO 117, GS to Divisional Commissioner, 17 November 1903.

only following pressure from the chiefs, the Chamber of Mines, the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce, and with the 1903 drought affecting agricultural production and the payment of tax, that the government was forced to regulate the activities of the labour agents.

Basotho migrants themselves were able to use the competition among labour agents and the absence of an active government role to their advantage. Primarily attracted to particular occupations by high wages, relatively good working conditions, and shorter lengths of contract, Basotho men used this crisis to go to employers of their choice. When the annual colonial report began listing destinations of Basotho migrants in 1898, the category "farm and domestic" accounted for most of the men who took out the "labour" passes in that year, followed by the 5 971 and the 4 494 who were destined to Johannesburg and Jagersfontein, respectively. From 1903, a category "miscellaneous works" started featuring in the annual colonial report; and during 1905-06, 46 486 "labour" passes were issued under this category, as compared to 14 012 for Johannesburg, 18 802 for "farm and domestic" work, and 12 699 for the Orange Free State mines. By declining to reveal their destinations, or by simply claiming to be heading to the Cape Colony and Free State farms, Basotho migrants could avoid binding themselves to labour agents. This gave them the freedom to shift from one employer to another if they wanted to. In some instances in later years, the colonial government even tried to intervene on behalf of the Randlords, by refusing to issue passes to Basotho men wishing to go to the Witwatersrand on their own.³⁷

The South African Native Affairs and the Transvaal Labour Commissions established in 1903 by Milner's government to investigate the labour question in British South African territories were able to establish some of factors behind Basotho's avoidance of the gold mines. Among these were the wages; the six months contract; underground work; and the

³⁷. CAR, 1897-97 to 1905-06.

treatment of the sick.³⁸ The Basutoland National Council also sat in 1903, and similar complaints were communicated to the High Commissioner. Lagden, now the head of the Native Affairs Department, regarded Basotho chiefs as people who "are characteristically brusque and need not be taken too seriously as they are in the habit of overstating their case very often upon unsupported evidence of boys who return from labour with a desire to magnify their difficulties and minimise the result in hard cash". His "Inspectors are always ready to listen to real grievances and to remedy them at once. My instructions to them are to discriminate carefully and not to disturb the whole economy of the Mines by entertaining or encouraging vexatious complaints".³⁹ This attitude did not help to improve the reputation of the gold mines among the majority of Basotho.

The deliberations at the Basutoland National Council resulted in the proclamation of the Labour Agent Bill in December 1903, which marked the first major attempt to control the activities of labour agents in Basutoland. Each recruiter was to carry a license valid for not more than twelve months, at the cost of 10s a month. In the application for a license, the agent was to specify the name and address of his employer, the nature of work, and the wage scale.⁴⁰ But even this measure did not bring order to the recruitment system. Some individuals came into the country, paid 10s for a one-month license, gathered recruits with false promises, and disappeared.⁴¹

With the situation gradually worsening, the Paramount Chief convened emergency meetings with the Resident Commissioner in October and November 1906, at which the activities of agents

³⁸. South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-1905: Minutes of Evidence, vol.4; Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission Together with Minority Report, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, cd.1897, 1904.

³⁹. SAB, SNA 196, NA 325/04, Lagden to HC, 16 February 1904.

⁴⁰. SAB, SNA 196, NA 325/04, Labour Agent Proclamation, 11 December 1903; RC to HC, 12 November 1903.

⁴¹. LNA, S3/3/1/6, RC to HC, 4 February 1904; CAR, 1902-03; 1903-04.

who were accused of robbing Basotho were discussed. The newspapers, especially the Friend of the Free State and the Rand Daily Mail, publicised these meetings. The Friend of the Free State was concerned with the interests of the Orange Free State diamond mines, and the Rand Daily Mail with those of the Rand mines.⁴² At the height of this conflict, one trader, Alfred Sterley, asked the colonial government to give him the monopoly of recruitment in the country in order to eliminate labour agents and competition. He was ready to open branches in all districts, abolish "native" touts, set aside half of his profit for a charity fund, and deposit L1 000 with the government as security. The Resident Commissioner did not accept the proposal, possibly because of not wanting to give the whole recruitment business to a single trader. Another trader in Butha Buthe, J. White-Smith, also approached the government in June 1907 with a proposal to establish a monopoly of recruitment in Leribe for the same reasons as Sterley.⁴³

The solution was found in the passing of a proclamation in August 1907 to amend the Labour Agent Bill. The new law streamlined the definition of labour agents, and gave them the right to employ African "runners and messengers" (or labour "touts"). The most effective measure was to require all agents to deposit L100 with the government as security; licenses were to be for a year instead of a month. This legislation put many agents out of business. Numbers dropped from 298 in 1906-07 to 69 and 30 in 1907-08 and 1908-09, respectively. An amendment to this Bill in December 1912 laid the framework for dealing with "deserters", and proclaimed that all contracts were now to be written down. The following year in January, the Resident Commissioner issued a circular instructing all his Assistant Commissioners to issue labour recruiting licenses only to agents who intended to reside in

⁴². LNA, S7/7/37, RC to WNLA, 18 November 1906. Clippings from these newspapers are attached to this correspondence.

⁴³. LNA, S7/7/39, J. White-Smith to RC, 18 June 1907; S7/7/37, A. Sterley to RC, 1 November 1906; GS to Sterley, 20 November 1906.

Basutoland.⁴⁴ These measures laid down the legal infrastructure for managing the recruitment system; addressing principally the question of unscrupulous recruiters and labour deserters. This change in the government's attitude was due to the increasing centrality of labour migration in the economy and Basotho society.

Employment Frontiers

The establishment of a legal framework to manage the system of labour recruitment and migration went together with the re-orientation of Basotho migrants from other employment sources to the gold mines.

Table 2.2: Number of Basotho employed in the Transvaal

Year	Mines and Works	Other
1903	1 874	3 503
1904	1 398	4 319
1905	3 303	5 002
1906	3 593	5 462
1907	5 832	4 058
1909	4 346	4 022
1910	8 210	2 565

Source: CMAR, 1903 - 1910.

⁴⁴. For the proclamations, see Basutoland, Orders in Council, High Commissioner's Proclamations, and Government Notices, 1868-1916. See also LNA, S3/3/1/6, RC's circular to ACs, 7 January 1913; S7/7/39, Sterley to RC, 18 July 1907; S7/7/37, Secretary for Native Affairs (henceforth, SNA) to RC, 3 September 1906; CAR, 1906-06; 1908-09.

Table 2.3: Territorial Analysis of Basotho employed in Transvaal, July 1903.

District	Mine and Works	Other Employer
Johannesburg	349	2 749
Krugersdorp	510	126
Boksburg	237	61
Vereeniging	62	71
Germiston	693	250
Springs	5	82
Heidelberg	9	138
Klerksdorp	9	26

Source: Transvaal Native Affairs Department, Annual Report, 1903.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 show that up to 1905 most of Basotho who were employed in the Transvaal were outside the mines. In 1905, the Chamber of Mines reported that "although large numbers of these [Basotho] natives leave their homes to seek outside work for short periods, most of them are absorbed by domestic employment in Johannesburg and other large towns, and by the outdoor service of municipalities".⁴⁵ And as far as Basotho then on the gold mines were concerned, a number of them were employed as hospital staff. In 1904 at the City and Suburban mine, the workers there were said to be "well cared for by the Compound Manager and superior Basuto assistants"; the Randfontein gold mine employed a "good staff of Basuto and Xosa boys" for hospital service, and an "educated Basuto attendant" was responsible for health services at the Village Deep mine.⁴⁶ WNLA tried in vain to induce Basotho migrants to accept standard four-month and six-month contracts in 1904 and 1905, respectively. The Chamber finally accepted that "this territory [Basutoland] therefore does not afford much assistance to the labour requirements of the mines".⁴⁷

Besides having worked for municipalities and mine hospitals, Basotho had a long history of working on railway construction in Natal, the Orange Free State and the Cape Colony; they also

⁴⁵. CMAR, 1905, p.xxvi.

⁴⁶. Ibid., 1904, pp.25, 30, 33.

⁴⁷. Ibid., 1905, p.xxvi.

benefited from the post-South African War boom in railway works. The bulk of the 2 326 workers employed on the Bloemfontein-Modderpoort railway line in 1903 were Basotho "who are...only willing", the Chamber of Mines was told, "to undertake this work owing to the fact that it is of a congenial nature, and that it lies in a close proximity to their homes, so that if this number were released from railway work it is doubtful whether they would swell the number available for work on the mines".⁴⁸

Natal coal mines and sugar plantations, and farm work in the Free State and the Cape Colony, were other alternatives. But most Basotho migrants avoided working on the coal mines, because of poor pay and working conditions there. The Chamber of Mines wrote in 1895 in relation to applications for labour from its affiliated companies that "one application stands over from a coal company, awaiting the arrival of suitable men. Basutos refuse to work in coal, and it is useless supplying men who, through discontent, are certain to desert".⁴⁹ Nor were Natal sugar plantations popular with Basotho migrants due to their low wages and its hot climate.⁵⁰

Farm work in the bordering colonies had been an important source of income for many Basotho migrants prior to the mineral revolution. But as the mines became the most popular destination, farm work came to provide employment mainly for mine-work rejects, the aged, juveniles, and women.⁵¹

As early as January 1888, Basotho were being enrolled in the

⁴⁸. *Ibid.*, 1903, p.87. The Harrismith-Bethlehem line employed 328 workers; the Springfontein-Jagersfontein, 31; and railway work on the Reef, 583. The workforce in the Orange River Colony was largely from Lesotho.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, 1895, p.38. At the end of the 1930s, several thousand Basotho were working on coal mines; see Table 2.10. Their history, however, falls outside of the scope of this thesis.

⁵⁰. Ashton, *Basuto*, p.163.

⁵¹. LNA, S3/5/18/1, "Memorandum on Native Labour Recruitment in Basutoland", 1928.

Bechuanaland Mounted Police. In 1896 some 250 Basotho were sent, with the help of the Resident Commissioner and his Assistant Commissioners, to help British South African Company forces suppress the Ndebele Rising in Southern Rhodesia.⁵² This experience was in sharp contrast to the Transvaal where the Chief Staff Officer of the South African Constabulary, after an unsuccessful experiment with Basotho police recruits, wrote to the Secretary of the Native Affairs Department in December 1903 asking for a suggestion of better recruits for the Rustenburg district. "The local natives are useless for Police purposes being unreliable [sic], and the natives of Basutoland who have been tried in the Western Transvaal Division, S.A.C. have not been a success, they were of a bad stamp and could not speak any other language than their own".⁵³ Similar experiments with Basotho police recruits continued for another 20 years,⁵⁴ but the only real success was in Bechuanaland.

Bechuanaland remained the major employer of Basotho police recruits until well into the 1920s. The Bechuanaland Resident Commissioner would contact his counterpart in colonial Lesotho, stating the numbers required. His Basotho counterpart would then notify the Paramount Chief and send a circular to his Assistant Commissioners who, in turn, asked local chiefs to identify and send possible candidates. Sometimes the Bechuanaland government would send an experienced Mosotho in their service to Lesotho to help with the recruitment and selection of the men. Arriving at the offices of the Assistant Commissioners, the men would be selected according to age (the preferred age being between 23 and 32 years) and height (the preferred height being between 5.1 to 5.10 feet). Conduct, the level of discipline and obedience, past police or military experience, the level of literacy and multilinguality, also

⁵². Friend, 1 July 1898; F. Barkly, Among Boers and Basutos, (Roxburghe Press, United Kingdom, 1896), p.247.

⁵³. SAB, SNA 188, NA 3157/03, Chief Staff Officer to SNA, 15 December 1903.

⁵⁴. In December 1920 some Basotho were recruited for police service in Kimberley; see SAB, GG 50/53, vol.1870, RC to HC, 29 March 1921.

counted.⁵⁵ Medical examinations were thorough. In 1930 medical officers charged the Bechuanaland administration 10s.6d per recruit examined, compared to the 1s they charged for mine recruits. A medical officer examining one police recruit took the time equivalent to that required for examining at least fifteen mine recruits, because "...in addition to the examination which is required for a mine recruit, there is entailed, in the case of a Police recruit, comparative chest and abdominal measurements, test of height as compared with weight of the individual, examination of the nervous and digestive systems, and test of urine for albumen and sugar".⁵⁶

Recruits who passed the medical and other tests were given a 10s to 12s advance, a railway warrant, and put on the train. At the same time, their names were mailed to the Resident Commissioner in Mafikeng. Contracts varied between six months and two years. Wages were quite high; in 1908 a sergeant earned L6 per month, a corporal L5, and a trooper L3. And Basotho remained an important component of the police force in Bechuanaland until their repatriation in 1920.⁵⁷

However, it was the diamond mines which were the major employer of Basotho labour in the period before the 1920s. Basotho had a long history of working in Kimberley where they

⁵⁵. Among the nine candidates selected in Mafeteng for the March 1918 batch were these cases: "Joel, No previous service, speaks and writes English, talks Zulu and some Dutch, age 26"; "John Lekhoaba, Served France [during World War I], good discharge, talks and understands English, young and smart, age 25"; "Keatsi, Served France, good discharge, writes Sesuto and talks a little English. Age 30 but does not look it"; "Johannes Masiu, No service, writes and reads Sesuto, understands Dutch. Good with horses, a groom, Age 28". See LNA, S3/21/3/1, Memorandum, "Candidates for Bechuanaland Protectorate Police", 23 March 1918.

⁵⁶. LNA, S3/21/3/1, RC Basutoland to RC Bechuanaland, 17 September 1930.

⁵⁷. LNA, S7/7/39, Sterley to RC, 18 July 1907; S7/7/41, RC Bechuanaland to RC Basutoland, 20 October 1907; S7/7/44, RC Bechuanaland to RC Basutoland, 26 June 1908. LNA, S3/21/3/1, RC Bechuanaland to RC Basutoland, 24 April 1920; RC Bechuanaland to RC Basutoland, 14 March 1930; Leselinvana, 17 March 1922.

were the third major source of labour after the Shangaan and Pedi.⁵⁸ But with Cecil Rhodes' De Beers Consolidated Mines establishing a monopoly in 1888 and cutting back on diamond production in order to control prices, the number of African miners employed on Kimberley mines dropped from 11 300 in 1887 to 6 000 in 1890.⁵⁹ For Basotho, though, the cutbacks at Kimberley were somewhat compensated for by the boom in diamond mining in the Orange Free State.

Table 2.4: Number of African Workers Employed on Orange River Colony Diamond Mines, 1905-08

Year	No.
1905	4 659
1906	4 934
1907	5 975
1908	5 694

Source: Orange River Colony Mines Department, Annual Report, 1905 - 1908.

Table 2.5: Average Number of Basotho Employed on Selected Diamond Mines

Mine	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917
De Beers	1736	1893	n/a	646	1458
J/fontein	2374	2180	-	240	437
K/fontein	293	226	-	9*	48

Source: SAB, GNLB 97, 220/13/100, H.S. Cook to Colonel Creswell, 26 January 1928.

* only for the period June to December.

At the Jagersfontein and Koffyfontein mines,⁶⁰ Basotho came to be one of the key components of the labour force. Labour

⁵⁸. See, W.H. Worger, South Africa's City of Diamonds, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987), pp.64-109; R. Turrell, Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871-1890, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), pp.19-31.

⁵⁹. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.66.

⁶⁰. For a detailed history of this mine, see D.C. McGill, A History of Koffiefontein Town and Mine, 1870 to 1902 and 1902 to 1980, (The Author, Koffiefontein, 1991).

for Jagersfontein, the leading Free State diamond mine, was primarily supplied by Lesotho and the Cape Colony. Of c.6500 employed on this mine in 1912, about 4000 came from the Cape Colony and 2 000 from Lesotho. In 1910, an average African contract or piece-worker at Jagersfontein earned 2s.2d per truck loaded.⁶¹ So popular was Jagersfontein that labour never had to be recruited except in isolated instances.⁶² The mine spent about 5s on each of the small number of recruits in 1914, and this was substantially lower than the gold mines' recruitment expenses.⁶³

The Transvaal Premier Diamond Mine at Cullinan, (40 kms east of Pretoria) came to be a particularly attractive mine for Basotho migrant workers. The mine began operations in 1903 and within a year, employed 2 000 Africans. The Pedi of the Northern Transvaal were initially a major source of labour for this mine because of their relative proximity to Cullinan and

⁶¹. Orange River Colony Department of Mines, Annual Report, 1905 to 1908; Union of South Africa, Native Affairs Annual Report, 1910; Friend, 31 January 1896; 16 June 1896; Great Britain, Royal Commission on the Natural Resources, Trade, and Legislation of Certain Portions of His Majesty's Dominions: Minutes of Evidence Taken in the Union of South Africa in 1914, Part II, pp.20-23.

⁶². Jagersfontein maintained an agent in Maseru during the period of anarchy, but by 1917 Basotho were arriving on their own. In 1923 the Government Secretary wrote to the Assistant Commissioner of Mhales Hoek that "it is not necessary for labourers desirous of going to Jagersfontein to go to labour agents, in fact a great number are known to go there direct". See, LNA, S3/3/1/8, GS to AC (Mhales Hoek), 17 December 1923.

⁶³. The Chamber of Mines was paying as much as L4 to agents for each recruit in the 1890s; between 1903 and 1904 the fee increased from L3.5s to L5 for a recruit for a 12 months contract, L1.12s to L2.10s for six months contract recruit, and L1 to L1.5s for a locally recruited migrant for three months contract; see, van der Horst, Native Labour, pp.129, 192. It was reported (CMAR, 1903, p.ix) that one of the reasons why Free State mines were so popular - possibly the Jagersfontein mine - was because "in addition [to the better food they supplied], [they] give all underground boys one tot of rum a day". Jagersfontein also supplied its workers with rations of tobacco (at least until 1914).

their long experience of working at Kimberley.⁸⁴ Basotho, also with a long history of working on diamond mines, saw the Premier Mine as an important source of employment in the Transvaal and an alternative to working on the Rand gold mines.⁸⁵ Basotho and Pedi came to be key sources of labour for the Premier Mine, hence the only two recruiting agencies of the mine in 1907 were in Pietersburg and Maseru. The number of Basotho on this mine increased from 849 between October 1905 and September 1906 to 1 768 between October 1906 to September 1907; the latter figure was almost half of the total 2 952 Basotho employed in the Transvaal between July 1906 and June 1907. This rapid increase in the Basotho numbers employed at the Premier was also made possible by the dramatic increase in the number of labour migrants that followed the 1903 drought. By June 1910, 4 000 Basotho were employed on this mine alone (Table 2.6). The dramatic increase in the average number of Basotho employed in Mines and Works in the Transvaal between 1904 and 1907 (see Table 2.4) was largely due to the opening of this mine. Hence a drop in 1908 due to the 1 486 Basotho who left the Premier Mine after a "faction fight" there in September 1907.⁸⁶ When one Basutoland official visited the major Transvaal mines in October 1911, he found Basotho distributed as in Table 2.6.

⁸⁴. See P. Delius, "Migrant Labour and the Pedi, 1840-1880", in S. Marks, and A. Atmore, (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa, (Longman, London, 1980); idem, "Sebatakomo; Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.15, no.4, 1989, p.582.

⁸⁵. Premier Mine was even popularly known among Africans as "Pikinini Kimberley" - Little Kimberley.

⁸⁶. Premier (Transvaal) Diamond Mining Company: Annual Report (PDMAR), 1907, p.10; SAB, SNA 465, NA 1578/10, Acting Assistant Director of Native Labour to Imperial Secretary (henceforth Imp. Sec.), 9 June 1910; LNA, S7/7/40, "Report as to Disturbance at Premier Mine", 6 September 1907. See also Chapter Six for a discussion of "faction fighting" at the Premier Mine.

Table 2.6: Basotho in Selected Mines and Works, 1911.

Mine	No. employed
Nourse G.M	12
City Deep G.M	25
City and Suburban	500
Cason G.M	471
New Gogh G.M	23
Premier Mine	2000*

Source: SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, George Boyse's report to RC, October 1911 (undated).

* about 4000 were employed in July 1910; the decrease was due to a "riot" on the mine in June 1910.

The Managing Director of the Premier Diamond Mining Company was therefore partly correct when he told the Royal Commission in 1914 that "the Basutos are very fond of the diamond mines; they have been working in them for years, and they love this contract work, more particularly the loading. They go to the diamond mines more readily than the gold mines, and I think you will find that we have more Basutos than the whole of the gold mines put together".⁶⁷

In 1914 an average African worker at this open-cast mine earned 3s per shift; piece-work in loading paid a minimum of 3s.4d and a maximum of 4s.6d per shift or, fortnightly, L11.2s.6d; and drilling paid 2s.11d per shift as a minimum and 3s.2d as the maximum. This compared very favourably with the 1s.8d maximum average wage per shift on the gold mines. But recruitment also played an important role in supplying the Premier Mine, because of its proximity to and competition from the gold mines. Of the 21 605 Africans employed on this mine in 1907, 13 088 had made their own way there. The balance of 8 517 had been recruited by labour agents. Of the 17 862 on the mine in 1910, 13 017 had been brought by the agents. From 1912 the Premier Mine, in an attempt to reduce recruitment costs, developed a strategy for encouraging voluntary labour by offering a L1 bonus to workers who arrived on their own at

⁶⁷. Royal Commission, p.38.

the mine. This system worked well, gaining popularity among Africans, until when it was suspended in 1926 when the mine faced an over supply of labour. By the 1930s the Premier Mine was employing between 6 000 and 8 500 Basotho workers.⁶⁸

There are several reasons which explain the popularity of diamond mines among Basotho migrants. One argument, used in the case of the Premier and Kimberley mines, is that African workers were attracted by the system of buying their own food from the mine stores.⁶⁹ But this would not explain the popularity of the Jagersfontein mine which supplied food rations to its workers.⁷⁰ Another argument, accepted by Judy Kimble, was that Basotho resisted the gold mines because of underground work.⁷¹ However, Donald Fraser told the Transvaal Labour Commission in 1903 that Basotho initially resisted underground work at Kimberley and but later adapted, and that they were also in the process of accepting to this type of work on gold mines.⁷²

In fact, there appear to be three principal reasons which best explain the popularity of diamond mines. Basotho were attracted by contract or piece-work in loading, which offered

⁶⁸. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.44; SAB, NTS 2076, 163/280, Clerk (Rayton) to Sub-Native Commissioner, 10 April 1926; SAB, NA 209, 2279/1914/F473, General Manager (Premier Mine) to SNA, 22 June 1916; Royal Commission, pp.33-42; South African, Mining and Engineering Year Book, 1920-21, p.103; 1921-22, p.30.

⁶⁹. The Manager of the Premier Mine told the Royal Commission that one of the reasons that made his mine popular was: "I think... the system of feeding themselves... By feeding themselves they can get just what they fancy, instead of having a rigid ration of mealie meal served out to them...". See Royal Commission, p.35.

⁷⁰. The Orange Free State Inspector of Mines justified to the 1914 Royal Commission the Jagersfontein practice of issuing food rations: "If you allow boys to ration themselves, the tendency, as has been proved on several occasions, is for them to neglect their food in order to save as much money as possible. I have heard that this has led to considerable mortality". See Royal Commission, p.20.

⁷¹. Kimble uses testimonies to the Transvaal Labour Commission. See Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", p.238.

⁷². Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission, p.219.

them greater control over the labour process and their earnings. They organised themselves in groups to load the trucks, setting targets, and therefore increasing their earnings per shift. Secondly, the three-four months contract on the diamond mines, compared to the six months contract on gold mines, allowed Basotho men time to return to their homes for ploughing and harvest. Finally, one common observation was that "the open workings on the diamond mines with the ever possible chance of picking up a diamond and being rewarded, attracts the native".⁷³ The Manager of the Premier Mine cited "the possibility of finding stones" as one of the reasons accounting for the popularity of his mine.⁷⁴ In 1914, African miners were rewarded with up to L100 at the Premier Mine for handing over any diamonds which they had picked up. There was in any event a flourishing underworld traffic in diamonds in the Orange Free State, with Basotho and Boers in the forefront.⁷⁵

Recruitment, Competition and Labour Agents

Labour agents, as the previous section has indicated, also played a role in stabilising the migrant labour system. Among those who played a crucial role in shaping the system was Ernest Mabile who was expelled from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in 1894 after a case of adultery with his Mosotho servant. Mabile then wandered about, trying to obtain a job with the Dutch Reformed Church, and to start his own missionary training college in Johannesburg. Back in Lesotho, Mabile was commissioned by the Chamber of Mines' Labour Commissioner in 1895 to investigate possibilities of labour recruitment in the country, and in February of the

⁷³. ORC Mines Department, Annual Report, 1907, p.6.

⁷⁴. Royal Commission, p.35.

⁷⁵. This illicit trade in diamonds had been taking place as early as the 1880s; some Basotho stole diamonds in Kimberley and sold them to Boers at one-tenth of the price. On this, see P. Hadley, (ed.), Doctor to Basuto. Boer and Briton, 1877-1906: Memoirs of Dr. Henry Taylor, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1972), pp.143-44.

following year was made local representative of the Rand Native Labour Association. Not certain that this authority would suffice, he wrote to the Resident Commissioner Lagden asking for "the support of your influence and authority to recommend me to the chiefs and their people".⁷⁶ In March 1895, he appealed to Sloley who was then the Government Secretary: "I may add that although I have undertaken the work in order to gain a living, still my great desire is to be of use to this tribe. Would you consider that you were using favouritism if you would give instructions to the government officers when boys take passes to mention my name as being the permanent Representative of the Chamber of Mines for Basutoland".⁷⁷ He also sent a circular to traders in the country informing them about his new position and his scheme, asking them to help him in return for a capitation fee. He later toured the country with Lagden and an RNLA agent, visiting several chiefs to urge them to encourage their men to go to the Rand mines.⁷⁸

But Mabile was not happy with his position. He wanted Lagden to make him a Basutoland agent in Johannesburg: "...you will understand that in my circumstances I must try everything to find a means of living. If I have undertaken this Labour Agency in this country on behalf of the Chamber of Mines, I have always considered it as something temporary, and as a *pis aller en attendant mieux* [a stepping stone]".⁷⁹ Lagden proposed to second him as interpreter for the 250 Basotho being sent for police service in Matabeland later that year, but Mabile turned down the offer. By the end of April Mabile had abandoned his job with the RNLA, and in June he left for Johannesburg to take a job with the South African Compound and Interior Mission at the Simmer and Jack gold mine. With the outbreak of the South African War, he left the Transvaal in October 1899 for Lesotho. Between April 1900 and

⁷⁶. LNA, S7/7/18, Mabile to Lagden, 28 February 1896.

⁷⁷. Ibid., Mabile to GS, 14 March 1896.

⁷⁸. Johannesburg Times, 4 April 1896.

⁷⁹. LNA, S7/7/18, Mabile to Lagden, 23 April 1896.

June 1901, he worked as a Chief Interpreter at the Railway Native Labour Depot in Bloemfontein. Later, he became the Superintendent of the Native Refugee Camp in Klerksdorp, and in December 1901 he took a job with the Chamber of Mines as the WNLA agent in Lesotho. There he stayed until May 1902 when he joined the Native Affairs Department (NAD) at the invitation of Lagden. Mabile combined his job at the NAD with labour recruitment and missionary work. In the process he won for himself the appellation "Ralikoata", that is, "father/keeper of Basotho migrants".⁸⁰

In October 1906, at the height of the labour agent crisis in Lesotho, Mabile placed an advertisement in a number of Sesotho newspapers. It introduced his labour recruiting partnership with a certain McComb. But when the Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB) was formed the following year, Mabile was made responsible for Basotho affairs. He later returned to Lesotho to work for the labour contractors Marwick and Morris between 1911 and 1913, recruiting labour for the East Rand Propriety Mines. In 1920, after years of demonstrating his piety, as well as his commitment to Basotho, he was invited back to the Paris Missionary Society.⁸¹ As a labour recruiter/contractor, missionary, and NAD/GNLB official, Mabile was able to leave his mark on the system of labour migration. The savings agency which was set up by the NAD in 1902 (see Chapter Three), the Basutoland Johannesburg Agent established in 1932 (see Chapter Three), and the expansion of the Paris Missionary Society to the Rand in 1922 (see Chapter Five), were all due to his initiatives.

⁸⁰. Leselinyana, 15 November 1906; LNA, Maseru, Letters Despatched (1906-08), AC (Maseru) to GS, 6 September 1906; SAB, RAD 160, 4025-4026, "Claim for Compensation" form, 7 April 1903; Journal des Missions Evangeliques, 1929, pp.559-62.

⁸¹. Paragraph based on LNA, S7/1/4/22, Labour Agent licences issued, 3 January 1912; S7/1/4/23, Labour Agent licences issued, 18 January 1913; SAB, LD 762, AG 2610/04, Secretary for Law Dept. to SNA, 7 November 1904; LNA, Maseru, Letters Despatched (1906-08), AC (Maseru) to GS, 6 September 1906; SAB, RAD 160, 4025-4026, "Claim for Compensation" form, 7 April 1903; Journal des Missions, 1929, pp.559-62; Naledi ea Lesotho, 4 June 1907; Leselinyana, 15 November 1906.

As in other parts of Southern Africa, traders also played an important role in labour recruitment. The most important traders in Lesotho in the 1890s were George Hobson, Douglas Fraser, Alfred Sterley, Charles Tulley, and Charles Stevens. Hobson, Fraser and Sterley were the major traders in Maseru during the South African War, even preventing the government from issuing new trading licenses. Fraser began his activities in Lesotho in the 1870s and, by 1911, had 27 trading stations in this country and the Free State. He entered into an arrangement with Stevens in 1888, dividing Lesotho between themselves; he took the south, and Stevens the north. By 1911, the latter had 19 trading stations in the Free State and Lesotho. Though Hobson's operations were not as widespread as those of Fraser and Stevens, he was, however, the leading white settler-citizen in Lesotho from the 1890s to the end of the 1910s. He chaired the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce from its inception in 1890 for 27 years. But, except in isolated instances, Stevens, Fraser and Hobson, never focused their operations on labour recruitment. It was Tulley and, especially, Sterley, a trader in Maseru since the 1890s, who went into labour recruiting in a big way - of the two, Tulley was in the weaker position. His poor finances led to his dismissal as a WNLA agent. In 1903 Sterley, on the other hand, was the leading labour recruiter in Lesotho until 1910.⁸²

The most successful labour recruiting partnership in Lesotho during this period was the Basutoland Native Labour Bureau which was formed by Wright, Todd, Lacey and Gilchrist in 1907. The BNLB was very active during the years of "anarchy" discussed above, even changing hands in the process, and

⁸². Paragraph based on D. Ambrose, Maseru: An Illustrated History, (Moriya Museum and Archives, Lesotho, 1993), pp.81-140; T. Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation and Improvement: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.12, no.2, 1986; J. Walton, Father of Kindness and Father of Horses: A History of the Frasers Limited, (Moriya Printing Works, Morija, 1958); LNA, S7/7/57, AC (Maseru) to GS, 15 December 1910; S7/7/39, Sterley to RC, 18 July 1907; S7/7/41, RC to SNA, 17 December 1907.

ultimately being taken over by Midgley and Wright. After the passage of the 1912 Labour Agent Proclamation which made it unlawful for companies to be issued recruitment licenses, the two owners simply applied for a license each. In 1919 the two agents were registered as recruiting for the De Beers diamond mine, Randfontein Central gold mine, "farm work", and the Free State Sundry Diamond mines. The company was dissolved in 1922, though Midgley remained in labour recruitment for another six years.⁸³

The formation of the GNLB in 1907 under the directorship of H.M. Taberer, was an attempt by the Het Volk government to intervene and improve the supply of labour for the gold mines. In 1908, however, Taberer left his position as the director of the GNLB to head the newly-formed Native Labour Department of H. Eckstein/Rand Mines company. This new scheme was another attempt to establish a monopsony for the Rand mines since the collapse of WNLA in South Africa and the High Commission territories. When the Native Recruiting Corporation was formed in October 1912 with Eckstein/Rand Mines' Labour Department at its core and Taberer as the chairman, only J.B. Robinson refused to join. By the 1920s, after Robinson had joined the NRC in 1919, and with the rural economies of Basotho and similar areas in decline, the Randlords found themselves in a position of strength.⁸⁴

The transformation of Eckstein/Rand Mines labour company into the NRC with Colonel Maitland Brown as its Superintendent in Basutoland, opened a new phase in the recruitment system in the country. Sterley and Tulley, the leading agents during the

⁸³. SAB, GNLB 226, 499/15/53, GS to Director of Native Labour (henceforth, DNL), 12 September 1918; LNA, Maseru Letters Despatched (January 1906 - January 1908), AC (Maseru) to RC, 25 December 1907; LNA, S3/3/1/2, AC (Maseru) to RC, 27 January 1922; S3/3/1/13; AC (Maseru) to GS, 7 October 1928; S3/3/1/4, Labour Agent licences issued, 19 January 1919; Leselinyana, 17 July 1908, 19 June 1908; Naledi, 17 July 1908.

⁸⁴. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, pp.121-50; Great Britain, Report of Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, 1908, and Correspondences as to Affairs of Basutoland, cd.4196.

period of "anarchy", continued to operate for some time longer, but by as early as January 1912, the two were no longer recruiting for the gold mining industry. Sterley tried his luck for another 24 months after the formation of the NRC, recruiting for marginal employers such as the Voerspoed diamond mine in the Free State and the Germiston municipality. For his part, Tulley was simply swallowed by the NRC. He was employed as its sub-agent in Maseru until 1919.⁸⁵

Sterley was replaced as Lesotho's leading labour agent by Maitland Brown, an Australian who came to South Africa during the South African War to serve in the army. Although he arrived in Lesotho around 1909, he only became a factor in labour recruitment when he took a job with Eckstein/Rand Mines' company in 1911. E.H. Stephens, another Australian who arrived in South Africa during the war, eventually became Lesotho's second most important recruiter after Brown. Stephens was employed as an overseer by the Premier Diamond Mine where he worked for nine years before being sent to Lesotho in 1915 to recruit for the mine. He later became known as "Mafafa" to Basotho because of the "bags" of money he gave to chiefs who induced their men to take labour contracts with him. By the mid-1920s he had established his own Stephens Labour Organisation, which had taken over many of the independent firms outside the NRC. He diversified into business in the 1930s, opening a store (close to the NRC office) and buying a hotel in Maseru. The third leading agent after Stephens was a Mafeteng trader, George Stuart, who had got into labour recruiting around 1912 while working for the Hadley Labour Organisation. By the 1920s, these three men - Brown, Stephens and Stuart - dominated labour recruitment in Lesotho. They elbowed out independent recruiters, standardising the system to suit themselves.

⁸⁵. LNA, S7/1/4/22, Labour Agent licences issued, 3 January 1912; S7/7/65, Mabile to GS, 8 March 1913; S7/1/4/25, Labour Agent licences issued, 2 February 1917; S3/3/1/4, Labour Agent licences issued, 19 January 1919; S3/3/1/13, Labour Agent licences issued, 3 January 1928; Leselinyana, 18 March 1911.

As labour agents became better organised, they started lobbying the colonial government over certain aspects of their enterprises. In February 1917 a delegation of labour agents met with the Resident Commissioner to raise complaints over the way in which the recruiting system was working. They demanded, among others, that the Labour Agent Bill be amended to define tout-agent relations along master-servant lines. They also wanted more power to be given to touts in order that they might enforce the terms of contracts, and so exercise more control over recruits to prevent desertions.⁸⁶

This white-cum-NRC domination of the labour "business" adversely affected those Basotho petty traders who saw recruitment as an important avenue of capital accumulation. The period of "anarchy" had in fact provided opportunities for entrepreneurial Basotho and the tsoelopele class to take their own chances, despite Sterley, Tulley and the BNLB. Even the general secretary of the Basutoland Progressive Association, Simone Phamotse, tried his hand at recruiting for the South African Railways in September 1911.⁸⁷ At the time of the establishment of the NRC in Lesotho, Jack Maoba, acting for the Eckstein/Rand Mines group in Leribe, was the most prosperous Mosotho labour recruiter. He was later joined by Thomas Mofolo - the famous Mosotho novelist - in 1912. Mofolo, a product of Paris Evangelical mission schooling, had left Lesotho in 1910 after an adultery case to exile himself in Northern Rhodesia, and later went to Johannesburg to join

⁸⁶. This paragraph and the preceding one based on LNA, S7/1/4/35, Labour Agent licences issued, 2 February 1917; S3/3/1/4, Labour Agent licences issued, 19 January 1919; S3/5/18/5, RC to Brown, 8 March 1917; S7/1/4/22, Labour Agent licences issued, 3 January 1912; S3/5/18/11, General Manager (Premier Mine) to RC, 8 November 1927; Ambrose, Maseru, p.135; Basutoland News, 29 October 1929; 12 June 1951.

⁸⁷. Among other independent Basotho recruiters during this period were one Emmanuel Lichaba (Mafeteng), Chief Letlatsa (Maseru), Chief Molapo Seetsa (Leribe), Jack Maoba, James Makepe (Leribe), Elijah Koloti (Butha Buthe), D.M. Molapo, Joseph Dichabane (Maseru). See, LNA, S7/1/2/32, Labour Agent licences issued, 3 January 1912; S7/7/65, AC (Leribe) to GS, 3 September 1912; LNA, L1/3/14, SAR Native Labour Superintendent to AC (Leribe), 30 September 1911; Naledi, 27 January 1911.

Ernest Mabile. It was through this connection that he was despatched to Leribe in 1912 as a sub-agent for the Eckstein/Rand Mines group. But although Maoba was not particularly successful, Mofolo went on to accumulate enough wealth to establish a mill in Teyateyaneng in 1921, as well as a mail/taxi service between there and Ficksburg. When his position improved still further, Mofolo extended his little empire in the 1920s, recruiting for several diamond mines, farms, and a number of Natal sugar estates. He also opened stores in Bokong and Teyateyaneng. In 1937 he sold his property to buy a farm in Matatiel, but later became bankrupt after a futile struggle to protect himself from the Land Act in South Africa.⁸⁸

Maoba and Mofolo were exceptions, however. Labour recruitment was dominated by whites men, most of whom were traders. One strategy employed by the NRC, Stephens and Stuart, was to open sub-agencies in other districts through the employment of touts, thereby avoiding the necessity of taking out labour agent licenses and the payment of the L100 deposit. This was one of the demands raised by the delegation of labour agents with the Resident Commissioner in February 1917 meeting, as a result of which a circular was sent to the various districts informing them that touts were to be considered as having the Power of Attorney for their employers. This meant that they could contract recruits without the labour agent having to be physically present. By the 1920s, thanks to this practice, Mofolo was the only Mosotho labour agent operating in the country. All other labour recruitment was now in the hands of the NRC, as well as Stephens and Stuart, who were operating from their headquarters in Maseru and Mafeteng. This provoked protests from the Basotho elite, and at a meeting with the Resident Commissioner and his Assistant Commissioners in

⁸⁸. LNA, S3/3/1/10. AC (Leribe) to GS, 2 August 1925; G.H. Franz, "The Literature of Lesotho", Bantu Studies, vol.4, 1930; D.P. Kunene, Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1989), pp.29-41; Dictionary of South African Biography, vol.1, 1968, p.551; E.W. Smith, "Thomas Mofolo", Africa, vol.19, no.1, 1949; Basutoland Witness, vol.4, no.2, April-June 1951.

November 1923, it was agreed that a mechanism should be worked out to limit the number of sub-agencies "staffed" by touts. The Government Secretary later met with Brown, Stephens and Stuart, all of whom opposed the proposal. Brown argued that any changes to the prevailing system would increase competition and the cost of labour. The idea was then dropped.⁸⁹ The overall result, as in the case of trade, was that the colonial state effectively frustrated the further development of the tsoelopele class.

Shift to the Gold Mines

Basotho migrants began entering the gold mines in larger numbers after the turn of the century, attracted primarily by piece-work in lashing and tramping (that is, shovelling ore into the trucks which were then pushed). This piece-work was popularised by labour contractors who had expanded their operations from production to labour recruitment during the labour "shortage" crisis which was sparked by the collapse of WNLA in British South Africa and the phasing out of Chinese labour on the gold mines. At first, labour contractors would enter into an agreement with a mining company to perform certain operations on the mine, but when the gold mines experienced a labour crisis and competition became rife during 1906-1912, many contractors despatched their own labour agents to the supplying areas. For example, J.S. Marwick of Marwick and Morris deployed labour agents in Swaziland, Zululand and Lesotho to supply the East Rand Propriety Mines with labour; A.M. Mostert deployed his in such places as Lesotho and the Northern Transvaal to supply Robinson Randfontein Estates; and "Kaffir" Wilson operated in areas such as Zululand, Swaziland

⁸⁹. LNA, S3/3/1/3, Brown to GS, 24 January 1924; S3/5/18/2, AC (Butha Buthe) to GS, 7 February 1929; S3/5/18/7, RC's circular to ACs, 4 June 1931; LNA, QN Circulars (October 1917 to December 1919), Circular no.5, 11 November 1917; LNA, MH 3/1/5, minutes of the meeting of Assistant Commissioners, 19-20, November 1923.

and the Eastern Cape.⁹⁰

So popular was piece-work in lashing and tramping among growing numbers of Basotho migrants during this period that Sesotho newspapers carried advertisements with headlines: "Setoko/Stokwe!" - a term that had entered the Sesotho vocabulary to refer to contract/piece-work.⁹¹ Some Basotho migrants preferred this piece-work because shovelling ore allowed them to bring their diamond mine experience where they specialised in working in loading trucks in groups. These were probably the "poorest" strata of the Basotho society who found it difficult to compete for better-paying diamond mine jobs. And, as on the diamond mines, this piece-work gave workers more control over their earnings, as some gold mines payed very high rates for every 100 trucks loaded.⁹² Some Randlords were aware of the relationship of this type of work to Basotho's preference for loading on the diamond mines. The East Rand Proprietary Mine asked its labour agent in Maseru in August 1910 to find recruits for lashing and tramping, because "no special knowledge is required and the work may be said to be exactly the same as that which the boys do in the diamond mines".⁹³ Also, contract workers enjoyed relative freedom as they partly controlled the pace of their work, not withstanding the fact that lashing and tramping were the most physically arduous tasks of all underground work. Between 1909 and 1914 the number of Basotho as a percentage of the total African workforce on gold mines rose from three to seven percent, partly due to piece-work.⁹⁴

⁹⁰. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, pp.92-99, 109-12, 158-60, 243-47.

⁹¹. Although some issues of these papers are missing, the surviving ones give us an idea of the extent of competition for piece-work labourers. See, for example, Mochochonono, 30 September 1911; Leselinyana, 18 February 1911; Naledi, 27 January 1911.

⁹². On how piece-work system worked at the Wankie colliery in Southern Rhodesia, see I. Phimister, Wangi Kolia: Coal, Capital and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1894-1954, (Baobab Books, Harare, 1994), especially pp.122-24.

⁹³. LNA, Miscellaneous Letters (Maseru), 1910, Manager (ERPM) to L.E. Turvey, 10 August 1910.

⁹⁴. Jeeves, Migrant Labour, p.158.

Piece-work in lashing and tramping on gold mines was so popular that it even became a subject of the Government Native Labour Bureau enquiry in February 1913. Among the issues that emerged was that the leading labour recruiters for this type of work in Lesotho were the Morkel Brothers. Morkel had begun his activities as a labour contractor in 1909 at Robinson Central Deep gold mine, using his African "bossboys" to recruit labour illegally in the Rand labour districts. Within a short space of time he had about 200 workers under him, most of whom coming from Lesotho. Workers earned 1s per truck loaded, with 25 percent of their earnings going to the "bossboys". Morkel later despatched his "bossboys" to Lesotho, establishing links with chiefs who, in turn, appointed their own "bossboys". In 1911, Morkel was joined by his younger brother; and the following year he took out a recruiting license in Lesotho, employing his own labour touts. Eckstein's Labour Department, before being transformed into the NRC, also competed for "setoko" recruits. Although this system was rotten with corruption involving chiefs, labour agents, labour contractors, "bossboys" and "policeboys", African workers nonetheless derived some benefit from it. Working under African "bossboys", for example, was usually better than being supervised by white mine captains and overseers.⁹⁵

For all these reasons, work on gold mines gradually increased in popularity. But this process was also facilitated by ecological crises in Lesotho and the vulnerability of the diamond mines, both of which increased the numbers of Basotho available for gold mine work.

⁹⁵. *Ibid.*, pp.158-61; LNA, L1/3/16, SNA to AC (Leribe), 18 June 1913; SAB, GNLB 3, 313/09, "Report of Commission of Enquiry Appointed by Acting DNL to Investigate the 'Piece Work System' (Lashing and Tramping) in Vogue on Central Mines on the Witwatersrand", 9 March 1913.

Table 2.7: Average Number of Basotho on the Gold Mines

Year	Number
1909	6 256
1910	5 113
1911	7 104
1912	7 481
1913	6 667
1914	10 557
Total	43 178
Average	7 196

Source: SAB, GNLB 97, 220/13/100, DNL to Colonel Creswell, 26 January 1928.

Table 2.8: Percentage of African Labour in the Transvaal Gold and Coal Mines

Year	Cape Colony	Basotho	Shangaan
1904	12.7	2.91	66.23
1907	14.47	2.33	69.37
1908	24.38	3.09	54.98
1909	24.31	2.48	54.32
1910	26.02	3.17	51.96
1911	23.19	3.82	51.59
1912	26.17	5.22	47.93
1913	22.04	5.68	52.15
1914	24.97	7.44	47.71
1915	33.00	6.24	42.09
1917	29.79	7.04	46.93
1919	32.37	6.92	46.14
1920	26.70	7.33	55.60
1921	30.82	10.56	47.08
1922	34.52	7.91	44.24
1928	29.21	7.99	49.78
1929	29.99	10.53	47.15
1930	35.33	13.17	37.11
1931	36.31	13.62	32.71
1932	42.08	13.61	25.10
1933	42.86	14.34	22.34
1934	41.96	13.03	24.67
1936	39.23	14.46	27.83
1939	33.92	14.98	26.11

Source: Van der Horst, Native Labour, p.216.

Table 2.9: Number of Passes Issued in Lesotho, 1905 to 1913.

Year	"Labour" Passes	"Visiting" Passes
1905-06	95 009	50 889
1906-07	76 785	51 100
1907-08	78 863	51 463
1908-09	68 870	n/a
1909-10	82 000	55 300
1910-11	84 600	n/a
1911-12	66 900*	n/a
1912-13	77 244	59 422
1913-14	90 814	53 184

Source: CAR, 1905-06 to 1913-14.

* only for the first nine months of the fiscal year.

Table 2.10: Number of Passes Issued in Lesotho for Labour Purposes, 1921 to 1938.

Year	Gold	Coal	Diamonds	Agri.	Rail.	Miscel.
1921				12 301	2 082	20 843
1922				11 578	2 032	20 016
1923				15 613	794	33 437
1924				14 834	862	40 929
1925				13 194	233	43 253
1926				19 217	659	41 484
1927	13 309	1 854	9 697	9 507	173	23 407
1928	15 490	764	9 269	7 353	284	20 718
1929	18 995	694	9 016	13 483	449	32 125
1930	21 571	572	6 383	12 778	185	23 298
1931	24 162	252	2 434	12 099	-	27 802
1932	25 642	47	62	12 678	-	19 628
1933	25 731	72	-	15 237	-	10 816
1934	22 994	156	220	6 700		8 372
1935	29 502	472	83	5 584		9 852
1936	34 877	627	229	6 964		13 878
1937	30 460	1 428	847	3 782		14 811*
1938	47 029	2 546	30	3 872		13 859#

Source: Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.195; CAR, 1937; 1938.

* includes railway construction (88), roads (84), and other public works (206).

includes railway construction (94), roads (146) and other public works (349).

With the formation of Eckstein/Rand Mines' Labour Department in 1911 and the repatriation of the Central African miners in 1913, the proportion of Basotho on the gold mines increased from about four percent in 1911 to five percent in 1912 and six percent in 1913 (Table 2.8), although in absolute terms, the average number employed decreased from 7 481 in 1912 to 6 667 in 1913. But the severe drought that hit Lesotho during the 1912-13 fiscal year killed stock and led to the importation of large quantities of grain. Consequently the number of "labour" passes increased from 84 600 in 1910-11 and 66 900 in 1911-12 to 77 244 and 90 814 in 1912-13 and 1913-14, respectively. This pushed the proportion of Basotho on the gold mines from six percent in 1913 to seven percent in 1914; and the average number employed increased from 6 667 in 1913 to 10 557 in 1914 (Table 2.7). World War I led to the closure of diamond mines. The Premier Mine, for example, suspended its work in 1914, sending 14 000 African workers home. Another major suspension of production on the diamond mines in 1920 caused the number of Basotho employed on the gold mines to climb from 14 615 in that year to 22 115 in 1921. As a result, the Basotho proportion of the total African labour force on these mines increased from about seven percent in 1920 to 11 percent in 1921. In its 1921 annual report, the Chamber of Mines did not hide its mixed appreciation of this improvement: "The increase in the supply [of African labour] was chiefly due to very considerable numbers of natives from British Basutoland usually employed by the diamond industry coming to the goldfields. Many of these natives will no doubt return to the diamond industry as soon as those mines are reopened".⁹⁸

This pessimistic view was influenced by the Chamber's past experience, and was confirmed in 1922 when the number of Basotho on the gold mines fell to 19 115, representing a 2.6 percent decrease since the previous year. But the situation had nonetheless turned in favour of the gold mines. Between 1922 and 1927 the average number of Basotho on gold mines more

⁹⁸. CMAR, 1921, p.76.

than doubled from the 1909-1914 average of 7 196 to 15 343.

The depression beginning in 1929 and the 1932-33 drought marked a significant turning point in the history of Lesotho. From this period Lesotho came to occupy its present position as a labour reserve. These crises affected the pattern of labour migrancy in Lesotho in three ways.

Firstly, the number of Basotho workers on gold mines increased dramatically after the 1929 depression. With the drought the Basotho proportion on these mines increased by some one percent between 1932 and 1933 to reach 14 percent in the latter year, but dropped by another one percent to reach 13 percent in 1934 (Table 2.8). In March 1931 the South African authorities, responding to the crisis sparked by depression and drought in southern Africa as a whole, imposed quotas on the labour supplying areas. The Resident Commissioner was asked to cut the number of Basotho leaving for the gold mines to 50 percent of the January 1930 figure. To implement this, the NRC placed an advertisement in several Sesotho newspapers informing Basotho that there was no more work for those who wished to go the mines on their own. In February 1932 the Assisted Voluntary Scheme (AVS) established by the NRC in 1928 whereby migrants wishing to go to the Rand mines without binding themselves to a specific employer were given cash advances for food and train fare,⁹⁷ was then expanded into what was publicised as the "Easy Way" to the Rand mines. This new scheme was coordinated by Stephens in Maseru and the northern districts, and Stuart in the southern districts. Men wishing to go to the mines in this way were supposed to go to specific offices where they were given cash advances for the train fare and food. On their arrival on the mines, if they wished, the men were given another L2 advance. Those failing to obtain employment were to present themselves to the WNLA compounds where they would stay until work was found for them.

⁹⁷. On the AVS, see LNA, S3/5/18/1, NRC Memorandum on "Encouragement of the flow of voluntary natives to the gold mines", 10 July 1928.

This AVS explains why the number of passes issued for "miscellaneous" labour began to drop after 1931 (from 27 802 in that year) to 8 372 in 1934 (Table 2.10).

In this way - as Basotho men flocked to the NRC offices on their own - the process of phasing out labour touts accelerated. Government income from touts' licenses dropped from L168 in 1931 to L49 in 1932, and L40 in 1934. Some touts even sent letters of protest to the Sesotho press, asking for support and solidarity! At the 1932 and 1934 Basutoland National Council sittings a number of chiefs appealed against the quota system, but in vain. However, the AVS scheme did not alleviate the problem of unemployment; by August 1934 the NRC bus taking recruits from Leribe was leaving only on one day a week.⁹⁸ The situation was so desperate that the Basutoland Progressive Association attempted to form a "Basuto Unemployed League".⁹⁹ Mochochonono described the seriousness of the crisis:

Things are still going as before with difficulties facing the Basotho nation due to poverty, drought and unemployment. Wool has no value in the stores, cattle have no price. People do not know where to go because there is even no work. People who stay in Camps like this one of ours, Maseru, see the misery of young and old men who are loitering about here wanting to be touted for work without success. The few that are fortunate are taken on certain days, and will be some twenty or thirty; hundreds and hundreds of hungry people who are naked, wearing rags of blankets which are now useless, others wearing rags of sacks, exposing their dry bellies, others wearing sheep-skins which have lost shape, cannot find work.¹⁰⁰

Table 2.10 shows that the number of Basotho going to the gold mines in the depression years, including the period of

⁹⁸. On the introduction of NRC buses in colonial Lesotho, see Appendix II.

⁹⁹. This paragraph and the preceding one based on Mochochonono, 22 October 1930; 25 September 1931; 6 January 1932; 10 February 1932; 24 August 1932; 15 March 1933; 17 February 1932; 24 February 1932; LNA, S3/5/18/4, RC's circular to Acs, 10 April 1931; CAR, 1932; 1933; 1934.

¹⁰⁰. Mochochonono, 10 February 1932.

drought, exceeded 20 000 per annum. By comparison, the number of Basotho on the diamond mines showed a tendency to decrease. By the mid-1930s an average of 30 000 Basotho men were heading to the gold mines annually. In 1938 alone, about 40 000 took out passes to go to the gold mines (Table 2.10). The proportion of Basotho workers on the gold mines increased from about 13 percent of the total African labour force in the early 1930s to almost 15 percent by the end of that decade.¹⁰¹

The second effect that depression and drought had on the pattern of labour migrancy in Lesotho was famine. With starvation in the country, the NRC office in Leribe arranged with the Assistant Commissioner to offer grain and blankets by way of an advance for potential mine recruits. The government also ran its own relief programme. This involved the employment of able-bodied men in public works in return for food. With the approach of the ploughing season in 1933, seeds were also distributed on credit through traders. But the government's attitude towards its relief programme was so hard-nosed that people were supposed to be medically examined to check whether they had taken any meal on that day or not, before qualifying for food rations. There were cases of people dying in queues before they reached the doctor. Cases of pellagra - a disease due to deficiency in vitamin B - were spotted from 1934 (76 cases in that year, 147 in 1935 and 242 in 1936).¹⁰² Starvation and malnutrition led to many men being rejected by doctors as unfit for mine work.¹⁰³ And

¹⁰¹. The 1956 census shows that about a quarter of the total population was absent to labour centres in that year, as compared to about six percent (1911), ten percent (1921) and 18 percent (1936). See, Basutoland, 1956 Population Census, p.73.

¹⁰². CAR, 1933 to 1937; Ambrose, Maseru, pp.133-35; Mochochonono, 29 March 1933; 18 October 1933; 1 November 1933; 3 January 1934; 14 March 1934; Pim, Financial and Economic Position, pp.32-33; LNA, S3/3/1/11, Brown to GS, 21 March 1930.

¹⁰³. One Sunday Times correspondent wrote in February 1933: "On most Mondays the stores at Mhaleshoek are crowded with natives looking for work, many of whom are so starved and poverty-stricken that no doctor could possibly pass them as

Basotho on the mines, as shown in Chapter Three, remitted money to their families at an unprecedented rate.

Thirdly, this crisis led to many Basotho settling permanently on the Rand. The female population in Lesotho actually dropped by 5 623 between 1936 and 1946, while the male population only increased by 7 639, compared to an increase of 16 863 between 1921 and 1936.¹⁰⁴ It was pointed out in the 1947 Basutoland Annual Report: "It is generally agreed that this fall [in population between 1936 and 1946] is not due to faulty enumeration but to certain economic factors such as land scarcity, soil poverty and a succession of bad harvests which has inevitably resulted in a large exodus to the Industrial Centres of the Union, where many have probably become permanently resident".¹⁰⁵

This emigration, together with the 1934-37 gold boom and the development of secondary industry on the Rand, increased bokholoa (i.e. remaining on the "mines" for many years without returning home) among Basotho migrants. "It is also evident", according to the 1947 annual report, "that many Basuto are staying on the Reef after the completion of their contracts, instead of returning home, finding casual employment and helping to cause overcrowding in the Johannesburg locations".¹⁰⁶ Some Basotho of the tsoelopele class even formed "Sons of Basutoland" with an initial membership of 200, to protect their interests on the Reef. For their part, traders tried to come together in a "Basutoland Co-operative Association". It was during this time that the celebration of Moshoeshoe Festivals on the Rand became an important event, especially for the Basotho elite.¹⁰⁷

fit for any kind of work" (cited in Leselinyana, 10 May 1933).

¹⁰⁴. 1956 Population Census, p.69; Basutoland, Litaba, 1934, p.212; Mochochonono, 21 March 1936; Journal des Missions Evangeliques, vol.1, 1934, p.351.

¹⁰⁵. CAR, 1947, p.16.

¹⁰⁶. Ibid., p.17.

¹⁰⁷. Mochochonono, 21 March 1936; 17 April 1935; 29 March 1933; 7 January 1939.

With more and more Basotho beginning to depend on migrant labour due to the combined impact of economic depression and drought, their bargaining power declined accordingly. The Chamber of Mines which for decades had failed to impose a six-months contract on recruits from Lesotho, now found itself in a stronger position. In 1919, the Chamber finally managed to raise the minimum contract to six months (180 shifts), and in 1924 to nine months (270 shifts).¹⁰⁸ By the mid-1920s, the bulk of Basotho recruits employed by the Chamber of Mines were engaged for nine months contract, and in the 1930s many started taking 12 months (360 shifts) contracts. Basotho were now leaving their country for longer periods, and in 1935 the Chamber even urged its members to repatriate makholoa¹⁰⁹ who had been working on the mines for two years or more without returning to their homes.¹¹⁰

Shift to Shaft-Sinking

Having initially entered the gold mines through piece-work in lashing and tramping, a significant number of Basotho migrants came to assert themselves in shaft-sinking. A shaft is central to most mining, but essential to deep-level mining. It connects the surface to underground working, and it is by this means that workers and material are transported between the surface and underground. The process of sinking a shaft went through three stages: blasting, shovelling and drilling - performed by African workers (with the exception of blasting) under white supervision.

Yet for an extended period, Basotho miners were absent from the shaft-sinking scene. As late as July 1929 one observer could still comment: "Ask any mine manager or mine captain for his views on the comparative quality of the labour in his

¹⁰⁸. Van der Horst, Native Labour, p.206.

¹⁰⁹. From the abstract, bokholoa (sing: lekholoa).

¹¹⁰. Van der Horst, Native Labour, p.212; Ashton, Basuto, p.165; Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.35.

charge, and without hesitation you will be told that of all the various races of natives which are attracted to the Reef by the lure of high wages, the Basuto is generally regarded as the dirtiest and the most indolent individual of any tribe recruited for this work".¹¹¹ Yet, only six years later, in 1935, Alan Pim indicated that "Basuto, like the Shangaan from Portuguese Territory, are usually employed on the more difficult and better paid tasks such as shaft sinking".¹¹² And, in January 1949, the Chamber of Mines introduced an article on shaft-sinking:

It is the proud boast of the Basuto that they have sunk all [emphasis original] the shafts on the Witwatersrand gold mines.

While this may not be literally true, the Basuto have certainly established a fine tradition in the specialised field of mining labour in which the closest co-ordination of all activities is essential;. The Basuto have set a standard of speed in drilling and "lashing" - shovelling rock - not lightly to be challenged and certainly beyond the reach of gangs composed of mixed tribesmen.¹¹³

This was a stereotype and reputation with which Basotho were to be associated well into the 1950s, when mechanised lashing was introduced.

Basotho, as discussed earlier in this chapter, became gold miners in increasing numbers during the early 1910s, attracted primarily by piece-work in lashing and tramping. By 1919, lashing and tramping was regarded, according to the Director of Native Labour, as "the class of work preferred by Basuto".¹¹⁴ In the same year, Chief Lekeketa of Mafeteng was sent by his father to spend time on the Reef investigating conditions and to find work for his people exclusively in lashing and tramping.¹¹⁵ An inquiry in December 1927 found the 13 081 Basotho employed on the gold

¹¹¹. Sunday Times, 14 July 1929.

¹¹². Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.35.

¹¹³. "Basuto Tradition in Shaft-Sinking on the Witwatersrand", Mining Survey, vol.2, no.1, January 1949.

¹¹⁴. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, DNL to SNA, 12 March 1919.

¹¹⁵. LNA, S3/3/1/4, SNA to AC (Mafeteng), 17 October 1919.

mines distributed in the following manner:

- * lashing and tramping = 8 143
- * shaft sinking and shaft development = 237
- * machines = 407
- * developmental work = 20
- * hand-drilling = 99
- * other underground work = 2 687
- * surface general = 178
- * reduction works = 532
- * miscellaneous surface = 787 116

This distribution shows not only the concentration of Basotho miners in lashing and tramping, but also their preference for miscellaneous underground works and their growing concentration in shaft-sinking.

Although more and more Basotho miners became shaft-sinkers in the late 1920s, the real change occurred after the devaluation of the South African pound in December 1932 increased the local price of gold and led to the opening of new mines as well as the expanded development of existing ones. The total African labour force on the gold mines increased by almost 100 000 between 1932 and 1938; the 222 000 employed in 1930 increased to 233 000 in 1932, and reached 324 000 in 1938.¹¹⁷

As part of this overall growth in the size of the mines' labour force, Basotho workers discovered that they could not easily displace Shangaan and the Pondo miners from drilling which they tended to monopolise. Instead, Basotho miners increasingly turned to shaft-sinking. This suited them as it involved lashing and encouraged a much the same system of team-work as they had developed on the diamond mines. It is also probable that the mine managements themselves, aware of the Basotho's display of skill as "lashers" and their mastery of team-work, gradually deployed such men in shaft-sinking in

¹¹⁶. SAB, GNLB 137, 2828/13/104, Dr Cluver's report on "Mortality among Basuto", 5 November 1928.

¹¹⁷. Van der Horst, Native Labour, p.217; Crush, J, et al, South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1991). pp.33-54.

an attempt to speed up work and raise minimum levels of skill. Mine managements, according to one informant, even came to refer to Basotho as the "High Speed".¹¹⁸

Though the gold boom on the Rand only lasted from 1933 to 1937, the subsequent loss of jobs was compensated for by the development of secondary industry and, more importantly, by the opening of the Orange Free State gold mines in the 1950s. This development in particular confirmed the position of Basotho as shaft-sinkers, not least because of the geographical proximity of these mines to Lesotho. Many Basotho later developed a career as "nomadic" migrants who moved from mine to mine, sinking one shaft after another without binding themselves to long contracts. According to Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, Basotho miners who had associated tramping and lashing with youthness, strength and endurance, later extended this ideology to shaft-sinking.¹¹⁹ Basotho came to regard themselves as the toughest and most fearless, the people who loved hard and dangerous work.¹²⁰ Even today, according to an informant, Basotho miners like showing-off their strength and displaying their muscles.¹²¹

Migrants' Strategies

Basotho migrants were not, however, passive statistics oscillating between their homes and the labour centres. They developed varied and complex strategies to cope and deal with

¹¹⁸. Interview with Ntate Mosalla, date of birth unknown. He worked on the mines as an induna from the 1950s until his retirement in 1990.

¹¹⁹. J. Guy, and M. Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-Sinking on the South African Gold Mines", Journal of South African Studies, vol.14, no.2, 1988.

¹²⁰. P. Bonner, "Backs to the Fence: Law, Liquor, and the Search for Social Control in an East Rand Town, 1929-1942", in Crush, J, and C. Ambler, (eds.), Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa, (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p.284.

¹²¹. Interview with Ntate Mosalla.

their experiences of migrancy. After the extension of the railway line to Maseru in 1906 complaints from Basotho evangelists and other members of the elite about the behaviour of Basotho migrant workers started appearing in Leselinyana.¹²² Basotho migrants increasingly came to be called likoata (sing: koata). The word "koata" was associated with a particular type of behaviour and character.

The meaning of "koata" came to preoccupy sections of the Basotho elite who saw the koata character as a disgrace to the "nation". One "educated" Mosotho in 1927 defined likoata as "people who behave like animals", but said that the word had been in circulation not for more than 30 years.¹²³ Another "civilised" Mosotho wrote that "the songs that they [likoata] sing are full of abusive words and are completely useless"; and that "what is surprising is the power that it [the word 'koata'] has on a person; it intoxicates, dehumanises and reduces a person to a senseless thing, it transforms him, it destroys his mind".¹²⁴ For one informant who first went to the mines in 1925: "We were people called likoata", he said, "because we behaved ourselves badly".¹²⁵

The word "koata" appears in Adolphe Mabile and Hermann Dieterlen's Sotho-English dictionary (first published in 1911), but has no association with migrants. It is "khoari" which is defined as a "boy coming back from the gold mines".¹²⁶ Paroz's revised edition of this dictionary (published in 1950) has an additional meaning to koata; that it is a "boy returning from the gold mines; man working in the mines", and bokoata as "manners of boys coming from the mines", and associated the concept with the English word

122. Leselinyana, 31 March 1914; 2 March 1917; 3 June 1927; 27 April 1928.

123. Ibid., 2 June 1927.

124. ibid., 2 March 1917.

125. Interview with Michael Mokenela, born 1908.

126. A. Mabile, and H. Dieterlen, Sesuto-English Dictionary, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1911), p.137. "Khoari" comes from "quarry" which was associated with diamond mining in Kimberley before deep-level mining.

"squad".¹²⁷

The word "koata" had been in circulation long before it came to the attention of "civilised" Basotho.¹²⁸ Basotho migrants had been walking in groups or "squads" since the early years of migrancy. It is possible that the word was initially used by ordinary people, and was later appropriated by the middle-class elements in their effort to win for themselves a better position and privileges in the colonial set-up. The word was possibly used initially to refer to groups of recruits, but gradually became independent of its English root. The word is still in use today, now as a generic term for a particular behaviour and personality.

Particular to the behaviour of likoata was their unruliness and abusiveness. They insulted people, including women and train officials; they sang, whistled, and shouted. What was initially a way of coping with going to the mines became an established form of behaviour which was also reinforced by certain stereotypes. Young migrants were also socialised into this behaviour, thus passing on the koata pattern of behaviour to other generations.¹²⁹ A Sesotho novel published in the 1950s has a section which brilliantly illustrates koata behaviour. Thunthung obtained a job at the Native Recruiting Corporation offices in Maseru as a cook (after being rejected for mine work on medical grounds) where he was subjected to harassment from likoata:

Since this young man did not like abusive words, he was humiliated daily, to the extent that he tolerated this by just keeping quiet. ...when the migrants arrived drunk from there in the locations, you would hear them shouting from a distance, saying: "Hey, dish, *Tjhepha* [chef]!" One there would jump, saying something: "Hey, this one, *Tjhepha*, has cooked his garbage again!..." ...Another one would jump there, saying: "Hmm, what a beautiful *Tjhepha*,

127. R.A. Paroz, Southern Sotho-English Dictionary, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1950), p.177.

128. At the turn of the century, one missionary-labour recruiter in Lesotho was known as "Ralikoata", i.e. "father/keeper of likoata. See Leselinyana, 15 November 1906.

129. Leselinyana, 3 August 1938.

I wish I could go to load trucks for him there in Johannesburg!" Sometimes Thuthung would dish out badly, angered by the insults that he was subject to, and one of them would say: "...You will feed us whether you like it or not. It is because you have eaten all the meat, even gnawed the bones, leaving but rotten intestines... you're spoilt! What a cruel man! Where do you come from? Dish! Dish! *Tjhepha!*..."¹³⁰

Koata behaviour was linked to the association by many Basotho of South Africa with violence, exploitation, oppression, suffering and hatred; or, as they metaphorically put it, with "cannibals". Crossing the Caledon River was seen as entering not only the world of "cannibals" but also the place of adventure. South Africa was seen as the "flatland" as a way of comparing it with the beautiful mountains of Lesotho; Basotho working in the mines were compared to rats, while those at home were seen as jovial monkeys. This is one of the central themes in the songs collected by Hugh Tracey, and later by David Coplan, Dunbar Moodie's students, as well as in novels inspired by this experience.¹³¹ This theme is well summarised in the song "Another Blanket":

Mohokare,¹³² now I assume another blanket
 Now that I have crossed you.
 Wash me from the profanations I have had
 With a woman at home.
 Here I cross to the other side
 And I do not know what dangers may face me.

¹³⁰. J.T. Khalala, Motwaitwai wa Lesotho, (APB, Johannesburg, 1956), p.57.

¹³¹. H. Tracey, "Basutoland Recording Tour: November 19th to December 3rd, 1959", African Music Society Journal, vol.2, no.2, 1959; Agency for Industrial Mission, Another Blanket, (Roodepoort, 1976), pp.11-13; D. B. Coplan, In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994); T.D. Moodie (with V. Ndatshe), Going to the Mines: Men, Mines and Migration, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1994), p.13; R. Shanafelt, "The Heroic Ideal in Three Sotho Novellas of Labour Migration", African Studies, vol.47, no.1, 1988; S.N. Majara, Liakhela, (Mazenod Book Centre, Lesotho, 1972); S. Matlosa, Molahlehi, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1950).

¹³². The Caledon River.

The song continued in another stanza: "In crossing the river I become a new man \ Different from the one I was at home".¹³³

Going to the mines was associated with going to war and cattle-raiding. This was because, as my informants also show, many Basotho men generally went to the mines to acquire bohali cattle; cattle also symbolised masculinity, and were used for the storage of wealth. The cattle metaphor is expressed vividly in one song-poem that Basotho migrant-travellers used to sing about themselves:

We the poor will die far away
Our feet will grow and be swollen
Where we search for a milch cow.¹³⁴

In this way, migrancy was rationalised, internalised and accepted. The bokoata attitude and mentality helped Basotho to confront the reality of migrancy and mine work in the face of their hardships. Chief Letlatsa Moshoeshe of Maseru had a conversation with several missionaries in November 1904, at the time that Basotho were recovering from the 1903 drought. "Are the people going to work nicely?", he was asked:

Answer: Yes, by thousands although they are complaining about the wage.
Question: Are they living well, are they not dying much?
Answer: They are dying.
Question: Are they not afraid when they see that they are dying in great numbers?
Answer: They keep on going because they are in want [...] they want to come and help themselves.¹³⁵

Chiefs and Migrants

Basotho chiefs were also a factor in the system of labour migrancy. They were motivated, on the one hand, by the threat

¹³³. Another Blanket, p.12.

¹³⁴. Christian Council of Lesotho, Merafo ea Afrika-Boroa le Moruo oa Lesotho, (Migrant Labour Project, Maseru, 1983), p.12.

¹³⁵. LNA, S7/7/33, Letlatsa Moshoeshe to AC (Maseru), 21 November 1904.

posed by the regular movement of their men to the labour centres, and, on the other, by the desire to improve their fortunes. Many of them accepted brandy, rifles and money from labour agents, as an inducement to urge their men to take mine contracts. Complaints that chiefs "sold" their people were raised with the South African Native Affairs Commission¹³⁶ and at the 1903 Basutoland National Council sitting. It was claimed that chiefs would make arrangements with labour agents or employers in return for a commission, without the consent of their people. The Resident Commissioner subsequently urged chiefs not to accept money but only "presents". There was also a special clause in the 1903 Bill denying chiefs any right to contract their people to labour agents.¹³⁷ But in September 1906 the Assistant Commissioner of Maseru in his memorandum to the Resident Commissioner on the working of this Bill, revealed that: "I can make no definite charges, but it is an open secret that the Chiefs are bribed to a considerable extent by unscrupulous agents, and I have reason to suppose that liquor is at times supplied to them as an inducement for them to compel their people to go to an individual agent".¹³⁸ A similar complaint came up again during the 1908 sitting of the National Council.¹³⁹ And as late as March 1921 Umteteli wa Bantu published a letter insisting that "many Basotho who are working on the Rand mines have a tendency to say that they have been sold by their chiefs".¹⁴⁰

But signs of resistance against chiefs who "sold" their men were apparent by 1912 if not earlier. One Mosotho wrote to Leselinyana in March of that year to report Chief Joel's

¹³⁶. Chief Jonathan testified to the Commission that "the boys do not like to be sent by us, because they say we get money for them"; see Native Affairs Commission, vol.5, p.394.

¹³⁷. SAB, SNA 196, NA 325\04, Extract from Minutes of 1903 BNC, 11 February 1904; E. Rosenthal, African Switzerland: Basutoland Today, (Juta, Cape Town, 1948), p.189.

¹³⁸. LNA, Maseru Letters Despatched (January 1906 to January 1908), AC to RC, 6 September 1906.

¹³⁹. Report of Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, 1908, p.20.

¹⁴⁰. Umteteli wa Bantu, 12 March 1921.

attempts to force his men to the mines:

The chief had summoned all the people under him [in Butha Buthe] to congregate in the morning, and they [the people] arrived between 6 [a.m] and 7 [a.m.].

When they were all there, the chief said: "I want to inform you about the work I spoke to you about. As you know, I have been to the Witwatersrand with fourteen men, and stayed there for one week and four days, and liked the job... Now I want you to know that you are going to leave with this white man... my brothers Molukuoa and Mohalenyana will accompany you. You have been turning down a lot of my job offers, today you will go. Those who are going, step forward; I want to see you [!]". No one responded...

... Everyone was silent. He [the chief] then said: "Even if you are so quiet, in winter I will come in person to confiscate your farms to give them to those who have gone to the Witwatersrand..."

We sat there until 3 and 4 o'clock, without food nor anything to drink... The chief was angry, but in the end he said: "Go to your homes to fetch your provisions and blankets to sleep here".

We all dispersed, noone showed up until after two days; others arrived amid the tension, [the people being told] that those who refuse should leave [the village].¹⁴¹

Chiefs also controlled the movement of their men to the labour centres for political and/or humanitarian reasons. Men could be summoned en masse from wage employment in times of war and other emergencies. About 4000 Basotho left for home in the period leading up to the Gun War in 1880.¹⁴² Chiefs could also ask for the return of a man or men from the mines because of his/their failure to support his/their family(ies). Sometimes they would prevent men from leaving. Chief Leshoboro Majara of Maseru prevented two men in July 1907 from going to join the Bechuanaland police force, because the wife of one was seriously ill, and the other because he "has also some matters here about which I need him very much".¹⁴³

Chiefs also played an important role in the repatriation of Basotho from their places of work. Relatives and families

¹⁴¹. Leselinyana, 14 March 1912.

¹⁴². On this "exodus", see Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland", p.123.

¹⁴³. LNA, S7/4/4, Majara to AC (Maseru), 19 July 1907.

would approach the chief or the Assistant Commissioner with requests for the return of a particular individual. Common reasons included the man's state of health and physical condition; family problems at home; the man's failure to remit money to support his family; or the man's length of absence from home. The Assistant Commissioner would then contact the NAD or the GNLB and ask them to trace the man in question. Sometimes members of the family, especially wives or mothers, would approach their chief or the Assistant Commissioner for permission to fetch a sick son or husband from his place of work. The NAD received complaints from compound managers that they were being inundated with letters from Basutoland officials asking for the repatriation of this or that individual thought to be in their compounds.¹⁴⁴

By the 1920s a standard "Return of Native" form was in use in Lesotho, and this required the name of the worker; reason/s for the application for the repatriation; the suspected place of work; and his address in Lesotho (i.e. the name of his chief/sub-chief). The usual response to such forms was that the Mosotho in question had been traced and was preparing to leave; or would be remitting money, or that he could not be found.¹⁴⁵ Work of this kind was greatly facilitated by the opening of the Basutoland Agency in 1932 in Johannesburg (see Chapter Three), applications now being addressed to that office rather than to the Union authorities. As the next chapter discusses, these applications for repatriations reflected tensions and struggles within Basotho homesteads, tensions caused by the absence of migrants.

¹⁴⁴. LNA, S7/4/4, General Manager (Premier Mine) to PC Letsie, 23 August 1907; S7/7/53, SNA to GS, 19 March 1910; S7/7/40, Ntja Lerumo to Mabille, 2 September 1907; S7/7/68, AC (Maseru) to PC, 12 September 1913; S7/7/34, Api Lerotholi to Mabille, 14 February 1905; LNA, MFT 3/1/9, Mohlalefi Bereng to AC (Mafeteng), 12 August 1928. In fact most Basotho chiefs and individual families addressed their requests for repatriation via Mabille as long as he worked for the NAD and GNLB.

¹⁴⁵. LNA, MFT 2/1/18, has a copy of "return of Native" form, 18 February 1921; LNA, Leribe Collection, Box 29, AC (Leribe) to GS, 12 March 1923.

Migrancy, Patriarchy and the Rural Economy

Controlling the movement of Basotho women was also essential to the migrant labour system. Women had to perform agricultural work to subsidise migrant earnings entering the rural households.

Basotho women arrived on the Witwatersrand as early as 1911. This new generation of women, unlike its predecessor, was not comprised mainly of dissatisfied wives seeking refuge and work on the farms, but was linked to the decline of the Basotho economy and the ongoing effects of labour migrancy. These migrant women, condemned as matekatse (from ho teka; to wander about or prostitutes) by Basotho men and chiefs, came to specialise in commercial beer-brewing and prostitution.¹⁴⁶

By the early 1920s, Basotho migrants were raising complaints about the increasing number of women from their country on the Rand. The problem, as men saw it, increased in the 1930s following the depression and drought in Lesotho. The number of absent women as a percentage of the total number of absentees in Lesotho rose from about 12 percent in 1911 to about 20 percent (1921), 22 percent (1936) and 25 percent (1946). Absent women as a percentage of the total Basotho population were about one percent in 1911, three percent in 1921, and seven percent in 1936.¹⁴⁷ The women most likely to leave Lesotho were widows, certain categories of single women, and neglected wives of men absent at the mines.¹⁴⁸

The mine and South African authorities tried to clamp down on these "undesirable" women whose shebeens (taverns) and brothels were patronised by African miners (see Chapter Four).

¹⁴⁶. P. Bonner, "Desirable or undesirable Basotho women? Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945", in Walker, Women and Gender.

¹⁴⁷. 1956 Population Census.

¹⁴⁸. See Chapter Seven.

Some of the matekatse in Benoni and Nancefield locations were said to be using taxis to visit the mine compounds for "tea parties" and the picking up of "husbands". The Union government blamed this influx of Basotho women on what it considered to be an indiscriminate issuing of passes in Lesotho to women wishing to visit or join their husbands in South Africa. A suggestion was then made by the Native Affairs Department to request the South African Railways not to issue tickets to women not in possession of written permission to leave Lesotho, but this was rejected on the ground that women from the Free State would be confused with matekatse. The Chamber of Commerce of the Free State border towns also opposed any measure which would affect the coming of Basotho women to its members' stores.¹⁴⁹

The Union government sought a solution through the repatriation of these Basotho women. Repatriations began around 1929, and in November 1930 a procedure was agreed upon with the Basutoland government: deportees were to be delivered to the Police Post nearest to the Basutoland border. Between 1930 and June 1931, 13 males (who were mainly "criminals" or ex-convicts) and 189 females were repatriated to Lesotho. All the deported women appear to have arrived on the Rand after 1913; 51 indicated that they arrived between 1923 and 1931. When the process of deportation was in full force in 1931, some matekatse turned to lawyers for their defence, others even producing "husbands". Some took "visiting" passes in Lesotho in order to return the Reef.¹⁵⁰ But the NAD was determined: "There is no place in which these women can legally stay during the period of a visit and we certainly have no need of Basutoland women for work on the Witwatersrand, which is at present overstocked with native women from the Union".¹⁵¹ Yet, as Chapter Seven will show,

¹⁴⁹. Bonner, "Desirable or undesirable", pp.241-47; Umteteli, 5 March 1921; 12 March 1921; 10 December 1921.

¹⁵⁰. SAB, NTS 7725, 143/333, DNL to SNA, 8 July 1931; NTS 7725, 166/333, DNL to SNA, 24 February 1931; Bonner, "Desirable or undesirable", p.247.

¹⁵¹. SAB, NTS 7725, 166/333, DNL to SNA, 24 February 1931.

these Basotho women deportees did not cease to sell beer and their bodies once back in Lesotho.

Conclusion

The shift of increasing numbers of Basotho migrants to the gold mines was the result of, on the one hand, the general decline of the Basotho economy, and, on the other, the efforts of the Chamber of Mines to expand the geographic area from which to recruit labour in order to keep the cost of African labour low. The strength of Basotho migrants initially lay in their manipulation of competition in the labour market. They chose an employer on the basis of the length of the contract, the wage scale, and the working conditions. Hence the diamond mines initially became the major employer of Basotho labour not only because of the relatively short contract that recruits could take, but also because of piece-work which gave miners more control over the labour process and pay; and the possibility of picking up a diamond and being rewarded was another attraction. But the vulnerability of the diamond mining industry to recessions, combined with the worsening socio-economic situation in Lesotho, gradually eroded the bargaining power of Basotho migrants and pushed them to rely on a single employer - the gold mines.

The Basotho shift to the gold mines in the 1920s was accompanied by the standardisation of labour recruitment and migration in Lesotho. Basotho migrants, for their part, developed varied and complex responses to their experiences, which helped them to cope and deal with the dangers associated with oscillating between their homes and South African mines. The central place which labour migrancy assumed, and migration to the gold mines in particular, had long-term implications for Basotho and their country. It is to this issue that attention should now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

DEEPENING DEPENDENCY

The impoverishment of most Basotho homesteads and the engendering of a nondiscretionary migratory labour system, resulted in a scramble for the meagre earnings of migrants. This struggle was not confined to homesteads, but also involved chiefs and the colonial state. This chapter outlines in detail the various ways in which these processes and dynamics were articulated in Basotho society.

Remittances and Deferred Pay System

Migrant labour became a source of capital for colonial Lesotho in all sorts of ways. These included cash advances to recruits served both to pay tax, and as a source of funds for family expenses; capitation fees by companies to labour agents; fees for labour recruiting licenses; remittances to relatives; deferred pay; cash and goods brought by returning migrants; and finally, compensation paid to recruits and relatives in cases of death, accidents, tuberculosis and phthisis.

Yet as far as capitation fees were concerned, only those paid to a few labour agents like Stephens, for example, who invested much of his wealth in Lesotho, were significant. Otherwise they were lost to the country. In any event, the annual income from all licenses (including trading and hawking licenses) never exceeded L15 000 during the period covered in this study. It averaged L3 500 between 1904 and 1909, L5 500 between 1909 and 1914, and increased from L9 172 in the fiscal year 1932-33 to L12 906 in 1933-34, and then only because of the introduction of the new Basutoland postage stamps.¹

In fact, by far and in a way the most important source of the

¹. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, Appendix X.

country's income were remittances from labour migrants to their relatives. Indeed, deferred pay continues to be vital to the economy of Lesotho to this very day, and actually exceeds the country's Gross Domestic Product. Not surprisingly this has been a source of struggle between migrants on the one hand, and chiefs - and later the post-colonial government - on the other. Money could be remitted to relatives or be deferred through the facilities offered by the NRC, the Native Affairs Department and post offices, but the infrastructure for all of this had only been put in place over many years, mediated by a number of forces, struggles and interests. It is this process which is traced in what follows.

The introduction of facilities for remitting earnings of Basotho migrants was partly due to Ernest Mabile. Early in 1896, while he was working as the Chamber of Mines' Rand Native Labour Association's representative in Lesotho, Mabile raised the idea of establishing such a facility with the Resident Commissioner Lagden in February 1896:

During the time I spent in Johannesburg, I have seen the great difficulty the Basutos have in saving their earnings. It is a fact that a considerable amount of their wages is lost, partly because they do not know where to keep their money or how to send it home, also because they are often robbed on their way home. They are afraid to get money orders in the ordinary P.O. [post office] as the officials treat them so roughly. I thought of proposing to Mr Grant [Chamber of Mines' Native Labour Commissioner] to make an arrangement with you by which the Basutos could send their money by drafts to any of the magistrates. Do you not think this would be a great advantage to the Basutos though perhaps a little difficult to work? It would certainly bring a great deal more money to the country.²

After relocating to Johannesburg in June to work as a missionary at the Simmer and Jack, Mabile was then asked by the Government Secretary, H. Sloley, to establish a private remittance and deposit agency for Basotho migrants. By July, Mabile had the scheme well worked out, sending out his first

². LNA, S7/7/18, Mabile to Lagden, 28 February 1896.

batch of remittances on the 19th of August to the Maseru post office. He also placed an advertisement in Leselinyana early in September, announcing his scheme and its charges. He recorded the transactions on three counterfoils; one copy kept by himself, the other given to the sender, and the third copy sent to the recipient with directions as to where to go to collect the money. Remittance charges to cover Mabile's expenses and those of the postal services were 1s.9d for L2, 2s.6d for L5, 3s.3d for L7, and 4s for L10. Within six months of its operation, the scheme served all Basutoland districts, including Griqualand East and some parts of the Orange Free State. Although Mabile thought that instead of sending postal orders for each remittance it would be better to put all the remittances together and send them in his name to relevant Assistant Commissioners in Basutoland with a list of recipients, this was not accepted by the authorities, despite the inconvenience of handling so many individual vouchers, and the further problem of legal implications of misspelt Sotho names.³

Table 3.1: Mabile's Remittances, 19 August 1896 to 6 January 1897

Destination	L
Qachas Nek	11 10s
Quthing	24 15s
Mafeteng	229
Morija	10
Maseru	104 3s
Teyateyaneng	21
Leribe	239 13s
Other*	18
Total	658 1s
East Griqualand	47 10s
Free State	68 16s
Grand Total	780 7s

Source: LNA, S7/7/19, Mabile to GS, 6 January 1897.

* sums sent "previously" to the Basutoland government.

³. Ibid., Mabile to Lagden, 28 February 1896; S7/7/19, Mabile to GS, 6 January 1897; Leselinyana, 1 September 1896.

Considering the small number of Basotho employed on the Reef during this period, the October 1896 wage reduction, the post-Jameson raid scare and the resultant mass exodus of labour from the Rand, as well as the effects of rinderpest on the mobility of labour, the L780.7s remitted (Table 3.1) was a noteworthy achievement. That Leribe accounted for almost 30 percent of the total remitted shows that Mabile was able to use the contacts he had developed while running a parish in that district. Maseru undoubtedly came second because of its centrality in labour recruitment as the colonial headquarters, while the fact that Morija, the headquarters of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, featured, also shows that Mabile was able to call on contacts he still had there.

Within two years, Mabile had sent over L40 000 in the above manner. But his problem was that the postal money orders were very expensive and contributed to the unattractiveness of his scheme. In September 1898 he proposed that bank notes be used for sums of L5 and more, and that postal vouchers only be employed for lesser amounts, explaining that charges for a L20 bank note, for example, were 4d, compared to the 1s.6d charged for a L2.10s postal order. However, the colonial government in Basutoland refused to stand security for a bank account for this purpose. Mabile managed to obtain assistance from two Paris Missionary Society colleagues, but even so, his other problem was that Assistant Commissioners were not taking his scheme seriously. Some of them delayed returning slips to him as proof for the senders.⁴ He wanted Lagden to act on this, because "you know how important this money business is, especially when you consider how suspicious these natives are".⁵

In October 1898, taking advantage of the partial success of his two-year work and the relations he had developed with the authorities in the Transvaal and colonial Lesotho. Mabile

4. LNA, S7/7/19, Mabile to GS, 6 January 1897; S7/7/20, Mabile to GS, 2 September 1898.

5. LNA, S7/7/19, Mabile to Lagden, 28 October 1897.

suggested to the Government Secretary that his scheme be expanded to include tax collection. But this was not accepted. The Chamber of Mines, concerned that some individuals might be enriching themselves from migrants' earnings, proposed the opening of a government-run remittance agency. When the Native Deposit and Remittance Agency was finally established by the Native Affairs Department in August 1902, Mabile was made the head. The Agency was also to operate like a bank, with migrants who saved their money being given bank books. The procedure for sending remittances was not very different from that used by Mabile; the charge was 2s.6d irrespective of the amount sent. By October 1902 the Basutoland government was receiving remittances from this Agency with Mabile's signature on them. The Agency, though, was not popular among Basotho workers. Mabile toured the mine compounds to urge "his" Basotho to use the scheme, and in 1904 the NAD was forced to request the Chamber to send a circular to its members asking them to popularise the scheme among their workers. Leselinyana of October of that year also carried a translation on the circular as an advertisement.⁶

None of this addressed the problems which many Basotho had with the Agency. There were occasionally unexplained discrepancies between the amount remitted and that received by relatives. And remittances were often delayed before they reached recipients. In one case the money sent by a Mosotho migrant to relatives in Morija took three months, and this at a time when Basotho preferred three-to-four months mine contracts!⁷ The Government Secretary expressed his concern to the Acting Secretary of the NAD in April 1905: "The remitting Native, whose purpose in forwarding the money was

⁶. Paragraph based on LNA, S7/7/20, Mabile to GS, 2 September 1898; S7/7/30, SNA to RC, 3 October 1902; SNA to RC, 13 February 1903; S7/7/33, PC to RC, 17 May 1904; SAB, CT 211, T76/14, SNA to Chamber of Mines, 12 September 1904; Leselinyana, October (the only issue of the month) 1904; CMAR, 1902.

⁷. LNA, S7/7/34, SNA to GS, 7 January 1904; S7/7/36, SNA to GS, 8 May 1905; S7/7/35, AC (Maseru) to Registrar and Accountant (NAD), 30 January 1906; S7/7/44, SNA to GS, 1 October 1908.

defeated by the delay, is naturally dissatisfied, and the incident is likely to militate against the progress of the Agency".⁸ The NAD, for its part, accused the Assistant Commissioners of delays in informing relatives; while the Resident Commissioner, for the other, accused the NAD of delays in sending vouchers. In a desperate attempt to save the Agency, in September 1905 charges were reduced to 1s for remittances below L5, and maintained at 2s.6d for L5 and above. Nonetheless, Basotho migrants continued to utilise the Agency to a far lesser degree than either Zulu or Cape Colony recruits; they accounted for only 17 percent of total remittance sent between July 1904 and April 1905, compared to 44 percent for Natal and 33 percent for the Cape Colony.⁹

An attempt to find a solution to the problems of the operation of the NAD Agency was sought in expanding the orientation of the facility. This became possible after the formation of the NRC, and particularly the establishment of the Voluntary Deferred Pay (VDP) scheme in January 1918 for recruits from British South Africa. It was now up to recruits, when attested, to indicate whether they wanted part of their pay to be deferred to Lesotho to await collect on their return. In a circular to its district superintendents and representatives, the NRC explained that the VDP scheme had been established because of "representations having been made by many natives expressing a desire, to use their own words, to be saved from themselves".¹⁰ In Lesotho the scheme was to be co-ordinated by the NRC with the co-operation of the Resident Commissioner and his Assistant Commissioners. In Maseru the deferred money was to be paid out by the NRC agent, and in other districts by Assistant Commissioners. The VDP scheme was to be controlled by a Deferred Pay Board made up of three representatives from the Union government and three from the Chamber of Mines; and chaired by the Director of Native Labour.¹¹ But by October 1919 the Deferred Pay Board brought the Basutoland

⁸. LNA, S7/7/34, GS to SNA, 1 April 1905.

⁹. LNA, S7/7/36, SNA to GS, 8 May 1905; CAR, 1905-06.

¹⁰. LNA, S3/5/18/9, NRC Circular, 17 January 1918.

¹¹. Ibid.

authorities' attention to the fact that Basotho migrants were not utilising the scheme to the same extent as other African miners. The Government Secretary promised that "every endeavour will be made to push the scheme but as you are no doubt aware the Basuto are slow to adopt any new scheme though I have no doubt the percentage of labourers availing themselves of the privilege will in time improve".¹² Attesting officers were instructed to include the VDP scheme when explaining the terms of their contracts to Basotho recruits, but to no avail.

Table 3.2: Number of Basotho Recruited by the NRC during 1918-21 and the Number and Percentage who availed themselves for the VDP

Year	No. recr.	No. recr. on VDP	Percentage
1918	8 657	147	1.7
1919	11 013	771	7
1920	11 053	532	4.8
1921	24 559	359	1.5

Source: SAB, GNLB 163, 434/14/26, DNL to GS, 4 August 1922.

Table 3.2 shows that though the number of NRC recruits from Lesotho increased significantly between 1918 and 1921, the percentage of those availing themselves of the VDP scheme actually decreased. Recruits from the Cape Colony liked the scheme, with 35 percent of those recruited by the NRC in 1918 making use of it. For Zululand, 71 percent and 72 percent of those recruited by the NRC in the months of August and September 1919 respectively, took advantage of the VDP; while the figures for Basutoland during each of these months was less than four percent.¹³

The colonial authorities were not the only ones worried about the failure of VDP among Basotho migrants. Many chiefs were

¹². SAB, GNLB 163, 434/14/26, GS to DNL, 28 October 1919.

¹³. SAB, GNLB 163, 434/14/26, DNL to GS, 4 August 1922.

also concerned. In 1922 the Basutoland National Council passed a resolution urging the Resident Commissioner to make the deferment of pay compulsory for Basotho miners. Pitsos were later convened in the villages, where chiefs urged parents and families to encourage their sons and men to use the scheme. To try and win the support of the NRC and the Union government, chiefs argued that the making of VDP compulsory for Basotho migrants would reduce desertion. Support for the chiefs' position came from missionaries and the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce (whose trade depended on this money).¹⁴ The Director of Native Labour was also sympathetic to the chiefs: "Far too much money is wasted here in the mine stores dotted along the Reef, and it would be far better, in the interests of health, efficiency and control, if the spending power of the native labourer during his contract could be reduced to, say, 10s a month and the balance of wages either remitted periodically to his home or await his arrival on return".¹⁵ But, according to the Rand Daily Mail, "Sir Edward Garraway [the Resident Commissioner] said that whilst appreciating the unanimity of councillors desiring compulsion, it would be illegal and impossible to make deferred pay compulsory, as it would interfere with personal rights of people in their own land, and therefore he felt it useless to interfere or even recommend to the High Commissioner the introduction of a law compelling the Basutos to send even a portion of their earnings back to the territory".¹⁶

At the 1929 National Council, the chiefs tried with little success to persuade the Resident Commissioner to reconsider his objections to the compulsory scheme. But with the onset of economic depression the following year, the context changed. In March 1931 the Resident Commissioner asked the Paramount Chief to send his representatives to the district headquarters to speak to recruits. This was done in June; but the Paramount requested the government to provide him with

¹⁴. Litaba, 1929, pp.22-24; LNA, S3/5/18/9, GS's circular to ACs, 11 September 1922.

¹⁵. LNA, S3/5/18/9, Pritchard to GS, 1 September 1922.

¹⁶. Rand Daily Mail, 7 September 1922.

paid tax collectors, and again used the opportunity to push for a compulsory deferred pay scheme. The Assistant Commissioner for Qachas Nek then proposed a compromise whereby the scheme would be made compulsory for recruits under 21 as these were minors under Sesotho law, but the Resident Commissioner and the NRC opposed the idea.¹⁷ The situation was summed up by the Chamber of Mines in 1930 to the South African Economic Commission: "In Basutoland, particularly, the Council chiefs have on several occasions recommended the Basutoland Administration to make the deferred pay system compulsory. The natives who are concerned, who earn the money, say 'No'".¹⁸

The Struggle over Migrants' Earnings

The arguments of Basotho chiefs and members of the elite for making deferred pay compulsory tended to be coded in moralist terms. Chiefs argued, according to the Resident Commissioner, that Basotho migrants spent their money "on women, drink and other extravagances".¹⁹ One Mosotho working in Durban wrote to the "Respected Father" (the Resident Commissioner) in support of the chiefs' position:

I have been at Premier Mine, Pretoria and Johannesburg and today I am here in Durban. It is not astonishing or wonderful that a man who has been away from home for all that period to have no penny in his purse? [sic] The things that cause extravagance of money are mainly kaffir-beer and things sold by Indians, such as oranges, bananas, monkey-nuts and drinks of different kinds... Dances, tea-parties and concerts are things in which young men waste money.²⁰

On occasion, however, chiefly concerns were expressed more

17. LNA, S3/5/18/9, RC to PC, 1 March 1931; PC to RC, 6 June 1931; Litaba, 1929, pp.22-24.

18. University of Cape Town Manuscripts, BC 630, "South African Native Commission: Minutes", par. 9073-9176.

19. LNA, S3/5/18/9, RC to NRC Maseru Representative, 5 May 1931.

20. *Ibid.*, Bethany Moketa to RC, 19 November 1928.

bluntly. In 1931 the Paramount claimed in a letter to the Resident Commissioner:

...I am greatly surprised if this matter is not an important one in this nation, for these monies will help by being taken by people in need of tax, they will exchange their stock for these monies of these people, instead of it being wasted in the Union. And this is help to the Government and to the Chieftainship, and even to the traders of this country, because they will buy with these monies, at the shops. It is also help to the nation because those in difficulties will sell their stock for these monies.²¹

But the great majority of Basotho migrants were not willing to allow chiefs access to their earnings. The General Manager of the Natal Coast Labour Recruiting Corporation explained to the Resident Commissioner in 1927:

...I have been doing everything possible to insist upon Basutos returning home being paid on their arrival, by our agents or one of your Commissioners, but these boys have a very independent nature, and they very strongly object to these terms. They state they are not children, and have a right to spend their money how, and where they like.²²

This struggle was, however, temporarily resolved in favour of the chiefs during the 1932-33 drought when many Basotho migrants sent large sums of money to families and relatives at home. L86 732 was remitted in 1933 as compared to L34 820 and L41 018 in 1931 and 1932, respectively. L58 856 was on deferred pay in 1933 as compared to L28 645 (1930), L44 331 (1931) and L50 446 (1932).²³

Yet arguably, the main factor affecting the attitude of migrants to deferred pay was linked to struggles within Basotho homesteads. In 1909 the Resident Commissioner of Bechuanaland wrote to his counterpart in Basutoland regarding the complaint that Basotho in the police service in his Protectorate were not remitting money to their families: "I have seen requests from uncles, cousins and persons who

21. Ibid., PC to RC, 19 May 1931.

22. Ibid., Natal Coast LRC GM to RC, 12 February 1922.

23. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, Appendix IX.

probably are no relations at all, for money from men who are earning their living in the police".²⁴ This intra-homestead struggle became more pronounced in the course of the following decade, and was particularly acute during the 1932-33 drought. One Mosotho in Maseru wrote to the Assistant Commissioner in May 1933:

I beg to ask for assistance regarding my brother who had been in the Transvaal for a long time - directly after my father's death in 1923. Up to this day he has not returned to Basutoland, and his mother died in 1929 during his absence...

I make this request because I hear from those who were working with him that he spends money carelessly and has no clothing. His salary is L3 per month.

Under the abovementioned reasons I beg to request that you will be kind enough as to ask the compound manager on my behalf that when this boy has paid his tax up to date, he should be forced to defer L2 every month and get L1 only so that when he is discharged all that money should be sent to the government at Maseru where he would receive it... I make this request as I am now responsible for his living...

Owing to this prevalent depression I would not like him to return home at once but should work for a few months and then come home.²⁵

A case which was to lead to intense correspondence in 1934 was of one Mosotho ("Flag" Letsoela) from Leribe who was employed as an induna at the Comet Deep mine in the East Rand, whose elder brother ("Potfol") wanted to take control of his earnings. Potfol sent Flag's two wives to the Comet Deep to demand money, but the younger brother sent the women back. Later, Potfol applied to the Assistant Commissioner for permission for Flag's first wife to go to the East Rand again. But the Basutoland Agency in Johannesburg intervened after Flag had produced slips and letters proving that he was supporting his family. Potfol defended himself:

...it is not true when he states that he supports his children. If he supports them what is the reason for them to go to him?

Secondly why his second wife...returned to live with her

²⁴. LNA, S7/7/46, RC Bechuanaland to RC Basutoland, 12 February 1909.

²⁵. LNA, Miscellaneous Native Letters (1933), Ngaka to AC (Maseru), 12 May 1933.

own parents if she is being supported by him [?] Thirdly why does his mother, daughter in law and daughter go about practically naked if he looks after them? How much money does he say he has sent to me if he says that I am cause of his inability to support his family [?] Three years ago he gave me L2 ... and again on July 1st last he gave me L1. Are those amounts the cause of his inability to support his families? It would be a mistake for child (sic) to say that his **father** [my emphasis] causes him to be unable to support his wives only because he happens to give his father a knife for cutting nails...
 ...I have no pride above the law. I find sons of Seisa asking for three head of cattle for the bohali of Flag's son who married in his father's absence. Have I to pay these debts or not? I also find a man of Tumahole's who is asking for payment of a beast and 10 [sic] for doctoring Flag's daughter in law. Have I to pay these or not? I also find that Messrs Frasers, Namely, Mr. Field [sic] taking Flag's horse for a debt which Flag has not paid for a long time. His son was stopped by my wife from going to the Mines because his father does not support his [Flag's] children.²⁸

What is probable is that Potfol, with no other source of income and using his position in the extended family, claimed and took the money that Flag was sending his family. Flag's wives probably tried to assert their claim, hence one of them had to return to her family. It is not surprising that Flag blamed Potfol for the remittances not reaching his family.

As migrants' earnings started becoming decisive in the developmental cycle of Basotho households, conflict within the extended families also increased. The traditional distribution of power and privileges was manipulated to achieve certain ends; elder brothers made claims over their younger brothers' earnings, especially in cases where the parents were not alive. Uncles and fathers also made similar claims. While such efforts were intended to protect households from collapsing as the result of the loss of access to migrants' remittances, the tensions they caused frequently had the opposite effect.

The interest of the South African authorities in the VDP and

²⁸. LNA, Leribe Collection, Box 29, Potfol to AC, 3 September 1934.

remittance schemes was motivated by different factors. Claims that the scheme was established to "save" migrants from "themselves" and to "protect" them from "robbers", were clearly, just like the chiefs' moralist discourse, intended to deflect attention from the real issues. In the first place, considerable importance was still attached to recruits spending part of their earnings in the Union, hence in 1931 maximum VDP was fixed at 10s per fortnight. Also, interest from the Deferred Pay Fund came to play an important role in financing recreational programmes in the gold mine compounds.

The authorities' prime concern, however, centred around the long-term impact of the migrant labour system on the rural economies. In colonial Lesotho, as has been shown, the situation became more serious from the 1920s with rural production decreasing and dependence on migrants' remittances increasing. Pim concluded his 1935 assessment of the position of labour migrancy in Lesotho:

It is clear that the Territory could not under existing conditions dispense with the income from the mines, supplemented as it is by the earnings of some 30 000 men who have on the average received passes for agriculture and miscellaneous labour, and of a proportion of the 45 000 who have gone abroad on visiting passes. Any serious restriction of the present opportunities for outside labour would cause severe distress, more especially if it coincided with unfavourable agricultural seasons or low prices for wool.²⁷

This provided the basis for a struggle over the control of the earnings of the migrants. This continued until the Leabua Jonathan government made the deferment of pay compulsory in 1975, but even then, only after much resistance from Basotho migrants.

Basutoland Johannesburg Agent

The refusal of the Basutoland government to make the deferment of pay compulsory was not primarily due to concern over

²⁷. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.37.

"personal rights" of Basotho men as the Resident Commissioner claimed. It was not the determination of the colonial government but that of Basotho migrants themselves which led to the failure of the chiefs' campaign. Like the NRC, the Resident Commissioner was not prepared to risk upsetting the supply of labour with measures which would be unpopular with Basotho migrants, especially those which had the potential of creating unrest. What was of great concern to the colonial government, however, was the failure and refusal of Basotho migrants and makholoa to pay their tax dues. This was to lead to the establishment of a Basutoland Johannesburg Agent, though the scheme was initially presented as one which would look after the welfare of Basotho migrants.

The idea of a Basutoland Agent was first put on the agenda of the colonial government by the ubiquitous Ernest Mabile after his brief visit to Johannesburg in February 1896 where he was inspired by the example of J.S. Marwick, the Natal Johannesburg agent responsible for the welfare of Zulu migrants. But Lagden at first ignored the proposal. Undeterred, within a few days of his arrival in Johannesburg in June to take up a missionary job, Mabile began back-stage manoeuvring. Marwick sent a telegram on the 22nd of June to the Natal Native Affairs Department: "E. Mabile a French gentleman formerly of Basutoland bearing a letter from Mr G. Lagden... asks me to write for information of latter a memorandum showing objects of the office here and how they are carried. May his request be complied with".²⁸ On the 24th of the same month, Mabile wrote to Sloley: "I thought the best way to explain what I mean would be to interview the Natal Agent, Mr Marwick, and ask him for details of the working of his Agency. His reply was that his Government would gladly supply the Basutoland authorities with official information if applied to".²⁹ He did not reveal that Marwick had already contacted the Natal government to request

²⁸. Natal Archives Depot, SNA 1/1/223, 924/1896, Telegram to SNA, 22 June 1896.

²⁹. LNA, S7/7/18, Mabile to GS, 24 June 1896.

such information.

With Lagden and Sloley refusing to implement his plan, Mabile went ahead and established himself as a *de facto* Basutoland Agent. Through his savings agency and work in the NAD, his missionary visits to the mine compounds, as well as his involvement in labour recruitment, Mabile managed to build a reputation for himself as the "father" of Basotho migrants. He played an important role in helping Basotho parents and chiefs trace and repatriate their missing and sick sons and men. In April 1910 the NAD complained to the Government Secretary that "letters on official paper are frequently received from the Native Staff at Leribe addressed... to H.E. Mabile... one of the Inspectors of this Department, requesting his assistance on obtaining the return of natives, in conveying messages, and various other matters connected with native affairs, which it is peculiarly the province of this Department to deal with".³⁰ What the NAD was not aware of was that Mabile was in fact encouraging this irregular practice in order to make himself indispensable to the Basutoland government. In 1906, after outlining to Sloley the twelve areas he thought such an Agent could cover, Mabile had written:

I herewith enclose specimens of typical letters which I receive by every post requesting me to assist in tracing the whereabouts of husbands, sons or brothers who have abandoned their families or leave them destitute. I have also been often requested by Assistant Commissioners in the name of Chiefs or relatives to trace boys and prevail upon them to return home, to visit patients in Hospitals or prisoners in gaols, and it is evident that I cannot possibly be of any assistance in such cases unless I am officially appointed to do this kind of work.³¹

When WNLA collapsed in British South Africa in 1906 and with Paramount Letsie convening emergency meetings with the Resident Commissioner in June and November of that year to discuss the activities of labour agents, Mabile took the opportunity in December to present Sloley with concrete

³⁰. LNA, S7/7/53, SNA to GS, 13 April 1910.

³¹. LNA, S7/7/39, Mabile to Sloley, 29 December 1906.

suggestions as to how the Agent's functions could be used to resolve the "anarchic state" of labour recruitment in Lesotho. He specifically blamed the crisis on unscrupulous agents and chiefs who conscripted their men to the mines:

The great point with Natives generally and with Basutos particularly is to establish confidence. Those who have studied the ideosyncracies of the Basutos know that more perhaps than other tribes they are very suspicious and at the same time very credulous, that they believe in individuals more than in impersonal institutions however good they may be, and I venture to say that nothing would do more to bring Basutoland in line with other countries and districts and help to solve the important problem for the Rand of unskilled labour, than the establishment of an Agency in Johannesburg where they would have access to some one they know and trust for advice and protection.³²

Mabille then took his campaign to the press. The Rand Daily Mail had earlier suggested, in connection with the "anarchy" in Lesotho that "what is really needed to remedy the complaints is for the [Basutoland] Government to appoint a person in Johannesburg to hear and investigate all complaints, and to obtain justice for the Natives".³³ By July 1907 articles had appeared in the Star, Friend of the Free State, and Naledi ea Lesotho, all urging the Basutoland government to consider a Johannesburg Agent.³⁴

Mabille's involvement in labour recruitment also gave him other connections and opportunities for his campaign. In July 1907 his labour recruiting partner, C. McComb, met with the Transvaal minister responsible for native affairs to discuss labour questions, and to raise the issue of a Basutoland Agent. McCombe subsequently wrote to Sloley about this meeting and the wish of the Transvaal government to argue for a Basutoland office similar to those of the Cape Colony and Natal. His report closed with a postscript drawn word for

³². Ibid.

³³. Daily Mail, 7 November 1906.

³⁴. These newspaper articles are attached to LNA, S7/7/37, Mabille to Sloley, 17 April 1907; S7/7/39, Mabille to Sloley, 22 February 1907.

word from Mabile's December 1906 letter cited above.³⁵

Mabile combined his various strategies of making himself indispensable, campaigning in the press and rallying the Transvaal government behind him, with agitating for a Basutoland Agent among the chiefs. In July 1907 eleven chiefs petitioned the Resident Commissioner, requesting him to "find us a man who will look after our people who are working in the goldfields", and recommending Mabile for the position.³⁶ When Taberer visited Lesotho with Mabile later in August to introduce and popularise the GNLB, the chiefs again put forward their request for an Agent, referring to the NAD and the GNLB as "foreign". This process culminated in the issue being discussed at the January 1908 sitting of the National Council. Discussion centred on the GNLB which some chiefs did not think was best placed to play the role of an Agent. Although several chiefs suggested Mabile, others had no confidence in either him or Taberer:

I visited the [GNLB] compound [said councillor Morolong]. There were many people there enclosed in a ...fence to prevent them [from] running away. They said they were being sold... When they came back here with complaints they are simply told that a native has no right to complain. I remarked to Mr Mabile that he did not tell our people would be badly treated. Mr Mabile said it was law that a native should not reply or defend himself when he is being judged.³⁷

³⁵. LNA, S7/7/39, McComb to Sloley, 31 July 1907. In March 1907, while recruiting labour for the Village Main, Mabile had confided to Sloley: "The [Savings] Agency I am conducting in the meantime is simply a temporary means of making a living. Beside being insecure and subject to ups and downs according to the wants of the mines or the fancy of the boys, it does not offer me that sphere of usefulness to all the Basutos employed on the Rand which it is still my aim and ambition to secure. My action on their behalf, besides being restricted on account of being private is only confined to the two mines for which I am recruiting labour. I shall therefore be very glad if you will kindly keep in mind the matter of a Basutoland Agency being eventually started on the Rand". See LNA, S7/7/39, Mabile to Sloley, 22 March 1907.

³⁶. LNA, S4/4/4, petition to AC (Maseru), 19 July 1907.

³⁷. Report of the Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, 1908, p.21.

Deadlock ensued, and there the matter rested for another two decades, by which time the indefatigable Mabile had died.³⁸.

There are three possible reasons why Lagden and Sloley blocked the issue of establishing a Basutoland Agent even though Natal, the Cape Colony, and southern Mozambique, all operated such an office. Firstly, the colonial government was reluctant to spend money on the welfare of Basotho migrants as the policy had always been to minimise costs and increase revenue. Secondly, as demonstrated during the 1908 National Council, Sloley was convinced that the NAD and the GNLB fulfilled the functions of such an Agent. And finally, Lagden and Sloley may well have regarded the whole project as nothing more than Mabile's personal ambition and agenda; when the press and the chiefs joined the campaign, these officials had already been receiving letters and memoranda from Mabile on this issue for ten years.

It was only when labour migrancy affected tax collection that the colonial government moved to open an office in Johannesburg. The first two decades of this century saw the streamlining of the system of taxation in Basutoland. The hut tax had been increased from 10s to L1 in 1898. In 1911 this tax was converted into poll tax; the new law now required that every Mosotho man of more than 18 years old should pay tax, and every man with more than one wife was required to pay for each additional wife but with the ceiling put at L3 to avoid antagonising the chiefs, all of whom had more than one wife. Chiefs, during the discussion of this tax increase at the National Council sitting, argued that the minimum age should be put at 21 instead of 18. The issue came up again in 1916 with the new Resident Commissioner wanting to impose the 18-year age limit. The intention here was to drive the youth to labour centres, but chiefs complained that many of the 18-year old boys were herdboys and should be exempted from the payment

³⁸. According to Stephen Gill, the curator of the PEMS Morija Archives, Mabile died in 1929 from cardiac failure.

of poll tax. By 1930 a compromise was in operation whereby 18-year old boys at home were exempted from this tax, while those in wage employment were required to pay. This arrangement continued until May 1933 when a new law set the age limit at twenty-one.³⁹

In 1920 poll tax was increased from L1 (20s) to 25s. The colonial government had initially wanted a 10s increase but had to agree to 5s following protest from the National Council. In 1927 an "education levy" of 3s was added to this tax. Additionally, once the system of registration of tax payers was put in place between 1911 and 1912, responsibility for the collection of tax was taken away from the chiefs, eventually being made over to paid tax collectors in 1928. Revenue from Native Tax grew from L69 601 (1909-10) to L97 722 (1912-13) and L141 719 (1928-29).⁴⁰

But despite increasing efficiency in collection, the problem of tax evasion continued to grow. This was due to both bokholoa and the increase in the number of Basotho migrants who took contracts which lasted longer than any one fiscal year. In 1915 the government asked the GNLB to help in tracing Basotho "tax defaulters" on the Rand. The system worked as follows: an Assistant Commissioner in Basutoland would send the GNLB a list of "defaulters" from his district, indicating the miner's headman or chief and his employer on the Rand. The GNLB would, on its part, send a note to various compound managers asking them to trace "defaulters" thought to be on their mines. If the migrant was found, the mine officials would collect the L1 from him and send it to the GNLB offices to be forwarded to the relevant Assistant Commissioner in Lesotho. But the arrangement was short-lived. Within a year the GNLB officials were complaining that this practice was increasing the Bureau's office work, and asked

³⁹. Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", p.238; Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.55-58; Basutoland Proclamations and Notices, 1933, p.23.

⁴⁰. Kimble, "Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule", p.389; Pim, Financial and Economic Position, Appendix X.

the Basutoland administration to find other ways of collecting tax on the Rand. The sending of a Native Tax Collector to the Rand was then considered.⁴¹

It was only at the beginning of 1922 that a decision was taken to send the Collector but the project had to be suspended until November because of the Rand Revolt. The Collector was to spend six months on the Reef, tracing "defaulters" and collecting tax from them. The Paramount Chief even despatched his own representatives to the Rand to urge his people to cooperate; other chiefs wrote letters to migrants from their districts instructing them to pay their tax at the Johannesburg Pass Office where the Collector was to be stationed. But many Basotho made a fool of the Collector, dodging him or playing him against the Union's tax collectors. Possibly out of frustration, the Collector insisted on attempting to collect tax from makholoa and Basotho who now regarded themselves as South African citizens. Due to problems such as these, the Collector was withdrawn in 1923 and a solution eventually found in establishing a permanent Basutoland Agent in Johannesburg.⁴²

In fact, a Basutoland Agent and five "native clerks" were only appointed in 1932 by which time tax evasion had assumed greater proportions because of the depression. Not surprisingly, there was resistance to Armstrong - the Basutoland Johannesburg Officer - on the part of many Basotho workers. The Acting Resident Commissioner reported to the Paramount Chief in April 1932:

...in his [Armstrong] report he mentions that on the Simmer and Jack one Masopha a son of Chief Api, brother of Ramabanta refused to pay Tax and having some influence over the other Basuto there a good many others followed his example. Again at the City Deep one Selise Ntemere son of headman Ntemere chief Sempe [sic] also refused and

⁴¹. SAB, GNLB 219, 209/15/91, GS to DNL, 12 November 1915; Acting DNL to GS, 8 August 1916.

⁴². Ibid., Chief Pass Officer (CPO) to DNL, 24 November 1922; CPO to DNL, 6 October 1922; DNL to CPO, 30 November 1922.

persuaded others to do the same. The Mine Authorities very kindly supported Mr Armstrong altho' of course they have nothing to do with Tax Collection and in each case these two men were discharged and are to be repatriated to Basutoland. Chief Masupha afterwards addressed the Basuto in these Compounds and when they saw what happened to these two people they agreed to pay.⁴³

As a result, the 1932 annual report was able to claim that "the collection was a great success, and when once the initial difficulties had been overcome the natives appeared to be keen to pay".⁴⁴ Between April and July of this year L17 300 was collected, and L24 128 during the 1932-33 fiscal year.

Table 3.3: Tax Collected from Basotho by the Johannesburg Agency

Fiscal Year	L
1932-33	24 128
1933-34	26 500
1934-35	33 146
1935-36	34 303
1936-37	34 477
1937-38	38 634

Source: CAR, 1937; 1938.

Table 3.3 shows that though the total income from Native Tax in Lesotho declined in 1933-34⁴⁵ due to the drought, tax collection in Johannesburg itself actually increased.

These improvements in the collection of the Johannesburg tax were due to various strategies used by Armstrong. Besides the active support he received from the mine and Union authorities, Armstrong toured the compounds, addressing Basotho workers. He also attended mine activities like sports

⁴³. LNA, S8/2/2/28, Acting RC to PC, 15 April 1932.

⁴⁴. CAR, 1932, p.32.

⁴⁵. Income from Native Tax had been declining since the depression; from L141 719 (1928-29), L136 237 (1929-30), L125 665 (1930-31), L116 783 (1931-32), reaching L90 017 (1933-34). See Pim, Financial and Economic Position, Appendix X.

and Moshoeshoe Festivals. At the same time, the personnel in the Office, staffed largely by chiefs, was also increased. By 1939 the Office employed eleven tax collectors, many of whom (at least for the seven from Lesotho) were linked to the chieftaincy. But resistance from at least some Basotho migrants did not cease. One Mosotho employed at Maraisburg complained to the Paramount about tax collectors who were invading their places of work. In 1936 some Mosotho complained that tax money was being deducted from their earnings through the intervention of the Johannesburg Office, and that they were being arrested if they objected.⁴⁶

Cash Advances and Desertion

The colonial government was, however, still faced with the long-standing problem caused by desertions. Money advanced by labour agents for the payment of tax had to be refunded if recruits deserted on the way to the mines or from service. This became a growing source of tension between the colonial government and labour agents.

Cash advances were important for the colonial government and labour agents. For the former, this money provided income for households and guaranteed the payment of tax by departing migrants. Labour agents, on their side, used cash advances to lure labourers and encourage families and chiefs to push their sons and men to the labour centres. As already noted, recruits were advanced cash for railfares, provisions, hut/poll taxes, and for miscellaneous purposes such as leaving families and relatives with money. Blankets and grain also

⁴⁶. Leselinyana, 31 January 1934; 22 July 1936; 6 September 1939; 15 November 1933; Union of South Africa, Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, no. 17, 1936, G.P.S.1322; no.18, 1937, G.P.S.1255; no.24, 1948, G.P.S.2277; Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.58.

served as advances in times of distress.⁴⁷ In 1910 the maximum which could be advanced to recruits was fixed at L5 in South Africa and L2 in Lesotho. The reason for imposing a limit on advances was because competing labour agents would offer up to L25, thus putting the whole system at risk. With the establishment of the monopsony following the formation of the NRC, the pressure to offer large advances decreased.⁴⁸

The desertion of the recruits en route to the mines was primarily caused by the need for quick cash. At a meeting of the colonial government with labour agents in December 1920, it was noted that "advances are the main cause of all desertions and impersonation".⁴⁹ A Mosotho man in urgent need of money, or not willing to go to the mines, would approach a tout and take a contract using a false name. Depending on the district, the man would then disappear somewhere along the way, especially at entrainment points or when changing trains. In 1912, Mabile reported that one of his recruits "left the train at Bloemfontein with his blankets, etc, on the pretext of buying some food in that town and that he has not arrived at the New Comet".⁵⁰

The colonial government initially refunded the agents only for tax money paid for recruits who were rejected on medical grounds on arrival at the mines. It refused to refund monies when it came to cash advanced to deserters. At the same time, labour agents felt that the authorities were not making enough effort to recover deserters. This culminated in an exchange in 1916 between the NRC District Superintendent, Maitland Brown, and the Basutoland authorities on this issues. Brown wanted labour agents to be refunded tax advanced to deserters,

⁴⁷. Cattle, however, never featured as advances. For the case of Pondoland where cattle were used as advances to mine recruits, see W. Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860 to 1930, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982), pp.54-62.

⁴⁸. Van der Horst, Native Labour, p.195.

⁴⁹. SAB, GNLB 291, 168/19/35, Minutes of the Government Secretary's Meeting of Labour Agents, 2 December 1920.

⁵⁰. LNA, TY 1/3/8, Mabile to AC Maseru, 20 February 1912.

and, citing a letter he received from the Basutoland Mounted Police Officer in Charge, demanded "protection":

"Should a desertion be reported we are told that we must send an identifying witness with the Police before the arrest can be made as they so often arrest the wrong person: you will see that this is a very expensive method to us and rather than waste money by hiring horses for the witness we prefer to let the deserter go Scot free". Surely we are entitled to Police protection?⁵¹

On this point, the government eventually gave way, and agreed to refund labour agents the tax they had advanced to deserters. This culminated in a meeting with labour agents in December 1920 where a compromise was worked out. It was resolved

...that a labourer who has been convicted for desertion and on expiry of his sentence or payment of fine has not refunded the amount of advances, shall be given the option of fulfilling his contract with the Agent who recruited him or any other, failing which he should be sent out to the Chief for collection of such advances; that labourers on attestation should be warned of the penal consequences of desertion, and that the name of the Labour Agent and the Mine to which he is recruited should be written on the pass issued to labourer; and that...the Resident Commissioner be requested to review and if possible alter the ruling whereby the Government is responsible for the refund of tax paid to deserters, the meeting considering it an ordinary trade risk to be taken by the Labour Agent.⁵²

In addition, the system for recovering deserters was also to be improved. Police and chiefs were to be mobilised, and a list of deserters circulated in the country. All deserters were to be marked in red in the Tax Register column for the tax due to be paid. Labour agents, for their part, undertook to despatch their recruits as soon as possible to minimise chances of desertion. So successful was this meeting that labour agents further agreed that the government could stop refunding them tax paid to recruits rejected in Johannesburg.⁵³

⁵¹. LNA, S3/5/18/5, Brown to GS, 10 August 1916.

⁵². SAB, GNLB 291, 168/18/35, Minutes, 2 December 1920.

⁵³. Ibid.; LNA, QN 3/1/2, AC (Qachas Nek) to GS, 30 November 1920.

However, by 1922 this agreement was in crisis. Brown blaming the increasing rate of desertion on police "apathy" because the government was no longer refunding the tax paid to deserters. Between January 1921 and June 1922, 175 NRC Basotho recruits deserted, causing the Corporation to lose nearly L800. Brown estimated that desertion figures for other labour agents during this period were about 525, entailing a loss of L2 500. Desertion rates continued to rise, especially between 1924 and 1925; in Maseru alone, 90 desertions were reported in January–November 1925, compared with 18 in 1924. The NRC then intensified its fight against desertion throughout the sub-region. Deserters arrested inside the Union were sent to the Rand for trial, while Bechuanaland and Lesotho tried their own cases. Fines in Bechuanaland went up to L5 or a two months prison term with hard labour; the common sentence in colonial Lesotho was a L10 fine or six months with hard labour. The Basutoland Mounted Police also intensified its work, and instructions issued that lists of deserters should be taken along on all patrols. Regular visits were to be paid to chiefs and relatives of wanted deserters, and police officers were to send monthly reports to the Officer in Charge in Maseru on deserters.⁵⁴

With little improvement in desertion rates, Stephens despairingly exclaimed: "It will simply mean that if desertions go on like this, that we shall have to go out of the business".⁵⁵ The colonial government was powerless: "As the bulk of the desertions appear to be taking place in the Union, I am afraid there is little else to be done beyond taking the usual steps to have the deserters apprehended when notification of desertions has been made".⁵⁶ With the NRC continuing to suffer from desertions, appeals were sent to the Resident Commissioner of Basutoland, but he did nothing except

⁵⁴. LNA, S3/5/18/7, B.M.P. Staff Officer's circular regarding "Labour Deserters", 1 December 1925; LNA, MH 3/1/5, NRC circular no.13, 5 February 1925.

⁵⁵. LNA, S3/5/18/7, Stephens to GS, 30 November 1925.

⁵⁶. LNA, S3/3/1/10, GS to Stephens, 2 September 1927.

send circulars to Assistant Commissioners.⁵⁷

Basotho desertion from the mines was difficult to control for a whole variety of reasons. Not only did conditions on the mines themselves account for many of such desertions,⁵⁸ but there were also other factors away from the point of production.

For example, there was a flourishing traffic in pass books between the Rand and the labour supplying districts. In 1907 Mabile complained to Leselinyana as follows:

I regrettably hereby inform the [Paramount] Chief and chiefs and the whole nation about a disgraceful practice that spoils the name of Lesotho and Basotho, which must be attended to and stopped. I refer to this practice of helping people to desert by bringing and selling to the passes. Several sons of chiefs are also implicated, and I have their names which I cannot disclose here. Basotho seems to be the only ones involved in this traffic, and the Johannesburg pass authorities are now aware that this is a big business for Basotho of Moshoeshoe. Only in one week five people were arrested and are all the children of Lesotho, while others are still under surveillance and will soon be arrested too.⁵⁹

But this traffic continued to increase. The offices of Assistant Commissioners were broken into, and blank and stamped pass books stolen. Signatures were forged and the books sent to the Rand for sale. Basotho who wanted to desert would ask their relatives or friends in colonial Lesotho to arrange a pass for them. This also happened when employers

⁵⁷. LNA, S3/5/18/4, RC's circular to ACs, 2 April 1931; S3/5/18/7, Brown to GS, 22 August 1922; RC to HC, 7 January 1933.

⁵⁸. For colonial Zimbabwe, see the seminal article by C. van Onselen, "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920", Journal of African History, vol.14, no.2, 1973. South African mines are discussed in Richardson, and van-Helten, "Labour in the South African gold mining industry", in Marks and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change. See also R. Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers", Review of African Political Economy, vol.19, 1980.

⁵⁹. Leselinyana, 1 August 1907.

refused to release sick or injured miners,⁶⁰ or men who had emergencies to attend to at home.⁶¹ To acquire a pass, a relative/friend would either steal one, bribe, for example, a tout for an extra pass, or buy one from known dealers like one Theko Hamilton who was arrested in Johannesburg in January 1916 for travelling under the name "Monamela Sam" and charged with "trespass", forgery, and "being in possession and making use of a pass belonging to another".⁶²

Conclusion

The deepening of dependency on the earnings of Basotho migrants was accompanied by the sharpening of struggles within many homesteads, and between Basotho migrants on the one hand, and the chiefs and the colonial government on the other. These struggles centred around access to and the control of these earnings. The wages of Basotho migrants were not only essential for their families and relatives, but also, as tax, provided the colonial state with revenue. Hence it was so important that mechanisms were put in place to facilitate the

⁶⁰. One Mosotho defended himself in June 1930: "I deserted because I was injured by a stone on my fingers" (Rex vs Lefosa, 12 June 1930); and another (March 1927): "I was sick" (Rex vs Matsosa, 17 March 1927). For other cases, see LNA, CR Mafeteng (MFT) 1910-13, CR MFT February 17/27 to February 34/28, CR MFT August 202/30 to January 11/31.

⁶¹. See, for example, the case of Mashoela who "was working on the Jupiter Mine when he deserted [in January 1916] for these reasons. He was attested here [at Peka] for the mines for four months and after working for two learned of the death of his father Makhoala. He then requested that he might be granted leave to visit Basutoland as he knew of the whereabouts of his father's flocks, offering to pay wages in lieu of the two months further work. He wrote to the man who recruited him on the subject but received no reply. I [the Basutoland Mounted Police Officer in Charge] have... interviewed Mashoela's uncle Marata who bears out the statement that Mashoela alone knew of the deceased property and also the recruiter admits that Mashoela wrote asking him to arrange his release from the mine". See LNA, S7/7/75, Basutoland Mounted Police (BMP) Officer in Charge to BMP Commissioner (Maseru), 12 January 1916.

⁶². LNA, S7/7/75, Acting Chief Pass Officer to DNL, 7 January 1916.

deferment of migrants' pay to their families, and to trace tax evaders and labour deserters. But these measures had to face up to the resistance of the migrants themselves.

With so many Basotho now taking longer contracts and bokholoa on the increase, mine compounds assumed an increasingly important place in the lives of migrants, and it is to these experiences that the following chapters turn.

instrument in this regard. By the mid-1920s, the mine owners were in a relatively comfortable position, with labour supply stabilised and costs kept in check. Now concerned with the long-term profitability of their mines, managements began to improve conditions in the compounds and to address questions of occupational safety and the recreation of African miners.

But none of this was achieved without struggle, as managements often acted in response to initiatives taken by the miners themselves. Moreover, the early 1920s were a critical period in African urban history. The rapid African urbanisation that followed World War I was accompanied by the radicalisation of African politics. For the mines, the period 1918-20 was one of African labour unrest across the Reef. And the support that the Transvaal Native Congress gave to the mine workers, and the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in 1919, were both serious concerns for management. In all of these ways, the compounds were sites of struggle.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline certain of these processes and struggles. Part I will deal with the period 1900-1920, and Part II with 1920-1940 (with specific reference to struggles around leisure and recreation in the compounds). Chapter Five will focus on religion in the mine compounds, while Chapter Six will examine collective violence by examining the case of the Premier Diamond mine compounds.

I

THE COMPOUNDS

The institution of compounds was developed in the Kimberley diamond mines in the mid-1880s for the housing and control of

African migrant workers.² To prevent diamond thefts, Kimberley compounds were "closed", with workers only allowed to leave the premises at the expiry of their contracts and only after a thorough search. On the Rand, the housing of African gold miners was unplanned and unsystematic before the South African War. Workers were housed in loosely arranged wooden and iron and, later, brick formations; and as these early compounds were not fenced, workers could move in and out without seeking permission. But after the war, with the gold mines faced with a serious labour "shortage", reducing desertion and "loafing" assumed a greater significance. In 1903 the Chamber of Mines despatched a delegation to Kimberley to study the compound system there, and this culminated in the 1904 Coloured Labour Compound Commission which presented recommendations relating to, among others, the number of workers to be allocated per dormitory, ventilation, and the type of windows and floors in dormitories. The Coloured Labourers Health Regulation Ordinance was passed the following year.³

The importation and use of Chinese labour from 1904 allowed the Chamber to experiment with new compound structures. Workers were housed in rectangular iron buildings resembling barracks. At the centre of this cluster of

². R. Turrell, "Kimberley: Labour and Compounds, 1871-1888", in Marks, and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa; I. Phimister, "Historians and the Big Hole: Kimberley's Historiography Reviewed", South African Historical Journal, vol.20, 1988. See also C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, (Pluto Press, London, 1976), pp.128-32.

³. Paragraph based on S. Moroney, "The Development of the Compound as a Mechanism of Worker Control, 1900-1912", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.4, no.3, 1978; idem, "Mine married quarters: the differential stabilisation of the Witwatersrand workforce, 1900-1920", in Marks and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.112; J. M. Smith, "Working in the Grave: The Development of a Health and Safety System on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1900-1939", (MA, Rhodes University, 1993), pp.66-102; The Transvaal Report of the Coloured Labour Compound Commission as Appointed to Inquire into the Cubic Amount of Air-Space in the Compounds of the Mines of the Witwatersrand, 1905.

dormitories for the accommodation of between 20 and 50 workers, was a courtyard where a kitchen, washing facilities (if they existed), and the compound manager's office were placed. But the absence of the problem of theft on the gold mines - and pressure from the local trading community - led the Chamber to opt for "open" compounds whereby miners could come and go from, albeit with special passes from the compound authorities.⁴

Central to the running of a compound was the compound manager. During this period, a compound was seen as a "tribe" and the compound manager as the "Supreme Chief". The popularity of the mine partly relied on the popularity of its compound manager whose paternalistic relations with the workforce, so it was believed, shaped their outlook of the mine and their work. Almost all gold mines had "native" names, some of which were inspired by their compound managers. Meyer and Charlton mine was known as "Mahleka" ("the one who likes laughing"); the Witwatersrand Gold Mine as "Mafuta" ("the fat one"); and the Government Areas mine as "Nkosi" ("the chief"). The majority of compound managers during this period had "native" nicknames, even where the mine carried a different name. Although Crown Mine, for example, was called "Mafenstere" ("the windows"), its compound manager in 1934 was known as "Molokisi" ("the one who puts things in order or makes people happy") to Basotho workers.⁵

Often enough, African miners associated a mine with its compound and authority with compound managers. In the Basotho press, the words merafo (mines) and kompone (compound) were

4. Van Onselen, Chibaro, pp.128-32; Moroney, "Development of the Compound". See also V.L. Allen, The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa. Volume I. The Techniques of Resistance, 1871-1948, (The Moor Press, Keighley, 1992), pp.237-63.

5. J.K. McNamara, "The Development of a Labour Infrastructure: Migration Routes to the Witwatersrand Gold Mines and Compound Accommodation, 1889-1912", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.4, no.3, 1978, p.27; Moroney, "The Development of the Compound", p.38.

used interchangeably to refer to the mines.⁶ One Mosotho wrote to Leselinyana in 1911: "I just arrived here at the mine called City Deep Compound, which was once under Mr Blisset, (Mkulu-ndaba,⁷ in Setebele⁸), but now it is under Mr Cook (Mboma in Setebele): this is Sezulu not Sexhosa, it means, a sjambok [whip]".⁹ This particular individual was writing to encourage his fellow countrymen way to the mines to join him, because Cook, although very strict, prohibited any maltreatment of workers.

Mine officials promoted certain names to make mine work and mines popular, and to manage and control the workforce without coercion. They and the Native Affairs Department officials were aware of African nicknames of the mines, even circulating in 1906 and 1917 a list of Sesotho and Zulu/Xhosa names of Rand, Pretoria, Heidelberg, Rooiberg, Klerksdorp and Witbank gold, coal and diamond mines. In addition to the character and appearance of compound managers, these names were also inspired by the location of the mine, a memorable incident, the nature of the work and the working conditions, and the composition of the workforce. But names like "Dagafontein" (Daggafontein) and "Banchesi" (Bantjes Consolidated) were based on the original English name.¹⁰ Most names were

⁶. Even in A. Mabile, and H. Dieterlen, Sesuto-English Dictionary, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1911), kompone is defined as "company, compound, mine" (p.155); and morafu as "digging, mine" (p.289).

⁷. "Big news".

⁸. From "Ndebele"; a reference used by Basotho to refer to the Nguni-speaking people. It dates to the 1820s, during the highly disputed period of "Mfecane", when the Basotho were subject to attacks which are being attributed to Shaka in popular history.

⁹. Leselinyana, 19 October 1911.

¹⁰. Modder Deep Level = "Mapondweni" ("at the Ponds"); Van Ryn Deep = "Mazambane" ("the potatoes"); Angelo = "Nyoni Mhlope" ("a white bird"); Premier Diamond Mine = "Pikinini Kimbili" ("Little Kimberley"). Different mines could also carry the same name or more than one name; "Pikinini Kimbeley" was also applied to Langlaagte Deep which was a gold mine, and New Gogh gold mine was known as "Joji Goro" and "Mafuta". For the full lists, see LNA, S7/7/35, Assistant SNA to GS, 9 January 1906; S7/7/76, Acting DNL circular to labour supplying areas, 7 February 1917.

derived from Nguni languages (with Basotho simply adapting the name to their language),¹¹ with a few mines carrying Sesotho names.¹²

Under the compound manager were the induna who were often chiefs or sons of chiefs from the rural areas. These men were appointed by the compound manager to ensure law and order and settle quarrels among the workers. As a privileged group, the indunas were given separate rooms, extra meat and beer, and earned more than other miners in the compounds. In addition, relatively highly-paid "policeboys" or compound police were appointed by the compound manager to carry out police duties in the compounds, though sharing rooms with their compound mates. Armed with knobkerries and sjamboks, they guarded the compound gates, patrolled and searched dormitories when necessary, controlled queues in the kitchen and washing rooms, and detained workers who contravened the mine rules. Each dormitory chose a sibonda who would liaise with compound authorities and settle petty squabbles among the room mates.¹³

But compounds were more than merely institutions for the control and discipline of labour, as miners tried to make a living and live their lives against the odds. Arriving on the mine, a worker was initiated and socialised into a network of sometimes conflicting and contradictory relationships that linked him to compound and mine authorities, his room-mates, home-mates and work gang-mates. This process began at home as recruits travelled in home-boy groups, and took shape in the daily experiences on the mine, as well as in nearby slums and

11. For an example, "Nkonyama" (Robinson Deep) for the Nguni "Ngonyama" ("lion" - used as a symbol of royalty and bravery), or "Mafopoka" (Crown Reef) for "Mavumbuka" ("the one who emerges/appears unexpectedly").

12. City and Suburban = "Machechisa" ("the one who makes you crawl/creep/go backwards"), and the Nguni turned it to "Matshetshisa"; Randfontein Estate = "Mohlakeng" ("marshy place") or "Malehlakana" ("the mother of marsh").

13. McNamara, "The Development of Labour Infrastructure", p.26; Moroney, "The Development of the Compound", pp.34-39.

locations.¹⁴ For Basotho miners, relatives were the most important network because of the extended nature of the Sotho family structure. Cousins, fathers, brothers and uncles advised new recruits on the best choice of mine and type of job to take; what to expect on arrival; and how to respond. Stimela Jingoos, who took his first mine contract in 1916, learnt a lot about the mines from his father who was a miner himself, and knew about "hammer-boys" (and chose to be one at Langlaagte Mine) as "I knew about them through a cousin of mine who was earning about eleven pounds a month at that job", and "had been told by another cousin, Mokoena, 'You take care when you first go underground...'.¹⁵ According to one informant: "In all those compounds, I arrive already with the knowledge that this one is my relative, he is of so and so, he is from such and such a place... when one is now inside [the compound], meeting new faces, he come across his relative without knowing that he was there".¹⁶ It was ngoaneso (a relative) who facilitated one's integration into the complex relations with the new "faces", community and authority.

Chiefs on the Mines

The movement of growing numbers of Basotho migrants to mines, the increasing phenomenon of bokholoa, and the permanent emigration of thousands of Basotho to South Africa's urban centres following the 1932-33 drought, all posed serious challenges to the chiefs. Almost from the start, the latter had played an important role in the lives of Basotho in the compounds and locations. One of the oldest roles assumed by

¹⁴. T.D. Moodie, (with V. Ndatshe), Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1994), pp.11-43. On these compound networks in the 1970s, see J.K. McNamara, "Brothers and Workmates: Home Friend Networks in the Social Life of Black Migrant Workers in a Gold Mine Hotel", in P. Mayer, (ed.), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Oxford University Press, London, 1980).

¹⁵. S.J. Jingoos, A Chief is a Chief by the People, (Oxford University Press, London, 1975), p.59.

¹⁶. Interview with Solomon Mokoaleli, born 1914.

chiefs was that of indunas and "policeboys" in the compounds. With regard to Basotho, this practice first came under scrutiny in 1907 following the outbreak of a "faction fight" involving Basotho at the Premier Diamond Mine. Ernest Mabile argued in his report that young Basotho chiefs who were employed there as indunas and "policeboys" were "irresponsible", and suggested that the mine should consider employing "elderly headmen from Basutoland responsible to the Compound Manager".¹⁷

Although this suggestion was not implemented, it was later resurrected after another "disturbance" at the same mine in June 1910. During the 1910 Basutoland National Council sitting, Basotho chiefs blamed the cause of the "disturbance" on the use of Zulu "policeboys" over Basotho workers. They communicated their protest to the Government Native Labour Bureau, and an investigation was conducted. They suggested, with the support of the High Commissioner, that a "Mosotho of high rank" should be employed as an induna for Basotho (along the same lines suggested by Mabile three years earlier), and that if the scheme worked it could be tried on other mines.¹⁸ It is not clear whether the suggestion was followed up, but a similar complaint occurred in 1919 when Chief Mojela was sent to investigate factors behind the "bad" conduct of Basotho on the Reef.¹⁹ It was also raised again during the National Council proceedings in 1938 but was quickly dismissed by the then Resident Commissioner, who argued that Basotho miners already had "enough" "policeboys" in proportion to their total number on the mines.²⁰

17. SAB, SNA 465, NA 1578/10, SNA to Imp. Sec., 18 May 1910. See Chapter Seven for a discussion of this "faction fight".

18. SAB, SNA 465, NA 1578/10, SNA to Imp. Sec., 18 May 1910; SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, Boyse's report to GS, October 1911 (undated).

19. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, Imp. Sec. to Governor General, 30 April 1919.

20. Litaba, 1938, p.316. For a different perspective, see a Mosotho miner who visited the Premier Mine in February 1922 and was impressed by the number of Basotho employed there and the use of "leaders of the nation" to manage them and listen to their complaints. He wished that such a system could be

Chiefs' relations with mine officials, the GNLB and the Native Affairs Department, tended to be good. As the Director of the Native Recruiting Corporation, Taberer had developed good links and relations with chiefs in the labour supplying areas through his regular tours of those places. When Taberer died in June 1932, Paramount Griffith sent a wreath on behalf of the Basotho "nation", and instructed three Basotho chiefs who were employed as tax collectors in Johannesburg to attend the funeral. Some lower-ranking mine officers were also held in high esteem. When Knight Deep compound manager Jack Moseley passed away in 1916, Sotho, Pondo, Xhosa and Pedi chiefs arrived on the mine to convey their condolences. Moseley was well liked because he never allowed the beating of workers. Moreover, there were rewards attached to loyal service; the NRC assisted Griffith in 1916 to buy a Hudson motor car valued at L550, and even railed it to Lesotho.²¹

Chiefs also personally visited the mines. Such visits, which became regular from the 1910s, were supported by mineowners as they helped ensure a regular flow of labour and assisted with discipline on the mines, despite reservations expressed over the expense involved.²² The first formal Basotho chiefly visit to the mines was after the formation of the GNLB in 1907, when two representatives of the Paramount Chief were sent to the Rand at the invitation of Taberer.²³ In 1916 Chief Jonathan sent Chief Peko to the Rand to raise L1000 for the payment of a fine, following his attack on his brother Joel.²⁴ Peko only visited the Premier Mine because most

implemented on other mines, as workers had complaints that they were afraid of raising with compound managers and their indunas because of fearing to be dismissed. See Umteteli, 4 March 1922.

²¹. LNA, S7/7/75, NRC to PC, 7 January 1916; S8/2/2/28, PC to Armstrong, 27 June 1932; Leselinyana, 14 January 1916; 22 June 1932.

²². Jeeves, Migrant Labour, pp.162-63; SAB, GNLB 149, 136/14/D.37, NRC to DNL, 7 July 1915.

²³. Report of the Proceedings of BNC, 1908.

²⁴. The dispute between Jonathan (the principal chief of Leribe) and Joel (the principal chief of Butha Buthe), both sons of Molapo (one of Moshoeshoe's brothers), had been a

Basotho employed in the Transvaal were there.²⁵ In June 1918 a chief from Maseru visited the Rand to look for his daughter, and later applied for work as a "policeboy" at the Jupiter Compound.²⁶ The following year, Chief Seeiso who was to succeed Griffith as Paramount Chief, visited the Premier Mine to collect his "tribal dues".²⁷ In June 1926 Chief Letsie Moshoeshe was said to be on the Rand to meet "his friends" and was given temporary accommodation at the Nourse Mines.²⁸

Seeiso again visited the Rand two months after succeeding his father as Paramount Chief in October 1939. He was accompanied by the Deputy Resident Commissioner, six "leading chiefs", two Basotho police officers, a Mosotho Catholic priest, and a number of attendants. He later met Basotho (including miners) at a "pitso" at Dougall Hall in Pretoria. For his formal inauguration in February 1940, 500 Basotho left the Rand in buses and cars to attend the ceremony.²⁹ Among this group was "a special committee of mine Indunas who", according to the Rand Daily Mail, "will carry with them for presentation to their Chief a cheque of nearly L200"; "[t]his money has been collected in less than three weeks from mine employees, the donation ranging from threepence to 2s.6d". During the ceremony "mine natives will form a separate procession and will march, led by a European official of the Basutoland Government".³⁰ The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association band was expected to perform.³¹

serious issue in Lesotho as early as the 1890s. This remained so until the death of Joel in 1919. See Machobane, Government and Change, pp.108-10.

²⁵. SAB, GNLB 149, 136/14/D.37, SNA to DNL, 24 October 1916.

²⁶. Ibid., SNA to GS, 7 June 1918.

²⁷. Ibid., NAD Inspector (Rayton) to DNL, 18 November 1919.

²⁸. Ibid., temporary pass issued to L. Moshoeshe, 22 June 1926.

²⁹. Rand Daily Mail, 16 February 1940; 14 February 1940; Star, 31 October 1939; 1 November 1939.

³⁰. Ibid., 16 February 1940.

³¹. Ibid., 14 February 1940.

The procedure for a chief intending to visit the mines was to approach the local Assistant Commissioner who would then contact the NRC through its local representative. On arriving in Johannesburg, the chief reported at the GNLB offices where he was given a temporary pass. The NRC then gave him a letter of introduction to be handed to compound managers on the different mines where his people were.³² Outside the Rand itself, chiefs could go straight to the mines, merely requiring letters of introduction previously sought from Assistant Commissioners and the Resident Commissioner.³³ So popular were these visits that some elements even tried their luck. In April 1913 a certain Mohale, pretending to be a chief, visited the Premier Mine to raise money for "a National Memorial to Chief Moshesh", but received no cooperation from Basotho workers as they did not trust him and questioned his credentials. In September 1916 one Lehlonono Mpiti visited Ferguson mine with his wife and met Basotho miners without the knowledge of the compound manager. Claiming to bring them a message from the Paramount Chief, he instructed them to remove and kill a clerk employed on the mine and push for his uncle, who was part of the gatherings, to be made a "policeboy". The uncle himself and other Basotho present protested, questioning Mpiti's credentials.³⁴

Chiefs played another crucial role. At the height of the African workers' strikes across the Reef in July 1918, the NRC superintendent in Maseru, Maitland Brown, and the Resident Commissioner, asked the Paramount Chief to intervene and stop Basotho from participating in this activity. Chief Sekhonyane Bereng was subsequently despatched with haste to catch the next train from Maseru. Basotho on the mine met the chief and presented their grievances to him; he urged them to be

³². SAB, GNLB 149, 136/14/D.37, Acting DNL to NRC, 2 July 1915.

³³. In 1906 PC Letsie asked RC to give pass and letter of introduction to Chief Mojela who was going to Kimberley to "see how the people are working". See LNA, S7/3/22, Letsie to RC, 15 October 1906.

³⁴. LNA, S7/7/68, GS to SNA, 15 April 1913; Leselinvana, 10 November 1916.

peaceful and promised redress.³⁵ With nothing improving, the Transvaal Native Congress approached the director of the NRC, Taberer, in March 1919 to ask for a meeting to raise the grievances of the mine workers. But Taberer, believing that "the only persons that I can recognise as representing the natives on the mines must be their own Chiefs",³⁶ sent an emergency telegraph to labour supplying areas asking for chiefs or their representatives to hurry to Johannesburg for a meeting. The telegraph was received in Lesotho on the 21st of March, and the following day Chief Mojela was on the train to Johannesburg. The meeting took place on the 2nd of April.³⁷ Mojela then moved around meeting Basotho, calling for calm. Basotho complained that Sekhonyane had also asked for calm and promised to address their grievances, but nothing happened. Mojela later reported to the Resident Commissioner that "as far as he was able to ascertain, all the trouble amongst the natives outside the mines originated at a Native Congress".³⁸

Diseases

To minimise expenditure on African labour, the Randlords not only targeted wages but also spent as little as possible on black workers' living conditions in the compounds. As a result, African miners died from preventable and curable viral diseases linked to poor diet and living and sanitation conditions, as well as occupational diseases. During the first three decades of this century c.93 000 black miners died from disease-related causes.³⁹

³⁵. LNA, S3/19/5, Taberer to GS, 29 April 1919.

³⁶. Ibid., Taberer to GS, 27 March 1919.

³⁷. Ibid., RC to HC, 25 March 1919; GS to Taberer, 24 April 1919; RC to HC, 16 April 1919; PC to RC, 14 April 1919; S3/19/6, "Minutes of meeting of Chiefs and Headmen, held at the offices of the NRC", 2 April 1919; Star, 4 April 1919.

³⁸. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, RC to HC, 16 April 1919.

³⁹. Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.103.

African miners were aware of the dangers involved in their work and developed their own interpretation of mine diseases and accidents, and how their sick kinsmen and the dead should be treated. One informant remarked: "At the mines? Truly speaking, whites have long been aware of this... when you are attested, when you leave, you are measured; a coffin already being prepared for you".⁴⁰

One of the earliest diseases to make its presence felt in the compounds was smallpox. It attacked mineworkers during 1893-94 and again in 1897-99,⁴¹ but was stamped out by the beginning of this century, mainly through massive vaccination of both white and African miners. The outbreak of this disease was linked to the rapid expansion of the mine labour force due to the beginning of deep-level mining. Living conditions, always poor, deteriorated as overcrowding increased. However, vaccination campaigns both in the compounds and in the labour supplying areas, brought the epidemic under control. As Chapter Seven will show, recruits were required to carry vaccination certificates during smallpox outbreaks. The systematic construction of compounds after the South African War also helped in this regard.

Scurvy, caused by vitamin C deficiency, was linked to poor diet and long hours of work on the mines. This, like with other diseases to be discussed later, was a consequence of the fact that the Randlords subordinated workers' health to the imperatives of capital accumulation. Many returning migrants reached their homes suffering from scurvy, some dying on the way. One Mosotho miner died from scurvy in Ficksburg in November 1897 on his way back from the Rand; and his

⁴⁰. Interview with Solomon Mokoaleli. This fear and concern with illness and safety on the mines continues to this day, as the research of Palesa Molapo shows. See M.P. Molapo, "Job Stress, Health and Perceptions of Migrant Mineworkers", in J. Crush and W. James (eds.), Crossing the Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in a Democratic South Africa, (IDASA, Cape Town, 1995).

⁴¹. At Simmer and Jack in 1899, the Basotho compound was the most affected. See CMAR, 1899, p.147.

belongings, including the L10.8s found on him, were sent to his home. In June 1899, the Chamber of Mines was contacted by the Superintendent of Native Affairs in the Cape Colony, concerned by the number of sick recruits from Transkei who were dying way home. The Chamber attempted to exonerate itself by claiming to be taking good care of its workers, despite the complete absence of any coherent approach to the housing and feeding of black workers. While member-companies were urged to issue vegetables to their African workers, little change occurred. Another Mosotho migrant worker died in Bloemfontein in July 1902 on his way from the Nourse Mine. This Mosotho was in the company of eleven Basotho, five of whom also suffering from scurvy; one later died, with another one in a critical state. This scandal led to an inquiry being conducted in that town and a complaint being addressed to the Chamber. Once again, however, the Chamber blandly denied that it was at fault.⁴²

From early 1902, at the time of the labour "shortage" crisis, proposals were made to ration sorghum-based beer to miners in order to combat scurvy. The Chamber of Mines claimed that such beer was the answer, despite medical opinion that the best solution for scurvy was the inclusion of vegetable and fresh meat in food rations. An investigation conducted around June 1902 indicated that with one or two exceptions, no gold mine issued vegetables to its African workers. Meal mealie was the principal item of diet, indeed the only foodstuff supplied at Nigel Deep, and fresh meat was limited to between one-half and 2 lb per week, except on the Robinson Propriety mine which supplied 3 lb. This was based on the convenient myth that the diet of Africans in the rural areas was solely meal mealie. By the end of 1902, scurvy accounted for five percent of total African deaths on the gold mines, or 229 deaths.⁴³

⁴². CMAR, 1899, pp.119-33; SAB, SNA 45, NA 1481/1902, SNA to WNLA, 2 August 1902; SNA 16, NA 339/1902, Chamber of Mines to Commissioner for NA (Johannesburg), 16 June 1902; SNA 137, NA 1375/1903, Governor General to J. Chamberlain, 23 May 1903.

⁴³. SAB, SNA 22, NA 652/1902, Medical Officer of Health for the Transvaal to Lagden, 18 March 1902; "Report on replies to circular of February 10th. 1902 concerning scurvy and its

With no substantial improvements in diet, returning Basotho migrants continued to die on the way home, sparking an outcry from the Resident Magistrate of Winburg in 1903 when dozens of Basotho arrived at Winburg station suffering from scurvy and other diseases. Many of these men refused to be taken anywhere, preferring to die at their homes; those who agreed were taken to the local prison where they were treated as "destitute paupers" until they recovered. The NAD urged the Chamber of Mines to do something, as all of this negatively affected the image of the mines and labour supply. When the Chamber still demurred, the state was forced to intervene, and in 1904 it set up the Compound Commission. This was followed in 1905 by the Health Ordinance. Then, in 1911 the Native Labour Regulation Act addressed, among others, the question of diet in the compounds, setting minimum standards. From the 1920s vegetable and fresh meat or fish rations were increased, and beans and bread also added. Prior to 1913 an average of 30 per 1000 workers died from scurvy, but thereafter this figure dropped and remained low into the 1920s.⁴⁴

However, pneumonia was the major killer in the compounds until the 1920s. It accounted for about 40 percent of all deaths at the turn of the century. During the six months from 1 October 1902 to 31 March 1903, 1 476 Africans lost their lives on the gold mines; 43 percent of these due to pneumonia, 14 percent to dysentery and diarrhoea, 12 percent to scurvy, six percent to typhoid fever, five percent to accidents, and 20 percent to other causes. One District Medical Officer on the Rand even exclaimed in March 1903 that "the death rate amongst natives

prevention on the mines", 21 March 1902; Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.109. For discussion of Southern Rhodesian mines in much the same period, see van Onselen, Chibaro, pp.52-54; and I. Phimister, "African Labour Conditions and Health in the Southern Rhodesian Mining Industry, 1895-1953", in idem and van Onselen, Studies in the History of African Mine Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, (Mambo Press, Gwelo, 1978), especially, pp.111-18.

⁴⁴. Smith, "Working in the Grave", pp.103-23; SAB, SNA 188, NA 3159/03, SNA to Assistant Colonial Secretary (ORC), 29 March 1904; Resident Magistrate (Winburg) to Colonial Secretary (ORC), 2 November 1903.

on the Rand is recognised to be now abnormally high". But he nonetheless blamed the incidence of pneumonia on African miners' "carelessness and ignorance" for not taking "ordinary common-sense precautions against getting sudden chills when heated by exertion".⁴⁵ Amongst the Africans miners most affected by pneumonia, were Shangaan and other recruits from Central Africa; 11.9 per 1000 of the latter and 98.4 per 1000 of the former dying between July 1903 and June 1904.⁴⁶ This led to the banning in 1913 of recruits from Central Africa.

Significant improvements in health of the gold mines' black labour force occurred after 1914 following the employment of Dr A.J. Orenstein by the Rand Mines Group in that year. This was no coincidence as the government ban on, and the repatriation of, recruits from Central Africa in 1913, had clearly indicated to the Randlords that if a stable labour supply was to be secured, something had to be done about the high mortality rate. Moreover, the reestablishment of a partial recruiting monopsony in British South Africa with the formation of the NRC in 1912 and the successful imposition of a maximum average wage that followed, had created space for focusing on the living conditions in the compounds. This process was to accelerate in the 1920s.

Orenstein at last put a health infrastructure in place on the mines belonging to Rand Mines Group, even establishing a Department of Sanitation for the company. His two-pronged disease prevention strategy embraced, on the one hand, a general approach which involved improving hygiene and housing in the compounds, the diet of the workers, washing facilities, and waste disposal. On the other, it involved a strategy of targeting particular diseases, especially pneumonia, typhoid fever and scurvy. The improvement of miners' housing included reducing overcrowding and erecting separate sleeping bunks. The food programme targeted scurvy, giving each worker an

⁴⁵. SAB, SNA 137, NA 1375/03, memo by the District Medical Officer for Health on "Native Mortality on the Rand Mines", 23 May 1903.

⁴⁶. Ibid.

average of 4 000 calories per day. As far as ablution facilities were concerned, the plunge "mass" baths were blamed for skin infections and the spreading of typhoid fever, and were replaced by showers. Rooms were regularly disinfected and garbage removed; and a waterborne sewage replaced the bucket system which had been in use on the mines since the turn of the century. "Native" nurses were trained and the City Deep Native Hospital and the Crown Mines Central Native Hospital established to centralise and rationalise health services. On the mines themselves, workers were trained in "Safety First" and first aid teams established; by the mid-1920s some 10 500 Africans constituted the latter teams across the Reef, having gone through a twelve-lesson syllabus covering topics such as bone fractures, artificial respiration, and shock treatment. Other mines implemented Orenstein's programmes properties, although some retained the bucket system right up to the 1930s for "cost" reasons. Due to Orenstein's efforts and the repatriation of Central Africans, the death rate from all diseases per 1000 declined from 20.8 in 1913 to 11.6 in 1923.⁴⁷

However, Orenstein's programme did not eliminate one particular problem - the exceptionally high mortality of Basotho miners. This, as reflected in Table 4.1, became the subject of an inquiry in 1928. Its findings attributed the high death rate to the Basotho's lack of acclimatisation and immunisation; and that they lived "a considerably more dissipated life than other natives", notably that they went "out more in search of pleasure which generally takes the form of alcohol consumption and promiscuous immorality".⁴⁸

⁴⁷. Paragraph based on Umteteli, 20 September 1924; Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.140; M. Fraser, "The Introduction and Early Development of Health and Safety Measures in South African Mines in the 20th Century", unpublished paper presented at the International Mining History Congress, Bochum, September 1989.

⁴⁸. Cited in Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.147.

Table 4.1: Numbers of Deaths and Death Rate per 1000 from certain Causes among Basotho and Union African Gold Miners

1926				
Cause	Basotho		Union	
	deaths	rate	deaths	rate
Pneumonia	89	4.91	181	2.09
Pulmonary TB	23	1.27	40	0.46
Other TB	15	0.83	16	0.17
Accidents	57	3.15	216	2.49
1927				
Pneumonia	88	5.75	203	2.37
Pulmonary TB	20	1.07	33	0.39
Other TB	23	1.22	18	0.21
Accidents	45	2.40	236	2.76

Source: SAB, GNLB 137, 2828/13/104, Dr Cluver's Report on "Mortality among Basutos", 5 November 1928.

Clearly the contact of Basotho miners with Basotho women in the locations cannot be taken seriously as a major cause of their comparatively high mortality. Instead, the real reasons are to be found in the labour process itself. Basotho in this period were struggling to assert themselves on the gold mines, having established themselves as the best "lashers" and were just beginning to "colonise" shaft-sinking. They took more risks and worked under more dangerous conditions than other fellow African miners. It was reported in 1928 that a comparatively high proportion of Basotho were employed on mines deeper than 2 500 feet.⁴⁹

The relative decline after the mid-1920s of diet- and sanitation-related diseases and pneumonia left tuberculosis

⁴⁹. SAB, GNLB 137, 2828/13/104, Dr Cluver's Report, 5 November 1928. For every one African miner working in "A" Mines (that is, mines with a depth of less than 2 500 feet), there were in "B" Mines (that is, mines with a depth of more than 2 500 feet): with regards to recruits from the Cape Colony = 5.5; from Natal = 5.6; from the Free State = 8.4; from the Transvaal = 4.2; and from Lesotho = 17.1. This explains the high Basotho mortality from accidents in Table 4.1.

and silicosis as the major health challenges on the mines. As these occupational diseases have been extensively studied,⁵⁰ suffice it here to single out their implications for Basotho miners.

Silicosis (or miners phthisis), an incurable occupational disease caused by the inhaling of fine dust, was linked to blasting and the introduction of machine drills in the 1892 on the gold mines. It affected mostly white workers in the beginning. From 1897, Africans were allowed to operate machine drills, thus also becoming vulnerable to the microscopic particles of free silica. As the Randlords minimised expenditure on workers' health and safety to maximise profit, it was not until 1910 that the seriousness of silicosis on the mines was publicly acknowledged. Between that year and 1929, five government commissions and ten select committees sat to discuss the disease, and nine Acts were subsequently passed.⁵¹ Although Basotho miners were employed initially as surface workers and, later, as "lashers" they were also affected, hence some silicosis cases, as Chapter Seven shows, were spotted in Lesotho as early as the late 1890s. This disease is incurable and its problems continue up to this day on the mines.

In fact, it was tuberculosis (TB), rather than silicosis, which was a source of greater concern to Lesotho, if not the

⁵⁰. R.M. Packard, White Plague, Black Labour: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa, (James Currey, London, 1989); idem, "Tuberculosis and the Development of Industrial Health Policies on the Witwatersrand, 1902-1932", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.13, no.2, 1987; Smith, "Working in the Grave", pp.124-68; E.N. Katz, "Silicosis of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines: Incidence, Prevalence and Compensation, 1902-1978", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.4, no.9, March 1979; idem, The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994); Crush et al, South Africa's Labor Empire, pp.41-45; J.P. Leger, "Occupational diseases in South African mines - a neglected epidemic?", South African Medical Journal, vol.18, 15 February 1992.

⁵¹. Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.130; Katz, "Silicosis of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines", p.71.

Rand itself, when it became the major killer on the mines in the 1920s. TB, caused by the inhaling of the tubercle bacilli, is infectious but not as virulent as smallpox. It is easily spread in overcrowded and squalid conditions. Packard has shown that the disease arrived with European settlement, eventually spreading to Africans in South Africa's urban centres. The development of diamond and gold mining, accompanied by the emergence of compounds and towns, created the conditions for the propagation of this disease. The first commission on TB sat in 1912; and compensation for miners suffering from the disease began in 1916.⁵²

A further problem, however, was that unlike with cases of pneumonia and scurvy, mine managements were more successful in shifting the burden of TB to the rural areas where miners suffering from the disease were repatriated. Between 1910 and 1912, 7 500 African miners suffering from TB were discharged and sent home. More than this, African miners were not radiographed until the 1950s, as X-rays were thought to be "very expensive" and "wholly unnecessary". The mineowners refused to accept any responsibility for the spread of TB to the rural areas, a problem which had become serious by the 1930s.⁵³

With regard to Basotho workers, an inquiry was precipitated by the remark of the Benoni Native Sub-Commissioner in December 1925 to the effect that 50 of the TB cases that had come to his attention since April 1923 were Basotho workers aged eighteen years or older, with a mine experience of less than a year. He blamed this on the "standard of physical maturity" of the Basotho youth, and wanted the Director of Native Labour to limit their recruitment. Yet in the Germiston-Boksburg area, according to the Sub-Commissioner there, only 21 Basotho TB cases (with an average mine "stay" of fifteen months) were

⁵². Packard, White Plague, Black Labour, p.40; idem, "Tuberculosis and the Development of Industrial Health Policies"; Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.126.

⁵³. Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.135; Crush et al, South Africa's Labor Empire, pp.41-45.

noted during 1924 and 1925. Similarly, in the Krugersdorp sub-district, "very few" Basotho TB cases were reported. The sub-Commissioner there attributed this to the different stope structures in mines on the West and East Rand. The former did not require much lashing because of its steep stopes, while the flat stopes in the East required a lot of lashing, and therefore more Basotho "lashers" and hard work. The bulk of TB cases that had been identified in both the Krugersdorp and Germiston-Boksburg areas were Shangaan.⁵⁴ In 1924 and 1925, (Table 4.2) Shangaan miners accounted for over half of the compensated TB cases on all gold mines. Arguably, this was because of the centrality of Shangaan migrants to the cheap labour strategy of the mining houses, together with the fact that they stayed for longer periods on the mines than other migrant labourers.

Table 4.2: Compensated TB Cases among Basotho, Shangaan, and Miners from the Cape Colony, 1924-25.

	Basotho		Shangaan		Cape Colony	
	1924	1925	1924	1925	1924	1925
Number employed	15 657	14 198	75 283	74 067	63 616	65 385
% of total employed	8.71	8.03	41.86	41.91	35.37	37.0
Number comp.	35	50	260	239	77	107
% of total comp.	8.31	11.16	61.76	53.35	18.29	23.88

Source: SAB, GNLB 259, 427/16/108, Native Sub-Commissioner (Krugersdorp) to DNL, 14 January 1926.

The Basotho compensated cases in Table 4.2 came from Johannesburg and the East Rand. The City Deep Mine led with

⁵⁴. SAB, GNLB 259, 427/16/108, Native Sub-Commissioner (NSC) (Benoni) to DNL, 22 December 1925; NSC (Germiston-Boksburg) to DNL, 5 January 1926; NSC (Krugersdorp) to DNL, 14 January 1926; Smith, "Working in the Grave", pp.124-68; Packard, White Plague, Black Labour, p.90; CMAR, 1920, pp.68-69.

five cases in 1924, and 13 cases in 1925. It was followed by Brakpan Mines, Crown Mines, Nourse Mines and Village Deep, each with three cases in 1924. The following year New State Areas came second with eight cases, followed by Van Ryn Deep with six cases, and Brakpan Mines with five cases. These low numbers were used by the mines to argue against the claim of the Benoni Sub-Commissioner. But the numbers clearly do not reflect the real situation in Benoni; the only mine in Benoni with recorded Basotho compensated cases in 1924 and 1925 was the Van Ryn Deep with two and six cases respectively. This suggests that most TB cases were not reported and therefore not compensated for. As miners were invariably repatriated if TB was detected, many of them returned home and did not present their claim. Other workers, when rejected by one mine, moved on to different mines to try their luck. Mine managements, as will be shown later, in any event created obstacles for Africans wishing to make their claims. Chapter Seven discusses the spread of TB to colonial Lesotho itself, and the problems which this caused.

Mine Accidents

Keeping the cost of labour low was not only reflected in high mortality rates from diseases, but also in neglect of occupational safety. Major accidents during the period covered by this thesis were those caused by rockfalls and rockbursts, explosives, trucks and tramways, the cage/skip that transported workers and ore between underground and the surface, and the high risk involved in shaft-sinking operations.⁵⁵ Neglect, fatigue, lack of experience and training, poor supervision, and "high speed" to increase profitability, also contributed to accidents.⁵⁶ As will be shown later, Leselinyana and, to a certain extent, Naledi ea

⁵⁵. Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.179.

⁵⁶. H.J. Simons, "Death in South African Mines", Africa South, vol.5, no.4, July-September 1961.

Lesotho and Mochochonono, all regularly published letters from Basotho miners describing accidents. Such reports narrated the incident, gave the names of the deceased (if Basotho) and of the village and the name of the chief where the deceased were from, and concluded by conveying condolences to the affected families. These reports are particularly valuable to scholars because they show the reaction and attitudes of Basotho miners to accidents, and how they perceived and understood them.

Rockfalls and rockbursts were directly linked to deep-level mining and the temperature and humidity underground. The deeper the mines, the more likely were rockfalls and rockbursts. Together, they accounted for most of the deaths resulting from gold mine accidents; 26 percent of the total accidents in 1903, 32 percent in 1919, 38 percent in 1929, and 42 percent in 1939. This rising trend was a result of both the expansion of the mining after the abandonment of the gold standard in 1932, and the fact that mines were getting deeper.⁵⁷ Such accidents could result in many deaths, depending on the number of workers underground at the time of the rockburst or fall. The bodies of miners were frequently covered by tons of rocks for days or weeks. According to one informant: "Rocks would be removed... *Khele*, so many rocks..! In the evening and the following day, people were still being retrieved".⁵⁸ After a rockfall accident at City Deep in February 1915, one Mosotho miner lamented: "Oh, what a loss even though God spared the nation, this accident befalling only two [miners]. The latter have not yet being found, and it looks like they will be retrieved after a long time because the rocks have fallen with everything; huge trees, thick irons, big pumps".⁵⁹

Between 1903 and 1919, death from explosives came second after rockfalls and rockbursts. These accidents could happen during

⁵⁷. Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.180.

⁵⁸. Interview with Phomolo Matsabisa, born 1914.

⁵⁹. Leselinyana, 19 February 1915.

charging, or result from unexploded explosives and poor supervision of blasting operations.

Dynamite [wrote a Mosotho worker in 1911] has just killed one young Mosotho man while he was with his boss under the mine of Driefontein...

This young man was carrying a candle, as they are used underground, and the dynamite he was carrying caught the light, he tried to extinguish it, the boss then told him to drop it, he threw it to the floor, and stepped over it. His boss kept on saying: "Escape, leave it!"; but he did not move; it then exploded, breaking his legs and arms, and killed him.⁶⁰

Another Mosotho exclaimed after an accident in August 1911 at the City Deep: "Such accidents are stirring to be watched; especially those of the dynamite, because they really damage a person, the new arrivals having difficulty of going underground after seeing the victim...".⁶¹ From the 1920s onwards, however, accidents due to explosives declined in number once a new type of explosive was introduced, and improvements were made to blasting methods.⁶²

The trucks used for transporting broken ore, known to Basotho workers as likokopane (Eng: "cocopan"), often collided with one another, sometimes the speed at which they travelled was badly controlled. Accidents from such causes were rarely fatal, though the transportation of workers between the surface and underground in the cage or skip also involved risk; the rope could break, or its controller make a serious mistake. Fatal accidents involving cages invariably involved a significant number of miners in any one incident. This was one of the aspects of life on the mines that new recruits were warned against; this formed a key part of their socialisation and initiation. Stimela Jingoos' experience on arrival at Langlaagte Block B in 1916 is worth citing at length:

I had been told by another cousin, Mokoena. "You take care when you first go underground. There will be old-timers in the cage with you, the cage that takes you down

⁶⁰. Ibid., 10 June 1911.

⁶¹. Ibid., 7 December 1911.

⁶². Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.187.

to the level where you will work, and they are sure to try to frighten you. They will say a lot of things. Try not to scare easily".

I felt prepared for whatever underground held in store. The next morning a whole batch of us newcomers waited at the top of the shaft. At first we saw only a rope turning, and then suddenly the cage appeared from out of the mine. It opened.

"Go on! Get in! Get in, you new ones!"

Mokoena was right. There were old-timers waiting for us in the cage. The door closed, and a bell signalled that we were ready to lower away. That signal must have been rung in a certain way to inform the controller that there were new ones in the cage, for at once the cage shot straight up. It stopped dead. Then it fell like a stone. We gaped at each other, with eyes like pebbles, our stomachs heaving.

"Speak, boy! Who's your love?"

"If you don't tell, the rope will split...."

"We'll all die...."

"I'll tell you....Stop...."

"Talk up!"

"Who's your mother's lover?"

"How many sheep did you steal at home?"

"We don't want to die...."

"Oh God...!"

"Who's your lover?"

" Y e s ! Y e s ! I s t o l e them....Yes....Please....Please....Stop...."

The questions came so fast, from all sides, that none of us could think straight. I clutched at the thought of Mokoena.

"...Try not to scare easily...."

I need to start talking, I told myself. *If I close my mouth firmly....*How those others babbled....They were confessing to the most dreadful deeds. The truth must be spoken: I was terrified.

"You! You quiet youngster! You're cocky, eh?"

"You think we're playing a game here? If we're not all killed here when the rope snaps, you'll be taught manners!"

"*Molimo* [God]....We're dying...."

As the cage plunged down, it grew dark as night. At last it stopped. We were all panting, but we were alive, and from there we went to our various stations to work.⁶³

The nature of shaft-sinking and the speed with which the operation was executed also put workers at great risk. Simons wrote in 1961 at the time the Free State mines were expanding: "Relative neglect often occurs also in shaft-sinking and development, usually the most hazardous stage in mining.

⁶³. Jingoos, A Chief is a Chief, p.64.

Partly for this reason the Orange Free State gold mines have an annual accident death rate of 3 to 4 per 1 000 workers, which is similar to the incidence on the Witwatersrand 50 years ago".⁶⁴ Yet Basotho miners, as we saw in Chapter Two, rationalised their concentration in this dangerous work by appealing to their heroic history, strength and capacity for hard work.

Accidents in the skips, on trucks, rockfalls and rockbursts, even the collapse of shafts, were among the accidents most frequently reported by Basotho miners. It was common for miners to have experienced numerous accidents by the end of their mine careers. An example was one Moloantoa Sekaja:

On 17 January 1917, an accident befell a young man called Moloantoa Sekaja... A rock fell..., as he was a foreman underground...that rock broke his right hand. This was at one of the mines of Knights' Deep known as Robertson Shaft. That Moloantoa once broke his left arm while working at the Premier Mine. Now he is a cripple, as those arms, even though not amputated, will no longer do any heavy work. He has been here on the Rand for a very long time. At the moment, he is still at the hospital. May his family know this.⁶⁵

Accidents on any one mine also tended to be frequent than the majority of mine reports admitted. For example, on the 23rd of May 1917 a Pedi was run over by a truck at 11.15 a.m at a work site called Number Three at the Premier Mine. At 11.45 a.m. falling debris closed part of Number Four, slightly injuring two Pedi and a Mosotho. At 4 p.m. Number One also experienced a rockfall, killing a Pedi and a Mosotho, and seriously injuring four other miners. At 4.40 p.m. a Mosotho was struck by a lump of rock at Number Four, injuring him on the leg. The following day another Mosotho was struck by a truck on the thigh, tearing off his skin.⁶⁶

Although mortality from accidents decreased from the 1920s onwards, the number of injuries increased. This was largely

⁶⁴. Simons, "Death in South African Mines", p.42.

⁶⁵. Leselinyana, 16 February 1917.

⁶⁶. Ibid., 8 June 1917.

due to measures taken by Orenstein to reduce the number of fatal accidents. By means of Prevention of Accidents Committee, first established in 1913, and its four sub-committees, research related to health and safety was undertaken. Safety measures were popularised through the organisation of competitions among workers and between mines, and first aid schools and underground rescue teams were set up. The medium for such campaigns included posters and advertisements in fanakalo, the mine lingua franca, and films.⁶⁷ However, the death of 177 workers in the Kinross mine disaster in 1986, and of 104 miners at Vaal Reefs in May 1995, clearly indicate that occupational safety still remains a crucial issue on the gold mines. Even in the 1990s, an average of 1.5 per 1000 workers die annually from gold mine accidents, and a further 26 per 1000 suffer injuries.⁶⁸

The response of Basotho workers to mine accidents usually assumed two forms. In some instances they resorted to strike action, refusing to work until the cause of the accident was attended to. This was the case at the Main Reef Mine in February 1911 when eight Basotho and two whites died in a skip accident. Ten days later a similar accident killed another miner. The following day Basotho miners refused to go out shift, and the compound manager called in the NAD inspector to intervene. Represented by Chief Foso Majara, the Basotho workers indicated that they were unwilling to work until the skip was repaired. Majara even selected a group of men to verify that the repairs had been done. When the mine engineer eventually arrived and demonstrated that the repair had at last been done, the Basotho miners agreed to return to work the following day.⁶⁹

⁶⁷. Simons, "Death in the South African Mines", p.50: Chamber of Mines, Campaign Against Mining Accidents: 1913-1953, (Public Relations Department, Johannesburg, 1953).

⁶⁸. Cape Times, 22 May 1995, 18 May 1995; J. Leger, "From Hlobane to Kinross: Disasters and the Struggle for Health and Safety on the Mines", South African Review, vol.4, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987).

⁶⁹. Naledi, 1 January 1911.

The second response, actually the most common one, was linked to the koata strategy (discussed in Chapter Two) of likening labour migrancy to a cattle-raiding expedition and war. Mine accidents were seen as an integral aspect of mine work. In 1911, a Mosotho miner at City Deep encouraged his countrymen to come to the mines: "But do not be afraid, my fellow brothers, money is little [here], they [cattle] are not captured with ease. Rise up, let us help our elders. We are really tired of simply saying: 'Father, I have fallen for so and so's daughter'. Join so that we may drive them [the cattle]!"⁷⁰ After a serious mine accident in 1928 which killed three miners and injured another seven (including five Basotho), one Mosotho concluded his letter: "It is really true that the cattle are captured with great risk".⁷¹ This comparison of mine work to cattle-raiding not only reflected the role of bohali in pushing men out to the mines, but also made it easier for at least some Basotho to continue going to the mines, and in large numbers, despite the dangers that were involved.

Similarly, Christian converts used biblical equivalents of the cattle-raiding metaphor. After an explosion of dynamite at the Premier Diamond Mine in October 1912 had killed two miners and injured another three, one Mosotho worker commented in his report: "We on the mine live daily on the verge of death, there is nowhere where people are not dying on this earth, even Jesus Christ said: 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof'- Matthew 6:34".⁷² "Evil" was translated as "risk"/"danger" in the Sesotho bible that this miner quoted. When two Basotho miners were trapped under rubble following a rockfall accident at the City Deep, their parents were consoled as follows: "Let us mourn with the parents of these children, who thought their children were here to work, while God was expecting them to leave because their time had arrived".⁷³ In January 1917, a falling rock smashed the face

70. Leselinyana, 19 October 1911.

71. Ibid., 9 March 1928.

72. Ibid., 5 December 1912.

73. Ibid., 19 February 1915.

of a Mosotho, and this was accepted: "This young man, even though he is now injured, it is acceptable, because he was not lying on his stomach in the field nor did he collapse on his way from beer-drinking; he was just fulfilling this law: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' (Gen.3:19)".⁷⁴

The problem, of course, with such attitudes, both in their cattle-raiding and biblical variations, was that while they may have helped Basotho to cope with dangers on the mines, they limited the possibilities of them taking more militant action against poor working conditions. Strikes caused by accidents were infrequent, and even then, often turned on the question of repairs and not fundamental issues of mine safety. All too often, this rationalisation, though a useful survival strategy, led to docility and passivity. Parents and relatives were called upon to understand and accept the fate of their sons, fathers and husbands. They were consoled, asked to look upon God, or see their son/father/husband as a hero-warrior.

Compensation

After the turn of the century, the mining companies began to compensate their workers for accidents, TB (from 1916) and silicosis (from 1912). Ad hoc compensation for accidents began in 1903 after considerable pressure from the NAD, but payments were first codified a year later after much deliberation, as some mining companies had been unwilling to meet their obligations. Under the 1904 Agreement, L10 was to be paid to the family of a miner who died from an accident; L10 to the miner who suffered "permanent total disablement"; and L5 for "permanent partial disablement". Beneficiaries were defined as wives, children under age, and parents who could prove that they depended on the deceased at the time of

⁷⁴. Ibid., 16 February 1917.

his death. The mine concerned was to pay the money to the NAD which in turn would forward it to the beneficiaries. In the case of permanent disability, the compensation was to be paid to the miner in the presence of a NAD inspector. This agreement was subsequently incorporated into the 1911 Native Regulation Act. The amount of compensation somewhat increased; between L1 and L20 for permanent or partial disablement resulting in loss of work; and L35 to L50 in the case of death or permanent total disability.⁷⁵ Total compensation was, however, less than or at best equivalent to what a miner could earn in a one nine-month or twelve-month contract, and therefore only enough to sustain a worker for a short period, never mind really compensate him for injury and loss. And though a total of L1 500 of compensation was paid to miners between March and June 1905, more went to white employees than Africans (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Compensation in L to Black (B) and White (W) Miners Compared.

	DEATH				INJURY			
	Number		L		Number		L	
	B	W	B	W	B	W	B	W
1911	764	86	7585	41355	477	2810	2633	84463
1920	413	27	12966	13720	1655	2148	14453	72549
1930	508	30	16015	17383	3409	3166	19402	96009
1938	578	38	23529	16596	7342	6051	40660	136582

Source: Smith, J, "Working in the Grave", p.183.

African miners were anyway excluded from the benefits of the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1914. While this Act made provision for the sum of L144 to be paid as compensation to workers earning L4 a month or less if they suffered total incapacitation, African miners were limited to L50 by the 1911 Regulation. Amendments to the Compensation Act in 1934 and

⁷⁵. SAB, GOV 899, 50/39, SNA to HC, 15 June 1905; LNA, S7/7/34, SNA to RC, 22 February 1905; S7/7/32, SNA to RC, 18 February 1904; CMAR, 1905, pp.27-29; Smith, "Working in the Grave", pp.182-85.

again in 1941 extended the scheme to Africans, but even then excluded them from pension benefits. African workers were given a lump sum of L150 or slightly more, depending on an individual's earnings, while white, Indian and Coloured workers had the right to a pension equivalent to 55 percent of their normal earnings.⁷⁶

Over and beyond discriminatory compensation practices, mine and government authorities from the start tried to minimise the amount paid to Africans by cutting down on the numbers who could qualify for compensation. In April 1913 the Director of Native Labour sent a circular to labour supplying areas:

It having being held that before any compensation may be paid the fact, even in the case of a wife, a child, or a parent, that the beneficiary has been dependent upon the deceased must be established, it is necessary in each case where such information is called for that I should be informed of the exact degree of dependency of the individual to whom it is suggested that compensation should be paid.⁷⁷

Many African miners were, however, ignorant of their right to compensation for death or serious injury. A Mosotho worker wrote to Leselinyana in 1921 suggesting that such rights should be publicised. Indeed, they should be read out to recruits when they signed their contracts:

The most troubling thing is this: Whites or white people, when they are victims of an accident, they are often paid, there are even laws that relate to diseases that affect them and compensation; but for us, black men, there is nothing, even when we die from accidents we do not know what compensation for each person is. Whites know quite well what theirs is... they also know what their orphans and widows will get. Oh sirs, please attend to this matter, talk to recruiters, that before we cross [the Caledon River] we are well informed, we be told about our rights the moment we are informed about our pay.⁷⁸

More than 15 years later, one of the issues raised with the

⁷⁶. Simons, "Death in the South African Mines", p.51; Smith, "Working in the Grave", p.185.

⁷⁷. LNA. S7/7/67, DNL circular, 18 April 1913.

⁷⁸. Leselinyana, 11 November 1921.

Resident Commissioner and the NRC and discussed by the Basutoland National Council in 1937, was the continuing Basotho ignorance on the part of migrants of their right to compensation, especially those who only discovered the full extent of their illness at home once they had been repatriated. Nor was the problem made any easier by the deliberately difficult bureaucratic and medical procedures of proof which compensation required. Basotho chiefs were informed that when their men died at home from silicosis or TB, their lungs had to be sent to Johannesburg for confirmation of the cause before any compensation could be released.⁷⁹

Even where compensation was obtained, the sums were so small that they were soon exhausted. Thus my informant exclaimed: "These compensations have no use; a mere L50!"⁸⁰ One Mosotho miner disabled at the Simmer Deep in 1915 and paid L50 compensation, approached the Resident Commissioner 15 years later:

In 1915 I was at work in Johannesburg where I accidentally lost my two eyes, and I was given L50 compensation which was a great help to me, it lasted me ten years and then got finished. Sir now I am in difficulties, I have six children and their mother...it is real misery regarding food and clothing for them. Owing to this difficulty, on the 21st December 1929, I was guided to Johannesburg to see the workers, when I arrived there, the workers were very much pleased to see me, if there was any permission.⁸¹

For once, the NRC acted on this matter quickly, because it was "impossible for us to permit him to visit the Rand personally for the purpose of collecting money".⁸² There was official concern that this might raise the miners's awareness of the problems of the compensation system.

Other incapacitated Basotho workers forced matters and were

⁷⁹. Litaba, 1937, pp.229-34.

⁸⁰. Interview with Solomon Mosunyana, born 1913.

⁸¹. LNA, S3/5/18/3, Moholo Senyaki to RC, 17 August 1930.

⁸². Ibid., NRC District Superintendent to GS, 7 May 1930.

allowed to take light mine jobs. This was the case of one informant who was crippled by a loose rock while employed at the Witwatersrand Mine in 1936: "I remained at the mine hospital. After recovering I was taken to Moselekazi [WANLA compound]... there were all tribes there of injured and seriously ill people... We stayed there until all was fixed... each person was sent home".⁸³ But "I continued to go to seek work. They were even saying I should not be compensated because I will still continue coming to work...They had given me a job I could do without hurting myself". But not happy with the pay at the Witwatersrand Mine, he insisted on being sent to another mine, and was referred to the WANLA compound:

When I arrived at Moselekazi, there is an office of one white man called "RaBasotho". I went there and stated my appeal...he said: "If you will agree to go underground, it is fine. But I will write a letter that they should know that you are injured when they send you underground, because that leg is crippled." He then gave me that letter ... I arrived there [on the new mine] in the evening and slept in the compound.⁸⁴

He was accepted on that mine, and taken underground to monitor fire and smoke.

Of course, when injured Basotho workers insisted on returning to the mines, because compensation payments were so small, mine managements then tried to exploit this by attempting to claim back such compensation as they had paid out. But one concern, shared by NAD officials, was that problems around compensation should not spark unrest. Another problem was that some widows, many of them quite young, on receiving the compensation, used the money to flee to the Rand where they joined the ranks of matekatse. This disturbed the chiefs, and at the 1937 Basutoland National Council it was decided that compensation should be governed by the Lerotholi Law of inheritance. The compensation money was to belong to the whole family of the deceased, including his parents. This meant that widows no longer had the right to spend it without

⁸³. Interview with Mokopoi Mokopoi, born 1914.

⁸⁴. Ibid.

consulting their in-laws.⁸⁵

The Sick and Deceased

There is no doubt that the mining companies repatriated sick miners in order to transfer the cost of caring for the sick from themselves to families in the rural areas. But at the same time, at least for some Basotho, the miners themselves insisted on being repatriated, preferring to die at home. It was also not uncommon for Basotho chiefs to apply for the return of their "boys" on hearing that they were sick. Miners commonly wrote letters to chiefs and families reporting the illness of a countryman. In February 1905, for example, Chief Api Lerotholi wrote to Ernest Mabile asking him to repatriate eight Basotho working at Knights Central who had been sick for some months. He appealed to Mabile to do everything possible as he was prepared to refund him for the cost incurred. The Resident Commissioner and districts' correspondence files in the government archives in Lesotho are full of requests of this nature addressed to the mines, labour agents and NAD officials. The usual procedure was for a concerned father, wife or any member of the family, to approach the local chief or Assistant Commissioner, or even the Paramount Chief and the Resident Commissioner, and ask for the return of their son, husband, or brother. Sometimes mine authorities would claim that the men being sought were not sick but just "loafing".⁸⁶

The return of the sick was one of the major issues raised at the first sitting of the National Council in 1903. Chiefs wanted the sick to be returned in the company of one of their

⁸⁵. Litaba, 1937, p.229.

⁸⁶. Paragraph based on LNA, S7/7/34, A. Lerotholi to E. Mabile, 14 February 1905; S7/4/4. Compound Manager (Premier Mine) to RC, 23 August 1907; S7/1/3/25, Pesa to AC (Mafeteng), 1 May 1910; LNA, AC Maseru, Letters Out (unnumbered), AC to DNL, 7 February 1911; LNA, MF 3/1/9, Chief Bereng to AC (Mafeteng), 12 August 1928.

kinsmen in order to minimise the chance of death on the way. The head of the NAD, Godfrey Lagden, responded:

The case of men who are very ill and fearing death desiring to return home though in bad condition has presented many difficulties. Both the Doctors and Medical Attendants and even the friends of the sick men have at times failed to deter them from leaving when they ought not to leave. The superstitious dislike of dying and being buried away from home has not been overcome and it is doubtful whether for a long time it can be overcome. The various Mines have been approached by me upon the subject of allowing in such cases a friend to accompany a sick man. That however will not obliterate the risks of death on the road to those who start in extremes. I do not think it can now be alleged that any man dies from lack of reasonable attention.⁸⁷

The issue of the treatment of the dead in the compounds was also disputed. As early as January 1899, in response to protests from white residents, the Johannesburg City Council complained to the Chamber of Mines about the way the corpses of African miners were being transported. "The corpses are in most cases nearly uncovered and are generally transported on open carts",⁸⁸ the City Council observed. The Chamber agreed that in future corpses would no longer to be conveyed along public roads; that graves would be dug deeper; and that, where possible, "the natives [would be] buried on the most isolated portion of the [mine] property".⁸⁹ In April of the same year, however, the City Council proposed that a crematorium for Africans be created: "This is rendered more important by the fact that the present burial ground will shortly be filled up and the Town Council has no other available space at its disposal".⁹⁰ But the Chamber opposed the idea on the grounds that this would interfere with Africans' "tribal customs", and not least because it might lead to a mass exodus of African labour.

With the death toll of African miners from disease and

⁸⁷. SAB, SNA 196, 325/04, Lagden to Imp. Sec., 16 February 1904.

⁸⁸. CMAR, 1899, p.135.

⁸⁹. Ibid., p.136.

⁹⁰. Ibid., p.137.

accidents extremely high at the turn of the century, the Chamber was obliged to approach municipal councils along the Reef to consider establishing cemeteries for black workers. This process began in 1904, and by 1905 the Johannesburg and Springs councils had adopted guidelines which were forwarded to the government for approval. In November 1906 regulations permitting the creation of cemeteries on mine property were gazetted. Inter alia, they specified that the site should not affect existing ones, and that Chinese and African labourers were to be buried at separate sites; bodies could neither be cremated nor exhumed; graves were to be a minimum depth of 4 feet; and corpses were to be covered soon after being laid in the grave. Finally, death registers were to be kept by each mine, stating the name, "race" and "nationality", address of the deceased, and the cause of death. It was taken for granted that the corpses would be buried without coffins.⁹¹

But among the issues raised with Buckle's Native Grievances Commission in 1913, was the complaint that the mines were not supplying the deceased African employees with coffins. Graves, moreover, were shallow. As far as the latter complaint was concerned, Buckle recommended that mine cemeteries should be respected and fenced. But he rejected the demand for coffins because the "native custom" of using blankets had to be "respected". According to him, only a "minority" of Africans required coffins.⁹²

The demand for coffins was continually raised with the government and the Chamber, but was invariably dismissed out of respect for "native custom". Yet when African families objected in 1913 to autopsies being conducted on the bodies of their deceased, following the establishment of the South African Institute for Medical Research, their complaints were dismissed "in the interest of research".⁹³ It was not considered that this also interfered with "native custom".

⁹¹. Ibid., 1899, pp.135-37; 1905, p.27.

⁹². Report of the Native Grievances Inquiry, 1913-14, U.G.37, p.14.

⁹³. CMAR, 1913, p.21.

despite the fact that Africans believed the dead or their organs could be used by witches in their craft.⁹⁴ What is clear, therefore, is that the reason why African miners were not offered coffins was because of the costs that the mines would incur, and not some concern with "native custom". This struggle around the provision of coffins was only resolved by the amendment of the Compensation Act in 1941 which required the mines to contribute towards funeral costs. However, what became an issue then was the repatriation of the deceased rather than burying them on the mines.⁹⁵

Nor were Basotho miners satisfied with the manner in which their dead were treated. According to one informant: "You are just buried - the Johannesburg way, not according to our custom".⁹⁶ After an accident, bodies were taken to the mine morgue, while graves were prepared by hired diggers or "home-boys" released from duty. The burial was conducted after a day or so by "home-boys" released for that purpose. This contrasted sharply with the respect accorded the dead in colonial Lesotho itself.

During the period under review, Basotho in Lesotho buried their dead near kraals, in fields, on mountains, or in huts,

⁹⁴. In 1893 in Kimberley, one Mosotho reacted against what he thought to be the mutilation of the bodies:

There was one person of the Nguaketsi who was sick for 14 days and died on the fifteenth. The same day that he passed away I requested the owners of the Compound to allow me to bury him, and they agreed, asking me to come the following day. The following morning I went there at 7 o'clock and found the deceased still there. I waited until 8 o'clock. At 8 p.m. I saw some black men working here walk past me. I asked them where they were going to. They were carrying a bucket. They were going to the morgue. Then when I peeped through a small opening on the door, I saw them piercing that corpse on the chest, even draining the blood. They did not cut out any flesh from the body. I used to hear in the past that whites flay people, I did not believe it but today I now do. (Leselinyana, 1 March 1893).

⁹⁵. M. Knight, "The Mines Death Benefit Scheme", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.9, no.4, 1984.

⁹⁶. Interview with Solomon Mosunyane.

despite the existence of cemeteries near mission stations for the burial of converts and the missionaries themselves. A corpse would be placed in the grave in a squatting position and facing the east, although by the 1930s this practice was disappearing as more and more people adopted the practice of laying bodies in a vertical position. The deceased was buried with the implements that s/he had used in life, and dressed in a blanket or suit with a hat or doek. This reflected the belief that s/he was going to live in another life. The dead body, therefore, was part of the society, death being seen as a rite of passage from one form of life to another. The use of coffins in Lesotho had widely spread by the 1930s though blankets were still being used by those who could not afford coffins.⁹⁷

On the mines burial practices were subordinated to the impersonal demands of capital accumulation. According to one informant: "Nothing was done! That is why you will find the Shangaan putting together their shoes, different type of clothes... [to] put on top of the grave there".⁹⁸ With a coffin costing some L1.5s.6d or L3 in the mid-1910s, depending on the quality of wood and make, Basotho workers helped each other and struggled to find space for treating their dead in accordance with custom. The fate of one Mosotho who fell sick at the Premier Mine was described in the following terms:

He was sent to the Native Hospital, he remained there. but not mentioning the pain in his chest. He was now breathing with difficulty. On 28 March 1917, at 3.30 p.m., he passed away. On the 29th, at 5.30, he was buried. Before he was buried, the son of a chief, Phate Letsie, with his counsellors, arranged to get a coffin for the deceased. When they had agreed, they informed the [Basotho] nation, asking for contributions. The response was good; so and so teke [three-penny piece], so and so sixpence, and so forth. When put together, totalled L10.1s.8d.

A coffin was purchased for L3. L1 was used to serve food to those who attended the funeral. The balance was L6.1s.8d.⁹⁹

⁹⁷. Ashton, Basuto, pp.101-12.

⁹⁸. Interview with Mokopoi Mokopoi.

⁹⁹: Leselinyana, 29 May 1917.

One of the Basotho chiefs at the Jagersfontein diamond mine called a pitsso in March 1917 where it was agreed that a fund be established to purchase coffins in the case of death and to help the sick return home; each Mosotho was to contribute 3d every month. In another instance, at the West Rand Consolidated Mine in February 1912, Basotho workers led by the son of a chief managed to raise enough money from their kinsmen to purchase a coffin and clothes for deceased miners. Collections were also made in order to send money to the family of the deceased at home.¹⁰⁰ Basotho miners were not alone in this practice; other people also established mutual aid associations.¹⁰¹

The role of the church, especially the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society once it had established itself on the Reef in 1922, was also important. Following a skip accident at Randfontein Estates in June 1939:

23 people were retrieved as corpses, plus one white person; all 24 casualties. From these corpses the evangelist of the Church of France [the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society], Elias Moleli, tried this servant of God to look for the Christians without finding a single one. It was sad to see that among those many, none had accepted God.

... The corpses were then taken to the cemetery. It is a big yard. Arriving, they were put down. Mr Elias Moleli, of the Church of France and a Wesleyan priest...prayed for the corpses.¹⁰²

The time and day of funerals all affected attendance which was likely to be higher if the cause of death had been a "faction fight"¹⁰³ or a serious accident. Numbers fluctuated, from as low as seven and 11 people; while during one funeral in Springs, 33 women and 57 men attended.¹⁰⁴ During one particular funeral at the Knights Deep Mine in March 1917, 14

¹⁰⁰. Leselinyana, February 1912: 2 April 1917: 18 May 1917; 29 May 1917; 9 February 1917.

¹⁰¹. For the existence of such associations among Pedi miners, see Delius, "Sabatakomo", p.586; and for the Southern Rhodesian gold mines, see van Onselen, Chibaro, p.198.

¹⁰². Leselinyana, 19 July 1939.

¹⁰³. See Chapter Six.

¹⁰⁴. Leselinyana, 29 May 1917; 19 July 1939.

white boys and seven girls approached those attending to inquire about the cause of death and stayed for the whole service. C. Rampa, a Mosotho miner and a regular contributor to Leselinyana, attributed it to the World War which he thought was haunting whites and making them more aware of death.¹⁰⁵

The NAD sent the belongings, especially money, of the deceased back to their families, but regarded clothes as not "saleable". Basotho miners, however, developed their own system. "Home-boys", friends or relatives, would take the belongings of the dead to their families. Those who were literate wrote letters to inform the families directly, or indirectly through Sesotho newspapers. If noone was in a position to write, the family was informed when the belongings were taken home. At the Knights Deep, Rampa regularly sent the belongings of the deceased to their families via Maitland Brown of the NRC in Maseru. He would write to the family concerned, even sending a copy of the letter to the Sesotho newspapers, urging them to fetch the belongings of their child. In one instance he appealed to a certain family to respond and not abandon child. However, there was always the danger of people falsely claiming to be relatives of the deceased, wanting to be given the belongings. There was no system of monitoring this; everything depended on the honesty of those concerned.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵. Ibid., 6 April 1917.

¹⁰⁶. Ibid., 9 February 1917; 8 December 1916.

II

"DESECRATION OF THE SABBATH"? LEISURE IN THE COMPOUNDS.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the rapid development of black urbanisation, as well as the emergence of an urban black petty bourgeoisie on the Witwatersrand. This was linked to the decline of rural economies in the years following the 1913 Land Act. It was also in this period when the white government grudgingly accepted the fact of black urbanisation, and passed the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 which was intended to control this process.

The permanent settlement of Africans on the Rand dates from the very beginning of mining development. They settled in the slums which had proliferated and spread across Johannesburg before and especially after World War I. Places such as Fordsburg, Ferreirastown, Marshalltown, City and Suburban, Old and New Doornfontein, Ophir, Jeppe, Vrededorp, Prospect Township, and George Gogh, were all affected. Black locations first emerged after the South African War as a result of attempts by the state to purge Johannesburg suburbs of African slums. Klipspruit was established in 1903, Alexandra in 1905, and the free-hold areas of Western Native Township (Sophiatown, Newclare and Martindale) in 1919, and the Eastern Native Township in 1925, were all established as dumping grounds for African urban dwellers.¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, inner city slums and locations came to be centres of a rich urban culture. By the 1920s a particular form of music and dance called marabi had emerged as a principal form of working class entertainment. Parallel to this was the "dance hall" culture of all-night "concerts" and "tea meetings" with American-style jazz bands, patronised largely

107. D.B. Coplan, In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre, (Longman, London, 1985), pp.90-102; S.M. Parnell, "Johannesburg Slums and Racial Segregation in South African Cities, 1910-1937", (Ph.D, University of Witwatersrand, 1993), especially pp.79-140

by the African middle-class. The central spaces of marabi culture were the shebeens (taverns) which began to appear after 1897 following measures which prohibited the sale of liquor to Africans. The illicit sale of liquor to Africans was initially dominated by white shebeen owners who purchased spirits from bottle stores at a price of 1s.8d per bottle and resold them at 10s per bottle.¹⁰⁸

As the number of African women on the Reef increased dramatically in the 1920s, many of them, without employment opportunities, opted to brew sorghum-based African beer. By the 1930s their shebeens, which also provided sexual services, had replaced white-owned ones. Some powerful and easily-made drinks like "khali", "shimeya", "skokiaan" and "babaton" became popular; their manufacture was based on yeast, golden syrup, stale bread, figs, sugar and raisins, and sometimes methylated spirits, tobacco or bluestone, and carbide. The advantage was that such beverages were cheap to make and fermented more quickly than traditional beer which required at least a day. Also, drinkers could become intoxicated without having to drink the beverage in great quantities, as was the case with African beer. However, the survival of the shebeens was threatened by the passage of the Slum Act of 1934 which led to attempts to clear Johannesburg suburbs of Africans, and resettle them in the locations. The establishment of municipal beer-halls after 1938 was another threat.¹⁰⁹

108. C.M. Rogerson, and D.M, Hart, "The Survival of the 'Informal Sector': The Shebeens of Black Johannesburg", Geojournal, vol.12, no.2, 1986; E. Koch, "'Without the Visible Means of Subsistence': Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg, 1918-1940", in B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Town and Countryside in Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Responses, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983).

109. Coplan, In Township Tonight, pp.98-102; C.M. Rogerson, and D.M, Hart, "The Survival of the 'Informal Sector': The Shebeens of Black Johannesburg", Geojournal. vol.12, no.2, 1986; C.M. Rogerson, "Humanizing Industrial Geography: Factory Canteens and Worker Feeding on the Witwatersrand", South African Geographical Journal, vol.70, no.1, 1988; idem, "Drinking, Apartheid, and the Removal of Beerhalls in Johannesburg, 1938-1962", in J. Crush, and C. Ambler, (eds.), Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa, (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1992); Koch,

The principal clients of the shebeens during the period in question were migrant workers from mine compounds who could obtain special passes on weekends to visit other mines, slums and locations. Basotho shebeens also emerged and developed their own form of music and dance, thanks to the number of matekatse on the Rand. The Basotho famo¹¹⁰ dance and focho music played on concertinas with the accompaniment of home-made drums, were the equivalent of marabi. This music was centred around the matekatse, whose dance movements involved the lifting and flaring of skirts. One part of Newclare location where large numbers of Basotho had been settling permanently since the turn of the century, became popularly known as "Seteketekeng" ("place of staggering") because of the kind of entertainment that was taking place there.¹¹¹

Sunday and the Miners

Leisure in the compounds was contested, with management and workers each battling to control and influence its content. From the companies' perspective, controlling leisure time in the compounds helped keep workers from the reach of industrial or political "agitators", as well as away from the locations where they engaged in beer-drinking (and the associated difficulties of Saint Monday). For African miners, far from their homes and largely isolated in compounds, leisure time was spent in reaffirming one's self and dealing with the alienating effects of mine work.

Key figures in the struggle to control the leisure time of African miners and Africans in the locations were white liberals, especially the American Board of Foreign Mission (ABM) missionaries. A number of studies have demonstrated how

"Without the Visible Means of Subsistence", pp.158-62.

¹¹⁰. "Ho re famo": "to open nostrils; to raise garments, displaying the genitals". See Coplan, In Township Tonight, p.98.

¹¹¹. Coplan, In Township Tonight, p.98; Ambler and Crush, "Alcohol in Southern African Labor History", in their Liquor and Labor, p.29.

after World War I, especially in the aftermath of militant working class action during 1918-1920 and the growing radicalisation of the Transvaal Native Congress, white liberals developed a programme aimed at winning over the African petty bourgeoisie. Inter-racial forums, in the form of the Gamma Sigma Club established in 1918 and the Joint Councils of the 1920s, were initiated for the exchange of views on racial issues. This culminated in the opening in 1924 on Jeppe Street of a Bantu Men's Social Centre, which came to play an important role in the promotion of sport among Africans. Parallel to this was the establishment of the Chamber of Mines newspaper Umteteli wa Bantu in 1920 and later the missionary-run Bantu World, both designed in part to counter the Transvaal Native Congress.¹¹²

Time and work shifts on the mines were structured in such a way that Sundays were the only days when miners could have leisure time. The Transvaal Sunday Observance Law of 1894 required that Sunday, Christmas, Good Friday and Dingaan's Day, be observed as holidays; although an amendment in 1898 allowed the mines to utilise such days for repairs and other work necessary for the running of the mine. Any work on Sunday had to be arranged in such a way that miners on shift were able to attend church services either in the morning or evening.¹¹³

Sunday as the most frequent mine holiday assumed a particular meaning for miners in the compounds. The day not only provided African miners with time for rest but also the

¹¹². Paragraph based on B. Hirson, "Tuskegee. The Joint Councils, and the All African Convention", Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collected Papers, vol.10. no.26, 1981; T. Couzens, "'Moralizing leisure time': The transatlantic connection and black Johannesburg, 1918-1936", in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation and Social Change; A.G. Cobley, Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924-1950, (Greenwood, New York, 1990); P. Bonner, "The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: the radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand", in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation and Social Change.

¹¹³. CMAR, 1894, pp.118-23; 1896, pp.31-32; 1903, p.44; 1911, pp.53-65.

opportunity to engage in different activities. The Anglican missionary, Latimer Fuller, described what a Sunday looked like in one of the compounds he visited shortly after the turn of the century:

Everywhere in this great courtyard you see groups of men. Here half a dozen lying in the sun, wrapped up in their brown blankets asleep. There three or four sit smoking round a fire burning in an old tin; you watch them a moment and can hardly believe your eyes; they smoke cigars with the lighted end in their mouths; why, I don't know, probably because they find it nice and warm! There again by the door of one of the rooms a couple are hard at work; they have a flat stone, a bit of iron for a hammer and a quantity of horsehair and brass wire. They are making bangles such as are universally worn by men, women and children. A little further on seven or eight have made a square of little cup-like holes in the ground and are playing a most complicated game with little stones. Another group have another fire, but they are cooking their Sunday meat by hanging it in gruesome chunks all round and on the embers; when it is sufficiently charred, they will eat it.¹¹⁴

The "complicated" game that Fuller referred to was tchouba, introduced into the compounds by the Shangaan; Basotho miners would play their morabaraba on a board with pebbles. On diamond mines such as the Premier Mine where the workers had to purchase their food at the compound stores, some miners spent Sundays supplementing their income by cooking and selling cheap food. The Swiss missionary Creux visited the Premier Mine on one Sunday in March 1907, and after meeting his contacts: "... we went to a big and immense courtyard by going through the dormitories and corridors where there were tobacco, meat, fruits, etc. on sale. What a mess and disorder! Hundreds of Bapedis were dancing to the sound of drums..."¹¹⁵

The informal sector in the compounds was an important area for supplementing one's meagre wage. Barbers, tailors, knitters,

¹¹⁴. L. Fuller. The Romance of a South African Mission: Being an Account of the Native Mission of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, in the Transvaal, (Richard Jackson, Leeds, 1907), p.17.

¹¹⁵. Bulletin de la Mission Suisse en Afrique du Sud, 1907, p.160.

food peddlers and hawkers, all supplied workers with services and goods at cheaper rates and great convenience. Some miners grouped themselves into the magodisana or mutual aid associations, whereby each member contributed a given sum each month to the common pool, the money going to the member leaving the mine. These associations helped miners to save money to take home at the expiry of their contracts. As in the Southern Rhodesian gold mines, these mutual aid associations, including burial societies, were informed by concerns over destitution, sickness and death.¹¹⁶ The scope and function of, say, magodisana and burial societies, was flexible and indeed broader than is suggested in the name. What was established for magodisana purposes could also carry out the functions of a burial society. But the functioning of these associations relied on the honesty of their members, especially those chosen to keep the monthly contributions. The Chamber of Mines issued a circular in 1927 instructing compound managers not to accept the keeping of the funds of these "financial societies", because this money was causing many fights among miners at Kimberley where several treasurers had disappeared with their associations' funds.¹¹⁷

Gambling was another way in which workers hoped to supplement their wages. Card-playing was the most common, and regularly took place in compounds and the many gambling dens along the Reef.¹¹⁸ At the Premier Mine in the 1920s, one could win up to L17 a day from the cards. But those who lost found it hard to accept. In one case in 1911 at Driefontein Hill mine:

¹¹⁶. See, van Onselen, Chibaro, pp.198-204.

¹¹⁷. CMAR, 1927, P.38. One Mosotho wrote to Leselinyana: "Here in Dutoitspan mine, Beaconsfield, we see a lot a lot of trouble. Money "Societies" are being formed. But those who keep the money abuse and steal it. On Monday when we were about to sleep a fight broke out between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. What will bring Basotho back to line? That is why we are expelled from work. We are always implicated during fights". See the issue for 2 October 1913.

¹¹⁸. Transvaal Leader, 25 March 1909; G.F. Williams, The Diamond Mines of South Africa: Some Account of their Rise and Development, (Macmillan, London, 1902), pp.407-49.

A young Zulu man [wrote a Mosotho worker at this mine] has just brutally killed a Shangaan. These people were playing cards for money, then afterwards the Shangaan wanted to leave, but the Zulu [known as Sekei] refused... It was in the evening, and in the end the Shangaan decided to leave without an agreement. Sekei then extinguished the light and grappled the innocent Shangaan, cutting the latter's sinew of the leg with a knife, killing him instantly.¹¹⁹

Sekei was later arrested together with his Mosotho accomplice. Another case was of two Basotho (Ngaka and Sello) at the Premier Mine in which the compound police intervened when Sello approached Ngaka one night to demand his money back, threatening to kill the latter when he refused. The two men were advised to share the money lest the compound manager was informed.¹²⁰

Many miners were anyway robbed of their money by the gangs which infested and patrolled certain parts of the Reef at night.¹²¹ Concern with security outside the mines was a recurring theme in letters written by Basotho miners to Leselinyana.¹²² One instance was of a Mosotho who wrote to this newspaper in 1913 from his hospital bed:

We were from Ferreira, then we saw them [the "Malaita" gang]... and they started telling us to take out our money. Then my companion, Samuel Sepitla, said that he did not have their money. Then they started attacking; I tried to tell Samuel to run, but he refused as he had no speed. They grappled him, and I escaped. I saw someone fall, I thought it was Samuel, but it was one of the malaeta who killed him.

The police appeared, then those thugs fled. As to Samuel he is in hospital in intensive care as he was stabbed with a knife which is still stuck in him. We understand

¹¹⁹. Leselinyana, 17 June 1911.

¹²⁰. Ibid., 8 April 1927.

¹²¹. For the Malaita gang, see C. van Onselen, "The Regiment of the Hills - Umkosi Wezintaba: the Witwatersrand's lumpenproletariat army, 1890-1920", Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies, no.80, 1978; on Pondo gangs, see W. Beinart, "Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting: the Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.16, no.1, 1990.

¹²². See, for example, Leselinyana, 2 October 1913: 27 March 1913; 1 May 1913; 15 September 1937.

that he is not going to survive. He is from Ficksburg.¹²³

In the 1940s some Basotho, initially out of self-defense, formed the "MaRussia" gang. However, the latter later developed its own momentum, playing a role in influencing the famo and focho culture, and even contributing to the notoriety of Basotho on the Reef.¹²⁴

Despite such incidents, Basotho and other African miners were not deterred from visiting their friends and relatives in other compounds, locations and slums, as the link between compounds, and between compounds and locations, provided them with an avenue for leisure. Ironically, even the mining house historian, A.P. Cartwright, recognised this dimension when he wrote in defence of the gold mines:

To dispel this illusion [that miners are locked up in the compounds] they [the critics] ought to see the mines on Sundays, which are "visiting days". There the Reef trains and roads are crowded with mine employees dressed in their best and way to visit others mines. Every representative of the fifty tribes who are employed in the mines has dozens of "brothers" - men from his own kraal, men from the same district, men who live under the same headman. He visits them all. There are hours of conversation and interchange of "home news". Not a single calf is born, a snake killed or a good rain recorded in the far-off village but these men hear of it through this intelligence service.¹²⁵

An essential part of these weekend visits was beer-drinking, not only for maintaining and asserting home-boy and work-mate networks, but also for helping workers briefly forget the isolation, alienation and danger associated with living and working in the compounds and on the mines. In the mid-1940s.

¹²³. Ibid., 1 May 1913.

¹²⁴. J. Guy and M. Thabane, "The Ma-Rashea: A Participant's Perspective", in B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987); P. Bonner, "The Russians on the Reef, 1947-1957: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilisation", in Bonner et al, (eds.), Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1993).

¹²⁵. A.P. Cartwright, The Gold Miners, (Purnell and Sons, Cape Town, 1962), p.220.

the Chamber of Mines, concerned about the number of weekend robberies and accidents in which African miners became involved during their visits, established information bureaux in the compounds to advise workers on train schedules and fares, help with small money change, and to distribute slips with ticket prices on them and maps of railway stations. This latter measure was also intended to stop corrupt train and station officials from misinforming miners about train fares and destinations.¹²⁶ Out of sheer self-interest, the mining companies wanted to make sure that their men returned safe for work.

Beer-drinking in particular was central to leisure in the compounds. Mine managements had initially supplied workers with liquor in an attempt to attract labour, but by the mid-1890s, with the need for increased productivity due to the imperatives of deep-level mining, it was already clear that the long-term profitability of the industry depended on sober, disciplined and efficient labour. The industry could no longer tolerate the same degree of drunkenness and absenteeism. Randlords then put pressure on the Kruger government to take action. This was done after the Jameson Raid, and as part of new Pass Law regulations, the sale of liquor to Africans was prohibited. But the interest that the Kruger state and certain foreign and national businessmen had in the liquor industry made the suppression of illicit sales difficult. After the South African War, Milner's efforts in the form of Ordinance no.32 of 1902 were equally unsuccessful, as liquor dens continued to flourish. Some compound and mine managers themselves turned a blind eye to the "illicit alcohol trade" in order to protect the popularity of their mines. The 1918 liquor commission, the 1926 Select Committee, and the 1930-32 Native Economic Commission, all expressed

¹²⁶. Chamber of Mines, The Native Workers on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, (Public Relations Department, Johannesburg, 1947), p.9.

disappointment with the failure of the Liquor Ordinance.¹²⁷

One factor affecting efforts to impose sobriety on the workforce was that the 1902 Ordinance had allowed mine owners to brew African sorghum beer, albeit with less than three percent alcohol content. From 1903 this African beer was rationed to workers twice a day to combat scurvy, management believing that it was nutritious, as well as low in alcohol content. At the same time, the mining companies were also well aware of the role that alcohol played in popularising the mines and attracting labour, and never monitored the beer too closely. This left African workers more or less free to doctor sorghum beer with brown sugar and golden syrup in order to increase its alcohol strength. "Khali" was brewed in the compounds, especially by Shangaan miners. With the connivance of "policeboys", indunas and cooks, the "khali" trade flourished. A report in 1910 noted that most mines experienced between one and 15 percent absenteeism due to alcohol. And between 1913 and 1917 the gold mining industry lost 132 360 shifts (or almost two percent of the total workforce employed monthly), due to drunkenness.¹²⁸

Following the 1913 labour unrest on the mines, the Director of Native Labour banned the importation of golden syrup into the compounds. But this scarcely affected the traffic; the lifting of the ban in 1916 was partly an acknowledgement of this. The flourishing of marabi and shebeens in the 1920s and 1930s, and the emergence of East Rand locations in Boksburg, Benoni and Brakpan, further aggravated drinking on the mines. The period Saturday to Tuesday became a difficult one for mine officials concerned about the many workers unfit for work on

¹²⁷. C. van Onselen, "Randlords and rotgut, 1886-1903: an essay on the role of alcohol in the development of European imperialism and southern African capitalism, with specific reference to black mineworkers in the Transvaal Republic", History Workshop, no.2, 1976; J. Baker, "Prohibition and Illicit Liquor on the Witwatersrand, 1902-1932", in Crush and Ambler, Liquor and Labor.

¹²⁸. Baker, "Prohibition and Illicit Liquor", especially pp.141-45, 149-55.

Monday because of drunkenness or from injuries sustained in the locations and on weekend trains. Moreover, some miners would end up in prison for liquor-related offenses, while others remained in the locations to join the matekatse, and had no intention of returning to the compounds. Benoni's Indian Bazaar and Brakpan's Power Street were the equivalents of the Johannesburg slums and locations in the East Rand; the Boksburg municipality even fenced off its location in an attempt to prevent mine workers from entering the area.¹²⁹

Sport and Recreation

Dancing was one of the oldest forms of entertainment in the compounds. African miners brought their recreational activities from home and organised themselves into dance groups to perform on Sundays and other holidays. Though there were no conspicuously dominant dances like the Mbeni and Kalela ones found on the mines of Southern Rhodesian and the Central African Copperbelt,¹³⁰ Hugh Tracey estimated in the 1950s that over 30 percent of the total African workforce in the compounds entertained itself with dances.¹³¹ Both missionaries and some mine managements regarded these particular activities as "war dances", associating them with "savage" rituals. In October 1914, at the height of the recently introduced wartime measure of Martial Law, the Director of Native Labour issued a circular asking the Department's inspectors to inform compound managers in their respective districts that special passes issued to miners

¹²⁹. Paragraph based on CMAR, 1913, pp.23-26; T.D. Moodie, "Alcohol and Resistance on the South African Gold Mines, 1903-1962", in Crush and Ambler, Liquor and Labor; Baker, "Prohibition and Illicit Liquor"; and Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.197.

¹³⁰. See, van Onselen, Chibaro, pp.186-89; and B.K. Matongo, "Popular culture in a colonial society: Another look at Mbeni and Kalela dances on the Copperbelt, 1930-64", in S.N. Chipungu, (ed.), Guardians in Their Time: Experiences of Zambians under Colonial Rule, 1890-1964, (Macmillan, London, 1992).

¹³¹. H. Tracey, African Dances of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, (African Music Society, Johannesburg, 1958), p.11.

"should be carefully restricted and that organised native dances in compounds should not be permitted".¹³²

For their part, missionaries, convinced that theirs was a civilising mission, targeted "war dances" as an "evil" to be eliminated. Dexter Taylor of the American Board wrote in 1926 about the Chopi and Shangaan dances in the compounds: "The weird music of the crude African xylophone, the marvellous rhythm, the display of physical energy rising at times almost to dervish madness is a sight to be remembered. Efforts have been made by the Church Council to have them suppressed as a desecration of the Sabbath, but to suppress them before a better form of social and rhythmical expression has been provided would be folly".¹³³

Taylor was responding to the condemnation of Sunday sport programmes in the compounds and locations by Sabbaterian groupings.¹³⁴ Among those strongly opposed to Sunday sport were the Dutch Reformed Church and the Methodists, both of whom were convinced that such activities diverted the attention of Africans from the church and undermined the sacredness of the Sabbath. American Board missionaries, part, thought that the prime target of their programmes should be those Africans who were outside the reach of the church and thus exposed on a daily basis to the "evil" temptations of the Rand. All of them tended to see Africans as infants or as human species in a primitive stage of development needing moral, spiritual and intellectual guidance.¹³⁵ One convert wrote in April 1932 to the Bantu World: "There is no objection to war dances, provided they are staged by the enlightened

¹³². SAB, GNLB 192, 1329/14, DNL circular to Inspectors, 28 October 1914.

¹³³. Taylor, "The Rand as a Mission Field", International Review of Missions, vol.25, October 1926, p.654.

¹³⁴. For similar movements in England, see E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (Penguin Books, London, 1963) pp.442-52. The Sabbaterian movement denounced "profane" dances as part of its struggle for the establishment of industrial discipline and a capitalist work ethic.

¹³⁵. Umteteli, 14 September 1929; 5 October 1929; 12 October 1929.

Bantu. When they are staged by the uncivilized, it is a sign of retrogression, because finding his performance so patronised, he has no inducement to progress".¹³⁶

Unlike the missionaries, the more sophisticated of the mine authorities merely tried to contain dances, and as far as possible transform them into recreational devices for the control of labour. At the third annual meeting of the Transvaal Compound Managers Association in September 1921, it was reported that "the ... entertainment of Natives... [was] given serious thought".¹³⁷ Dance groups were encouraged, and by 1921 competitions were being organised among Mozambican workers as they were regarded as the best dancers, as well as being the most numerous on the mines. Competitions went through three stages: starting with the eliminations in each of the three Rand districts, the winners continuing to the semi-finals and finals. The teams were divided into three categories: namely, the "Manyambanes", the "Matshangaan", and the "Batshopi". White umpires used four criteria: (a) the rendering of the music; (b) the general appearance of the dancers; (c) the precision of movement of the dancers; and (d) the regularity of the dancing line.¹³⁸

Prizes were distributed by the Portuguese Curator, and included a shield for the winning "tribe", which was held for a year; a flag kept permanently by the winning team; flags for the losing finalists; and a bronze medal for each member of the winning team. These competitions were temporarily discontinued in the mid-1920s because, according to the then Acting Director of Native Labour, "there were indications that teams defeated at dancing were likely to test their capabilities in a more serious direction".¹³⁹

Basotho dancers, however, were not "privileged" in the same way as Mozambicans were, even though their mohobelo dance,

¹³⁶. Bantu World, 16 April 1932.

¹³⁷. Umteteli, 1 October 1921.

¹³⁸. Ibid., 10 October 1921; 5 March 1921.

¹³⁹. SAB, GNLB 368, 88/26/110, Acting DNL to SNA, 17 June 1926.

taken from home where it was used for amusement and recreation, was also performed in the compounds. An American missionary visiting a compound in 1918 "saw a perspiring line of Basutos, almost naked, writhing, stamping and grunting through a snake-like dance".¹⁴⁰ Unlike the Mozambicans, Basotho dancers did not wear "traditional dress" or carry the Sotho cowhide shield. By the late 1940s, their preferred uniform was khaki or black trousers, a headdress, shoes, and a short black ostrich feather. The upper part of the body was not covered in order to display masculinity and physical strength in line with the koata ideology of mine work. However, the mokorotlo dance which was performed in Lesotho during important political ceremonies, weddings or letsema parties, or when a chief was going for lebollo, was absent from the mines.¹⁴¹

As Sunday dances attracted a number of European visitors, the Tourist Office approached the NAD in March 1926 to consider utilising such activities for tourism purposes. The activities were to be organised on the Reef, in Zululand and in Basutoland (but the latter two were later dropped as they had no hotel facilities to lodge tourists). The Acting Director of Labour, aware that "there are serious objections to public entertainment of this nature on that day [Sunday]",¹⁴² suggested that the activity be organised during the week. The idea was that these dance shows would take place every three years. The Chamber of Mines was asked to release between 500 and 1000 Mozambican dancers from their duties for the event because no African group from inside South Africa and employed on the mines had recognised dancers.¹⁴³ The Chamber declined, arguing that:

¹⁴⁰. R.E. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming: Phases of South Africa's Race Problem, (Students' Christian Association, Stellenbosch, 1930), p.138.

¹⁴¹. Ashton, Basuto, p.96; Tracey, African Dances, pp.11-12.

¹⁴². SAB, GNLB 386, 88/26/110, Acting DNL to SNA, 17 June 1926.

¹⁴³. The Acting Director of Native labour wrote: "I think one can definitely put on one side any idea of organizing a Dance of Union Natives on the Witwatersrand. The only Union

In the first place, there are not so many as 500 to 1,000 trained dancers amongst the East Coast natives employed on the Mines; secondly, the Mine natives themselves are usually unwilling to participate in combined dances of this description. The individual dancing teams have high opinions of their own abilities, and efforts to bring them together for a combined dance would probably result in failure.¹⁴⁴

A compromise was eventually found by organising underground tours for tourists which romanticised African labour; and which by the 1930s included "native" dances. This process culminated in the erection of dance arenas for audiences of up to 2 500 people. From 1946 tourist excursions in Chamber of Mines' coaches also included visits to the compounds and the surface works of certain mines.¹⁴⁵

As part of their programme to combat "war dances" and influence the outlook of the workers, American Board missionaries encouraged the playing of various sports. The Rev. Bridgman, while preparing Ray Phillips in 1918 for his job as a social worker in the compounds, laid down the basic framework:

... during long hours of leisure these young fellows [referring to a group of Basotho dancers] have nothing to do but get into trouble. If we have anything in the way of Christian social service activities to project into this situation which will give these young fellows something clean and wholesome to think about and talk about during these hours, we shall be rendering a Christian service. We must capture the physical and

Natives indulging in dances to any extent are the Zulus, who are scattered about mainly in domestic service on the Witwatersrand and it would be quite impossible to organize them or get them together for the purpose. It occurred to me that the Chamber of Mines might be disposed to assist in the arrangement of something on a fairly large scale in connection with natives from Portuguese East Africa, who are the only natives who indulge in dancing on the Mines". See SAB, GNLB 386, 88/26/110, DNL. to SNA, 17 June 1926.

¹⁴⁴. SAB, GNLB 368, 88/26/110, General Manager (Chamber of Mines) to SNA, 3 June 1926.

¹⁴⁵. C. Rasool, and L. Witz, "'South Africa: A World in One Country": Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern", unpublished Seminar Paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, September 1994.

mental life of these young men during six days of the week, besides preaching the Gospel to them on the seventh.¹⁴⁶

Phillips was to introduce volleyball, football, athletics, and, more bizarrely, games like "Hunt the Thimble" and "Who's got the Ring?", but he met with little success.¹⁴⁷

However, in giving the impression that the only forms of recreation in the compounds before the ABM's work were gambling, "war dances" and beer-drinking, Phillips was mistaken. Cricket and football were the oldest and the most popular European sports in the compounds. Cricket, because of the influence of mine officials who were predominantly English, was more popular among the miners than soccer, which was the leading sport in the locations. Indeed, in 1915 the Native Recruiting Corporation Cup for cricket was established.¹⁴⁸ But the competition only took place once because of a boycott by mine-based teams. The problem was that the competition was open to all African cricket teams on the Rand, and mine teams wanted the activity to be for them only, as the Cup had been donated by the NRC. Taberer intervened, convening a meeting in October 1920 to resolve the conflict, but when the NRC made it clear that it wanted to see all teams participating in the competition, the gathering broke up.¹⁴⁹

As with the dance groups, the mine authorities played an important role in these competitions, making speeches and giving out medals to the winning teams. Cricket teams like

¹⁴⁶. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.139.

¹⁴⁷. Ibid., pp.138-41.

¹⁴⁸. This was to remain the highest Cup for Africans until 1976. See R. Archer and A. Bouillon, The South African Game: Sport and Racism, (Zed Press, London, 1982), p.92.

¹⁴⁹. Paragraph based on Umteteli, 16 October 1920; 25 December 1920; 3 September 1921; 6 December 1924; 26 April 1930; Archer, and Bouillon, The South African Game, pp.112-51; C.M. Badenhorst, "'Teach the Native to Play': Social Control and Organized Black Sport on the Witwatersrand, 1920-1939". GeoJournal, vol.12, no.2, 1986; T. Couzens, "An Introduction to the History of Football in South Africa", in Bozzoli, Town and Countryside in the Transvaal.

"Fight Forever", "Orientals", "Fear Not" and "Wit Deep" appear to have been amongst the strongest on the mines in the 1920s. The "Stone Breakers" was one of the leading teams in the locations. But cricket was played mainly by Xhosa miners from the Cape Colony, and this partly explains why Umteteli's cricket reports were generally written in Xhosa and not in Sotho-Tswana or English.¹⁵⁰

The majority of Basotho miners, however, preferred football. This sport was also promoted by compound managers. For example, at the City Deep in April 1923, a match was organised between the Chopi and the Shangaans who had never played football before.¹⁵¹ At the Knights Mine, Basotho workers formed the "Basutoland Star Football Club" in 1923, which, though not among the leading teams, performed well, even winning the label "Maja-lipere" (horse-eaters). However, the Witwatersrand District Native Football Association had been coordinating soccer activities in the compounds and administering the NRC Challenge Cup as early as 1920. The Rand was divided into sub-districts, and the competition arranged along lines similar to those of the dances groups. The 1920 Cup was won by the "Caledonians" of Village Deep who beat the "Transvaal Champions" at the Crown Mines sport field. By the 1930s the "Natalians" of Simmer and Jack were the strongest team on the mines, even beating the location-based "Pretoria Callies" 5-0 to win the 1932 Cup. In colonial Lesotho itself, the promotion of soccer culminated in the introduction of the Basutoland Football Cup in 1932.¹⁵²

Ethnic affiliation appears to have played an insignificant role in the formation of sport teams. My informant who was a

¹⁵⁰. Umteteli, 16 October 1920; 25 December 1920; 3 September 1921; 6 December 1924; 26 April 1930.

¹⁵¹. The Bantu World described the event for its readers: "Arrayed in their usual war dance apparel, the two teams were an interesting sight. Some of the players have such strong toes that they would easily make three-inches-deep excavations on the ground in an attempt to kick the ball". See the issue for 23 April 1923.

¹⁵². Umteteli, 25 December 1920; 2 October 1920; Leselinyana, 27 April 1923; 2 November 1932.

great lover of soccer claimed that skill rather ethnicity was the key in the choice of players.¹⁵³ For example, a Mosotho was captain of one of the main soccer teams, the "Herbanies", at the New State Areas in 1937, and most of his fellow players were from different ethnic groups. Conflict among supporters, apparently more rife among the Xhosa with their cricket teams, was, however, not uncommon. Certainly football was no exception. In December 1914 there was a serious outbreak of violence between Shangaan and Xhosa supporters after a football match at the Crown Mines. The conflict engulfed nearby compounds, causing a compound manager to intervene and kill one Xhosa with his revolver.¹⁵⁴

The Chamber of Mines, motivated partly by the American missionaries and mostly by the sporting activities already established in the compounds, began systematically to introduce more recreational activities in the 1920s. It was believed that compound sports would "civilise" and educate the "natives" and keep them away from the locations. In 1928, the Chamber employed a social worker, P.C. van Hagt, to find the best recreational activity for some 6 000 workers on a large mine. Van Hagt, himself supervised by the American Board, embarked "on outdoor activities under the bright lights of specially installed lamps, and aided by a giant, highly amplified gramophone", and had "at his disposal material for active and quiet games, mass singing and instrumental music, dramatics, the cinema, Night Schools, Bible Classes, religious meetings, etc.". He even "occasionally [imported] a drama or boxing match from outside".¹⁵⁵

By the mid-1930s, tennis and golf were also becoming popular on the mines. At Daggafontein mine, for example, cricket and soccer were the only major sports until golf and tennis were introduced in 1937. A number of Basotho miners had taken the initiative in playing tennis long before facilities were

¹⁵³. Interview with Mokopoi Mokopoi.

¹⁵⁴. Leselinyana, 29 January 1915; 12 August 1937.

¹⁵⁵. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.151. See also CMAR, 1928, p.143.

provided. "Initially, [wrote one enthusiastic Mosotho from Daggafontein], we began in the compound, where we were learning to play it with well-shaped planks, hitting it [the ball] even though there were no poles or net, but only a small white line. Today we play it in [a beautiful court]; all is well organised".¹⁵⁶ On this mine, tennis was dominated by Basotho players.

A decade later, soccer, cricket, tennis and rugby were all major sports on the gold mines, with cricket largely played in summer, and soccer in winter. There were now 57 cricket teams on 33 mines, with 39 playing fields. There was a total of about 595 tennis players in the compounds, with 50 tennis courts on 31 mines. Rugby, a late comer, was played on 18 mines. The mine authorities provided sports players with balls, jerseys, money for equipment and other related facilities. By this time, too, a few mines had established libraries and distributed newspapers to those miners who could read. Writing paper and envelopes were given to those who wished to write letters home. About 20 mines now had nearly 40 recreation halls between them. Nearly 90 music bands, supplied with instruments by the authorities, could be found on the mines; and the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association brass band itself toured compounds on weekends. Loudspeakers were also installed in the compounds to broadcast radio programmes and gramophone music.¹⁵⁷

Basotho miners had still another avenue for leisure. As part of their struggle to legitimise themselves, in 1919 Basotho chiefs in colonial Lesotho had declared the 12th of March, the day that Moshoeshoe accepted British protection in 1868, as "Moshoeshoe Day". Moshoeshoe Festivals to celebrate this day began to occur on the Rand in 1928. Celebrations took place on the first Sunday after the 12th of March as the day was not a holiday in South Africa. But it was only in the 1930s,

¹⁵⁶. Leselinyana, 27 October 1937.

¹⁵⁷. Paragraph based on Mochochonono, 22 June 1946; 29 June 1946; 6 July 1946; 13 July 1946; 20 July 1946; 27 July 1946; Chamber of Mines, Native Workers, p.8.

following the major drought discussed in Chapter Two, and the consequent Basotho diaspora, that the commemoration of the day on the Rand became more organised. A committee made up of chiefs was put in place, its activities financed by the Chamber of Mines and the Basutoland government through the Johannesburg Agency. The organisation for the day was coordinated with location municipalities, mine officials, representatives from Basutoland, and the Johannesburg Agency. The Festival held in March 1935 in a hall at the Western Native Township was opened with a sermon by a Paris Evangelical Society missionary who spoke of Moshoeshe as a man "who feared God, accepted the gospels and listened to advice". The main speaker for the day was D.M Wilson of the Basutoland Johannesburg Agency who was introduced as the "father" of the Basotho, and who spoke about Basotho workers on the Rand and the work of his office. Among those present at the celebration held in Pimville in 1939, were the location superintendent and the police, the latter of course to keep law and order. But these Moshoeshe occasions were attended more by the Basotho elites (such as chiefs and traders) and missionary converts than ordinary Basotho miners.¹⁵⁸

Basotho miners who were Christian converts developed their own particular way of spending their leisure time. As the next chapter will show, missionary societies targeted Rand mines and the locations as "universities of crime". The ABM was especially concerned about all-night "concerts" and "dance halls" in the locations which, according to Taylor, "make the heathen war dance on Sunday afternoon look like a Sunday school picnic".¹⁵⁹

Christian mine converts met on Sundays for church services and later divided into groups for the evangelising of other miners in the compounds. They also organised themselves into

¹⁵⁸. Paragraph based on Umteteli, 22 March 1930; 15 March 1930; 16 March 1935; 23 March 1935; Mochochonono, 17 April 1935; 7 January 1939, 29 March 1933; Basutoland News, 12 March 1940.

¹⁵⁹. Taylor, "Rand as Mission Field", p.656.

compound-based choirs. Depending on the relations between different missionary societies, such choral groups would meet in a hall to celebrate a Christian festival like Christmas. While other miners in the compounds bought bullocks, sheep and goats, and prepared beer to celebrate their Christmas,¹⁸⁰ converts bought tea, sugar, milk, cakes and bread for their "tea meetings" and "concerts" which were dominated by choral music, prayer and sermons. A distinctive church-music culture emerged which involved using body gestures to illustrate moods, meanings and certain phrases in choral songs and hymns. Arms could be raised to point to the imaginary star of Bethlehem, or hands put on heads to express a state of sin. A Swiss missionary described one of these choirs in the following terms:

Before starting, time is spent in putting this one a little to the right, that one to the back. Then they cough, the key energetically given in "So-mi-do-do"... The conductor, overwhelmed by his music, gestulates... illustrating the words, pronounced with conviction by the members of the choir, with gestures, while others [in the choir] close their blissful eyes, lifting their heads, singing with pleasure.¹⁸¹

Moshoeshoe Festivals were themselves an important occasion for Christian Basotho who, in the company of female converts from the locations and in competition with fellow Christians, displayed their new and colourful clothes. Particular forms of dress, walking styles, evangelical work, bible reading and singing, were all at the core of the leisure activities of this generation of mine converts.

Films

The struggle to confine African workers to the mines (during weekends and holidays) without "closing" the compound, was

¹⁸⁰. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.196; Interview with Solomon Mokoaleli.

¹⁸¹. Bulletin de la Mission, March-April 1940, p.37.

also launched on another front. As early as 1913, individuals were approaching mining companies to erect cinemas or "bioscopes" on the mine property. Under section 69 of Act 35 of 1908, application for "surface right" or the permission to use the mine land for other purposes other than mining, had to be addressed to the Mining Commissioner. Mine managers could offer sites but only with the approval of the Commissioner and the Director of Native Labour. As there was no clear guideline for the operation of "bioscopes" on the mines except Act 35, the Mining Commissioner, in granting permission, did so on three conditions: firstly, that the permit could be cancelled should the government "not approve of the character of the entertainment or the class of films being shown"; secondly, that the authorities "may at any time investigate the class of entertainment which is being carried on or the conditions under which [mine] employees are admitted"; and finally, that the permit could be withdrawn with one month's notice without offering any reason or compensation.¹⁶² Responsibility for ensuring that these conditions were adhered to and the censoring of films, was left to the Native Affairs Department. These conditions were motivated by, among others, the fear that the existence of cinemas would facilitate trade in and the sale of liquor, as well as the contravention of the Trading on Mining Ground Regulation Act which forbade the running of business on mining property. But mine, Native Affairs and South African Police officials were all in favour of the project on the grounds that it would popularise mine work, educate mine workers and keep them away from locations.¹⁶³

A major problem for the authorities was the question of censorship. It was believed that "the majority of the Natives [who were to watch the films] would be those fresh from the

¹⁶². SAB, GNLB 277, 335/17/370, Mining Commissioner to Native Commissioner (Witwatersrand), 5 February 1913.

¹⁶³. Ibid., Mining Commissioner to Native Commissioner (Witwatersrand), 27 March 1917; NAD Inspector (Roodepoort) to DNL, 2 April 1913. For a general study, see K. Tomaselli, The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film, (Radix, Sandton {Johannesburg}, 1989), pp.54-80.

kraal and incapable of distinguishing between fact and fiction. It would be essential to cut out any films dealing with sexual matters or those which in any way lower the status of white women or men".¹⁶⁴ The South African Police District Commandant for the East Rand (Boksburg) suggested that a Film Censorship Board be formed, consisting of three or four missionaries, and one Native Affairs official. The Native Affairs Inspector for Benoni also supported the view that films should be allowed only if there was "strict" censorship, but felt that the censoring committee should include one compound manager seconded by the Compound Managers Association and one Inspector of the Native Affairs. After some deliberation, the three main actors (the SAP, NAD and the Mining Commissioner) agreed on a central committee to be made up of the Deputy Commissioner of Police for Johannesburg, a NAD inspector, and a compound manager. In the event, actual censoring of films was left to the SAP.¹⁶⁵

Among the first individuals to be offered surface rights for the purpose of establishing a "bioscope" was a local comedian, J. Smith, who regularly visited the compounds to give his shows. Smith was given permission in September 1913 but his scheme failed when a compound manager indicated that he knew the comedian, and that his experience with him was that he treated his African audiences so badly that in some instances he had to intervene. By the 1920s, Phillips of the ABM, was showing films in the compounds for the NRC.¹⁶⁶

There were generally three categories of films: those showed to whites and not "suitable" for anyone black;¹⁶⁷ those "suitable" for blacks (that is Indians and Coloureds) except

¹⁶⁴. SAB, GNLB 277, 335/17/370, SAP Inspector (East Rand) to Mining Commissioner, 19 September 1919.

¹⁶⁵. Ibid., NAD Inspector (Benoni) to DNL, 14 October 1919; SAP Commissioner to SNA, 24 November 1919; NAD Inspector (Johannesburg) to DNL, 25 June 1920; SAP Commissioner to SNA, 31 December 1919; SAP Commissioner to SNA, 14 January 1920.

¹⁶⁶. Umteteli, 2 October 1920; Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.141.

¹⁶⁷. "Blacks" here refers to Africans, Indians and Coloureds.

Africans; and those "suitable" for the latter. In censoring films, Phillips would cut what he regarded as "low-grade, suggestive stuff that seemed to be gleaned from the gutters of the world; the worst products of English, American and continental studios".¹⁶⁸ He concentrated his attacks on films that showed sex and whites in a state of undress, violence and crime. His fight against such films led him in 1921 to fight for the withdrawal of two films, "Intolerance" and "The Daughter of the Gods", at the Good Hope cinema on Commissioner street which, in theory, was for Coloureds but in practice was also patronised by Africans. In June 1922 Phillips addressed a memorandum to the Director of Native Labour complaining about the Good Hope which had just shown two other films that he did not approve of for "his natives". It was a fight which he continued well into the 1930s, constantly demanding tighter censorship. Over the same period, he succeeded in having commercial cinemas pushed away from the mines.¹⁶⁹

The Chamber of Mines itself made deliberate use of films. In collaboration with African Film Production, films were produced for the purpose of labour recruitment and the glorification of mine work. A film "W.N.L.A. in Portuguese East Africa", produced in 1920, showed the recruitment and movement of Shangaan recruits to the mines. In 1925 the NRC head, Taberer, directed a documentary "From Blanket to Civilization" which depicted Cape Colony recruits progressing from their "primitive" societies to "civilisation" on the mines. Though this film was initially produced for the Wembley Film Exhibition, it became such a success that a copy was presented to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in London. Phillips also used this film during his 1926 fund-raising campaign in the United States of America to counter "propaganda" in the "native" press. In December 1928, "From Blanket to Civilization" was shown at

¹⁶⁸. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.141.

¹⁶⁹. SAB, GNLB 277, 335/17/370, Phillips to DNL, 12 June 1922; Phillips, "The African and the Cinema", Race Relations, vol.5, no.3, August 1938.

the International Labour Organisation offices in Geneva. "From Kraal to Mine", a 1930 series filmed in Natal/Zululand, the Ciskei, Basutoland, the Northern Transvaal and Pondoland, also dealt with themes that juxtaposed "barbarism" with "civilisation", or village with mine life. These films were not only shown in the compounds but also in the rural areas. WANLA and NRC film vans would drive to remote villages to present film shows with the assistance of interpreters. Taberer showed one such film to a packed hall in Maseru during his visit there in June 1926.¹⁷⁰

Films also played an important role in health and safety programmes in the compounds. "The Dust that Kills", produced in 1921 under the directorship of Dr Orenstein himself, aimed at educating workers about miners' phthisis. "The Golden Harvest of the Union", produced during the same period, dealt with the prevention of the spread of diseases. This film was even awarded a bronze medal at the 1939 Biennial Exhibition in Venice. There were other "safety" but comical films in fanakalo, the mine lingua franca, with actors drawn from the mine workforce, and intended solely for mine audiences. One of these was the 1942 production "Pas Op Wena" (You Watch Out!), which dealt with trucks and tramways.¹⁷¹

Though the reaction of Africans workers to circus and comedians' shows were not to the satisfaction of compound managers,¹⁷² audience reaction to films produced better results. Certainly this explains the Chamber of Mines' involvement and willingness to spend money on such a scheme. Phillips usually showed four kinds of films; animal, travel

¹⁷⁰. T. Gutsche, The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940, (H. Timmins, Cape Town, 1972), pp.355, 378-81; Umteteli, 10 July 1926.

¹⁷¹. Other examples were "Pas Op Lo Dopu (Look out for Detonators), and "Pas Op Lo Sandla" (Look after your Hands). See Gutsche, History and Social Significance, p.379; and Chamber of Mines, Campaign Against Mining Accidents, p.18.

¹⁷². The experience of many compound managers, it was reported in 1919, was "that only the educated and semi-educated natives attended those shows". See SAB, GNLB 277, 335/17/370, NAD Inspector (Benoni) to DNL, 14 October 1919.

and adventure films; comedies, especially of the Charlie Chaplin, Larry Semon and Buster Keaton types; safety films; and religious films supplied by the Religious Films of South Africa Ltd., which were shown on Sundays with the help of two or three interpreters.¹⁷³

By the end of the 1920s, Phillips' enterprise had expanded to 60 centres outside the mines, including police barracks, orphanages, goals, reformatories, hospitals, locations and municipal compounds, across the Reef. After the Rand shows, the films were then railed to Natal's sugar plantations and Durban's locations, then to Pietermaritzburg, and finally back to Pretoria. The last leg covered Rhodesian copper, coal and gold mines. It took over twelve months for a film to complete this process, being shown to an estimated audience of between a quarter and a half-million African men and women.¹⁷⁴

But by the 1930s, Africans had become sophisticated consumers of films, and this put Phillips in a dilemma. The major challenge came from the "talkie" (talking) films introduced to South African cinemas some years previously:

The commercial talkie film [lamented Phillips in 1938] has gained a foothold in the consciousness of the South African Bantu which can only be supplanted by more and better films of an entertaining and amusing nature. The huge audience of the gold mines are to-day highly critical of programmes offered them. If the single-reel topical or educational picture is not quickly followed by a comedy or feature in which there is considerable action and interest, shouts of "Take it off!" are heard, and the crowd begins to thin. Single reels of an educational nature are tolerated at the start of the programme, and the substitution of the same amount of material showing Native actors speaking SiXhosa or SeSutho might be well received. But these reels would have to be of professional quality, with perfect voice synchronisation.¹⁷⁵

What was "supplanted" were, however, his films, as the degree

¹⁷³. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.144.

¹⁷⁴. Ibid., pp.146-51; Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa, vol.4 (pp.498-503), vol.3 (pp.233-38).

¹⁷⁵. Phillips, "African and the Cinema", p.61.

of censorship also affected the film narrative: "Most films depicting action, animals and actual circumstances appealed to natives", noted Thelma Gutsche, "but drama proper, rendered aseptic by sever censorship, interested them very little, particularly as audience, despite the sound-film, persisting on chattering loudly throughout the performance".¹⁷⁶

A decade later, the "talkies", especially "westerns", were the most popular films in the compounds. "Westerns" were followed in popularity by action-packed films with actors such as George Raft. Coming third were the Chamber's fanakalo safety movies with "mompapas" (dim-witted people) putting the audience into stitches of laughter for doing "everything" obviously wrong and stupid.¹⁷⁷ A hundred performances were now being shown weekly in the compounds to an audience of 1 500 on average and, in one instance, of 7 000; in general, over 50 percent of the miners attended the shows which lasted for about an hour.¹⁷⁸

Mine managements certainly derived some benefit from the film shows which occupied the leisure time of the workers. But as performances were spread across the week, the larger part of any weekend remained "free" on most mines, still leaving workers time to visit the locations and their friends.

Conclusion

The Randlords' efforts to minimise expenditure on labour in order to cut production costs resulted in neglect of workers' living conditions, health and occupational safety. It was with the intervention of the state, and also due to concerns with the long-term productivity of the gold mining industry.

¹⁷⁶. Gutsche, History and Social Significance, p.379.

¹⁷⁷. Umteteli, 5 March 1921; Standard Encyclopedia, vol.3; Mining Survey, vol.1, no.2, July 1946.

¹⁷⁸. Phillips, The Bantu are Coming; Mining Survey, vol.1, no.2, July 1946.

that the mineowners eventually addressed the high morbidity and mortality of their workers. Parallel to this process was the introduction by mine managements of recreational facilities in the compounds for African workers. The intention was to keep African miners away from the slums and locations where they drank beer, interacted with matekatse, and became exposed to political and labour activists.

These measures did not succeed as African miners accepted new recreational facilities without parting with those aspects of their life which they valued most. Beer-drinking and frequenting the locations remained at the centre of recreation and entertainment for most African miners. To some extent, at least, they transformed the compounds, an institution for social control, into their homes. African miners also cared for their destitute, sick and deceased kinsmen, through mutual aid associations.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGION AND CONVERSION

Christianity influenced and attracted an important proportion of African miners in the compounds. Some brought this religion from their homes in the rural areas and propagated it in the compounds; while others were converted on the mines and took the new religion to their homes. Thus Christianity was more than simply an instrument of control in the hands of mine managements.

Although recent research is at last beginning to reveal the multi-layered nature of Christianity in the mine compounds,¹ much work remains to be done on the work of missionary societies, independent churches and itinerant African lay preachers in the locations and compounds. This chapter, by using the case of Basotho miners and the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS), attempts to investigate aspects of these phenomena.

African Initiatives

Religious work which was conducted in the compounds by African miners without the mediation of missionaries was itself extremely important. Individual African converts in the mining areas tried in all manner of ways to group together fellow Christians in their compounds for prayer and religious services. They even attempted to make their own converts. Many of them wrote letters to missionary newspapers

¹. See especially the studies by Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.61-62, 213-21; and B. Kennedy, "Missionaries, Black Converts, and Separatists on the Rand, 1886-1910: From Accommodation to Resistance", Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, vol.20, no.2, 1992.

celebrating progress in their work, be it in Kimberley, Koffyfontein or Johannesburg, but lamenting the absence of assistance from white missionaries.²

Membership of such groups transcended ethnic and language barriers. Many Africans could speak more than one language and could act as interpreters whenever necessary. At the turn of the century, the Swiss missionary, Ernest Creux, often visited his Shangaan contact at the Premier Diamond Mine, Yohanes Makoubele, who headed a school there which he ran with the help of six miners. Members of this group were drawn from the Basotho, Bapedi and Bakgatla peoples, and encompassed Anglican, Lutheran and Wesleyan denominations. This group also held church services together. At Knights Deep, Basotho and Shangaan workers held their 1916 Christmas service together, despite fears and expectations of a "faction fight" between different groups in the compounds. Nor did initiatives by Africans cease with the proliferation of missionary societies on the Rand. They continued to act as pioneers and a driving force for the propagation of the gospel in the compounds. As late as 1928, religious work at the Premier Mine was headed by Africans in the absence of formal missionary presence. Close contact was established and maintained with the French and Swiss missionaries and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), however. At the Dutoitspan Mine in 1937, Basotho Christians were still meeting own, and had made arrangements with Xhosa converts to hold their services together.

Typically, a Christian arriving in a compound would first look for his church, but if one did not exist, he would either join established groups or set up his own. Still others erected their own proselytisation machinery. Take, for example, one Thomas Lutseke, who was employed as an assistant engine driver on a mine near Germiston. He used his hut for Sunday services, and even as a school for children and adults. From

². Leselinyana, 15 July 1893; 1 October 1893; 1 August 1893; 14 January 1911; 3 June 1911.

his own savings and collections from his congregation, he built an iron church in the location, and was later helped by the Anglicans to add the roof. He later gave up his mine job to work full-time for the Anglicans, in the process reducing his monthly salary by a third, to L2. There were, equally, other African converts employed as full-time evangelists by the missionaries, who rebelled and left to set up their own churches. One of these was a Shangaan miner, James Ngonyama, who was converted at the City and Suburban mine in 1896 by the South African Compounds and Interior Mission (SACM). The SACM engaged him as one of its first African evangelists, but by 1913 he had left the missionary society to run his own "Gazilandi Socide" which operated both on the Reef and in southern Mozambique.³

Yet the overall tendency was for these groups to gradually come under the hegemony of missionary societies. There are three possible reasons for this trend. Firstly, most Christian converts recognised missionary churches and their leadership as legitimate institutions for the propagation of the gospel. Many of those who initiated church groups independently did so with the hope of establishing formal contact with missionaries in the near future. Many undoubtedly regarded themselves as religious activists belonging to a particular denomination. It is not surprising that some of them wrote to missionary newspapers calling for support. Missionaries were often invited by these independent groups in the compounds to conduct Christmas and Easter services, baptisms, or Holy Communion, as participants felt that none of their companions had the religious sanction to do

³. This and the preceding paragraph based on Leselinyana, 22 January 191; 22 January 1917; 28 February 1928; 27 April 1928; 18 December 1935; 19 May 1937; Bulletin de la Mission Suisse Romande, (henceforth Bulletin) 1908, p.150; L. Fuller, The Romance of a South African Mission: Being an Account of the Native Mission of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, in the Transvaal, (Richard Jackson, Leeds, 1907); H. Bennet, Romance and Reality: The Story of a Missionary on the Rand Being a Sequel to "The Romance of a South African Mission", (Richard Jackson, Leeds, 1920), p.21; Africa's Golden Harvests, (henceforth AGH), December 1913.

so. Ordinary religious feasts and festivals, after-service money collections, literacy classes, and mutual support in the case of accident or death, could, however, be conducted without the assistance of white missionaries. Secondly, missionaries in their evangelical efforts in the compounds, targeted such groups and worked hard to win over their leadership. Thirdly, the problem of resources and facilities often undermined the viability of these independent groups. They needed venues, reading and writing material, plates for the Holy Communion and other items, all of which required relatively large sums of money not readily raised from sources other than collections from the miners themselves. In the mid-1890s, it cost the SACM more than L473 to build its hall and cottage on its City and Suburban site. The pump and well at its New Primrose site cost L135, and the installation of electricity at its Simmer and Deep cottage and hall cost over L40. In addition to this, some mines charged rent and electricity.⁴

Obtaining permission and appropriate venues in the compounds required good relations with the mine authorities, especially compound managers. Africans, of course, did not even qualify for surface rights on the land leased to the mines. More than this, Africans had to carry special or travelling passes signed by their employers. In some cases, the SACM made special appeals on behalf of its African evangelists.⁵ Contact with missionary societies, therefore, gave African independent groups crucial privileges and facilities, including access to chapels and churches, as well as a much broader community of brothers.

None of this supports the view that African Christian converts and evangelists were putting forward, as Lamin Sanneh has suggested, a gospel and world view essentially different from

⁴. Paragraph based on AGH, December 1913; March 1914; August 1914; SAB, GNLB 383, 13/14, Baker to NAD, 6 June 1916.

⁵. SAB, GNLB 383, 13/14, Baker to NAD, 6 June 1916; SNA to Native Commissioner (Germiston), 15 December 1931.

that propagated by the missionaries.⁶ As the latter remained firmly opposed to African ontology and religion, dismissing them as heathenism and paganism, and discouraged African social practices such as polygamy and beer-drinking, not surprisingly their compound converts, even when acting "independently", were socialised into this view of the world.

Missionary Societies

Although missionary societies regarded the Rand as an important and strategic site, they initially focused their attention on African slum-dwellers, neglecting those in the compounds. This was partly due to their belief that urban Africans were more "civilised" than their counterparts in the compounds, and partly to the fact that evangelising them was relatively easier as they were permanently settled in the locations, compared to mine workers who were only on the Rand for short periods. And even when the South African General Mission and, especially, the Wesleyans, did begin work in the compounds soon after the discovery of gold, their work was restricted by suspicious mine managements to Sunday visits. The American Board entered the scene in 1894, but focused on Zulu migrants who at that time were concentrated in jobs outside the mines.⁷

It was only in 1896 when Albert Baker established his SACM that systematic missionary work in the compounds could begin to take place. Concerned that "something should be done for the heathen who were being demoralised by strong drink and

⁶. Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, (Orbis Books, New York, 1989). For the debate on this, see especially M.R. Waldman, et al, "Translatability: A Discussion", Journal of Religion in Africa, vol.12, no.2, 1992.

⁷. J. du Plessis, A History of Christian Missions in South Africa, (Longman, Green and Co., London, 1911), pp.303-99. See also J.D. Taylor, Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A Year-Book of South African Missions, (Lovedale Institution Press, 1928).

cardplaying, and other vices of civilization",⁸ Baker managed to obtain a building site at the City and Suburban Gold Mine. It served as a base not only for his proselytizing activities on the City and Suburban, but also for the neighbouring Jubilee and Salisbury mines. He was joined in the same year by Ernest Mabile (whom he placed at the Simmer and Jack) and a certain Angus Black of Boksburg. Within two years, Baker's Compound Mission had expanded its activities to four other mines, establishing halls, schools and cottages. Nearby compounds and hospitals were visited regularly.⁹

Baker developed a model for mission work in the compounds. He located his buildings, normally comprising a cottage for the missionary/evangelist himself, and a hall for Sunday services and daily literacy classes, on mine property, near the compounds themselves. As soon as he had produced African evangelists from his converts, they assisted him and his white colleagues. He believed that Africans converted on the Rand would take the new religion to their families. This area, then, to his way of thinking, was the most strategic point in the country, as it was there that Africans from different regions were mostly concentrated. This was a philosophy which came to be shared by other missionary societies. Regarding the Rand as the "university of crime", missionaries saw their work there in two ways. On the one hand, it served to "conserve" and "protect" Christian converts from temptations such as beer-drinking and provide them with an alternative community. On the other, the work of the mission was to win

⁸. A.W. Baker, Grace Triumphant: The Life Story of a Carpenter, Lawyer and Missionary in South Africa from 1856 to 1939 (The Author, Glasgow, 1939), p.101.

⁹. Baker, Grace Triumphant, pp.101-14; Bulletin, 1896-97, pp.219-20; SAB, RAD 160, 4025-4062, E.H. Mabile's "Claim for Compensation"; D.P. Kunene, Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1989), p.33; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.213. The SACM disappeared from the scene when it merged with the Free Methodist Mission of America in 1936. See G.B.A. Gardener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field, (N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers, Cape Town, 1958), p.46.

"heathen" Africans over to the Lord.¹⁰

In 1903. the Anglicans established their Rand Native Mission under Latimer Fuller and Herbert Bennet, and by the end of the year. had a presence of sorts in 43 compounds. By 1906. when their operations covered more than 70 centres on the Reef, they had erected 27 churches, many of them on the mines. When Nama Jaques of the Swiss Mission arrived in Johannesburg in 1904 to begin his society's work among Shangaan migrants in the compounds, he contacted Ernest Mabile who by then was working for the Department of Native Affairs. Mabile introduced him to mine managers and helped him to obtain a site for a church at the Village Main Mine, a central point on the Reef. The society eventually spread from Village Main to Germiston in the east and Krugersdorp in the west.¹¹ Systematic work among Basotho miners, discussed in detail later, was initiated by the PEMS in 1922. Within a year, nearly 30 missionary societies, representing nine denominations and seven nationalities, were operating along the Reef, compared with just over 10 in 1912. As early as 1904 c.18 000 Africans in the Witwatersrand area were, in one way or another, associated with Christian churches, and by 1926, over one quarter of all Africans in South Africa (about 1 million) were said to be Christian. A generation later, in 1946, the number had slightly more than doubled to 53 percent.¹²

Different strategies were employed when proselytizing in the compounds, depending on the denominational doctrine of the missionary society, its target group, and the number of its personnel. The Anglicans and Wesleyans, for example, directed

¹⁰. For an example, see Taylor, Christianity and the Natives of South Africa, pp.181-86.

¹¹. Bulletin, 1904, p.38; 1905, p.86; Leselinyana, 1 November 1929; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.213.

¹². Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.213; D. Gaitskell, "Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women's Christianity in South Africa", in Walker, (ed.), Women and Gender, p.253. See also Gaitskell, "Female Mission Initiatives: Black and White Women in Three Witwatersrand Churches, 1903-1939", (Ph.D, University of London, 1981), p.6.

their work to all Africans in the compounds. Consequently, their sermons often had to be translated into two and sometimes three different languages. By contrast, the American Board missionaries and the Swedish mission targeted the Zulu of Natal; the Berlin mission Sotho-speakers from the Orange Free State and the Northern Transvaal; the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church the Shangaan of Inhambane; and the Swiss the Shangaan of the Lorenzo Marques district and the northern and eastern Transvaal. Shangaan migrants formed a major component of the SACM's congregation, but the society targeted all Africans, and used evangelists from different language groups, as well as white missionaries who spoke African languages. In one instance, one W. Allister, employed by Baker at the Nigel Gold Mine site, was dismissed in 1899 and replaced by an African evangelist for failing to learn a single African language during his three-year stint. While missionaries soon attached great significance to the use of indigenous languages in the propagation of the Christian gospel, the first languages used in the compounds were mainly English and Dutch. However, the SACM, with Baker speaking Zulu and Ernest Mabile Sesotho, soon extended the repertoire of missionary languages. The Anglican Rand Mission was also quick to realise this advantage. Bennet was sent to Natal to learn Zulu, and Fuller worked hard to improve his rudimentary knowledge of Sesotho. The Swiss, for their part, introduced the use of Tsonga.¹³

The advantage of knowing African languages not only enabled missionaries to reach their audience. Knowledge of the relevant language also gave them access to the world-view of their target groups. This enabled them to try to put their message across in a manner that would appeal to particular African audiences. Those societies that had no clear language strategy often found themselves at the mercy of translators who sensationalised their sermons, adding images and metaphors that the translators thought were appropriate:

¹³. Fuller, The Romance of a South African Mission, p.10.

A zealous visitor from England [wrote Bennet] once asked if he might preach to those "dear black souls" [in the compounds]. A good interpreter was found for him and the visitor made an eloquent discourse. But the interpreter, knowing the people whom he was addressing and their besetting sins, turned all the preacher's unctuous phrases about "love", and "excuse for ignorance", into the strongest denunciations of wrath upon evil doers and warnings to his hearers about the danger of disregarding the manifold calls which God had vouchsafed to them. When the interpreter was told afterwards that this device of his had been noticed, he said that he knew the preacher wished to help the people and, therefore, he had felt bound to interpret his pious wish rather than his unwise words... but there are many instances at the present time of most disastrous teaching receiving the authority of influential European preachers, just because they do not understand the interpreter's words and so cannot tell whether the sermons are being correctly translated or not.¹⁴

In the compounds themselves, missionaries used a variety of tactics to make their message heard. In the early years of the SACM, Baker characteristically stood in compound courtyards, playing hymns with his Mason and Hamlyn harmonium to attract an audience. Once enough people had gathered, he began preaching. As the SACM built more cottages and halls at different centres across the Reef and employed more white missionaries and African evangelists, its methods became more sophisticated. A two-pronged approach was developed; on the one hand, missionaries and evangelists based on the mines visited the compounds daily, while, on the other, volunteer lay preachers met on Sundays at about 8 a.m. for prayer, after which they split up into groups of about twenty to forty to preach from morning till evening at different compounds. The different mines were grouped together according to the number of mission personnel in the area and the location of the cottage and hall. In 1898 around Boksburg, for example, the New Comet, Cason, Cinderella, and Blue Sky mines, belonged to one sector: while the Crown Reef, Crown Deep, Langlaagte Estate, and Langlaagte Deep mines, formed another sector. By the 1920s, too, some of the older tactics had been superseded by more sophisticated methods. These included the use of

¹⁴. Bennett, Romance and Reality, p.33.

visual aids and diagrams drawn on the ground in the courtyard. Leaflets with concise messages were also regularly handed out to workers, because it was hoped that they would eventually be taken home to be read to relatives there. Where the Salvation Army typically used brass bands, the Anglicans marched in procession into compound courtyards led by missionaries clad in cassocks and surplices, and hoisting a wooden cross and chanting hymns to gain the attention of miners. The American Board, as we saw in the previous chapter, later developed the use of sports and films.¹⁵

Compound courtyards were important spaces for open-air services. As the doors of the dormitories faced the courtyard in order to give workers easy access to this space, missionaries knew that by centring their approach on this area, they could also reach those who were still inside. On Sundays in summer, as we saw, this space was occupied by workers engaged in a variety of activities, and these men were all seen as a potential audience by the churches. However, this space, as discussed below, was contested by different churches, including Zionist sects and African dance groups. In winter, missionary visits concentrated on the dormitories themselves because workers stayed inside, huddled around fires. In one instance in 1906, Baker even visited miners underground during working hours for hymn-singing and prayer.¹⁶ But such underground visits appear to have been very rare, and were probably discouraged by the mine authorities. By the 1940s, compound courtyards had lost their centrality for mission work, as more and more churches shifted their focus to the locations and improved their infrastructure on the mines.¹⁷

¹⁵. Paragraph based on Fuller, The Romance of the South African Mission, p.17; AGH, May 1914; August 1914; December 1913; June 1924; April 1921; July 1923; April 1917; du Plessis, History of Christian Missions, p.380.

¹⁶. Leselinyana, 1 November 1906.

¹⁷. Bulletin, March 1943, p.195.

Literacy

There is a need to look at the schools that the missionaries attempted to set up in the compounds. While the symbolic and practical significance of literacy for Africans has been demonstrated elsewhere,¹⁸ it is important to approach Africans' fascination with literacy historically, and not assume that attitudes were the same at all times. In fact, African attitudes towards literacy responded to changes and phases in colonial contact and conquest. Wars of dispossession, to take an obvious example, were followed by a reaction against missionaries and their programmes. For some Africans, an initial fascination with the written word began to wear thin, and in some areas school attendance declined, as the church was seen as an agent of colonialism. Yet once colonial rule was established, Africans' attitudes changed again, as literacy was regarded as a means of social mobility.¹⁹

The status of literacy classes varied for the greater part of the period under review. Classes were generally held after supper, between 5.30 p.m. and 8 p.m., and were commonly conducted by volunteers whose minimum level of education was Standard 4. To set up a school, interested miners were invited. Often, compound managers were persuaded to put pupils in the same dormitory. But one problem, common on mines with inadequate missionary facilities, was to find a literate miner to conduct the lessons. Moreover, it could take an evangelist months to win an audience with a busy compound manager, and even longer to get interested "boys" moved to the same dormitory. School attendance varied, depending on the strategy used by the society concerned, as well as on

¹⁸. For a recent study, see Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.217-18.

¹⁹. R. Elphick, "Africans and the Christian Campaign in Southern Africa", in H. Lamar, and L. Thompson, (eds.), The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared, (Yale University Press, London, 1981), pp.291-92.

evangelical work more broadly. While the maximum number attending PEMS schools averaged 15 per class in the 1930s, the American Board had up to thirty pupils in some of its schools ten years earlier. There were also a number of schools which had been initiated by concerned miners independently of any mission programmes. In one compound in 1924, two Basotho workers were paying one of their dormitory mates 1s per month to teach them to read and write. Others took the new discovery with them to their homes, opening night schools for their kinspeople.²⁰

Lessons focused primarily on reading and writing skills, although, during the mid-1930s, PEMS schools also imparted agricultural knowledge. It was hoped that this would encourage Basotho migrants to return to their home when their mine contracts expired, so as to avoid becoming morally and culturally "contaminated" by urban influences. Lessons were run with the aid of blackboards or wall charts, with slates and pencils being used by the pupils for writing. The bible was used for reading. Lessons for newly arrived recruits focused on basic reading and writing skills, while advanced pupils practised what they had learnt. For some societies, classes were rounded off by hymn singing and prayer. It took two to three months for an average worker to gain basic literacy skills.²¹

However, there were three obstacles in the way of successful literacy campaigns in the compounds. Firstly, there was no proper space in the compounds which could be used for classes; the atmosphere inside the dormitories was rarely conducive to study. Well-to-do societies such as the SACM were able to build special halls for school, but this was not something the financially-strapped PEMS could do. Secondly, the number of

²⁰. Paragraph based on Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, p.138; Bulletin, March 1943, p.196; Fuller, Romance of a South African Mission, p.21; AGH, July 1923; June 1924.

²¹. Journal des Missions Evangeliques, (henceforth JME), 1928, p.89; Leselinyana, 18 December 1925; 28 November 1930; 18 July 1934; 10 February 1928; 12 October 1932; Mochochonono, 5 September 1934.

teachers was seriously inadequate, and the fees charged were disproportionately high. The PEMS charged between 1s and 1s.6d in the 1930s, and the SACM 2s for school fees. These fees were more than what the average African worker earned per shift, and probably put off many of those who might otherwise have been interested. At the same time, teachers were supposed to be paid from these fees. So, where pupils delayed in paying or simply left after a few lessons, as many workers did, this meant that the teacher went unpaid. Somewhat unfairly in these circumstances, the collapse of many PEMS schools in the compounds was blamed on "lazy" teachers. Teachers would leave on the expiry of their mine contracts, and there would then be the problem of finding a replacement, which commonly took months.²²

The third problem, perhaps the most serious one, was that missionary societies saw literacy classes as an instrument of conversion. This could mean, of course, that if conversion generally was failing, such schools were also likely to suffer. The PEMS was convinced that, according to one of its Rand missionaries, "the most real advantage of these schools for those who participate in them, is to provide them with an effective shelter against all temptations that they are subject to [on the Rand]".²³ Similarly, at SACM schools, miners attended day and night classes where "they would be taught to read and write, and, after careful testing, would be baptised".²⁴ Pupils were expected not only to accept conversion, but had also to abstain from alcohol. Yet interest in literacy appears to have been one of the principal factors that attracted miners to the church, not the other way around. Bennet noted during his visits to the compounds that some miners were so interested in learning to read and write, and understand the English language, that they were even prepared to pay for instruction. There were also others who

²². Paragraph based on Leselinyana, 18 July 1934; 10 February 1928; 12 October 1932; 25 November 1930; 18 December 1925; JME, 1928, pp.84-90.

²³. JME, 1928, p.89.

²⁴. AGH, June 1911.

arrival at the mines would ask to be put in the dormitories of "those of the school". The SACM school at Nourse Deep in 1915 was said to be "too small for the pupils and congregation, and they are clamouring for enlargement and offering to pay part of the cost".²⁵

Missionaries, without exception, exploited this opportunity, and required all their pupils to attend prayer meetings and church services. They treated schooling as an inherently Christian affair. Quantities of books, especially the bible, were sold by missionary societies on the mines. Although supplies of cheap bibles in the 1900s mostly came from the Foreign Bible Society, some missionary societies had their own printing presses. The PEMS, for example, had the Morija Book Depot which published Leselinyana and other interesting material which literate miners could read to their friends in the dormitories. In 1927 alone, the PEMS sold books to the value of over L400, including 156 bibles. The SACM's printing press at New Primrose published its newspaper Izwi Lentokozo, and supplied the society with leaflets which were regularly distributed in the compounds.²⁶

By the end of the 1920s there were night schools in every compound, from where they were spreading to the locations. Mine officials belatedly began to experiment with systematising the workings of these schools by employing paid teachers who were to extend the syllabus to cover "subjects designed for the refinement of Native home life".²⁷ By the 1940s mineowners were taking a more active interest in the social welfare of their African workers, and provided classrooms, benches, chalks and blackboards from the Deferred Pay Interest Fund. Although missionary societies continued to play a role, it was slowly diminishing as some mines employed their own teaching staff. Arithmetic was now being taught in addition to reading and writing, and some classes went up to

²⁵. Ibid., March 1915.

²⁶. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.217; AGH, March 1914; JME, 1928, p.89.

²⁷. Umteteli, 7 December 1929.

Standard 4.²⁸

Literacy held out practical advantages to African miners. Knowing to read and write was a source of power and influence in the compounds. At best, literate workers stood a chance of obtaining white-collar jobs outside the mines, or clerical and other better-paying jobs within the system. These latter carried the additional advantage of being able to stay in married quarters instead of single-sex compounds. And at the very least, in the dormitories scribes were hired at 1s a time to write letters.²⁹ Because it was the dream of many workers to get such jobs, competition and jealousy were common. Stimela Jingoos, for example, was forced to abandon his training as a teacher in Morija in 1915, and later left to work at Langlaagte Block B mine. The compound manager felt that he was too young to go underground and offered him a "desk job", but his Mosotho induna was jealous. He used various methods to prevent Jingoos from obtaining the job, and succeeded in having him sent underground.³⁰ One of my informants had the opposite experience; he went to look for a job at Kimberley some time after World War II, and was singled out from a crowd waiting outside the mine. Then "[t]hey gave me a pen, book, a small box, [and] a desk", but he could not write: "I was so hurt when I remembered how my father tried to send me to school, being so ignorant, I preferred to look after the animals [as a herdboyl]".³¹ The association of literacy by miners with "desk", "pen" or "book", suggests that literacy was thought to provide a comfortable and better-paying job (you can sit) which was physically not demanding (comparing a pen and a book to the hard and dangerous work underground).

²⁸. Leselinyana, 18 July 1934; 10 February 1928; 12 October 1932; 25 November 1930; 18 December 1925; Mochochonono, 14 September 1946.

²⁹. Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.216-18; S. Moroney. "Mine Married Quarters: The Differential Stabilisation of the Witwatersrand Workforce, 1900-1920", in Marks, and Rathbone, (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change, pp.264-67.

³⁰. Jingoos, A Chief is a Chief, p.63.

³¹. Interview with Samuel Mokoaleli.

Relations with Mine Authorities

It should not be taken for granted that mine authorities happily embraced missionaries, seeing their work as important for instilling workers with an industrial ethic and work discipline. In the beginning, managers were hostile, their attitude only changing once they saw what religion could deliver for them. Unlike in Kimberley where De Beers supplied its workers in the compounds with bibles printed in different languages, missionaries on the Rand had their time cut out to convince mine and compound managers of the usefulness of the gospel. In line with thinking elsewhere in the country when it came to "educated natives", mine authorities initially thought that Christian, literate workers would develop political aspirations and ideas about collective bargaining. Some even feared that their workers would refuse to work on Sundays. One compound manager told Bennet that:

...if I find any nigger going to Church, I shall know that he is not giving all his time and attention to his work, and his work will be increased. And if your native preacher attempts to enter the compound to visit the Church boys, I shall put him in the stocks [detention room].³²

Mine "policeboys" in some instances were instructed to keep missionaries and their evangelists out of the compounds. On one mine, a compound manager who found workers in a dormitory busy learning how to read, seized and tore up their books, threatening to punish them if he caught them again. Indunas and "policeboys", if opposed to Christianity, would also frustrate the work of lay preachers and evangelists. In one particular compound, a visiting chief ordered the sjamboking of one of his people who insisted on preaching in the courtyard after being ordered to stop.³³

³². Bennet. Romance and Reality, p.59.

³³. Ibid., pp.58, 60.

Most missionaries reacted to this hostility with patience and determination. They regularly challenged and engaged mine authorities in discussion and debate. Baker did his best to convince compound managers to allow his evangelists access to their compounds. He even developed a five-point programme which he used to establish his credentials. It is a programme which can be seen as an attempt to place his work in the context of capital-labour relations on the mines: In it, he promised to teach only African languages; that his literacy lessons would be confined to reading and writing only for the purpose of knowing the bible and communicating in writing with the missionaries; that abstinence from drugs and alcohol would be a condition for membership; that confession of "sins" would be a necessary condition for repentance and spiritual growth; and finally, that there would be no missionary interference in disputes related to wages and working conditions. To further allay suspicion, he even agreed to the inclusion in his building site contract of a clause giving the mine authorities the power to evict him on one-month's notice if they were dissatisfied with his work.³⁴

The enforcement of "sin" confession occasionally produced noteworthy results. One Barnabas confessed to Baker that he had stolen a pair of Wellington boots belonging to his compound manager, and went back to the mine where he worked for nothing to pay off the cost of replacing them.³⁵ In 1911 the SACM summed up its progress: "Since this work began over 2,500 converts have been tested and baptised among these miners, and L300 of stolen money has been paid back to employees as a result of the encouragement which is given to converts to make public confessions of sin".³⁶ Not surprisingly, the compound manager of the City and Suburban praised Baker in 1920 as a man who "taught religion and no nonsense", and that not least he "is a good

³⁴. AGH, August 1914.

³⁵. Ibid.

³⁶. Ibid., June 1911.

disciplinarian".³⁷ The Anglicans, too, managed to convince the mine authorities that they taught their converts to obey the law and observe the work ethic.³⁸

Some mine managements took the initiative themselves to find out just what the implications were of the spread of Christianity. One mine official at the Crown Mines Company paid Baker's school a surprise visit, and was so impressed that he offered to install electricity in the building. When the Swiss began their work at Village Main the mine manager dropped in for a cup of coffee and look around. He later occasionally attended the society's open-air services and even offered them the use of a dormitory for educational and religious instruction until the society's own hall was completed. After 1906, the Anglicans also began to notice a shift in company attitudes. One mine company built them a L200 church and paid the salary for an African catechist/teacher for twelve months. And when the company was satisfied that it was getting its money's worth, the practice was continued. By 1912, the Anglicans were receiving an annual grant of L655 from various mining companies, and by the 1920s the Chamber of Mines was making an annual donation of L6000 to American Board missionaries for their weekly film shows.³⁹ These ad hoc developments were formalised at the third annual meeting of the Transvaal Compound Managers Association in September 1921, where it was agreed, reported Umteteli, that "duly accredited missionaries are now authorised to hold religious services in Native Compounds".⁴⁰ In addition to providing building sites and a degree of financial assistance, some mine managements were sufficiently impressed by the general conduct and reliability

³⁷. SAB. GNLB 383. 13/14. Compound Manager (C&S) to Chief Pass Officer, 11 February 1920.

³⁸. Bennet, Romance and Reality, p.59.

³⁹. AGH, August 1914; Bulletin, 1904, pp.272-74; Bennet, Romance and Reality, pp.68-69; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, p.215; Taylor, "The Rand as a Mission Field", p.68.

⁴⁰. Umteteli, 1 October 1921. It was during this same meeting that the decision regarding mine recreational programmes was taken.

of converts to arrange for them to be put in separate dormitories according to denominations. On a few mines, converts were even "ganged" together under white foremen.⁴¹

Mine officials nonetheless experienced three major problems with missionary work in the compounds. The first problem related to the conduct of the missionaries themselves. Their singing frequently disturbed workers on night shift who were trying to sleep. Secondly, it was not uncommon for compound managers to have to intervene and arbitrate in conflicts between societies in their compounds. These conflicts sometimes necessitated calling the police. Competition and conflict among societies working among Shangaan miners was particularly rife because of the numerical preponderance of this group on the mines. On various occasions, the SACM, Swiss, African Methodist Episcopal church and the American Board, all tried to come together but with little success. The main problem was the partitioning of their area to avoid their scramble for the Shangaan which resulted in considerable duplication and the squandering of resources. It was only in the 1940s that they managed to organise joint evangelical campaigns. Often, different groups and denominations found themselves competing for audiences in the compound courtyard, each trying to outbid the other with hymns and preaching, all of which caused much noise and disorder. Sometimes this culminated in open physical confrontation, causing their listeners to move away and go back to their rooms. Often enough, preachers would attack one another in sermons in each other's presence, each trying to convince the audience whom to listen. Converts housed in particular dormitories frequently prevented other denominations from visiting them. Squabbles and fights in dormitories were common where different denominations were housed together, and compound managers could find themselves faced with the problem of providing separate dormitories for up to fifteen different sects and

⁴¹. Bennet, Romance and Reality, p.67.

denominations.⁴²

A fairly typical example was the case of one particular group who

thought it had a call to evangelise not the heathens, but another group of Christians. They knew the number of [the latter's] dormitory, went to stand in front of the door, and as the door was locked they started chanting and announcing the 'true' Gospel; they accused the other of eating pork and smoking, this being proof of their paganism. The Christians who were being attacked could no longer tolerate this and came out of their dormitory with sticks to disperse this group.⁴³

It was not unknown for converts and evangelists to ask their missionaries to give them permission to fight back if they were provoked by other groups of Christians. Attempts to neutralise this competition were discussed at meetings of the South African General Missionary Conference in 1904, 1906, 1911, 1912, 1921 and 1925. By 1940, ten societies were working together in the compounds, undertaking joint visits and sharing platforms.⁴⁴ But separatist sects such as the Zion Apostolic New Jerusalem Church,⁴⁵ remained outside these arrangements, and continued to contest space in the compounds. Such preachers would do almost anything to gain a hearing: "They throw themselves on the ground", wrote one Swiss missionary, "lying backs, they repeatedly make utterances to their fellow brothers, or rise unexpectedly and accompany their preaching with big jumps, reminding one of war dances and especially jumps of pagan divines".⁴⁶

The third problem facing mine authorities related to the granting of building sites to these societies. A mine

⁴². Paragraph based on AGH, June/July 1918; Taylor, "Rand as a Mission Field", p.70; Bulletin, 1905, pp.83-84; 1924-25, pp.113-14; March 1943, p.195; Bennet, Romance and Reality, p.30.

⁴³. Bulletin, 1924-25, p.113.

⁴⁴. Ibid., March 1943, p.195

⁴⁵. This church claimed 217 members at the Van Ryn Estate mine in 1935. See SAB, GNLB 383, 13/14, Native Commissioner (Benoni) to DNL, 17 June 1935.

⁴⁶. Bulletin, 1924-25, p.113.

official would be reluctant to do this as, according to one American missionary, "he knows it may open the way to innumerable applications from other bodies".⁴⁷ All too often, ten or more church buildings would be concentrated on one site, with followers finding it difficult to explain and justify their differences. Sometimes it took societies two years or more to have their application for a site processed; they would be shuffled between the compound manager, the NAD, the Director of Native Labour and the City Council. When and if permission was eventually granted, the society concerned would then be instructed on whether to use bricks or wood for the building, depending on the location of the mine. Mineowners might later decide on a development project that required the use of the space that had been allocated to the churches, and this could lead to the demolition of church buildings as happened at Randfontein in the 1930s. It took two years before the affected societies were compensated with another site. As Zionist churches found it difficult enough in the locations to obtain permission and official recognition, and in any case usually could not afford the cost of building and churches; they faced insuperable obstacles in the compounds, with the result that they operated without the knowledge of compound managers.⁴⁸

The Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and Basotho Miners

Although the PEMS was not the first missionary society to visit Basotho miners, it was, however, Ernest Mabille and later the PEMS itself who initiated systematic work.

The PEMS began its work in what was to become Lesotho in 1833, and was followed by the Catholics in 1862 and the Anglicans in

⁴⁷. Taylor, "The Rand as a Mission Field", p.653.

⁴⁸. With the exception of the direct quotation, paragraph based on Leselinyana, 25 September 1935, 24 May 1939; JME, 1934, vol.1, p.355; 1942-45, p.132; P. Falk, Growth of the Church in Africa, (Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1979), p.182; B.G.M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, (Oxford University Press, London, 1948), pp.80-87.

1876. Despite Basotho reaction against missionaries during and after wars with the Boers and the British in the 1850s and the Cape colonial administration in the 1870s, the PEMS managed to style itself as the "Church of Moshoeshoe" or, rather, a "national" church. This myth was seriously and successfully challenged on the ground by the Catholics with their tolerance of Basotho traditional practices and of the chieftaincy. In 1912 Griffith became the first Sotho Paramount Chief to convert to Catholicism, and by 1936 Catholic church membership had outstripped that of the PEMS. Much of the Catholic progress against the PEMS occurred in the 1920s, when over half of the church membership of the three major denominations were women. But most Basotho were still "heathen" for the greater part of the period under review.⁴⁹

The PEMS' movement to the Rand was not simply due to concern about Basotho migrants in the compounds, but was also a reflection of the crisis and challenges it was facing in colonial Lesotho. Its hope of maintaining a monopoly over the evangelisation of the Basotho was not only challenged by the Catholics, but also had to deal with apostolic break-away groups from within its ranks. The most significant of these movements was that led by the PEMS evangelist, Walter Matita. Dismissed from his duties in 1922 for making messianic claims, Matita set up his own "Church of Moshoeshoe". Other apostolic or zionist sects were already in operation in the country, introduced from the urban areas mainly by returning miners. The other challenge to the PEMS came from a radical political organisation Lekhotla La Bafu, Council of Commoners, founded in 1919, which attacked missionaries as agents of colonialism

⁴⁹. Paragraph based on J.M. Mohapeloa, From Mission to Church: Fifty Years of the Work of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and the Lesotho Evangelical Church, 1933-1983, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1985), pp.2-3; S.J. Gill, A Short History of Lesotho: From the Late Stone Age until the 1993 Elections, (Morija Museum and Archives, Morija, 1993), p.173; Kennedy, "Missionaries, Black Converts", p.199. For figures on the religious and denominational affiliation of the Basotho, see Basutoland Census, 1911; 1936; and 1946.

and destroyers of the Basotho social fabric.⁵⁰ Arguably, then, the PEMS' expansion to the Rand was intended to give it access to the category of Basotho (i.e. the men) that was the most difficult to win in colonial Lesotho itself. It was also a reaction to the qualitative changes that the migrant labour system was by then undergoing.⁵¹

When the PEMS finally moved part of its operations to the Witwatersrand in 1922, it was able to build on what Ernest Mabile and African-run groups had already achieved in the compounds. Although Mabile's work with Baker's Compound Mission came to a halt with the outbreak of the South African War in 1899, once peace returned he was employed in the Pass Office of the Native Affairs Department. His new work involved visiting mine compounds, and he was able to use those opportunities to locate and meet hundreds of Basotho workers. He spent his Sundays riding on his bicycle, carrying books for sale, to these compounds, especially that belonging to the Johannesburg municipality where many Basotho worked in preference to the mines. When the Swiss missionaries opened their church at Village Main, he arranged with them to share this venue; the Swiss using the church in the mornings and afternoons for Shangaan converts, and Mabile taking over to preach to "his" Basotho in the early evenings. He continued this work until 1916 when he left for France as one of the commanding officers of the Native Labour Contingent. Even there, he never abandoned "his" Basotho; he would sometimes take up to 200 of them to a local church and translate the service from French for them. Mabile was readmitted to the PEMS on his return from France, having demonstrated his commitment to Basotho for decades, and returned to colonial Lesotho. He entrusted his work at Village Main to the care of his Mosotho assistant. His departure from the Rand coincided

⁵⁰. M-L. Martin, The Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in Southern Africa, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1964), pp.118-19; Gill, Short History, pp.173-78; B. Edgar, Prophets with Honour: A Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafu, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1988), p.16.

⁵¹. See Chapters Two and Three.

with the arrival of Bertrand Moreillon, charged with conducting an inquiry on behalf of the PEMS.⁵²

When Moreillon arrived in Johannesburg at the height of the Rand Revolt in February 1922, his mission was not to initiate PEMS work, but rather to investigate whether such work was necessary, given the existence of so many missionary societies in the area. Basotho labourers on the Rand had been pleading for some time with the synod in Lesotho for PEMS missionaries or a missionary, and whether or not this was at the instigation of Ernest Mabile, the latter's departure for France certainly intensified these demands. In June 1916, the Reverend Jacottet was despatched from Lesotho to the Rand, where he met those Basotho making the call. After some discussion, it was decided that the Basotho on the Rand would fall under the DRC. Many Basotho converts were not happy with the decision, as they associated the Dutch with the Orange Free State which had taken much of their fertile land in the wars of the mid-1860s. This partly explains why the DRC failed to make much headway among Basotho miners.⁵³

Moreillon received a cold reception from Basotho converts, some of them even refusing to have anything to do with him. Because of the PEMS' shaky financial situation, his station at Griqualand East had been handed over to the Glasgow Missionary Society before his coming to the Rand, and influential Basotho saw this as a betrayal of their opposition to incorporation into South Africa. As late as 1934, some were still asking what the PEMS was doing on the Rand, when the Basotho were fighting against the Union government. To such people, anyone

⁵². Paragraph based on JME, 1929, p.560; Leselinyana. 27 June 1934; B. Moreillon, "My First Three Weeks on the Rand", Basutoland Witness (BW), vol.4, no.2. March-April 1950, pp.19-21; E. Labarthe, "Mission Work in Johannesburg", BW, no.62, July 1962, p.2; V. Ellenberger, A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland, 1833-1933, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1938), pp.352-57, is PEMS' official history of the beginning of its work on the Rand, but does not acknowledge the pioneering work of Ernest Mabile, possibly because of his expulsion from the church.

⁵³. Leselinyana, 16 September 1927; 27 June 1934.

who supported the PEMS' mission on the Rand was regarded as a traitor! Moreillon nonetheless managed to conduct his inquiry and was later reinforced in his conclusions by Ernest Mabile's brother, Louis. Both of them strongly argued for the establishment of the PEMS on the Rand. Louis Mabile was so optimistic that he hoped their work on the Reef would then spread to the Premier Mine, Jagersfontein and as far as Kimberley. He felt that the PEMS needed to seize this opportunity which promised to expand the number of converts as well as increase the proportion of men in its ranks. Moreover, unless this step was taken, existing PEMS converts would continue to be exposed to "bad" influences on the Rand, to the extent that some of them were even being won over to other churches! As far as money was concerned, Mabile suggested that the work could be financed from the coffers of the PEMS' branch in Lesotho, by contributions from the miners themselves, and from collections to be held annually in all PEMS churches. Paris' only responsibility would be to pay the salary of the white missionary, as the DRC and the Swiss had promised to put their facilities at the disposal of the PEMS. The project was sanctioned, and Moreillon spent the next two-and-a-half years before getting it off the ground, handing it over in 1924 to Rene Ellenberger.⁵⁴

Like Moreillon, Ellenberger travelled by train or on foot across the Rand, from East to West and back again, in order to reach Basotho migrant workers in the compounds. His primary task was to prepare ground for the establishment of permanent PEMS mission, and this he did by studying the methods used by other missionary societies. He met the Director of Native Labour and the NRC on his arrival, and was given letters of introduction to all the compound managers. Nor was his work limited to the estimated 14 800 Basotho workers in the gold mine compounds by the mid-1920s; it also extended to those

⁵⁴. Paragraph based on Leselinyana, 27 June 1934; South African Library, Archives of the PEMS (APEMS), Mf. 730, L. Mabile's report on "Evangelising Basotho working in the mines", 23 October 1922; Mf.759, R. Ellenberger to an unnamed friend, 4 August 1925; Mochochonono, 10 October 1934.

Basotho labourers in the compounds of the Johannesburg municipality and SA Railways. His instructions were to work only among Basotho from colonial Lesotho, and specifically only among those living in the compounds. This certainly helped to overcome the problem of language encountered by other mission societies, but did nothing to alleviate the major problem of the huge distances between different parts of the Rand. From Springs to Randfontein the train took more than three hours to pass 53 stations, and even then he often had to walk for over 30 minutes from the station before reaching the nearest compounds. Not surprisingly, Ellenberger was soon pleading for a car. In 1926, when the first annual collection for the Rand mission was conducted in all PEMS churches in colonial Lesotho, Ellenberger rushed there from the Rand to address congregations and meetings from all over the country about the plight of Basotho workers in the compounds and on the Reef. He moved the emotions of his audiences, especially the parents among them, when he sensationally described how Basotho labourers were daily subjected to "evil" and "bad" temptations on the Rand. Only the PEMS could "protect" and "save" these "children" of Lesotho. So moving were his speeches that enough money was raised to purchase him a bicycle and to employ another evangelist.⁵⁵

The first evangelist, Saul Tumisi, himself an ex-miner. was deployed in 1925 at State Mines in Springs on the East Rand. This particular area was an obvious choice, as Basotho workers were concentrated there and in Johannesburg itself. Between them, the City Deep, Crown Mines, and State Mines. employed over 3 000 Basotho miners. But, due to the problem of accommodation. Tumisi had to stay with Ellenberger, and commute to State Mines, sometimes having to sleep with miners in the compounds. The second evangelist, Elias Moleli, arrived a year later and was deployed on the West Rand at Randfontein. A third evangelist, Bethuel Seotsanyane,

⁵⁵. Paragraph based on JME, 1924, pp.206-07; 1926, pp.285, 558; Leselinyana, 11 July 1934.

followed in July 1927 and was placed in the house which had finally been built for Tumisi on the East Rand. The latter was redeployed to the centre of Johannesburg. These three evangelists were allowed to bring their wives, but had to leave their children behind as the Rand, they were told, was not a good place for children. By the end of Ellenberger's service in 1927, the PEMS had four centres, three of which were run by evangelists and one by a volunteer: 14 schools run by volunteers; and 132 catechumens. Books to the value of over L400, including 156 bibles, had been sold in the compounds.⁵⁶

Ellenberger was replaced by Louis Mabile. For that matter, both Moreillon and Ellenberger had been asked to head the work of the Rand mission when they were retiring from their PEMS work in Lesotho to settle in Johannesburg. The former was relocating to Johannesburg for the education of his children, while Ellenberger wanted to finish his father's book on the history of Basotho. Louis Mabile, for his part, was still a full-time PEMS missionary. Because the process of setting up a permanent mission was not qualitatively different from what Moreillon and Ellenberger had been doing, Mabile continued to use the strategy of using evangelists and volunteers. However, as will be shown later, progress on the ground did not match his optimism. Initially, though, he was better off than his predecessors, as the Morija Book Depot had bought him a car, and the placing of a fourth evangelist in Benoni in 1929 strengthened the overall position of the PEMS on the East Rand. Each Sunday the PEMS missionary and his evangelists would visit compounds in their respective sectors. Permission to enter was sought from the compound manager, and indunas or "policeboys", and sometimes resident Basotho chiefs, were used to locate Basotho workers in the compounds. Often, evangelists would move from room to room, inviting Basotho miners to attend the service. Afterwards, the evangelist or missionary

⁵⁶. Paragraph based on JME, 1925, pp.396-97, 558; 1927, pp.373-74; Leselinyana, 11 July 1934; APEMS, Mf.759, R. Ellenberger to an unnamed friend, 19 April 1925; Mf.750, R. Ellenberger to an unnamed friend, 17 December 1924.

would ask if any of those present wished to give his life to God, and indeed if there were any such, their names were taken down for follow-up discussions. Most services were followed by the sale of books, especially the bible. During the week, as miners were either on shifts work or asleep, PEMS work was focused on visiting hospitals. Parallel to this, those already converted met daily for evening prayers, and for mutual spiritual support, guidance and defence against "evil" temptations. Each evangelist had groups such as these operating in several compounds, although sometimes, as discussed earlier, a number of such groups were independent of the formal control of missionaries. The fourth area of work were literacy classes discussed above.⁵⁷

The work of the PEMS cannot be adequately understood without looking at the role played by its evangelists and volunteers. The strategy of working through Basotho evangelists had been used in Lesotho since the 1860s. At the same time, white missionaries were very cautious in their selection of evangelists as they did not think that Basotho would have the same control, direction and discipline as whites. Consequently, African evangelists were always closely monitored. Although the PEMS was committed to transforming itself into a "native" church, and did produce its first Mosotho minister in 1891, the achievement of this goal was delayed by a combination of paternalism and racism which obliged Basotho ministers to work under the supervision of white missionaries. Another indication of such attitudes was the policy which stopped evangelists from bringing their children to the Rand before the 1930s. By contrast, Louis Mabile had the luxury of finding schools for his children in Johannesburg. For that matter, decisions around the activities and objectives of the Society continued to be taken for decades by a whites-only annual Conference of missionaries, and the process of transforming the PEMS into a "native"

⁵⁷. Paragraph based on Baker, Grace Triumphant, p.101; Coplan, In Township Tonight, p.46; JME, 1928, pp.84-90, 145; 1942-45, pp.129-32; Phillips, The Bantu are Coming, pp.141-51.

church was only completed in 1964 when the Lesotho Evangelical Church replaced it.

The process of selecting evangelists for the Rand does not appear to have been as thorough as it was in colonial Lesotho. Tumisi, the first evangelist, was an ex-miner, and did not follow any formal theological training as was the case with evangelists in Lesotho. At the same time, it would seem that he was the most trusted and skilled, as he was deployed in Johannesburg, an area which was more complex than the rural areas and where many missionary societies were represented. But with white missionaries experiencing what they regarded as "bad" conduct of some evangelists (and volunteers), evangelists came to be recruited via the Bible School and the Leloaleng Industrial School in Lesotho. Because of the belief that young men were more easily tempted, middle-aged candidates were preferred. Evangelists were regarded as the machinery of the mission, with white missionaries concentrating on coordinating and monitoring their activities. African evangelists were the ones who conducted most of the visits, spoke to and counselled miners about their personal problems, and it was also not uncommon for one of them to be invited to perform a small funeral service for a dead miner. Like the missionary, they received letters from workers' families in Lesotho, asking them to help locate "lost" sons, brothers, fathers or husbands. And again like white missionaries, their families, especially their wives, also had evangelical responsibilities. Bethual Seotsanyane was assisted in 1938 by his son and daughter in running a school he had established in Brakpan, while his wife worked among the women in the locations.⁵⁸

⁵⁸. This and the preceding paragraph based on Leselinyana, 6 April 1938; 1 August 1934; 25 February 1927; 11 July 1934; 6 April 1938; JME, 1928, pp.84-90; 1934, p.352; M. Malefane, "The Work of the Lord among Basuto People", BW, vol.3, no.1, January-February 1949, p.5; APEMS, Mf.783, L. Mabile to an unnamed friend, 19 December 1928; V. Ellenberger, Landmarks in the Story of the French Protestant Church in Basutoland During the First Hundred Years of its Existence, 1833-1933, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1933), pp.14-15, 27; Mohapeloa, From Mission to Church, pp.41, 47.

Non-salaried volunteers were no less significant. Most of them were literate, and some had even been to the Bible School in Morija. Still others were sent by the synod in Lesotho; in 1929 Mabile received six such volunteers. But probably the most important of all were those in full-time employment who dedicated their Sundays to evangelical work. In 1934 there were four such men in addition to the five evangelists. One was a clerk at Croesus near Langlaagte, another was a railway officer at Crown Mine, yet another was a tailor in Germiston, and indeed only the one at Sub-Nigel, south of Springs, was an ordinary miner. The fifth evangelist, David Patose, worked as a volunteer under Tumisi for five years at Geldenhuis near Germiston, before being accepted as an evangelist in 1932.⁵⁹

Besides these formally recognised volunteers, there were baholo (elders), enthusiastic and energetic converts, who paid visits to the compounds own or accompanied evangelists or the missionary in their work. They were regarded as senior members of the church, and acted as assistants and advisors to evangelists and the missionary. As in colonial Lesotho, they commanded respect and had influence; they could sway support for or against particular evangelists. Indeed, they were so important that they were even allowed to send representatives to the monthly meetings held between the missionary and his evangelists.⁶⁰

Younger volunteers organised themselves into groups of bahlanka (young men). There were three aspects to the activities of the bahlanka; one activity involved visiting the compounds, preaching from dormitory to dormitory, laying emphasis on such themes as punishment for and deliverance from sin, and the "lost sheep". Their second activity involved constituting themselves into units for the study of the bible.

⁵⁹. JME, 1929, pp.222-27; Leselinyana, 18 July 1934; 12 October 1932.

⁶⁰. Ellenberger, Century of Mission Work, p.182; JME, 1942-45, pp.131-32.

such as the Almanaka based at Croesus in the mid-1930s. And lastly, and most entertainingly, they organised themselves into choirs. These choirs had spread from PEMS schools in colonial Lesotho in the late 1920s to the locations and the compounds, where they comprised ex-students who had come to the Rand for one reason or another. The "Rambling Vagabonds" and the "Basutoland Shooting Choir" were reported to be among the most popular Basotho choirs in Sophiatown in 1921. Such choirs were invited by Basotho of some standing to hold concerts for the miners. When the PEMS opened its new church at the State Mine in July 1935, choirs from Brakpan and from the Swiss mission, were invited to perform. Amongst the most well-known Basotho choirs in the compounds during the 1930s were the "Dinare," and the "Roaring Tigers" (nicknamed "Majapere" by non-Sotho workers) of the State Mine near Brakpan. By then, the "Tigers" had been around for about a decade and were so popular that they were invited in one instance to perform in Vereeniging for Basotho audience.

These choirs did not restrict their choice of songs to hymns. It appears that what brought them a following were the popular secular songs that they were associated with; in 1936 "Miss Moipato, Ngoan'a Malome" (Lady Moipato, my cousin sister) threatened to replace "Chuchumakhala"⁶¹ as the most popular Sesotho choir song in the compounds and locations. Concerts provided a platform for competing choirs, during which members of the audience would bid with their money for such and such a person or group to sing a particular song. One such concert took place in a hall at Village Deep in March 1926 where the "Roaring Tigers" and the "Racoons" were performing at the invitation of one E. Malimabe. L11.18s.10d was raised in addition to the money collected from the sale of entrance tickets. In December 1936, the "Tigers" were preparing themselves for a competition at Springs Hall where they were going to face the "Nightingales" of Sub-Nigel. These occasions also attracted the attention of the tax collectors of the Basutoland Johannesburg Agency, although sometimes for

⁶¹. A name applied to a steam engine train.

relatively benign purposes. In one instance in 1937, a concert was organised by the Agency in order to reach Basotho miners and promote its official image.⁶²

In the course of the 1930s, the bahlanka formalised their structures in their respective compounds. The size of these bahlanka groups ranged between 16 to 30 members. This process culminated in a two-day meeting in March 1938 at Cleveland where 45 bahlanka delegates from Brakpan, Nigel, Driefontein, Village Main and Cleveland itself, met to discuss a common approach and the coordination of their activities. A nine-person committee was elected to serve as an umbrella body of the affiliates. The new body had its own funds, with each affiliate contributing 10s annually. Members and non-members were allowed to borrow money from this central fund. The group resolved to have its own badge to distinguish its members from non-members, and each member was to abstain from alcohol. The group and its affiliates committed themselves to working with evangelists.⁶³

Officially, the missionary met with his evangelists and baholo representatives once a month, while the evangelists met regularly with volunteers and baholo in their respective sectors. The missionary monitored his evangelists, issuing reprimands where necessary. He also handled all matters relating to relations with other missionary societies and the South African authorities. At the bottom of this hierarchy were ordinary church members. But this relationship, with the missionary at its apex, and evangelists and volunteers at the bottom, proved to be riddled with tensions and contradictions. Competition between evangelists, and between baholo and their evangelists was sufficiently common to cause tension.

⁶². This and the preceding paragraph based on VX. In Township Tonight, pp.37, 71-76; JME, 1942-45, pp.131-32; Leselinyana, 12 October 1938; 1 June 1938; 23 February 1917; 14 August 1935; 5 February 1936; 16 February 1938; 13 March 1935; 18 March 1921; 26 March 1926; 3 November 1937; 3 March 1937; 12 May 1937; 12 October 1932; 25 May 1938; Mochochonono, 12 September 1934; 13 March 1937; 7 August 1937.

⁶³. Leselinyana, 1 June 1938.

Mochochonono published a series of anonymous letters in 1934 and again in 1937, attacking the baholo and evangelists, accusing them of behaving like chiefs and indunas. When Ellenberger temporarily replaced Louis Mabile who had retired earlier in 1936 due to health problems, all of his time was taken up with such allegations: and indeed he became so disillusioned that he even refused to be thanked during his farewell function.⁶⁴

By the time of Mabile's retirement, little significant progress had been made. His optimism had been shattered by the lack of interest on the part of most Basotho on the Rand. Mabile had hoped that the dramatic increase in the number of Basotho workers on the mines from 1930 onwards, would lead to a significant increase in PEMS' church membership, but this did not happen. While the number of Basotho in the compounds climbed from about 20 000 in 1930 to over 30 000 in 1933, and indeed this trend continued in subsequent years following South Africa's abandonment of the gold standard in 1934, the proportion of men in PEMS churches did not increase significantly. A significant drop in the number of "heathens" in colonial Lesotho itself only occurred in the 1940s, and even then, much of the increase in the number of Christians was due to the Catholic successes. One of my informants, who worked at New Modderfontein near Benoni in the mid-1930s, was often the only person from his compound to attend Sunday services at the Wesleyan chapel behind the mine premises.⁶⁵

Oechsner de Coninck, who replaced Ellenberger in December 1936, was unfortunate that his term coincided with the most serious set of crises that the Rand mission had faced since its inception. The first crisis occurred in 1938 when Coninck tried to expel evangelist Tumisi, who, by then, had been labouring for the Society for more than ten years. The problem began with gossiping and conflicting allegations

⁶⁴. Mochochonono, 12 September 1934; 10 October 1934; 28 November 1934; 3 March 1937; 27 March 1937.

⁶⁵. Interview with Solomon Mosunyane. See also JME, 1934, vol.2, pp.640-41.

between Coninck's wife on the one hand, and Tumisi's wife on the other. Coninck sided with his wife, fabricated accusations against Tumisi, and expelled him. He did not know, however, how to explain this to Tumisi's congregation at Village Main, so he instructed Tumisi to say that he was voluntarily resigning his work because he was incompetent. This, however, the evangelist refused to do. Tumisi's congregation then protested against the decision, some even staging a walk-out on the Sunday that a new evangelist was introduced. Mochochonono carried a number of letters, including one from Tumisi himself, lashing out at Coninck's decision. The crisis continued for almost a year, but Tumisi was never reinstated.⁶⁶

Coninck was neither fluent in Sesotho nor skilled in handling crisis situations. His lack of fluency was a major barrier, as Basotho were known to be very proud of their language,⁶⁷ and his brusque handling of conflicts created enemies in the PEMS congregation. He nonetheless began the process of spreading PEMS beyond the confines of the Reef, in 1938 he and David Patose, evangelist at Geldenhuise, visited Basotho workers at Springfield Colliers near Vereeniging. Yet church membership in 1941 was a mere 2 390 out of an estimated figure of 60 000 Basotho working on the Reef. And although the number of evangelists grew from seven in 1938 to 12 in 1942, the number of centres stagnated, up from 14 in 1943 to only 15 six years later. The six chapels already in existence in 1938 did not expand at all over the next four years. Coninck increased the role of baholo and bahlanka significantly, always seeking their assistance during his visits, but it appears that general stagnation was only overcome in

⁶⁶. Mochochonono, 3 January 1938; 15 January 1938; 28 May 1938; 18 June 1938; 2 July 1938; Leselinyana, 12 December 1938.

⁶⁷. Basotho were said to be a "self-centred and a proud nation even though they may be far from their country; far out on the Rand they still exercise such pride, and feel that the Church of Basutoland is their Alma Mater. They do not want their sermons to be preached in any other language save Sotho"; see J.E. Selikane, "The Church of Basutoland on the Rand", BW, vol.3, no.1, January-February 1949, p.10.

subsequent years by a combination of accelerated African urbanisation and the disintegration of agricultural production in rural Lesotho.

By 1962 the PEMS on the Rand was divided into four parishes stretching from the East to the West Rand, and from Pretoria in the north to Welkom in the Orange Free State. Its focus had shifted away from the compounds to the locations; miners were now expected to attend services in the latter areas, and each evangelist now had a bicycle. But this reorientation represented more than the process of African urbanisation; it was rather a result of the relative failure of mission work in the compounds.⁶⁸

Explaining the failure

But why was the PEMS mission on the Rand failing? The central objective factor was the difficult financial situation that had faced the Society since 1914. As already noted, the Rand mission was supposed to be financed from the coffers of the Lesotho branch of the Society, as well as regular collections and donations from member-miners on the Rand. The salaries of evangelists and, in theory, the cost of building the chapels and accommodation for evangelists, were all supposed to be met from Lesotho funds. There was never enough money, however. The chronic financial problem was reflected at the level of staffing and logistics: the Society depending on the DRC and, especially, the Swiss mission for chapels and other necessities, even after the building of their first church at Village Main in 1933. Louis Mabile, for example, stayed for

⁶⁸. This and the preceding paragraph based on Leselinvana, 25 May 1938; JME, 1937, pp.182-84; 1940-41, pp.158-59; 1942-45, pp.129-32; Labarthe, "Mission Work", pp.2-5. JME, 1937, pp.182-84; 1942-45, pp.129-32; Leselinvana, 25 May 1938, G. Mabile, "Missionary Work on the Rand", BW, vol.3, no.1, January-February 1949, pp.4-5; and Malefane, "The Work of the Lord", pp.4-7.

some time at a house belonging to the head of the Swiss Mission in Johannesburg. Tumisi and Ellenberger held communion services at Randfontein in 1927, using a chapel and plates belonging to the Swiss. David Patose held his services under a tree outside the mine for years before the Swiss invited him to share their chapel. When the PEMS began its work in 1922 the staff of the Swiss Mission consisted of 14 evangelists, over 100 volunteers, a white missionary and an African pastor, while the PEMS by contrast, only managed to muster 12 evangelists as late as 1942. The DRC staff, in the mid-1930s in the sector covered by Tumisi alone with his volunteers, was made up of four evangelists, two pastors and a number of volunteers.⁶⁹

The survival of the Society depended on collections and fund-raising. Annual collections in Lesotho for the Rand mission, were usually preceded by a heavy campaign in Leselinyana, in the form of big headlines, frontpage reports on progress, and advertisements urging Basotho to help the mission to "save" their "children" from evil. In July and August 1934, this newspaper even ran a twelve-part series on the history of the "Basotho on the Gold Mines" which was mainly focused on PEMS' work on the Rand. A lot of publicity for the collections took place in the churches themselves, especially when Ellenberger or Mabile, for example, were visiting. Though these collections averaged L400 during their first few years, they began to fall away as the country's economic crisis worsened, reaching L196.12s.7d in 1934. The number of evangelists employed, four between 1925 and 1929 and a fifth one in 1932, was directly linked to the funds available. A lodging place for an evangelist cost L200 in 1929, and the building of a chapel on State Mine in 1935 amounted to L372, including L84 from the pockets of the miner-members themselves. Additional purchases, such as benches and

⁶⁹. Falk. The Growth of the Church, p.171; JME, 1929, pp.222-27; Leselinyana, 11 July 1934; 25 February 1927; Mochochono, 18 June 1938; APEMS, Mf.730. L. Mabile report on "Evangelising Basotho workers", 23 October 1922; Mf.759, R. Ellenberger to an unnamed friend, 4 August 1925.

pulpits, depended on donations from miner-members and further fund-raising. The shortage of staff meant that a few people had to cover great distances, and above all, there was the problem of the relatively short length of stay of individual miners in the compounds, which created the problem of continuity and follow-up, especially as many miners rarely returned to the same mine after the expiry of their contracts.⁷⁰

Besides these financial and logistical difficulties, there was an ideological problem linked to the approach of the PEMS, a problem that had cost the Society dearly in colonial Lesotho itself. The PEMS, as we saw, had presented itself as a "Church of Basotho/Moshoeshoe", wanting not only to give itself a monopoly over the evangelisation of the Basotho but also historical legitimacy. Even though this had lost ground to the Catholics and, to a certain extent, separatist churches as well, the PEMS transferred it to the Rand. On the eve of Moshoeshoe's Day in 1928, Louis Mabile was said to have been addressed as "Moshoeshoe" by Basotho miners at Geldenhuis Deep. But for all that Mabile's sermons invoked the good works of Moshoeshoe, there was always a powerful undercurrent of criticism of the Basotho way of life. The PEMS saw itself as Jesus going after his lost flock of sheep. Sermons in the compounds would compare the migration of Basotho and their eventual return home, to a soul leaving the body for heaven after death. More than this, PEMS operatives, including evangelists and African ministers, were convinced that theirs was the "correct" Word. What was life to Basotho, a way of life that had significant historical, socio-economic and cultural foundations, was seen as a moral and cultural disorder that needed to be cured by the gospel. This arrogant approach led to intolerance and antagonism towards Basotho practices, all of which were dismissed as bad or wrong.⁷¹

⁷⁰. JME, 1930, pp.308-09; Leselinyana, 27 January 1928; 11 February 1927; 21 August 1935; 31 January 1934.

⁷¹. Leselinyana, 16 March 1928; 12 October 1932; 13 March 1928.

George Mabile, the son of Louis Mabile, offered a typical explanation for the failure of the Rand mission:

Out of over 200 000 Basutos from Basutoland living in the Transvaal [he wrote in 1950], we hardly minister to 30 000, whereas in Basutoland out of five Basutos, one belongs to the Church. "Why so many lost for the kingdom?" will you ask. Because evil and sin are prevalent in those quick grown urban areas. Strong drink pulls down both the brains and bodies of thousands. Immorality and prostitution break down many families, which, in most cases, were only built up yesterday. Crime, burglaries and faction fighting are notorious at Johannesburg and it makes our heart bleed to realize that, in many cases, Basutos of Basutoland are involved... To those who have chosen to serve the Devil, church and religion have but a meaning of distrust.⁷²

No less stark were the conversion narratives that the missionaries chose to believe, record and publish:

Jakobo was a young miner at City Deep out from Basutoland. He was coming from a heathen family and except from school which he attended at the age of fourteen and fifteen years, he never bothered about the name of Jesus. One Sunday he was allowed to leave the Compound and he went with a comrade to visit, at a location of Orlando, Basuto prostitutes and Skokian queens. At night, half dizzy with drink, he was on his way back to the compound having lost the precious money he foolishly had carried about with him. Suddenly in the pitch darkness he saw a lovely man clad in white garments, standing in front of him on the pavement and pointing towards green pastures in the rear ground. His face was filled with love and he addressed him softly saying: "Would you like to follow the good shepherd to these wonderful green pastures?" Jakobo answered in a whisper, as he felt scared: "Yes Sir, I would..." Jesus then pointed towards our Village Main Church alongside, for it was the Lord Jesus, who was addressing Jakobo and said: "Go to your pastor, he will show you the way".⁷³

Recurrent themes in the plot of such conversion narratives are the locations, beer, the way to salvation, and the reaction from one's kinsmen and dormitory mates. The latter theme shows that missionaries and their converts were aware that conversion meant cutting old social bonds and replacing them

⁷². G. Mabile, "Spiritual Gold Digging on the Rand". *BW*, vol.4, no.2, March-April 1950, p.22.

⁷³. *Ibid.*

with Christian brotherhood. Both the missionaries and their converts needed such stories; the latter wanted to dramatise and rationalise the change they were undergoing, and the former by presenting themselves as saviours (in the form of Jesus or angels appearing at the conclusion of the narrative), wanted to shift the cause of the failure of their work on to drunkenness in the compounds and locations. One "Coffee" told Bennet that while he was in hospital recovering from an accident, he had a dream in which he was turned back at the gates of heaven by an African preacher: "Go back to earth again", he was told, "and give up drink and heathen customs. join the class and prepare to be a Christian".⁷⁴

Evidence of missionary intolerance and arrogance significantly influenced the attitude of many Basotho migrants. One Mosotho complained in Leselinyana that PEMS evangelists were quick to attack and condemn "wrong-doers". Often, he continued, "they have the habit of coming to the compound, make a very big noise in their evangelisation. stopping at the door [of dormitories] while those working night shift were still asleep". That is why, he explained, some compound managers refused to allow missionary societies access to their compounds. He thought that evangelists needed to respect people more, and know the times when miners took their break, meals or changed shifts.⁷⁵

What the PEMS neglected to take into consideration, was the significance that miners in the compounds attached to their holidays, as well as the positive role that beer-drinking and dances, and even prostitutes, played in the lives of Basotho migrants. The determination of African miners to maintain Sunday as a holiday was early remarked by H.O. Buckle in his 1913 report on Native Grievances.⁷⁶ One PEMS minister ruefully observed that "though these Basuto workers on the Rand get so interested in the Word of God, they take it that

⁷⁴. Bennett, Romance and Reality, p.31.

⁷⁵. Leselinyana, 5 July 1939.

⁷⁶. Report of the Native Grievances Inquiry, 1913-14, p.7.

the usefulness of the Gospel is only to dispel their sorrows and to comfort and console them in times of need and difficulty. On days of happiness and sunshine they do not bother to go to Sunday services: they would rather go to location beer-halls or visit friends on a Sunday than go to church".⁷⁷ Undeterred, missionaries would try to begin their Sunday visits around 10h00, before workers left for the locations or took up their drinking sessions from where they had left off the previous Saturday night. But this tactic did not work. While there were many Basotho who wanted to join the church, they did not want to part with their beer. Certainly there were many people who dropped out because of this problem. Nor was it uncommon for drunk miners to be among those present at church services; some would be drowsy or even black-out and collapse in front of the messenger of God.⁷⁸

A further problem that confronted the PEMS was that of the new generation of converts trying to appropriate Christianity for their own ends. Towards the end of the 1930s ceremonial feasts known as tafole ea bafu (table of the dead) began to take place in some PEMS stations in Lesotho. This practice was condemned as "ancestor worship" by the Church leadership, as it essentially involved paying homage to dead relatives. The other problem concerned the concerts which took place in PEMS chapels across the Reef and at other centres. Louis Mabile was approached by some members in 1929 to organise a concert, ostensibly to raise money for the building of a church, but he dismissed the proposal on "moral" grounds. A

⁷⁷. Selikane. "Church of Basutoland". p.10.

⁷⁸. Mohapeloa, From Mission, p.18; JME, 1929, p.227. The PEMS had a serious problem of drinking within its churches in Lesotho, and this reached a crisis point in the 1930s with some evangelists even attending their services drunk. Calls were made to extend the branches of the PEMS temperance organisation, the Blue Cross (founded in 1885), to all parts of the country. The PEMS was under pressure to give in lest it lost a lot of its members. See T. Verdier, "L'alcoholisme au Lessouto", JME, vol.1, 1930; and E. Mphatsoe, "The Blue Cross Association in Basutoland", BW, vol.8. no.3, July-September 1954.

year later, he expelled one of his volunteers for having organised a fund-raising party at which beer had been on sale. The problem became more serious in the 1940s when evangelists, baholo and bahlanka, played a leading role in organising such concerts. Coninck completely mishandled the crisis and was recalled to Lesotho in 1946.⁷⁹ His replacement was George Mabile, summoned from Ivory Coast as an emergency measure. Mabile's first move was to impose a total ban on concerts, but the "rebels" refused to obey his order. Tensions continued to mount, and the explosion finally occurred when Mabile was assaulted during his sermon by members of the congregation at Orlando. This was soon afterwards followed by a bloody fight at one of the PEMS' big annual services at Village Main. The services of evangelists who were regarded as puppets of the white leadership of the Church, were deliberately disrupted, and some even had to flee for their lives. An evangelist at Orlando had to hold one of his services under the protection of 20 policemen, and the situation as a whole was partially brought under control only with the arrest of some of the "rebels". This case shows that the "rebels" represented a new generation of mission converts who wanted to adapt the church culture to the demands of urban life, and who were opposed to strict white supervision.⁸⁰

Beer, women (and matekatse) and dance, as we saw in Chapter Four, were more than simply forms of entertainment for Basotho workers. They expressed and confirmed group and kinship solidarity and continuity with home, and were avenues for escaping the dehumanising and alienating conditions of mine work and compound life. In the locations and slums, miners visited marabi shebeens; the majority of likoata preferring urban Sotho shebeens where they enjoyed themselves with famo and focho dances and music. One Mosotho PEMS pastor lamented

⁷⁹. For his earlier mishandling of another incident, see the case of Tumisi above.

⁸⁰. Paragraph based on G. Mabile. Un Noire et un Blanc = Une Equipe: Temoignage a Michael Malefane par son Co-equipier George Mabile, (Paris, The Author, 1976), pp.69-87; Mohapeloa, From Mission, p.18; JME, 1929, p.226.

that:

Men do not go to church on Sundays but join one drinking circle after another to the accompaniment of the piercing ululation of the women. Their language takes on hard tones and is associated with a fierce blood-thirsty nation. They pride themselves in singing church hymns over pots of beer; they take verses from the Holy Bible and twist them to serve their own ends. "Abide with me" becomes a prostitution's plea.⁸¹

But underlying Basotho migrants' need for relaxation was a marked attachment to their own independent view of the world. One PEMS missionary was later to note that:

[t]here are still vast realms of thought to conquer in evangelizing the Basuto on the Rand, - they still bear their fore-fathers' beliefs of old; witchcraft, ancestral spirits, and the like. If an accident befalls a young man in the shafts under-ground, he believes that his great-grand-fathers are angry with him, and are to be appeased. Such men, the mission on the Rand has tried to win over, but apparently in vain.⁸²

It was a way of looking at things which was not easily compatible with Christian beliefs. Charms were used by Basotho migrants for protection against sorcerers and misfortune and to control the external world by bringing luck their owners. Diviners were routinely consulted in order to "strengthened" individuals for the long road to the mines, or to bring luck to those who wanted to become foremen or compound policemen. Diviners were often to be found in and outside mine compounds,⁸³ and indeed several leading PEMS members actually left the Church to become diviners. One Mosotho evangelist was to confess that "even our own Christians are attracted by queer, strange ways".⁸⁴

⁸¹. E.A. Makhele, "The Tragedy of Basuto Life on the Rand", BW, vol.7, no.4, October-December 1953, p.55.

⁸². Selikane, "Church of Basutoland", p.11.

⁸³. Ashton, Basuto, pp. 282-316; H. Dieterlen, "La Medecine et les Medecines au Lessouto". Les Cahiers Missionnaires, no.17, 1930, especially p.24.

⁸⁴. Malebane, "Work of the Lord", p.6; see Dieterlen, "La Medecine et les Medecins", and F. Laydevant, "La Sorcellerie en Basutoland". Etudes Missionnaires, vol.7, no.2, 1937. Of course, the persistence of superstition alongside Christianity was and is not unknown in Europe and North America.

Even many of those who had been converted in Lesotho itself, including ex-students from Morija, did their best to evade and dodge the missionary and his evangelists on the Rand. This resistance, whether by those who were already converts or by "heathens", was not restricted to simply not coming to meetings or services: it could take the form of sabotaging services or meetings actually in progress.⁸⁵ An evangelist described the reaction of Basotho miners when they were visited in their rooms: "Right here [in the room], words of contempt and mockery are thrown at this servant of the Lord... Eventually some ask him: 'Who are you, what do you want here?' He does not answer and carries on".⁸⁶

One of my informants admitted to holding such an attitude while on the Rand. Workers did not understand what missionaries were doing there because they themselves were there for only one thing - to work: "... you will hear somebody say 'This man is here with his things of missionaries. We are not for missionaries. man: we are here only for work!' When we say this we then sing our mohobelo".⁸⁷

When, for example, an evangelist or missionary had gathered his group at a courtyard corner, his problems had barely begun. In the words of one evangelist who experienced it all before:

...a passer-by shouts his war song, as he goes past the group. Some of our people ask him to keep silent and off he goes. He is soon followed by another who sings his own praises... They persuade him to lower his voice. Here come two fellows cursing each other. They restrain them. Some are playing Bantu chess [morabaraba], others dance. The evangelist preaches in the very midst of noise, clapping of hands and curses.⁸⁸

Such behaviour, especially the playing of drums and other

⁸⁵. JME. 1928, p.88; Leselinyana, 1 August 1893; 1 August 1934; 8 August 1934.

⁸⁶. Malefane, "Work of the Lord", p.5:

⁸⁷. Interview with Samuel Mokoaleli.

⁸⁸. Malefane, "Work of the Lord", p.6.

noisy instruments, were often deliberately aimed at disrupting meetings or services: "We were announcing our meeting by moving about the courtyard of the compound, singing hymns, with our group of christians [Coninck once lamented]; but young heathens, armed with their drums, also moved about the courtyard, causing a big disturbance; on this day we preached in vain".⁸⁹ Nor were the PEMS missionaries the only ones subject to such hostilities from mine-dance groups.⁹⁰ Converts were occasionally attacked. One of Baker's early converts was harassed by his dormitory mates for no longer participating in and financially contributing towards beer-drinking sessions. His books were torn up, his slate smashed, and attempts made to prevent him from attending Sunday services, but he managed to force his way out.⁹¹

Conclusion

The propagation of Christianity in the mine compounds during the period under review was undertaken not only by the missionary societies, but also independently by African lay preachers. Missionary work among Basotho gold miners was largely due to the efforts of the Mabile brothers, Ernest and Louis. But the conservatism of the PEMS, and its intolerance of the Basotho way of life, resulted in tensions within the church. The PEMS, like other missionary societies, shifted its focus to the locations after World War II in response to the failure of the work in the mine compounds, as well as the increase in the number of urban-based Africans.

⁸⁹. JME, 1942-45, p.132.

⁹⁰. For the experience of the Anglicans, see Bennet, Romance and Reality, p.33.

⁹¹. Baker. Grace Triumphant, p.106.

CHAPTER SIX

"FACTION FIGHTS": "FIXED BAYONETS" AGAINST STICKS AND STONES

Collective violence, referred to as "faction fights" because of their ethnic character, were common in the gold mine compounds as early as the late 1880s, and their prevalence has continued well into the 1990s. A correspondent of the Star reported in August 1889 that "faction fights" were now "becoming common [on the Rand] where strong drink, kerries, and sticks are within easy reach", and recommended the erection of closed compounds as one way of dealing with the problem.¹ This tendency by outside observers to associate "faction fights" with beer-drinking and "sticks" was to be inherited by historians and other social scientists, leading to the neglect of many important factors behind and around such clashes.

Those historians who have recently turned their attention to the study of collective violence in Rand mine compounds, have helped to shed additional light on the causes, importance and significance of this phenomenon.² Their studies have attempted to understand the symbolic significance of "faction fights", seeing them as expressions of ethnic solidarity and masculinity among African workers, at the same time relating this to the rural experiences of these miners. In one way or another, they draw on Robert Gordon's study of "tribal fights" in a Namibian compound.³ But none of them systematically

1. Star, 21 August 1889.

2. Amongst the most recent studies are those by W. Beinart, "Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography", and T.D. Moodie, "Ethnic Violence on South African Gold Mines, both in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.18, no.3, September 1992; T.D. Moodie (with Ndatshé Vivienne), Going for Gold, pp.180-210; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.121-26.

3. R. Gordon, in his "Celebration of Ethnicity: A 'Tribal Fight' in a Namibian Mine Compound", in B.M. du Toit, (ed.), Ethnicity in Modern Africa, (Westview Press, USA, 1978), uses

incorporate in their perspectives and arguments the important studies conducted by labour historians in the 1970s on black mineworkers' protests.⁴ One result of this is that little attempt is made to distinguish "faction fights" from "disturbances", "riots" or "strikes": acts of inter-ethnic confrontation among African workers are treated as "faction fighting". William Beinart, for example, has even gone to the extent of arguing that for the men who were involved in "faction fights", "the emphasis was on violence as display and sport",⁵ while Dunbar Moodie suggests that prior to the 1970s the "rules for faction fighting on the mines seem to have been derived from the mores of cattle-herding boys",⁶ hence the frequent use of stones and sticks and the relatively low casualty toll. For Patrick Harries, "faction fights" were the "ritual enactment of violence" and were "less about death than display".⁷ He also claims that these fights were "practically extinct" by 1913, due to the suppression of the sale of liquor to Africans, and the passage of the Prevention of Crime Ordinance which outlawed the carrying of "dangerous weapons", as well as the general tightening of control over the compounds. "Faction fights" were then largely replaced by "tribal dancing" which "served to produce a more peaceful factionalism".⁸

what he calls a "symbolic interactionist perspective". See especially p.214.

4. See, for example, those by P. Warwick, "Black Industrial Protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901-02", in E. Webster, (ed.), Essays in Southern African Labour History, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1978); S. Moroney, "Mine Worker Protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901-1912", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.3, no.5, 1977; P. Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: a preliminary account", in B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Labour, Township and Protest Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1979); I. Phimister, and C. van Onselen, "The Political Economy of Tribal Animosity: A Case Study of the 1929 Bulawayo Location 'Faction Fight'", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.6, no.1, 1979; T. Ranger, "Faction Fighting, Race Consciousness and Worker Consciousness: A Note on the Jagersfontein Riots of 1914". South African Labour Bulletin, vol.4, no.5, 1978.

5. Beinart. "Political and Collective Violence", p.479.

6. Moodie. "Ethnic Violence", p.596.

7. Harries. Work, Culture and Identity, p.122.

8. Ibid., p.212.

Arguably, such approaches depoliticise what in many instances were militant worker actions against mine managements, and by using the case of Basotho workers, this chapter will argue that "faction fights" were more complex than these most recent studies allow. Without denying or minimising the ethnic dimensions of many "faction fights", it will be suggested, with the use of the case of three "faction fights" at the Premier Diamond Mine, that most fights were influenced by working and living conditions, and by wage disputes. In all of this, the context of particular fights is crucial, as it demonstrates the impact of social, political and economic change incidence and content.

Basotho and Faction Fights

Many "faction fights" took place during mine holidays on Sundays, Christmas, Boxing day, and New Year's Day, because, as we saw in Chapter Four, it was during these days that compound workers engaged in various leisure activities such as beer-drinking, gambling, sports, and dancing competitions. As early as 1896 mine officials were trying, together with the police, to devise ways of ensuring that fights did not occur in the compounds. In 1912 the Chamber of Mines was approached by the Commissioner of Police to urge its members to ask their compound managers and their assistants not to take leave during that period in order to ensure that "disturbances" did not take place during "native festivities".⁹

The first recorded Basotho involvement in "faction fights" on the Rand dates from 1889. In August of that year, Zulu workers, after a "beer-drinking festival", provoked "Matchlozas" (Xhosa) labourers who in turn sought the assistance of Basotho migrants. But the first serious "faction fight" in which Basotho miners were involved was at the Premier Diamond Mine in 1907. By 1910, the records reveal

⁹. Standard and Diggers News, 31 December 1896; CMAR, 1912, p.394.

that Basotho workers were involved in over six "fights" and "riots" in different mining areas on the Rand and in the Orange Free State in that year alone. And it was then that Basotho chiefs, the Basutoland government, and the Native Affairs Department all took an interest in Basotho involvement in "faction fights". The problem continued in the 1920s and reached its peak in the mid-1930s.¹⁰ Looking back some years later, Eric Rosenthal was able to remind his readers of a "time... when Johannesburg newspapers every Monday morning were full of accounts of fights, usually with casualties, between members of hostile tribes in the compounds, and almost invariably the Basuto was to the fore".¹¹

Basotho chiefs, organised in the Basutoland National Council, had their own particular understanding of the causes of "faction fights". At first, they tended to link lintoa (fights or strikes) on the mines to the use of Zulu "policeboys" over Basotho migrants, when the latter were in the majority in certain compounds. On this basis, they requested the Chamber of Mines, through the Resident Commissioner and the NAD, to appoint only Basotho indunas and "policeboys" where Basotho were employed. Some chiefs even felt it necessary to ensure that, as in the past, each group of Basotho recruits left with a responsible chief to look after their interests at the mines.¹²

However, as far as the chiefs were concerned, the nature of the problem began to change in the course of the 1920s with the arrival of matekatse on the Reef, as well as the general increase in labour unrest. Gradually the problem of lintoa merged with that of matekatse, and the solution to lintoa was now seen as linked to the repatriation of these "undesirable" Basotho women. By the 1930s, lintoa had disappeared when

¹⁰. Star, 12 August 1889; Basutoland, Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, (henceforth BNC), 1910; Mochochonono, 29 May 1937.

¹¹. E. Rosenthal, African Switzerland: Basutoland of Today, (Juta and Co. Ltd., Cape Town, 1948), p.194.

¹². BNC, 1910; Report of Proceedings of the BNC, 1908, p.21.

"faction fights" were being referred to, and instead meferefere (riots or anarchy) became the usual term employed. For the Sesotho press and Basotho chiefs, the problem was now one of the boitshoaro (conduct and behaviour) of Basotho on the Reef. The problem was now triangular: at the apex were matekatse with beer and prostitution; while in opposite corners were "faction fights" in the compounds, and fights between Basotho gangs in the locations.¹³ The solution was sought in despatching special envoys to the Reef to "reprimand" Basotho men and women.

The first official visit from colonial Lesotho to the Rand to inquire into the causes of lintoa and communicate the position of the Basutoland National Council to South African officials, was undertaken in 1911 by George Boyse, a colonial government official. In all, Boyse visited the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association and the Government Native Labour Bureau compounds, and twelve different compounds on several mines. He produced a report, covering the numbers and distribution of Basotho employed on those mines and their conditions of service, which was used by the Basutoland government to call for certain changes and improvements in the working and living conditions of Basotho miners.¹⁴ But the NAD defended the mines, and the suggestion that only Basotho be appointed as indunas and "policeboys" in compounds where Basotho workers were in the majority was not accepted.¹⁵

Soon after the failure of Boyse's visit, Basotho workers were involved in another big "fight" at the Premier Mine in November 1913. In May of the following year, the Paramount Chief sent his brother, Teko, with a message that, according to one report, "was delivered by him in private to a number of

13. BNC, 1910; Mochochonono, 29 May 1937: 19 June 1937.

14. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, Boyse's report to RC, October 1911 (undated).

15. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, memorandum of NAD Inspector (Rayton) on "Treatment of Basuto Natives at the Premier Mine", 14 July 1911.

the most prominent members of the tribe" on the mine.¹⁶ The 1918-19 labour unrest on the Reef added another factor to lintoa. As shown in Chapter Four, the Paramount Chief despatched deputations in July 1918 and March 1919 to intervene as strikes were seen as nothing more than the problem of conduct.

In December 1928 Chief Mukuati Letsie also payed a visit; he went "round all the locations and mines visiting my people and to see how they are treated and the like", but was not happy that "from Randfontein to Springs", and "especially Randfontein and Benoni locations", the Basotho "go and contact with the free Native women", and that "Basuto Boys from the mines involved disappointing characters in the locations...and even go as far as the blood-shedding [sic]".¹⁷ He wanted the NAD to refuse permission for Basotho workers in the compounds to visit locations, but this was not accepted on the grounds that "a procedure that had been adopted in connection with restricting the movements of these natives so as to keep them out of the Locations was ruled by the Courts to be illegal and steps are being taken to amend the Law so that other measures to this end may be adopted".¹⁸ But the situation failed to improve to the chiefs' satisfaction, and in June 1936 Chief Sempe Nkoebe was on the Reef "to convey a message of reprimand from the Paramount Chief to the Basuto labourers working on the mines". According to Mochochonono, the Paramount Chief wanted, "the Basuto along the Reef [to] be informed to behave properly and avoid participating in unnecessary fights".¹⁹ The Paramount's letter, earlier published at length by the Star, expressed disapproval of:

...your bad behaviour resulting in uncalled for public violence and damage to other people's properties....I say to you that behaviour of this nature spoils the good name

¹⁶. SAB. GNLB 149, 136/14/D.37. NAD Inspector (Rayton) to DNL, 15 May 1914.

¹⁷. SAB. GNLB 374, 149/28/110. Letsie to Chief Native Commissioner (Witwatersrand), 23 December 1928.

¹⁸. Ibid.. Chief Native Commissioner (Witwatersrand) to Letsie, 19 January 1929.

¹⁹. Mochochonono, 13 June 1936: 20 June 1936.

of Chief Moshesh which has since been regarded with respect... Over and above that you are spoiling the very name of Basutos as a whole which has hitherto remained respectable among others, and by doing so you are likely to deprive your own people of the little bread they were earning by working in the mines on account of your public violence.²⁰

The letter went on to urge Basotho men to take their complaints to the mine and Union authorities or to the Paramount Chief himself. The names of those "misbehaving" were to be sent to the Paramount Chief for punishment return to home. But Sempe left before the completion of his mission, because of the lack of cooperation from most Basotho miners and matekatse.²¹

While such fragmentary evidence as there is suggests that the question of "faction fights" in the 1930s was qualitatively different from that of the beginning of the century, not least because of black urbanisation, the matter cannot be pursued here. Instead, the remainder of this chapter gives a closer look at the "faction fights" that took place at the Premier Mine in 1907, 1910 and 1913, and in doing so hopes to advance scholarly understanding of this phenomenon.

Premier Diamond Mine.

The Premier Mine started operating in January 1905, and in June of the same year what was then the world's largest diamond, later called the Great Star of Africa, was found on the mine. In November 1907 the Star of Africa was given to King Edward VII as a birthday present. to add to his "Crown Jewels"! The mine continued to grow, closing down briefly during World War I and in 1930s during the depression, but was the largest diamond mine in the world in the 1960s. Little is known about the men who worked on this mine: the annual reports of the Premier (Transvaal) Diamond Mining Company Ltd.

²⁰. Star, 15 May 1936.

²¹. SAB, NTS 2569, 887/295, Imp. Sec. to SNA, 6 July 1936; Mochochono, 18 July 1936.

itself are notoriously unhelpful. Besides the occasional paragraph and some statistics on white and African labour, the bulk of the content of the reports is devoted to dividends and developmental work on the mine.²²

The case of the Premier Mine in this study of Basotho involvement in "faction fighting" is justified by two factors. Firstly, as shown in Chapter Two, the mine was for the most part of the period 1910-20 the largest single employer of Basotho on the Rand. And, secondly, the first serious "faction fight" that involved Basotho miners took place on this mine in 1907.

"Squabbles Over a Pot of Mealie Pap".

At the time of the outbreak of the "fight" in 1907 the Premier Mine employed 9 495 Africans, of whom 2 900 were Basotho. 4 175 Bapedi, 1 200 Shangaan, 345 Zulu, 481 Nyasaland "boys" (Malawians), and 394 "miscellaneous". They were housed in three compounds, Number 1, Number 1 Extension, and Number 2. The two former compounds were for underground workers, and the latter was for surface employees.

On Sunday the 1st of September 1907 at 10 a.m. a fight broke out at the mine between the "British Basuto" and the "Transvaal Basuto" (Pedi). According to the Rand Daily Mail, there had been minor "disturbances" before then, not least a fortnight previously when Basotho workers had "a difference" with the "Central African natives". "The affair", however, "was comparatively unimportant". By comparison, the Sunday fight was the first serious "disturbance". It began with a "limited and short skirmish between British Basuto and the Transvaal Basuto plus all others with sticks and stones and

²². Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa, vols. 3 and 9; Premier (Transvaal) Diamond Mining Company Ltd.: Annual Reports (PDMAR), 1907-16 have some labour data but this is omitted in all subsequent reports.

kaffir pots and any missiles that were handy".²³ Approximately 4 500 Africans were involved. The "quarrel" originated in Compound No.1 Extension and spread to Number 1. other ethnic groups also taking sides. The Shangaan. reported the Pretoria Acting Resident Magistrate. "appear to have been reluctant participators. and the Zulus took up a position of armed neutrality".²⁴

The Assistant compound manager, Mitchell, arrived on the scene of the fight with one of his constables, but. claimed the Daily Mail, "was knocked out three times, and once had to use his revolver to get away". Mitchell, however, managed to separate the warring groups - confining them to two separate compounds - with the help of the local police force made up of a sergeant and four men. Twenty constables arrived later that morning, and in the afternoon 50 more constables came by "special train" from Pretoria. "In addition to this", reported the Daily Mail, "there are a small number of ordinary mine guards and a corps of special recruits from the mine [white] employees."²⁵ One hundred and thirty of these were sworn in the following day at 8 a.m as "special constables". "I did this", declared the Acting Inspector W.A.S. Ray in justification of his move. "in order to place Europeans under some control and in swearing each man I particularly warned him that no shots were to be fired unless orders were given... and that any man who fired without orders would be held responsible".²⁶ The situation was eventually brought under control, despite a small "disturbance" in the canteen later in the evening.

But on Monday at about 6 a.m., fighting resumed. The Daily Mail reported that the "boys who had turned out to work had

²³. Rand Daily Mail, (henceforth Daily Mail), 3 September 1907.

²⁴. LNA. S7/7/40. Pretoria Acting Resident Magistrate. "Report as to Disturbance at the Premier Mine on the 1st and 2nd September. 1907", 6 September 1907.

²⁵. Daily Mail, 3 September 1907.

²⁶. LNA. S7/7/40, Acting Inspector to DNL. 3 September 1907.

rapidly divided into two regiments and had appropriated all pick handles, shovels and sticks in the mine". According to this same newspaper, the Basotho were, "clad in distinctive red blankets". and the Bapedi in "their usual motley dark kaffir dress". By 6.30 a.m. the two groups had again been separated, and the police had positioned themselves between them. However, "the reds were dancing a war dance, and appeared to be thirsting for the fray". At 10 a.m. a few workers were persuaded to resume work which had earlier been suspended, and by 11 a.m. all was normal. Compared to the day before when 19 Africans had been injured by the cuts of the police's bayonets, the casualties of the Monday "fight" were 34 injuries, three of which were serious, as well as one death resulting from a gun fired by one of the special constables. After this, observed the Daily Mail, "the Transvaal natives were more submissive, but the Basutos proper expressed themselves willing to fight the police and afterwards stated that they had been harder used by the latter than their enemies, on which grounds some agitators have suggested sending a petition to the Crown".²⁷

All the Basotho miners then refused to go out night shift, despite the fact that the Bapedi had worked the day shift, and, continued the Daily Mail, "remained in the compound, whence their singing rose like the noise from a huge beehive, changing into a pandemonium of singing and shouting clearly audible all over the village [the nearby white residential area]".²⁸ What the Daily Mail did not report was that Basotho workers were angered by the shooting of two of their compatriots, one of whom lay dying. Some miners were sufficiently upset by this to approach the compound manager and demand that they be released to return home to Lesotho. Indeed, the entire contingent of 600 Basotho who had been on the mine for three months left on Tuesday under police

²⁷. Daily Mail, 4 September 1907.

²⁸. Ibid.

escort.²⁹ The following morning 16 Shangaan, Bapedi and Basotho were then arrested, and taken to Pretoria for trial as "ringleaders". As a result, Bapedi miners turned out for their day shift armed with "every available weapon. but pickhandles and iron rods with bolts at the end were in the majority".³⁰ And when it was the turn of Basotho labourers, only 150 went to work, while some 1 500 "trooped up to the office [of the Manager] and asked to leave the mine as they are unwilling to stay unless they can fight".³¹ The 150 Basotho miners who had gone to work were later returned to the compound, their place being taken by Nyasaland "boys" whose peaceful movement from their compound to the mine nonetheless gave a "scare" to the "ladies" in the white residential area.³² The four Basotho sub-chiefs employed on the mine as "policeboys" tried to intervene but in vain; one of them, George, even hid four Bapedi in his room. It was only when the manager of the mine promised them that they would be allowed to leave at the rate of 400 a week, that the Basotho miners returned to work on Wednesday night. This incident was taken so seriously by the mine that the Assistant compound manager, Mitchell, even went to Lesotho to meet the Paramount Chief.³³

According to the Star, the fight "originated through two natives having a squabble in No.1 Compound over a pot of mealie pap",³⁴ while for the Daily Mail the fight "arose, it appears, from a quarrel between two umfaans [juveniles] as to who should be first to fill his bucket at a tank".³⁵ The two newspapers had the same analysis as to the fundamental cause

²⁹. LNA, S7/7/40, Pretoria Acting Resident Magistrate, "Report as to Disturbance at the Premier Mine on the 1st and 2nd September, 1907". 6 September 1907.

³⁰. Daily Mail, 4 September 1907.

³¹. Ibid.

³². Ibid.

³³. Report of the Proceedings of BNC, 1908; LNA, S7/7/40, Acting Resident Magistrate's "Report as to Disturbance at the Premier Mine on the 1st and 2nd of September, 1907", 6 September 1907.

³⁴. Star, 3 September 1907.

³⁵. Daily Mail, 3 September 1907.

of the conflict, however. "Some months ago", noted the Daily Mail, "the British Basuto were in a large minority, but lately their numbers have been materially augmented":³⁶ they had, said the Star, "lately flocked in to the mine in increasing numbers".³⁷ Testimony given before the Acting Magistrate of Pretoria supported the claim that the "fight" was sparked off by a squabble between a Mosotho and a Mopedi at the water tap, but the magistrate realised that much more was at stake. He summed up his findings as follows: "Shortly the true cause of the disturbance in the first instance appears to have been tribal feeling coupled with labour jealousy arising out of competition over piece work", while at the same time the Basotho also "consider themselves a superior race on the ground that they have never been conquered and are better educated than the others".³⁸

"Getting The Boys to Turn out to Work at Midnight"

The Daily Mail of Sunday 31st of May 1910 reported a "riot" at the Premier Mine which had led to African workers stoning mine officials and the summoning to the scene of the police. The "disturbance" was caused by the mine officials' attempt "to get the boys to turn out to work at [Sunday] midnight". This order had been disobeyed, and "the natives by way of showing their disapproval commenced to create the disturbance". Soon afterwards "there developed preliminaries to a faction fight between the British and Transvaal Basutos [Bapedi]".³⁹ Tension later subsided and everyone went back to work. However, there were "fresh troubles" the following day, because of a "fight" between the "British Basuto" and the "Transvaal Basuto". Once again, work came to a complete standstill. Matters escalated after an attempt by the

³⁶. Ibid., 4 September 1907.

³⁷. Star, 3 September 1907.

³⁸. LNA, S7/7/40, Acting Resident Magistrate's "Report as to Disturbance at the Premier Mine on the 1st and 2nd of September, 1907". 6 September 1907.

³⁹. Daily Mail, 31 May 1910.

fighting workers to break through a police barrier, and in the ensuing carnage, eight Africans lost their lives and 40 were injured. On Tuesday 150 police reinforcements arrived, but by then all was quiet. Mine officials toyed with the idea that the "Moshesh boys" should do an extra afternoon or night shift, but "the angry aspect of the crowd induced the management to think better of their proposition". Later at night (at 10 p.m.) 30 members of the Premier Rifle Club⁴⁰ were sworn in as "special constables", and on Wednesday morning, the Bapedi turned out for their shift at 5 a.m., still armed with pickhandles and "heavy sticks", but under police guard, and the watchful gaze of "heavy-eyed civilians" and "other persons". Shangaan workers later followed suit once they had been promised that the Basotho would not be allowed out of their compound while they were on duty. Despite the fact that 12 Bapedi and Basotho "ringleaders" were arrested later that same day, all the Basotho miners went night shift.⁴¹

The Daily Mail attributed the "riot" to the fact that on the day of the funeral of King Edward VII, mine officials had released the workers four hours before the end of the shift, but the miners took this to be a "concession without loss of pay". As it happened, the only group affected by this were the "Moshesh boys" who were quick to revolt "against the management's inconsistency and refused to work".⁴² And, declared the newspaper, "the tribal instinct was uppermost when they [other groups] saw [Moshesh] boys refusing to work, and what at first was a mere local trouble developed into faction trouble between the various groups".⁴³ Compared to the 1907 "disturbance" which had cost the mine "several

⁴⁰. This Club. the 25 November 1913 Daily Mail was to comment, "are a very strong corps, most of the white workers on the mine belong to it. It contains, too, a number of expert shots".

⁴¹. Daily Mail, 3 June 1910.

⁴². Ibid., 1 June 1910.

⁴³. Ibid., 3 June 1910.

thousand pounds", the 1910 "riot" was even more expensive, costing the company L10 000 each day it lasted.⁴⁴

The Basutoland National Council discussed this issue during its 1910 sitting, and blamed the cause of the "fight" on the employment of Zulu "policeboys" over Basotho workers. The chiefs communicated their protest to the Government Native Labour Bureau, and an investigation was conducted. The Acting Director of Native Labour, Edward Wilson, blamed the "disturbance" on the Basotho's "warlike propensities and arrogant demeanour", but argued that "these troubles can hardly be said to be of frequent occurrence" since Basotho workers, despite their increasing number on the Rand and their concentration at the Premier Mine, had only been involved in two "fights" (in 1907 and 1910) at the latter mine and "two insignificant 'emeutes' on the Reef". As far as the employment of the Basotho as mine police was concerned, he referred to the inquiry conducted by Ernest Mabile after the 1907 "disturbance", and which had shown that young Basotho chiefs were already employed in such positions but that they "were too irresponsible", meaning that they were not effective in their control of Basotho workers on the mine.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, chiefs, supported by the High Commissioner, suggested that a "Mosotho of high rank" be employed as an induna for the Basotho, and that if such a scheme worked on the Premier, it should be extended to other mines.⁴⁶

The inquiry conducted by Boyse in 1911 on behalf of the Basutoland government, showed that the Premier Mine was losing popularity among the Basotho. Their numbers had dropped from 4 000 in June 1910 to about 2 000 in July 1911. Workers complained to Boyse that they spent most of their pay on the mine as they had to purchase food from the mine stores and cook for themselves. The mine had a butcher, as well as meal.

⁴⁴. Ibid.

⁴⁵. SAB, SNA 465, NA 1578/10, Acting Assistant DNL to SNA, 7 June 1910. The Bulletin de la Mission, 1907, pp.320-22. refers to Mabile's visit of the Premier Mine.

⁴⁶. SAB, SNA 465, NA 1578/10, SNA to DNL, 18 May 1910.

general goods, and coffee shops where the workers could buy "well cooked meat, excellent white bread, cakes, coffee, sausages, sardines, sweets, cigarettes, and numerous other tempting articles".⁴⁷ All the profit from these shops went to the mine. Another problem that Boyse noted was the high mortality rate at the mine among African workers principally due to pneumonia, the high incidence of which he attributed to the fact that workers had to sleep on cement floors in the compounds.

The NAD Inspector for Rayton strongly disagreed. He dismissed Boyse's claims, arguing instead that Basotho workers were attracted to the gold mines because of improving working conditions there, rather than because of anything wrong at the Premier. The Inspector insisted that the real reason Basotho workers were leaving was because their

pride has been greatly wounded by the loss of prestige which they suffered as a result of the riot at the Premier Mine in June, 1910... In the latter connection it is significant that a gradual decrease in their [Basotho] numbers has taken place since that date. They then found themselves pitted against all the other tribes combined and their pride was consequently humbled. They do not themselves refer to their humiliation at that time but I am convinced that they keenly appreciate it... .

He also rejected the miners' grievance over company stores, on the dubious grounds that workers constituted themselves into "'messes' of eight or more" for cooking arrangements. And as for the high mortality rate, he argued that the management was aware of the problem caused by sleeping on the floor, "but the question has hitherto however always been shelved on account of the great cost of erecting bunks throughout the compounds".⁴⁸

In all of this, neither the question of the workers' forfeited pay, nor the point that the actual "fight" was caused by the

⁴⁷. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, Boyse's report to RC, October 1911 (undated).

⁴⁸. Ibid., NAD Inspector (Rayton) to DNL, 2 November 1911.

order that night shift workers, mostly Basotho, turn out on a Sunday, were considered. Basotho chiefs, for their part, were concerned primarily with securing supervisory positions on the mine for themselves and their sons. What the workers thought or felt, or how they lived, was not an issue.

"The Natives, Shangaan and Moshesh, were now United in a Looting Game".

The Daily Mail of 25 November 1913 reported the outbreak of another "disturbance" at the Premier on Sunday some time after 4 p.m.. A Shangaan and a "Moshesh" were caught drinking and gambling at No.6 Compound and were arrested by the white Head Guard with the help of Shangaan "policeboys". A dispute arose between one of the "policeboys" and the "Moshesh", leading to the Shangaan assaulting the Mosotho worker. Both of them were then taken by the Head Guard and locked up in the "stocks", the compound detention rooms, but other "Moshesh boys" approached the compound manager and demanded that the "policeboy" be handed over to them. The compound manager refused and Basotho miners began looting the Shangaan dormitories, burning and destroying their belongings. By 7 p.m. all was quiet, but things began to change again after 8 p.m. with "stone-throwing" at No.6, the offices and windows of the compound being damaged.⁴⁹

By this time, a small contingent of police, led by a Sergeant McLean, had arrived, and, according to the Daily Mail, were confronted by a scene in which "the Shangaans and about 500 Moshesh boys, who also share their compound, were lining up and preparing for a faction fight". McLean and his five constables approached the warring "factions", but "the natives, however, charged them with sticks and stones, and in self-defence the order was given to fire a volley, which resulted in one native being killed and one injured".⁵⁰ A

⁴⁹. Daily Mail, 25 May 1913.

⁵⁰. Ibid.

later Daily Mail report of the same incident revealed that "it was not until the word went around that the natives intended breaking out of the Compound, attacking white employees and looting their houses that Sergeant McLean and his five men determined on drastic measures, and the Sergeant gave orders to shoot". In the later report of the incident, the number involved had grown from some 500 to between 3 000 and 5 000 Africans: "the use of firearms", it was concluded, "brought the natives quickly to their senses".⁵¹

But the fight was far from over. More "trouble" broke out at No.1 Compound. Basotho workers began looting the mine store there while McLean was occupied at No.6. It held a safe containing L800 which the Basotho tried to open using the "most scientific manner", not excluding "heavy hammers" and chisels. "Some [white] mine employees", continued the Daily Mail, "came to reinforce the police" who belatedly made their way to the scene, and "a volley fired over the heads of the safe wreckers dispersed them". By then, however, other African miners were looting the butchery, the coffee shop and the cook-house, taking stock amounting to L3 000. "The natives, Shangaan and Moshesh", exclaimed the Daily Mail, "were now united in the looting game". When the police finally appeared, they were greeted with "a fusillade of stones [which] was kept up on the compound offices, the police and the guard being obliged to take shelter in the Compound Manager's office", and a "cry was raised to break out and attack the whites in the township". It was at this time that "a volley was fired into the [looting] mob", but "the natives paid no attention to this and retaliated". However, "a second volley and a few independent shots scattered them, and it was found that a further two natives had been killed and fifteen wounded, making a total of three killed and sixteen wounded". This shooting "had a sobering effect on the rioters": and when Inspector Lloyd arrived at 1 a.m. with 50 constables from Pretoria armed with rifles and staves, order had been

⁵¹. Ibid. This refers to a later edition in the same day.

restored. Members of the Rifle Club patrolled the streets of Cullinan until Monday morning. The following day the workers went back to work. ⁵²

Lessons from the Premier Mine

It is true that Basotho migrants began, as the Star reported, "flocking" to the Premier Mine around 1907, posing a threat to the "Transvaal Basutos" who were a major source of labour for this mine. More than two thousand Shangaans were later recruited from Mozambique in 1909 following an outbreak of malaria in the Northern Transvaal which had affected the Pedi recruitment. It was from this period that the proportion of Basotho and Shangaan workers on the mine increased at the expense of the Pedi. Moreover, although the Premier Mine remained the single most important employer of Pedi labour until the 1930s,⁵³ the "Transvaal Basutos" could not own satisfy the total labour requirements of the mine. Faced with the problem of securing enough labour, the Premier Mine opened a recruiting agency in the Cape Colony in 1921 but with little positive results. By this time, Basotho workers were in a comfortable majority at the mine; one Mosotho miner who visited it in February 1922 was impressed: "Premier Mine is the mine where Basotho are really in great numbers", where the "leaders of the nation are used to control Basotho miners".⁵⁴ As this remark suggests, the fact that Premier Mine had finally implemented the system of control first put forward in 1910 by Basotho chiefs and the High Commissioner, may go a considerable way towards explaining why serious conflict never occurred at this mine after 1913.

⁵². Ibid.

⁵³. P. Delius, "Sebatakomo: Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.15, no.4, 1989, p.582.

⁵⁴. PDMAR, 1907, p.10, and 1909, p.11; The South African Mining and Engineering Year Book, 1920-21, p.103, and 1921-22, p.30; Daily Mail, 2 June 1910. For the impressed Mosotho, see Umteteli, 4 March 1922.

The September 1907 conflict had started as a fight between a Mosotho and a Mopedi. A subsequent inquiry claimed that the Basotho had been waiting for a fight; 500 dangerous weapons were found hidden in their rooms. As far as the magistrate conducting the inquiry was concerned, the entire episode could be reduced to one of ethnic hatred and jealousy. The newspapers, of course, sensationalised the conflict, emphasising African "savagery". By contrast, a report by the Acting Inspector of the local police force was more thoughtful. In trying to reach the basis of the conflict, the inspector attributed the fighting to two fundamental factors; firstly, that the Basotho undermined the Bapedi, referring to them as the "Mahowa" ("Ma-Aoa"),⁵⁵ meaning low people; and secondly, a wage reduction.⁵⁶

While there is no doubt that the use of derogatory and belittling terms could be a source of conflict among miners - Moodie also noted that the divide between Africans who practised circumcision and those who did not, could result in exchanges culminating in violence⁵⁷ - in this instance the question of wages was crucial. Some weeks before the outbreak of the 1907 conflict, the minimum wage on the mine was reduced from 3s-2s.10d per day to 2s.6d; and from 4d per truck loaded to 3d. This was of particular significance because the Basotho, when initially competing for hegemony and favours on the mine, had once proposed to the management that they be paid 2d per truck, hoping in this way to displace the Bapedi and Shangaan workers largely employed in this contract work. Though the management had declined the offer at the time, Bapedi workers had neither forgotten nor forgiven the earlier incident, and not surprisingly blamed the 1907 wage reduction on the Basotho labourers' earlier "conspiracy". This

⁵⁵. "Aoa" is a Pedi word for "no".

⁵⁶. LNA, S7/7/40, Acting NAD Inspector (Rayton) to DNL, 3 September 1907.

⁵⁷. Circumcision as a rite of passage implied that those who did not undergo it were not yet "men" but "boys". This was so with the Xhosa who belittled the Pondo and Zulu who did not practise this ritual. See especially, Moodie, Going for Gold, p.187.

certainly explains the extraordinary tension between the two groups. Even the magistrate who was otherwise quick to attribute the fight to "jealousy", acknowledged that a contributory cause of the conflict was the struggle to "control" contract work in loading. When all of this is considered, therefore, to simply reduce this conflict to primordial ethnic hatred or stereotypes surely misses the most critical point: the management's use of competition between Bapedi and Basotho to cut down on wages.

The 1910 conflict was caused by the management's attempt to force miners to work on a Sunday. The conflict later developed into a "faction fight" between Basotho and Bapedi. Here again, it is possible that the Bapedi, like the Nyasaland "boys" in 1907, were used as scab labour. Certainly there are plenty of examples of how a strike could end up as a "faction fight" in cases where one ethnic group was used as scabs against another striking group. In 1914, to take only one prominent case, there was a strike by Basotho workers at the Jagersfontein mine over the death of a Mosotho miner. His countrymen were unhappy with the management's explanation of the tragedy, and decided to stop work. When the strike began, however, "the Thembus did not fall in with us [Basotho] and attempted to go to work", testified one Mosotho later, "...the brother of the deceased went to stop them and we all followed, it was here [that] the fight with the Thembu started".⁵⁸ And when "scab" labour was combined with the matter of Sunday work as it was in 1910, the resulting mixture was frequently explosive. The chairman of the Native Grievances Inquiry, H.O. Buckle, noted in his 1913 report that African workers complained bitterly about being forced to work on Sundays.⁵⁹ This day of rest, as Chapter Four showed, gave workers vital space and time in which to deal with the stress and alienation associated with mine work and isolation from home.

⁵⁸. SAB, GG 50/395, 1542, Lintsa's testimony at the inquest held in Mhales Hoek, 15 January 1914.

⁵⁹. Report of the Native Grievances Inquiry, 1913-14, p.64.

The 1913 conflict is best viewed as a culmination of the conflicts that had been taking place at the Premier Mine, and more broadly as part of the labour unrest on the Rand which led to the establishment of the Native Grievances commission of inquiry. Buckle's report is important in that it tried to look at 1913 in relation to previous years, noting that the different ethnic groups "acted absolutely together" on almost all the mines where industrial conflict took place. He was worried that "during the last dozen years, tribal faction fights have markedly decreased"; compared to the past when "inter-tribal jealousies...have rendered it possible, in the last resort, to protect Europeans by utilising one tribe against another". The recent protests, for Buckle, were all the more disturbing because of the growing political mobilisation and consciousness among Africans in the form of increasing "agitation" in the "native press", and the formation of the South African Native Congress.⁶⁰ More than this, the 1913 labour unrest, according to Phil Bonner, was related to the hardships that Africans in most rural areas were undergoing due to a serious drought in the region.⁶¹ In colonial Lesotho, many cattle perished and large quantities of grain had to be imported from South Africa. The attack by Basotho workers on mine stores doubtless reflected not only their complaint that they spent most of their money there, but also mounting pressure to remit funds to their starving families at home.

What these cases show is that analyses of "faction fighting" should not be limited to their immediate causes. A whole number of developments took place on the mines, which, as they accumulated, resulted in actions that could spark off a violent incident.

⁶⁰. *Ibid.*, pp.64-65.

⁶¹. Bonner, "1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike", p.280.

Explaining Faction Fights.

There is no doubt that ethnicity was a factor in many of these "fights". Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane found a strong sense of ethnic consciousness among their informants,⁶² and Stimela Jingoos himself admitted that he "never mixed much with men of other tribes while I was in the compounds, simply because I was afraid of them, not knowing their languages. Each group usually kept pretty much to itself".⁶³ But there was no inherent hatred between different ethnic groups. Tensions were linked to local conditions, such as differences in treatment and the distribution of favours by mine managements, and the numerical balance and strength between ethnic groups in the compounds. Hence "Basutos" could fight against the "Mxosas" at the Koffyfontein Mine in January 1910, yet be in alliance with them against the Zulu and Swazi in December of the same year at the Canson Gold Mine.⁶⁴

The "celebration", if not reification of ethnicity by Gordon and a number of other historians in recent years, arguably has led to the neglect of other forms of relationships that kept workers together in the compounds. Besides home-boy and work-mate networks, mine workers in the compounds grouped themselves in church groups and sporting clubs as shown in Chapters Four and Five. Divisions within church groups were more denominational than ethnic, and the organisation of sports clubs was informed more by skill, interest and talent, rather than ethnic affiliation. More than this, violent conflicts took place in the compounds among Christian converts, and between supporters of different sporting clubs, not to mention gambling as a further source of violence. Nor was brutality against fellow relatives and home-boys uncommon: the Sunday Times reported in December 1908 that one Shangaan worker stabbed his own brother on Christmas Day at the

⁶². Guy and Thabane, "Basotho Miners", pp.242-43.

⁶³. Jingoos, A Chief is a Chief, p.66.

⁶⁴. VAB, CO 620, 2385/1, Detached Assistant Resident Magisistrate (Koffyfontein) report on the Koffyfontein "disturbance", 28 January 1910; Union of South Africa, Native Affairs Annual Report, 1910.

Robinson Central Deep, and that another Shangaan stabbed a fellow Shangaan "whom he had asked for a Christmas box [present]" at the Langlaagte Deep.⁶⁵

Certainly Stimela Jingoos noted that "it was seldom, in the compounds, that one found the Basotho on good terms with one another. One would find, in a room housing thirty to fifty Basotho, men from several chiefdoms, and they brought their quarrels with them from their homes, quarrels that usually started because of disagreements between their chiefs".⁶⁶ And even Moodie, for all of his insistence elsewhere that "faction fighting" represented ritualised violence, acknowledges the shortcomings of relying solely on ethnicity to analyse "faction fights".⁶⁷ The Basotho were not an homogenous group. Besides those who lived in Herschel and Matatiele, who also saw themselves as Basotho, there were others in Quthing and Butha Buthe who spoke Nguni-related languages. More than one of my informants associated themselves with the Xhosa, singing their songs with them on the trains way to the mines. In such cases, their families had Xhosa ancestry and still spoke the language.⁶⁸

Stones and sticks were also used by the Africans workers during "faction fighting" not because of some herdboyc influence, but because of their being regarded as deadly weapons.⁶⁹ One of the informants of Guy and Thabane exclaimed: "No, a white man cannot do harmful things to me - not when I am surrounded by so many stones".⁷⁰ It was also seen how miners at the Premier Mine in 1913 forced the mine guards to the compound manager's office with a volley of

⁶⁵. Sunday Times, 27 December 1908.

⁶⁶. Jingoos, A Chief is a Chief, p.66.

⁶⁷. Moodie, Going for Gold, pp.182-83.

⁶⁸. For example, interview with Michael Mokenela, born 1908: he first went to the mines in 1925.

⁶⁹. Other dangerous weapons were also used: an investigation in Mafeteng in February 1913 found 46 Basotho migrants returning from the Premier Mine and the East Rand Proprietary Mines with mine explosives in their possession. See LNA, S7/7/67, SNA to GS, 18 February 1913.

⁷⁰. Guy and Thabane, "Basotho Miners", p.253.

stones. A similar incident took place at the City and Suburban in July of the same year. when the African workers, according to Buckle, "hunted the compound manager out of the compound with stones". injuring other mine officials. The police were called in but the miners stood against them with stones: "the resistance was only quelled by calling in a company of soldiers, whose fixed bayonets appeared to cow the natives and who succeeded in arresting the leaders in each compound".⁷¹

Moreover. African workers had no particular attachment to stones and sticks. The use of more dangerous weapons was common as the case of the Premier demonstrated. And instead of eliminating the use of "dangerous weapons" as Harries suggests, the passing of the Prevention of Crime Ordinance led to an increase in the use of knives in the mine compounds as this weapon was easy to hide and handle. After a knife-stabbing incident in one compound in June 1911, one Mosotho wrote: "People. knives are finishing people here in Johannesburg, because the carrying of sticks is now prohibited".⁷² One French missionary lamented in 1929 that one of their catechumens was in prison for stabbing one of his room-mates. The use of knives in the compounds became serious in the 1930s to such an extent that the Randfontein municipality launched the "Boxing Gloves Instead of Knives" campaign in March 1937 in its African township.⁷³

A significant contributory factor in the incidence of violence on the mines was the organisation of white miners into Rifle Clubs. As in other settler societies in the region, white workers were used as vigilantes and "special constables" during clashes between the mine managements and African

⁷¹. Native Grievances Inquiry, p.64.

⁷². Leselinyana, 17 June 1911. See also SAB, GG 50/254, 1540. "Regulation as to the Sale and Possession of Dangerous Weapons", 25 July 1906.

⁷³. Daily Mail, 31 March 1937; JME, 1929, p.227.

workers.⁷⁴ This practice appears to have been most common in more isolated small towns like Cullinan. The case of the Premier Mine discussed above, showed that after the 1907 "fight" white miners were armed and given shooting lessons under the auspices of the Rifle Club, the members of which patrolled the white residential area and supplied "special constables" during emergencies. Certainly the Acting Magistrate of Pretoria did not think that there was any danger to the whites in the town, and refused to support a call for an increase in the size of the Cullinan police force, because he was confident that the "position could be made absolutely safe by enlisting the Mine Guards as special constables and keeping a stand of arms for their use in case of emergency".⁷⁵ A "faction fight" between Xhosa and Basotho workers at the Koffyfontein Mine in January 1910 led the Assistant Magistrate there to "enrol a number of armed volunteers to guard the town"; he later asked for "about thirty rifles [to] be placed at my disposal for use in such an emergency. These rifles might be kept at the gaol or in the magazine and issued if required to responsible persons".⁷⁶

The mine and NAD officials were, moreover, concerned about the attitude of African workers during "faction fighting". Buckle's report and reports of the Premier Mine 1907, 1910 and 1913 "riots" had special sections dealing with this subject. The Rayton NAD Inspector commented in March 1914 that: "Recent

⁷⁴. Writing on Northern Rhodesian settler society, C. Luchembe, observed: "...the white settler population as a whole was considered as a force that could easily be mobilised and armed. As early as 1903, the Kaloma Rifle Club Service was formed to 'train all able-bodied men in the Civil Service at Kalomo in the use of firearms, and it was the rule of the Club that services of all members be offered to the Government in the event of a native uprising'; see his "Ethnic Stereotypes, violence and labour in early colonial Zambia, 1889-1924", in Chipungu, (ed.), Guardians in their Time, p.33. See also van Onselen, Chibaro, p.150; and Phimister, Wangi Kolia, p.135.

⁷⁵. SAB, S3/5/17/4, Magistrate to Acting Attorney-General, 27 December 1913.

⁷⁶. VAB, CO 620, 2385/1, Under Colonial Secretary to Detached Assistant Resident Magistrate (Koffyfontein), 11 February 1910.

events [at the Premier Mine] would seem to indicate the fact that the British Basuto is ever ready to come to open revolt on the slightest provocation, whether imaginary or otherwise, and on such occasions all attempts made by the Europeans in authority to reason with them are met with jeers and insults, thus it would appear that the prevailing thought in their minds at such times is not to have their grievances amicably settled but that the opportunity is looked upon as a favourable one for them to openly show their utter disregard for all authority or discipline".⁷⁷ Hence the increased use of police violence was justified as "necessary".⁷⁸ And the role of the police was not that restrained, as guns were, at least during the period under review, frequently used. Control over the use of dangerous weapons was also made difficult by the arming of white civilians and miners in handling conflicts on the mines.

The attitude of Basotho workers themselves was also another factor contributing to their involvement in "faction fighting". Basotho were concerned not to be associated with South Africa's African groups. Boyse noted after his 1911 visit of the Rand compounds that though there were showers in many of those compounds, "the Basuto, as they object to exposing their persons before other tribes, do not avail themselves of this mode of washing but prefer to wash from buckets".⁷⁹

Linked to this was the Basotho's refusal to be incorporated in the Union of South Africa (a delegation even going to London in 1908). Basotho, at least up to 1910, never stopped threatening to retake their land conquered by the Orange Free

77. SAB, GG 50/427, 50/437, NAD Inspector (Rayton) to DNL, 16 March 1914.

78. The Magistrate of Pretoria concluded his inquiry: "In my opinion the action taken by Sergeant Maclean was necessary in the protection of life and property and was therefore justified". See LNA, S3/5/17/4, Magistrate to Acting Attorney-General, 27 December 1913.

79. SAB, NTS 2092, 216/280, Boyse's report to RC, October 1911 (undated).

State in the mid-1860s. After the walkout of the Basotho at the Vereeniging Estate in 1901, the Inspector of the Mines reported that "these Natives retort that they are all armed in Basuto Land and although we have taken the arms from Boers, they the Basutues are fully armed and intend having part of the country back again".⁸⁰ The Sunday Times of September 1906 was concerned about the pride the Basotho had in that they were never conquered by whites, and that "it is a Basuto dream to some day seize the mines at Kimberley and exploit them in the interest of the nation".⁸¹ According to Guy and Thabane, being a Mosotho for some of their informants meant "coming from a country which resisted the attacks of the Boers, and which had not been incorporated into the Union of South Africa. Of coming from a British colony, and therefore with a history very different from that of black South Africa".⁸²

This Basotho nationalist pride led to the problem of boitsoaro (conduct) which was also linked to the koata strategy that Basotho developed to deal with the experience of migrancy. Complaints about the boitsoaro of Basotho migrants appeared at the same time with the outcry against likoata in the trains.⁸³ One Mosotho wrote to Leselinyana in 1912 about the conversation he overheard between a Mosotho and other groups at the Koffyfontein mine. When asked whether they were also rude and abusive at home, the Mosotho responded: "Even when you see us like this, when you accompany us to our home, you will be surprised that when we cross the Caledon [River], entering Lesotho, all this that you see here remains behind where we come from, and we conduct ourselves like Basotho, obeying the law".⁸⁴

⁸⁰. SAB, SNA 1, NA (Pret) 68/01, Inspector of Mines (Germiston) to Chief Inspector of Mines, 14 September 1901.

⁸¹. Sunday Times, 23 September 1906.

⁸². Guy and Thabane, "Basotho Miners". p.242.

⁸³. See Chapter Two and Appendix II.

⁸⁴. Leselinyana, 11 July 1912.

The concern with boitsosaro of Basotho on the mines also extended to Kimberley. In 1926, one Mosotho complained to Leselinyana about this, making warnings that the Paramount Chief was to repeat in his 1936 letter: that Basotho were very abusive, troublesome, and always on the look-out for a fight, and that he was worried that this was not going to affect their recruitment for mine work. After one "fight" in Kimberley in 1936, the local Magistrate commented during the inquiry that if he had powers he would recommend the limiting of the number of Basotho recruited for mine work. This image and notoriety, compounded with the presence of matekatse, affected the participation of Basotho in justifiable strike action. When the Xhosa attacked the mine cook and police over food on one mine, Basotho stood aloof, making sure that it was noted that they were not part of the "fight".⁸⁵

There is a need, therefore, to distinguish a "riot" from a "faction fight" or "disturbance". These words, though sometimes used interchangeably, suggested some degree of difference in the incidents concerned. There were fights that resulted from beer-drinking sessions; this was more so before the prohibition of the sale of liquor to Africans in 1896 and the erection of well-guarded compounds. The arrival of matekatse in the 1920s, the Basotho diaspora of the 1930s and bokholoa, introduced new elements to the nature of these fights. Many of these fights came to originate from the locations, sometimes having been caused by a quarrel over matekatse. Basotho also saw the locations as "their" place, contesting this space with other compounded miners and preventing them from interacting with "their" matekatse.⁸⁶ The emergence of Basotho gangs, especially the "Marashea", in

⁸⁵. Leselinyana, 24 September 1926: 1 May 1935; 9 July 1936; 1 November 1939.

⁸⁶. P. Bonner, "Backs to the Fence: Law, Liquor, and the Search for Social Control in an East Rand Town, 1929-1942", in J. Crush, and C. Ambler, (eds.), Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa, (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1992), pp.286-87.

the 1940s, finally established "faction fights" as a tolerable part of the Basotho migrant culture and experience.²⁷

Other fights resulted from sectarian interests and competition, as when "new" ethnic groups arrived en masse on the mine. There were also fights that resulted from complaints against boss-boys, food, shifts, white violence, and so forth. The management also manipulated ethnic stereotypes to concentrate certain groups in certain jobs - like Basotho in lashing and the Shangaan in drilling; and changes in this division of labour could provoke conflict between the groups concerned.

But these "riots" were easily suppressed, the leaders taken away for trial and the workers resuming their work. The common charge for the leaders was "public violence"; in February 1936, 54 Basotho were arrested for their role in the stoning of the offices of No.2 Compound at the Brakpan Mine, and two of them, described as "ringleaders", were sentenced to three months with hard labour. However, there were a few instances where these "riots" led to victories for the workers, although the "troubles" of 1913 led to some improvements in the conditions in the compounds following Buckle's recommendations.²⁸

Conclusion

"Faction fighting" was not a form of sport or recreation; and our understanding of this phenomenon should not be restricted

²⁷. Basotho gangs came to be referred to as "liakhela"; and this word is used interchangeably to refer to those who participate in "faction fights". This has been one of the subjects that has interested Basotho novelists; see, for example, S.N. Majara, Liakhela, (Mazenod Book Centre, Lesotho, 1972).

²⁸. Daily Mail, 29 February 1936; Bonner, "1920 Black Mineworkers", p.275, refers to some of the victories of the 1913 strikes.

to ethnicity. Any analysis of "faction fighting" on the mines should go beyond the reification of ethnicity and consider racial and class struggles that were and continue to be an important factor on the mines. "Faction fights" were a reflection of the low level of the development of class consciousness and solidarity among the African miners largely due to the migrant labour system, and were linked to conflicting survival strategies employed by different African groups on the mines. "Faction fights" were also linked to the control-strategy used by the management (segregating the workers, distributing favours and making appointments, on the basis of ethnicity) to ensure the docility and stability of labour.

This perspective allows one to explain why before the 1930s - with the exception of 1913 and 1920 - African workers rarely focused their attacks on the structures of power on the mines. These workers would attack the "native" police or cooks, instead of those who were responsible for the repression and the unpalatable food in the compounds.

The case of the Premier Mine has also shown the complex context surrounding particular "faction fights". The active role of the police; the arming of white miners, and the ready employment of rifles in dealing with "rioters"; concern with confining the "disturbance" to the mine to prevent it from spreading to the white community; and recourse to the term "faction fighting" as an excuse to avoid addressing the grievances of the workers, all were factors common to the 1907, 1910 and 1913 "faction fights" on that mine.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISEASES, BEERSHOPS AND BROTHELS.

It is mainly since the discovery of the diamond fields that these baneful effects of contact with the Europeans have made themselves felt with the Basuto... It is in this environment that the youth of the whole of this part of Africa and more especially thousands of Basuto, have sought to initiate themselves to the ways and customs of civilized existence. At first, they were attracted to it by the lure of very high wages; then it became the fashion, the vogue became general...It is thence that a large number of them have brought back habits of theft, the taste of brandy and, quite recently, that smallpox which has caused so many deaths in this country. And I make no mention of yet more hideous diseases, the names of which were as yet unknown to the Basuto a few years ago. - Louis Samuel Duvoisin, 1885.⁸⁹

The regular movement of thousands of Basotho men between their homes and South Africa's labour centres, together with the economic decline of Basutoland itself, transformed many aspects of Basotho society. Not least of these changes were hitherto unknown diseases and epidemics brought back by returning migrants and spread to children, wives and relatives. Moreover, the position of Basotho women also changed. As shown in Chapter One, the prolonged absence of Basotho men to the mines affected the agricultural division of

⁸⁹. R.C. Germond, (ed.) Chronicles of Basutoland: A running commentary on the events of the years 1830-1902 by the French protestant missionaries in Southern Africa, (Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1967), p.541.

labour and the labour process itself. The workload of women increased as they had to undertake tasks in the agricultural cycle which were formerly performed by men. It was also in this context that homesteads headed by women emerged as a result of husbands and sons abandoning their families to opt for bokholoa. In response to the prolonged absence of their men and the collapse of the rural economy, many Basotho women resorted to various survival strategies which included beer-brewing and prostitution. This chapter, by focusing on diseases, commercial beer-brewing and sex in Lesotho, will try to show how profound were the effects of labour migrancy on Basutoland and its people.

I

DISEASES AND EPIDEMICS.

Epidemics

Among the major health challenges during the first few years of British rule in Lesotho were viral epidemics and diseases which flourish under poor sanitation conditions. By the 1920s and 1930s they in turn had been replaced by mine occupational diseases. To contextualise the study of this transition, some understanding of the health system and sanitation conditions in colonial Lesotho during this time is necessary.

The development of the modern health system in Lesotho went through three phases. In the pre-colonial period, medical services were provided by Basotho healers. The first European medical doctor arrived in 1844 and a second one came in 1864. Both were missionaries who extended their duties to include medical work. Following British intervention in 1868, and latterly Cape Colony rule from 1871, a colonial medical officer was appointed for Maseru and another one for Leribe in 1875. But the concern of the colonial medical officers was with the police and other colonial officials. When Britain took over again in 1884 after the civil war, there was only

one medical officer operating in Maseru, although a French missionary, Dr Casalis, was working in the south. The British authorities introduced a new health system, appointing medical officers for each district and establishing medical dispensaries. By 1893 there were five government medical officers in the country. In 1894 the system was reorganised with the appointment of a Principal Medical Officer who was stationed in Maseru. The first modern hospital was opened in 1902 immediately after the South African War, and by 1923 four hospitals were in operation. The passage of the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Proclamation in 1921, both authorised private medical practice and recognised Basotho healers. In 1935, each district had its own hospital, by which time there were 19 medical officers and two private doctors servicing the country.⁹⁰

But while elements of the health service increased in number over the same period, sanitation conditions actually deteriorated. Broadly speaking, this was a consequence of overpopulation; internal migration to government Camps, soon to become towns; the impact of labour migrancy; and last but not least, government negligence. Although pipes were used to draw water from outlying springs to central reservoirs supplying white households in the Camps, Basotho living in these towns or in villages had to fetch their own water from streams. As the number of people grew, so more and more people settled next to the streams themselves. Not surprisingly, this affected the cleanliness of the water. Indeed enteric fever invariably attacked villages during the rainy months of February, March and April. It was not until the late 1920s that the government began replacing the "pit" system in the

⁹⁰. Paragraph based on N.M. Macfarlene, A Record of Medical Work and of the Medical Service in Basutoland. (Courant P. and P. Company, Ladybrand, 1934); idem, "Some Observations on 28 Years' Medical Practice in an African Native Territory", South African Medical Record, vol.21, no.21, 1923; J.M. Varel, Traditional Medicine in Lesotho: A study in perspectives of its integration into primary health care with emphasis on management of nemopsychiatric disorders. (A.N. Research Programme, Antwerp, 1985).

Camps with the bucket system for sewage disposal, and started digging "communal pit latrines" for Basotho townspeople. But the problem of flies and the generally filthy state of these communal latrines discouraged many people from using them. Instead, they continued to resort to the fields, as was the practice in villages. The situation was so bad that not even Maseru train station had latrine facilities.⁹¹

There were also butcheries, bakeries and "eating houses" dotted about the Camps to service migrant workers and other Basotho townsfolk. Each Camp had three or four such establishments by the mid-1930s.⁹² But, reported the 1936 Medical and Sanitary Report, "most of these... [establishments] would fall short of the standard required in European townships".⁹³ The minimum health requirements referred to were cleanliness and the use of fly-proof compartments for meat in butcheries. In fact, concern over flies led to the installation of fly-traps in 1937 in some government establishments in Maseru, reducing flies by 75 percent in surrounding neighbourhoods. "Unfortunately", it was reported, "the cost of erecting 'Barber' traps is too high for universal use among the native peasants".⁹⁴ A description of one neighbourhood in Mhales Hoek in 1927 graphically described the extent of the menace:

Opposite the [main] road [to Quthing] is a donga populated by trees and this is used by the native community as a sewage system and at times an awful stench can be smelt.

On the left is a native recruiting office and at the back a native eating house, living rooms and bakery. Behind these are unfinished stables but used now and again for horses. The premises are in a filthy condition.

There are an abundance of flies especially in the so-called bakery and native eating house where porridge and bones and meat are freely left uncovered for flies.⁹⁵

⁹¹. Basutoland, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, (henceforth AMSR), 1928.

⁹². Ibid., 1928: 1935; 1936; 1937.

⁹³. Ibid., 1936, p.14.

⁹⁴. Ibid., 1937, p.13.

⁹⁵. LNA. S3/26/3/2, AC (Mafeteng) to GS, 12 January 1927.

These were places that were frequented by migrant workers and prostitutes.

The first serious epidemic during British rule was an outbreak of smallpox in 1883. The epidemic attacked Kolo near Morija in December 1883, and was introduced by a migrant returning from Kimberley where smallpox was rife. A second outbreak occurred in Molomo, also near Morija, and was again due to migrants returning from Kimberley. From January 1884 onwards, the epidemic began spreading to the north, and by March was creating havoc in the Berea district where the effects of the civil war had been particularly hard felt.⁹⁶

As the epidemic was well underway before the arrival of the first British Resident Commissioner, vaccination of the affected population was carried out by the French missionary, Dr Casalis. The appointment of Dr Reed as the medical officer for Maseru after the arrival of Colonel Clark in March, laid the basis for government intervention in the crisis.⁹⁷ But the overwhelming majority of Basotho, with the memory of their recent war against the Cape Colony still fresh in their minds, saw vaccination as a white plot against the people. "Some malicious persons", wrote Dr Casalis, "also preach that under the pretext of preventive inoculation against smallpox, white doctors want nothing but to put the germs of the cowardice of Europeans under the epidermis of the blacks. Even on our [mission] stations we find individuals who prefer to go to scarify themselves... and rub themselves with some black substance...".⁹⁸ In some cases Dr Reed was ambushed, and prevented from entering villages to carry out vaccinations. Many corpses were left unattended as villagers

⁹⁶. Friend, 10 January 1884.

⁹⁷. South African Library, (SAL), APEMS. Mf. no.334, Dr Casalis to Director of PEMS, 9 February 1884; Dr Casalis to Director of PEMS, 15 March 1884.

⁹⁸. Ibid., Dr Casalis to Director of PEMS, 9 February 1884.

were afraid of becoming infected.⁹⁹ The epidemic lasted until 1886.

But the regular arrival of returning migrants made control of the smallpox outbreak very difficult. The medical officer of Leribe conceded in 1893 after referring to the vaccination campaign that was taking place: "But the constant arrival of natives from Johannesburg is an ever-present source of danger".¹⁰⁰ Hence Dr Casalis was to rejoice during the 1884 outbreak: "We understand that the epidemic is in decline in Kimberley; this is not bad luck because it is that place which constantly send us the newly contaminated".¹⁰¹

Another smallpox outbreak occurred in 1893, however. It was introduced by migrants returning from the Rand, where smallpox had been a problem since the previous year. The epidemic entered through Leribe, and spread to Berea and Maseru, reaching the southern districts in 1894 and Qachas Nek a year later. This time, the response of most Basotho to vaccination was very different, partly because migrants leaving the country had been required to carry vaccination certificates in addition to their passes. By 1896 two-thirds of the population had been vaccinated, and the epidemic began to disappear in the course of 1897. However, another outbreak occurred on the Rand in June 1898, and spread to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. By September the deadly epidemic was again in the northern part of colonial Lesotho, putting doctors back to hectic work. In one three-day period alone, c.2000 people were vaccinated. Although small-scale outbreaks of smallpox occurred between 1910 and 1915, and again between 1921 and 1933, there were no further epidemics of the disease.¹⁰²

⁹⁹. Ibid.: Friend, 17 January 1884; 31 January 1884; 7 February 1884; "Further Correspondence Respecting the Cape Colony and Adjacent Territories, 1884-85".

¹⁰⁰. CAR, 1893-94, p.20.

¹⁰¹. SAL, APEMS. Mf. no.334. Dr Casalis to Director of PEMS, 9 February 1884.

¹⁰². CAR, 1890-1933; Friend, 24 June 1898; 23 September 1898; 27 September 1898.

Smallpox attacks normally led to the taking of quarantine measures and the establishment of fumigation centres in the Orange Free State border towns. Some of the routes normally used by migrants to employment centres were also closed. Vaccination certificates replaced passes as the most important travel documents. But as migrants were medically re-examined arrival at WNLA compounds on the Witwatersrand, many of them were vaccinated more than once regardless of whether they had vaccination certificates. Labour recruiters and Basutoland officials, at the receiving end of complaints from Basotho recruits who were victims of double vaccinations that often led to pain and swelling, attempted to discourage the practice as it tended to make people lose confidence in the vaccinations carried out in Basutoland.¹⁰³

Other serious epidemic diseases made their presence felt in colonial Lesotho after the turn of the century. The first of these was Bubonic Plague which entered South Africa in early 1901, finally reaching the Orange Free State in February 1916 and colonial Lesotho itself early in 1917. A "detention camp" was then erected in Maseru for returning migrants. A second epidemic to hit the country arrived in August 1917 in the form of a louse-borne typhus fever which attacked Basutoland from the Cape Colony through Quthing, Mohales Hoek, and Qachas Nek. The epidemic reached Teyateyaneng in the north in 1920-21, and remained in the country until 1924. The disease was virulent, decimating 50 percent of the people in some villages. Its effects were compounded by the Spanish "Flu" pandemic which entered the country in October 1918 and caused havoc until it began to wane in December. During this period, labour recruitment by the Chamber of Mines was suspended.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³. Friend, 7 February 1884; VAB, CO 170. 3419/03, Col. Sec. (ORC) telegram to GS, 8 May 1903; LNA, S7/7/64, SNA to GS, 20 August 1920; Leselinyana, 19 September 1912.

¹⁰⁴. S. Marks, and N. Anderson, "Typhus and social control in South Africa, 1917-50", in R. Macleod, and M. Lewis, (eds.), Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion, (Routledge, London, 1988); CMAR, 1918; CAR, 1917-18; H. Phillips. "South Africa's Worst Demographic Disaster: The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918", South African Historical

Clearly, the movement of Basotho men back and forwards between their country and South Africa made colonial Lesotho particularly vulnerable to epidemics that broke out on the mines and other labour centres.

The relative decline in colonial Lesotho of viral epidemics and diseases that flourished under poor sanitation conditions was accompanied by an increase in cases of TB and syphilis. From 1906 the Basutoland government identified the latter two diseases as the colony's most serious health challenges.

Venereal Diseases

Epidemics, though virulent, appeared but lost much of their force once people had been vaccinated, or their immune system had adjusted. This was not the case, however, with venereal diseases. These diseases continued to be a serious problem in Basutoland until after the Second World War when effective medication was introduced. Venereal syphilis and gonorrhoea, first introduced with white settlement, were intimately linked to labour migration, and were especially prevalent on the diamond and gold mines.¹⁰⁵

Venereal syphilis is sexually transmitted and has three stages; namely, the primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary stage, appearing some 21 days after the infection, is identified by the appearance of a hard chancre at the point of the infection which later forms an ulcer. In endemic syphilis there is no chancre; nor is it sexually transmitted. The symptoms of the secondary stage, which appear some two months

Journal, vol.20, 1988; idem. "The Local State and Public Health Reform in South Africa: Bloemfontein and the Consequences of the Spanish "Flu" Epidemic of 1918", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.13, no.2, 1987.

¹⁰⁵. S.L. Kark, "The Social Pathology of Syphilis in Africans", South African Medical Journal, vol.23, 1949; K. Jochelson. "Tracking down the Treponema: Patterns of Syphilis in South Africa, 1880-1940", History Workshop Paper, University of Witwatersrand, February 1990.

after the primary stage, are the lesions that can appear anywhere on the body. The tertiary stage, which often takes two to ten years to manifest itself, is identified by cardiovascular, neurological and visceral complications. There is also congenital or hereditary syphilis which happens when a syphilis-positive mother spreads the virus to the foetus through the placenta. Gonorrhoea is another type of venereal disease. Its symptoms, appearing three to five days after the infection, differ from those of syphilis, however. For men the disease is identified with semen leakages; for women with arthritis and rash, and pelvic complications which can result in sterility.

The first cases of what was known locally as "mocaula"¹⁰⁶ were spotted in Basutoland as early as 1887. At first, colonial medical officers were not sure whether "mocaula" was syphilis. Nor is the historian helped by the fact that "syphilis" in colonial reports was sometimes used interchangeably with "venereal disease" until the turn of the century. When medical dispensaries opened in 1887, it was noted that syphilis and digestive problems accounted for most of the cases treated. In Leribe, ten percent of the 3 101 cases treated at the dispensary between its opening in July 1890 and June 1891 were cases of "mocaula".¹⁰⁷

But the medical officers were confused by "mocaula" in at least two respects. Firstly, they found it difficult to classify the disease. A physician from Wepener in the Orange

¹⁰⁶. The Sotho word "mokaola", used today to refer to venereal syphilis, is also applied to a poisonous weed *Xanthium Spinosum* which was often a source of dispute between the Free State and Basutoland authorities. In the Sotho vocabulary Mokaola referred to the secondary phase of syphilis, which are identified with the appearance of rash; while imoto referred to the tertiary stage. But many Basotho were not aware that the symptoms in the tertiary and secondary belonged to the same disease. See Anon, "(Syphilis), Mokaola, 'Moto", 1946 (?).

¹⁰⁷. "Further Correspondence Respecting the Cape Colony and Adjacent Territories, 1886"; CAR, 1887-88; 1888-89; 1890-91.

Free State, visiting Mafeteng in 1889, tried to define the disease:

...the term mokaola as used by the natives embraces papular, pustular, and tubercular eruptions in all their varieties or stages, mucous patches, condylomata, gummatous ulcerations... The term, therefore, includes a great variety of simple skin diseases, but the large majority of cases of mokaola that have come under my notice I regard as syphilides, and have always found them to yield rapidly to anti-syphilitic treatment.¹⁰⁸

The second area of confusion, linked to the first one, was due to the officials' ignorance of endemic syphilis, which was only recognised in the 1930s, and yaws whose destructive effects were only understood in the 1920s.¹⁰⁹ Dr Macfarlane who served in colonial Lesotho from 1893 and became the Principal Medical Officer in the 1920s, wrote in 1923:

Syphilis was at one time, as in most South African native territories, a great scourge. It is well in hand now, but when I first came to the country its ravages were great. Destructive lesions, especially about the throat and nose, were frequent, and many died from the disease. I think syphilis is as prevalent now as it was then, but it has become much less virulent. One seldom sees the gross lesions of thirty years ago, and then only in neglected cases. Whether it is that a certain immunity has been established, or is it that vigorous treatment and a better knowledge of personal hygiene has anything to do with it, I am not prepared to say. Congenital syphilis is very common, and late manifestations of it - such as arthritis and synovitis - constantly turn up. In my experience all these years, including thousands of cases, I have only seen two chancres of the genital organs. The disease seems to be spread by cooking and drinking utensils, and also through bedding and clothing. Another peculiarity of syphilis amongst our natives is that cranial and nervous manifestations of the disease are practically unknown, or so rare as to be notable. This may be accounted for by its recent introduction into the country. The people are positive that it was unknown until within the last eighty years - that is to say, with the opening up of the interior of South Africa by Europeans. That is as it may be, but there is no doubt that the opening of the diamond and gold mines in Kimberley and Johannesburg had much to do with the spread of the disease, and the rapid syphilization of the

¹⁰⁸. CAR, 1888-89, p.8.

¹⁰⁹. Jochelson, "Tracking down the Treponema", p.33.

majority of those who went to work in those places. The native name for the disease is "makaola", meaning the thing that cuts off, having reference, I presume, to its phagedaenic¹¹⁰ manifestations.¹¹¹

The absence of both the chancre and the tertiary-stage symptoms in the cases that Macfarlene saw, supports the conclusions reached by Megan Vaughan and Karen Jochelson in their studies of syphilis in other parts of Southern, Central and East Africa, namely, that most of the cases diagnosed as venereal syphilis prior to the 1930s were actually endemic syphilis or yaws.¹¹² This can also be inferred from the Basutoland Annual Reports for the years prior to the end of the last century, which generally attributed "mocaula" to personal hygiene and gonorrhoea to "immorality". It was also reported in the 1890-91 annual report that "mocaula", typical of yaws, affected children more than adults. What Macfarlene's comment actually shows, therefore, is that yaws and endemic syphilis, as in Uganda, for example, began retreating in the 1920s, even as venereal syphilis advanced. Table 7.1 shows that though the number of secondary stage-cases dominated up to the 1930s, their proportion in the overall total was declining as tertiary and congenital cases increased.

¹¹⁰. Phagedaena is an eating ulcer, or a spreading erosion occurring in ulcer or sore.

¹¹¹. Macfarlene, "Some Observations", p.494.

¹¹². Jochelson, "Tracking down the Treponema"; M. Vaughan, "Syphilis in colonial East and Central Africa: the social construction of an epidemic", in T. Ranger, and P. Slack, (eds.), Epidemics and ideas: Essays on the historical perception of pestilence, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992).

Table 7.1: Cases of Syphilis Treated in Government Dispensaries, 1925-1936.

Year	Total no. patients	1st stage	2nd stage	3rd stage	Here-ditary syph.	Total syph.	syph. % of total
1925	40 500	468	4 327	545	418	5 758	14.3
1926	40 000	326	4 094	681	473	5 574	13.9
1927	42 000	454	4 197	590	603	5 844	13.9
1928	46 500	171	4 769	671	700	6 311	13.6
1929	41 500	582	3 938	830	604	5 954	14.3
1930	42 500	450	3 002	1 735	520	4 707	11.1
1931	39 000	148	3 114	812	766	4 840	12.4
1932	44 500	97	3 400	916	795	5 208	11.7
1933	40 400	136	3 377	775	820	5 108	12.6
1934	43 000	135	2 970	996	855	4 956	11.5
1935	45 500	315	3 126	1 091	1 052	5 584	12.2
1936	54 000	276	4 026	927	1 173	6 404	11.8

Source: Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1936.

The figures cited in medical and sanitation reports only referred to cases treated at government dispensaries. More than this, it was generally men who presented themselves for treatment, as women only came forward when the disease was well advanced.¹¹³ The general reluctance by women to seek treatment turned on patriarchy and taboos relating to strangers viewing a Mosotho woman's vagina.¹¹⁴ Many cases were in any event taken to Basotho doctors for treatment

¹¹³. AMSR, 1937.

¹¹⁴. It was reported in 1928 that: "The number of cases of women seen whose condition is one of incurable misery, though not fatal, caused by the fact that so many relatives must be consulted before medical advice can be sought at the time of parturition..."; see AMSR, 1928, p.8.

instead of government hospitals.¹¹⁵ Aware that their figures did not reflect the real situation, colonial medical officers tried to undertake their own research in 1935 by interviewing patients visiting the dispensaries, and came to the conclusion that about one percent of the Basotho population was syphilis-positive.¹¹⁶

Some years earlier, though, with venereal syphilis on the increase, the Basutoland government had begun to take preventative steps. In 1921 a system of free treatment for cases of syphilis was introduced, and country-wide depots were established for the distribution of anti-syphilitic medication. In 1929 an injection was added to the treatment, in order to reinforce the orally taken medication, but this was resisted by most Basotho until an explanatory campaign was successfully waged by officials in 1935. In that year, epidemic and infectious diseases accounted for 23 percent of all cases treated, about 54 percent of which were syphilis; in 1937 the figures were 21 percent for infectious diseases, about 56 percent of which were syphilis.¹¹⁷

Table 7.2: Number of Cases of Gonorrhoea Treated, 1925-1936.

Year	No. of cases
1925	875
1926	818
1927	800
1928	941
1929	1 057
1930	1 012
1931	980
1932	795
1933	517
1934	793
1935	918
1936	1 684

Source: Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1936.

¹¹⁵. One of the treatments involved rubbing the chancre with the powder of a plant called phoa; see Ashton, Basuto, p.303.

¹¹⁶. AMSR, 1935.

¹¹⁷. CAR, 1921-22; 1923-24; 1925; 1936.

Gonorrhoea was also rife, especially among women. The 1927 Annual Medical and Sanitary report noted that "gonorrhoea is a much more serious disease amongst our Natives and its effects are seen in the sterility of many of the women";¹¹⁸ while the 1935 Report again observed that "there is no appreciable reduction in the incidence of Gonorrhoea largely because the Basuto refuse to accept its infectious nature".¹¹⁹ Although the increase in the number of cases treated in 1928 and 1929 was directly linked to measures taken against prostitutes (as the next section will show), the campaign yielded valuable data. On analysing the figures, officials were able to link the incidence of the disease to variations in economic conditions. During the period of relative prosperity between 1927 and 1930, cases of syphilis totalled 414 and of gonorrhoea 950. During the depression of 1931 to 1934, however, the annual figure was 129 for syphilis and 771 for gonorrhoea.

Similarly, in the relatively prosperous years of 1935 to 1937, the annual figure for syphilis was 330 and 1 454 for gonorrhoea. The explanation for such variation in the number of cases, it was argued, was that when crops were "good" and the country prospering, Basotho migrants spent more of their earnings at brothels and shebeens where they caught the disease. But during times of economic depression, with their families starving, Basotho men tended to remit more money to their wives, children and parents.¹²⁰ Certainly there was some truth in this, particularly when it is remembered that the amount of money deferred and remitted by Basotho migrants increased during the 1933-34 depression.¹²¹ But there were also other factors at work, not least of which were the repatriation of matekatse from the Reef in the 1930s, the imposition of quotas on mine recruits in 1931, and changing attitudes towards western medical treatment.

¹¹⁸. AMSR, 1927, p.8.

¹¹⁹. Ibid., 1935, p.10.

¹²⁰. Ibid., 1937, p.7.

¹²¹. See Chapters Two and Three.

The relatively high incidence of venereal syphilis among Basotho workers in the gold mines was a major concern of both the Native Affairs Department and Basutoland authorities. In the 1930s, some 25 percent of all Basotho mine candidates screened in Basutoland were rejected, with another five percent suffering the same fate in Johannesburg.¹²² Many Basotho men arriving on the mines tested positive, and were taken to the syphilis hospital in Rietfontein by the Native Affairs Department, from where they were repatriated once discharged. In 1929, however, the Department decided to discontinue paying for the cost of treatment which was estimated at L2 to L3, including the railfare and an "escort" to the hospital, per individual treated. Instead the cost had to be carried by labour agents.¹²³ The South African Native Economic Commission noted in 1932 that "there is... little doubt that the Basutos are much more heavily syphilized than the Union labour on the mines".¹²⁴ Indeed, this had been one of the findings that had emerged from Dr Cluver's 1928 inquiry into the exceptionally high mortality of Basotho on the gold mines.

Table 7.3: Syphilis Test of 1 200 New Gold Mine Recruits. 1928.

Group	No. tested	% positive
Pedi	200	29.5
Basotho	200	25.5
Tswana	100	22
Pondos	200	8.5
Shangaan	300	7
Xhosa	200	2

Source: SAB, GNLB 137, 2828/13/104, Dr Cluver's Report on "Mortality among Basutos employed on Transvaal Mines", 5 November 1928.

122. Pim. Financial and Economic Position, p.35.

123. LNA, S3/5/18/2, AC (Maseru) to GS, 20 May 1929.

124. Union of South Africa, Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, p.214.

Dr Cluver attributed the comparatively high incidence of syphilis among Basotho migrants to their interaction with matekatse in the Reef locations and slums: "He [a Mosotho miner] goes out more in search of pleasure which generally takes the form of alcohol consumption and promiscuous immorality".¹²⁵ The Report concluded that the incidence of syphilis in Lesotho was likely to be very high, as samples he used were of recruits who had been passed as medically fit both in colonial Lesotho and at the WNLA compound in Johannesburg.

Of course, just why Basotho miners compared to, say, Shangaan workers, turned to township women in such numbers, was not part of Cluver's report. Not surprisingly, it was silent when it came to considering the cultural and historical dimensions of the problems. Perhaps the first point which needs to be made is that the Basotho's interaction with matekatse was also used to account for their non-participation in "mine marriages" and homosexual relations in the compounds. Though cases of sodomy were tried in the criminal courts of colonial Lesotho as early as the 1890s,¹²⁶ the British Agent for the High Commissioner Territories, reporting on homosexuality in the compounds in 1939, commented that the Basotho "apparently do not approve of this type of entertainment, and prefer their women, which accounts, I think, for the large number of Basuto women on the Reef".¹²⁷ Certainly, the observation of the British Agent was confirmed by my informants who dismissed "mine marriages" as an "affair" of the Shangaan.¹²⁸

According to Moodie and Harries, homosexual practices in the gold mine compounds emerged largely after the South African War, following the systematic construction of single-sex compounds and the passage of the 1903 Immorality Ordinance.

¹²⁵. SAB, GNLB 137, 2828/13/104, Dr Cluver's Report, 5 November 1928.

¹²⁶. One in 1896 in Leribe, and another in 1901 in the same district.

¹²⁷. Cited in, Bonner, "Backs to the Fence", p.285.

¹²⁸. See, for example, interviews with, Phomolo Matsabisa, born, 1914; Solomon Mokoaleli.

Shangaan workers were the first to introduce the practice, although by 1916 other groups, including the Pondo, Xhosa and Zulu, all participated. The kind of sexual intercourse involved, however, was not sodomy but the penetration of the penis between the thighs, as anal penetration was generally not approved of by the groups involved. Moodie and Harries trace this to similar practices between adolescent males and females in the rural areas, known as gagisa among the Shangaan, ukumestha to the Zulu, and hlobongo to the Pondo. This practice had customary sanction, and was a way of controlling pre-marital sex. Moodie also learnt from his informants that Pondo workers disliked contact with matekatse because they feared they would catch venereal diseases.¹²⁹

When homosexuality emerged in the compounds, then, the Shangaan, Pondo and Zulu were the groups that practised it. It was the high incidence of "mine marriages" among those groups which, at least for the Pondo, limited contact with matekatse, and which partly explains the low incidence of syphilis among them during these years.

Yet the Basotho abhorrence of "mine marriages" cannot be traced solely to the availability of matekatse, as such women only became a factor from the 1920s onwards. Hugh Ashton's anthropological study of Basotho in the 1930s showed that "...relations between boys and girls used to be entirely innocent. Premarital intercourse, even in the restricted form of ukumetsha practised by the Zulus, was and still is forbidden".¹³⁰ This shows that it was the absence of ukumetsha among Basotho rather than the availability or otherwise of matekatse which made imitating Shangaan practices an impossibility for most if not all Basotho migrants. All that the arrival of matekatse in the 1920s did was to provide Basotho men with an alternative to other women. All of these

¹²⁹. Moodie, Going for Gold, pp.119-58; Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, pp.200-08.

¹³⁰. Ashton, Basuto, p.39.

factors need to be taken into account when attempting to explain the high incidence of syphilis among Basotho miners during these years.

There is no doubt that syphilis, for all the diagnostic confusion characteristic of the early years, had a major impact on the health of a growing number of people in Lesotho. Returning men spread it to their wives and relatives, who in turn infected other Basotho. This became even more serious in the 1920s and 1930s when, as Section Two will show, prostitution became rife in the country.¹³¹

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB, caused by the contraction of tubercle bacilli primarily through inhalation, is not a highly infectious disease; and its propagation depends on the intensity of contact between the host and other people. Pulmonary TB, by far the most common form of this disease,¹³² and sometimes referred to as "phthisis" in early reports, (and not to be confused with miner's phthisis or silicosis),¹³³ was identified in colonial Lesotho among returning migrants as early as 1889. Douglas Fraser told the Transvaal Labour Commission in 1903 that "pulmonary complaints seem to be on the increase [among Basotho], owing perhaps to the use of European dress, and work in towns and mines".¹³⁴ It was also noted in the 1905-06 report for Maseru that:

Phthisis is becoming more common in the district, so much so that the natives who are otherwise indifferent to disease are beginning to be alarmed at its spread. Hitherto it has not been indigenous to this part, and the cases seen were boys who had been working on the mines and in Johannesburg, but now it is attacking others who have never left the country.¹³⁵

¹³¹. AMSR, 1935.

¹³². This form of TB is characterised by the development of a patch of inflammation and the formation of an abscess in the lung.

¹³³. This disease is discussed in Chapter Four.

¹³⁴. Transvaal Labour Commission, p.219.

¹³⁵. CAR, 1905-06, p.55.

This observation was supported by Dr Macfarlane's claim that TB cases had been rare in Basutoland before the 1890s. These views were supported by the conclusions of an examination of c.50 000 Basotho between 1900 and 1907 which showed that TB was now on the increase and spreading to people who had never been to the mines. During the same period Dr Casalis started spotting TB cases among children.¹³⁶ And Leselinyana reported in 1913 that a group of doctors was due to conduct a TB survey in the near future, at the request of the Principal Medical Officer because "...it is said that Basotho in Johannesburg die in numbers more than other groups dying on the mines...".¹³⁷

It was not until the 1920s, however, that the Basutoland government stirred itself, and then only after still more reports on the high incidence of TB among Basotho migrants on the gold mines. As the mine authorities insisted on repatriating TB cases, arrangements were made in August 1923 to work out a follow-up programme. Among its provisions were the following: the names, addresses, medical history and other related details of all Basotho TB cases were to be sent to the Principal Medical Officer; each repatriatee was to be given an identity card to be presented on examination; a list of all TB cases in every district in Lesotho was to be compiled and sent to headquarters in Maseru; the Principal Medical Officer was to send regular reports on repatriatees to the Chamber of Mines; the Native Recruiting Corporation was to pay the Basutoland government 2s.6d per examination; but the TB patients themselves were to be treated free of charge in dispensaries and hospitals.¹³⁸

Despite these measures, in 1930 a Dr Allan conducted a tuberculin test in Basutoland, and found that the proportion

¹³⁶. South African Institute for Medical Research. TB in South African Natives with Special Reference to the Disease amongst the Mine Labourers on the Witwatersrand. 1932. pp.203-04, 227-28.

¹³⁷. Leselinyana, 20 May 1913.

¹³⁸. LNA, S3/17/1/7, NRC to P.M.O., 12 August 1923.

of those testing positive was higher among females between the ages of 10 and 20 years old, and among males between the ages of 20 years and older. Mine recruits were drawn from the latter age group. By the 1930s, therefore, TB was well grounded in Basotho soil, and was carried by women and children who had never been to the labour centres.

Table 7.4: TB Cases Among Cases Treated in Hospitals, 1927-1937.

Year	Total Patients	No. of Pulmonary TB	Total no. of all forms of TB	% of all TB to total patients	% of Pul. TB to total patients
1926	39 711	269	-	-	.67
1927	41 936	159	-	-	.35
1928	46 535	370	460	.98	.79
1929	41 695	263	495	1.18	.63
1930	42 304	295	521	1.23	.69
1931	38 737	261	369	.95	.67
1932	44 368	390	539	1.21	.87
1933	40 373	318	509	1.26	.79
1934	43 051	254	445	1.03	.59
1935	45 455	549	812	1.78	1.21
1936	54 015	496	811	1.50	.9
1937	72 264	423	812	1.12	.59

Source: Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1936; 1937.

Table 7.4 shows that pulmonary TB constituted the bulk of all TB cases treated in hospitals and dispensaries in colonial Lesotho. The dramatic increase in the number of TB cases in 1935 was attributed to the 1932-33 drought, as it was argued, like syphilis, that depression/"prosperity" explained variations in the numbers obliged to seek medical treatment. Hence it was concluded from Table 7.4 that:

From the above it can fairly be deduced that, among the Basuto, tuberculosis is very definitely influenced by economic conditions and nutrition. If the efforts which are being made by Government and other agencies to stimulate the Basuto to improve their diets are successful, one can look forward with confidence to a

marked improvement in the tuberculosis incidence among the Basuto.¹³⁹

This kind of thinking was informed by the belief that TB was rife because of the weak immune system of the majority of Basotho who needed a proper diet to strengthen themselves. As in the case of syphilis, though, no mention was made of the problems caused by the repatriation of TB cases by the mine authorities.

II

BROTHELS AND CANTEENS

Two of the most critical effects of labour migrancy on the supplying areas were the psychological and economic implications the phenomenon had for women. Basotho women responded in various ways to the absence of their men and the decline of the economy. Some followed their husbands and brothers, joining the ranks of matekatse, while others remained at home. Judy Kimble and Phil Bonner have pioneered the study of these various responses, but no effort was made to look at the strategies of the women remaining at home.¹⁴⁰ And when scholarly attention was given to the latter category of women, focus was on the period post-1940s.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹. AMSR, 1937, p.10

¹⁴⁰. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?"; J. Kimble, "'Runaway Wives'? Basotho women, chiefs, and the colonial state, c.1890-1920", Centre for African Studies Seminar Paper, School of Oriental and African Studies, (University of London), 17 June 1983.

¹⁴¹. See, especially, J. Gay, "Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women: A Case Study", South African Labour Bulletin, vol.6, no.4, 1980; E. Gordon, "An Analysis of the Impact of Labor Migration on the Lives of Women in Lesotho", Journal of Development Studies, vol.17, no.3, 1981; C. Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981); A.D. Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation and the Diffusion of Migrant Labour Remittances in Lesotho", in P. Mayer, (ed.), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980).

Women and the Household

A significant number of Basotho women became involved in commercial beer-brewing and prostitution. They either moved to South African urban centres, or migrated to Lesotho's major towns. In both cases, beer-brewing and prostitution came to play an important role as a key source of income.

Women were treated as minors in the Basotho patriarchal society under discussion. Their access to the means of production, especially land, was mediated by their relationship with men as husbands or fathers, and, in the case of widows, sons. They were nonetheless a vital source of labour for agricultural production, and performed a wide range of household duties, not least of which was the brewing of beer. Their role as bearers and rearers of children, supplied men with additional labour, bohali, and male heirs. At the same time, their upbringing and socialisation emphasised their gender; girls were taught to cover their person as soon as they started crawling, while boys could go naked until they were about six-years old. Female children were taught to sit "properly", and in every way were prepared for womanhood, which principally meant being a wife and mother. As minors, they had no role in the public domain, being denied any participation in the political affairs of the country. The only time they could enter the chiefs' courts, the khotla, where village matters were discussed and court cases heard and tried by married men, was as witnesses or the accused in a case, or when bringing food and beer.

A number of anthropological studies have provided us with some insight into the impact of labour migrancy on Basotho family and marriage systems in recent decades.¹⁴² Basotho society itself tolerated certain practices which, if unregulated, might affect the stability of marriages. One such practice

¹⁴². Murray, Families Divided; A.D. Spiegel, "Polygyny as Myth: Towards Understanding Extramarital Relations in Lesotho". in Spiegel and P.A. McAllister, (eds.), Tradition and Transition in Southern Africa, (African Studies, 50th Anniversary Volume, vol.50, no.1 and 2, 1991).

was a particular form of concubinage called bonyatsi (nyatsi: "lover": pl: linyatsi). A form of extramarital relation between two people, one or both of whom might be married, it lasted over time, and involved a regular transfer of gifts which included money and such items as clothes and food. Hence Andrew Spiegel, on the basis of his study of this phenomenon in the mid-1970s, argued that "extramarital relations provided one of the routes along which migrants' wage-earnings were diffused within rural communities in Lesotho".¹⁴³

Contrary to Spiegel's assertion, however, bonyatsi seems to have preceded the growth of the migrant labour system. Ernest Mabile, who was born and grew up in Lesotho in the middle of the 19th century, wrote in 1905 that Basotho "morality is very low. Prostitution as a social evil is unknown, but adultery is general. Every man has his mistress and every woman her lover". A punishment of two cattle was typically imposed if a man seduced a woman; six in the case of the woman becoming pregnant.¹⁴⁴ What can be said, therefore, is that rather than causing it, labour migrancy introduced new elements to bonyatsi. Writing in 1935, Allan Pim observed that "marital fidelity does not appear to have ever been a prominent Basuto characteristic but it appears to have seriously deteriorated as a result of the prolonged absence of the younger men".¹⁴⁵

The other practice affecting the stability of marriages was the frequency with which potential wives eloped with men, or the chobeliso. This practice, as discussed in Chapter One,

¹⁴³. Spiegel, "Polygyny as a Myth". p.147.

¹⁴⁴. H.E. Mabile, "The Basutos of Basutoland", Proceedings of the British and South African Association for the Advancement of Science, vol.3, 1905, p.185.

¹⁴⁵. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.42. This view was taken to extremes by colonial officials who, as we shall see later, regarded bonyatsi as "general prostitution" and attributed the spread of beershops and venereal disease, to it. This was consistent with the tendency in colonial mentality and discourse to exaggerate Africans' sexual promiscuity.

became almost commonplace as bohali spiralled out of the reach of most men. Elopement could take place while the woman was working in the fields or while visiting a friend. The woman would appear to be resisting, even when she knew about the plan in advance. The man would then take her to his mother who in turn would inform her husband, the man's father. The family of the woman would then be informed, and a fine of six cattle would be added to the bohali price. The common practice was for the boy's family to pay only the chobeliso fine. Ashton estimated in the mid-1930s that some 25 percent of marriages taking place during that time resulted from this practice.¹⁴⁶ He is supported by Pim's remark that "the practice of elopement and of abduction is seriously on the increase".¹⁴⁷ The increase in chobeliso was accompanied by a decline in polygamous marriages. The number of men with more than one wife as a percentage of the number of recorded marriages, fell from about 19 percent in 1911 to about 16 percent, 11 percent and eight percent in 1921, 1936 and 1946, respectively.¹⁴⁸

But Basotho men, or at least the growing number of the poor among them, increasingly found even the payment of the chobeliso fine very difficult. By the mid-1930s a practice had developed whereby men eloped with women, left them with their mothers, and escaped to the labour centres in South Africa, without paying their fine. The rate of premarital pregnancies and illegitimate children was also on the increase. Affected parents approached their chiefs for action and this matter was discussed by the Basutoland National Council in 1934. Chiefs felt that men who eloped or impregnated women without paying either the fine or bohali, should be conscripted to the mines in South Africa and their wages remitted to their "in-laws". They were convinced that such a measure would prevent the practice from becoming normal and acceptable. The only stumbling block was the British

¹⁴⁶. Ashton, Basuto, p.65.

¹⁴⁷. Pim, Financial and Economic Position, p.42.

¹⁴⁸. Bonner, "'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women?'" pp.234-41.

Resident Commissioner who argued that the measure if implemented would violate the rights of the migrants. The only legitimate path was that chobeliso cases should be tried under colonial law as in the past. The problem that chiefs had with the Resident Commissioner's legal solution was that it had no way of ensuring that stockless men, products of social conditions brought about by colonialism and capitalism, paid their chobeliso and other related fines, hence they still insisted on compulsory conscription to the mines. The issue was again raised before the National Council in 1937 when chiefs called for the Resident Commissioner to issue letters to fathers whose daughters had eloped to South African towns. The idea was that the letters could then be presented to the authorities in South Africa for their assistance in tracing and bringing back the woman.¹⁴⁹

Both the nyatsi and chobeliso practices put many women in a vulnerable position. As more and more men became labour migrants in the 1920s and 1930s, the minimum length of contract increased from four to six months in 1919, and nine months in 1924. By the mid-1920s the bulk of Basotho recruits employed by the Chamber of Mines were engaged under nine month contracts, and in the 1930s many started taking 12 months "joins". With an increasing number of men remaining on the mines for long periods, not to mention some others remaining there permanently, and with returning migrants only staying for short periods at home, many Basotho homesteads effectively fell under the control of women.

Migrant labour and the prolonged absence of Basotho men transformed the nyatsi practice. The wives of absent miners increasingly became prime targets for those men who remained at home. Migrants in Quthing even composed a song which became popular in the mid-1930s:

Young men are still away in Kimberley;
Others are staying behind for the saliva of girls

¹⁴⁹. Litaba, 1934, pp. 114-20; 1937, pp. 246-50.

They are above all after: "she is now mine".¹⁵⁰

Hugh Tracey recorded a women's song during his 1959 tour of colonial Lesotho, which pointed to the link between the absence of men/husbands and prostitution. The song uses the subordination of women and their reproductive role to express socio-economic problems:

Helele, Masupha!¹⁵¹
 What do you people say I should do at home?
 Masupha says we should bear children promiscuously.
 Masupha has allowed us.
 The sling is strangling the baby.

A hen never goes after a cock,
 But the hens at Kolo seem to be calling the cocks!¹⁵²

Spiegel was also told during his research in the 1970s "of men returning home unexpectedly after having heard that their wives were being unfaithful".¹⁵³ It certainly seems likely that this practice became widespread in the 1920s and 1930s. Such women, of course, were not simply passive victims: many of them, especially those whose husbands were not remitting money home, turned to beer-brewing and prostitution as their only means of survival, but nonetheless ones which they controlled. The "Prostitution and Vagrants" court file for Leribe district in the government archives, for example, shows that some of the arrested women in the 1930s were the wives of absent migrants, and that their huts were used as brothels. However, the file also shows that several men succeeded in becoming leading pimps, and it was their huts that were sometimes used as venues for beer-drinking and prostitution.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰. Leselinyana, 5 February 1936.

¹⁵¹. A local chief.

¹⁵². H. Tracey, "Basutoland Recording Tour: November 19th to December 3rd, 1959", African Music Society Journal, vol.2, no.2, 1959, p.73.

¹⁵³. Spiegel, "Polygyny as Myth", p.147.

¹⁵⁴. LNA, Leribe Collection, Box 70. The "Vagrants and Prostitution" file in this box has the synopsis of court proceedings of the 1930s and 1940s, involving a considerable number of prostitutes.

Chobeliso could also place women in a precarious situation, as they frequently had to deal with their "in-laws", especially the "mother-in-law", own. The illtreatment of such women by in-laws was quite common; the source of trouble was usually money, or rather, the lack of money remitted by the son or husband. The legitimacy of the women as a wife and her right to what the family's son or her husband was sending, were often questioned. It was worse if the son/husband sent nothing home. All too often, this happened when some migrants found new "wives" among Basotho women on the Rand. Faced with little room to manoeuvre, and disowned by their families for having agreed to elope in the first place, chobeliso victims in such situations were then forced to seek refuge in nearby brothels, or open their own beer-brewing and sex "business", or cross the border to South Africa, where they settled in the towns and mining centres. Other women, who had eloped to South Africa only to be abandoned in the locations, were forced to return home to face their parents and eventually eke out a living in various illicit trades.¹⁵⁵

Divorced women were another target of Lesotho's pimps. Though Mabile noted that "divorce is practically unknown", he believed that "a divorced woman generally goes away from the country and becomes a prostitute in the native locations of the towns".¹⁵⁶ The two major causes of divorce were misunderstandings and quarrels, especially rife in polygynous marriages, and infidelity. The other common cause was the "apparent" sterility of the wife, that is her "failure" to give birth to a male heir. But Table 7.5 shows that the number of divorced women expressed as a percentage was remarkably low, but that, in terms of numbers, it increased between 1911 and 1936.

The age breakdown in the 1911 Basutoland census showed that of the 124 099 women who were returned as single, 23 262 were of

¹⁵⁵. Litaba, 1934 and 1937.

¹⁵⁶. Mabile. "The Basutos", p.185.

the age group 15 years and over.¹⁵⁷ With the average marrying age of Basotho women being between 18 and 24 for the period under review, these figures may therefore suggest that about 20 percent of single women were of the marrying age. With some 50 percent of women being single in 1911, 1936 and 1946 (see Table 7.5), socio-economic hardships must have pushed a number of women in this category to beer-brewing and prostitution. With bohali prices increasing and the practice of arranged and polygamous marriages in decline, the number of single women of marrying age must have also increased, especially as by the 1930s, as shown in Chapter One, many men remained unmarried until they were in their thirties. Many of these single women also became targets of chobeliso. However, as shown in Chapter Two, Basotho population growth rate suffered a drop between 1936 and 1946 due to bokholoa: the female population was the most affected, dropping from 320 568 in 1936 to 314 945 in 1946. The percentage of single women dropped from about 51 percent in 1936 to 47 percent in 1946 (see Table 7.5). This may well suggest that the proportion of younger women or girls in the total female population increased after 1936, as many older and married women left to settle in South African towns and mining centres.

Table 7.5: The Marital Status of Basotho Women, 1911-1946.

Marital Status	1911	%*	1936	%*	1946	%*
Single	124 099	56.6	162 300	50.63	148 321	47.09
Married	77 300	35.3	113 273	35.34	117 725	37.38
Widowed	17 807	8.1	42 104	13.13	45 056	14.31
Divorced	8	0.0	2 341	0.73	2 216	0.70
Unknown	10	0.0	550	0.17	1 627	0.52
Total	219 224	100	320 568	100	314 945	100

Source: Basutoland Census, 1911; 1936; 1946.

* percentage of the total number in that year.

¹⁵⁷. Basutoland Census, 1911, pp.36-37.

A key change reflected in Table 7.5 was, however, the increase in the number of widowed women between 1911 and 1946. It is possible that a significant part of those returned as "widows" were actually married women who had been abandoned by their migrant husbands. Some of the widows had probably lost their husbands in mine accidents, or because of occupational diseases.

Widows were more vulnerable than single women who could at least be protected by their fathers. A widow could be taken as a wife or an additional wife by the brother of her deceased husband.¹⁵⁸ This levirate practice, ho kenela, ensured that patriarchal control over women as minors was maintained, but arguably also provided the widow and her children with an element of social security and care. However, depending on her age and whether she had children or not, as well as the age and sex of such children, a widow could avoid ho kenela with relative ease. Often enough, this meant that widows, compared to other women, had more independence and control over the means of production; they were the pioneers of women-headed households. But just as frequently, they were victims of the greed and corruption of chiefs: their land was taken under false pretexts. One concerned Mosotho man wrote to Leselinyana in 1936 about prostitution. He argued that the problem had begun with the Spanish "Flu" of 1918 which took the lives of many men. And it was the chiefs who then had taken plots belonging to the widows on the grounds that they could not cultivate them. This had forced such women to move to South African locations where they survived by becoming prostitutes.¹⁵⁹ Ashton observed in the 1930s that "as it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a living in Basutoland, many families find the burden of maintaining a

¹⁵⁸. There is, however, some debate as to whether this practice should be regarded as marriage or not, as there was no bohali transaction; see B. Potash, Widows in African Societies: Choices and Constraints, (Stanford University Press, California, 1986).

¹⁵⁹. Leselinyana, 18 March 1936.

widow too much for them and either neglect her or raise no objection to her leaving the village and leading her own life elsewhere".¹⁶⁰

All of this suggests that widows, single women and the wives of migrants long absent to employment centres, were the most vulnerable to economic pressures and male demand. It was this broad category which was apt to turn towards beer-brewing and prostitution. These women were not only subject to socio-economic pressures, illtreatment from their in-laws and abuse by chiefs, but were also targeted by pimps and other men who made their living from running after such women. As we saw, these women could turn to beer-brewing and prostitution in two ways; they could cross the border into South Africa or move to Lesotho's nascent towns or, as they were called, "Camps" or "Reserves". This is well summarised by a remark made by the Catholic Missionary, Laydevant, in the late 1920s: "After the period of initiation, the young [Mosotho] man easily finds a willing partner, especially in the Camps where there are young widows and women whose husbands are absent".¹⁶¹ Table 7.6 shows that over 70 percent of Basotho women in Basutoland in 1936 were "peasants", meaning that they were "living" from their land, as opposed to less than one percent employed as domestic servants and working as farm labourers. Some 16 percent were at schools of one form or another. This shows that there was virtually no source of formal employment for the majority of women in the country.

¹⁶⁰. Ashton, Basuto, p.85.

¹⁶¹. R.P.J. Laydevant, "Etude Sur La Famille En Basutoland", Journal de la Societe des Africanistes, vol.1. no.2. 1931, p.255.

Table 7.6: Occupations of Basotho Women in Basutoland, 1936.

Occupation	Percentage
Peasant	70.61
Farm Labourers	0.27
Mine Labourers	0.00
Other Labourers	0.03
Domestic Servants	0.21
Mechanics	0.10
Teachers. Ministers	0.11
Scholars. Students	15.77
Household Duties	0.16
Children	12.18
Other	0.32
Unspecified	0.24

Source: Basutoland Census, 1936.

As part of the same process that was forcing many women in colonial Lesotho to opt for the sale of beer and sex, growing numbers of women were either "absconding" or becoming the "undesirables" in South African towns. Many of Basotho "undesirables" who were being repatriated from South Africa¹⁶² continued their illicit trades in Basutoland. Like male migrants, therefore, the "undesirables" were great travellers. It is at this point that we must turn to attempts made to suppress the sale of beer and prostitution in Basutoland.

Beer and Prostitution

Long before colonial rule, sorghum-based beer had been brewed in Lesotho not for sale but for domestic use: ritual and other ceremonies; exchange for services rendered; and for affirming and strengthening bonds of communal belonging. As with agricultural work, brewing was done by women even though men were the major consumers. There were two types of beer, differing in taste and alcohol content. Leting was lighter,

¹⁶². See Chapter Two.

the fermentation period being a couple of hours. Joala was stronger, with preparation and fermentation taking longer. Both beverages, however, were quite low in alcohol content, even joala rendered one drunk only after large quantities had been consumed. Writing in 1903, Martin Minnie who had lived in Lesotho for ten years since 1891, observed that "there are no canteens, consequently the number of inebriates is wonderfully small, and much of the degradation and misery of drunkenness is unknown".¹⁶³ And as we saw earlier in the chapter, Mabile had reported in much the same period that "prostitution as a social evil is unknown". What is clear, then, is that while the sale of Sotho beer and prostitution later became rife, both were largely absent at the beginning of the century.

Drunkenness in Lesotho was initially associated with the consumption of brandy. On 8 November 1854 Chief Moshoeshoe passed the "Ordinance Against the Introduction and Sale of Spirituous Liquors in the Territory of the Basutos", as a response to the invasion of his country by cheap Cape brandy. The Ordinance rejected brandy as a foreign drink, unknown to the ancestors of the Basotho. This Ordinance was codified into Trading Rule of 1877 by the Cape colonial government. But control collapsed after the civil that followed the failure of Cape colonial policies, and some Orange Free State farmers established brandy canteens along the borders and within Basutoland. Once the British resumed control of the colony in 1884, the new Resident Commissioner, Colonel Clarke, targeted the sale of brandy and the related problems of drunkenness. The 1877 anti-brandy clause was included in the March 1884 Proclamation, and the following year several chiefs joined hands with the French missionaries to form the Blue Cross. By 1886 the problem of brandy-induced drunkenness was almost over, and liquor canteens had been removed from the colony. Though an illicit liquor traffic continued, especially in the Orange Free State border towns, the consumption of brandy was

¹⁶³. M. Minnie. Basutoland: Its Legends and Customs, (Nichols and Company, London, 1903), p.39.

nowhere near its previous rate. Increasingly, its consumption was restricted to chiefs and those few wealthy Basotho who could afford it.¹⁶⁴

The sale of Sotho beer in Basutoland was first reported in the 1910s. Commercial beer-brewing and prostitution were already well-established in other parts of South Africa, especially in Natal and Bloemfontein, and so, as Mabile indicated, Basotho women who were forced into or opted for these practices, found it easier to leave the country. By 1911 the existence of canteens for the sale of Sotho beer was already a factor in colonial Lesotho. Officials claimed that men and women in many villages were neglecting their responsibilities and spending their time in canteens, where the women accepted drinks in return for sex. The Assistant Commissioner for Leribe was among the first to act against this new phenomenon, but was obliged to stand aside after the September 1911 issue of Mochochonono criticised him for taking arbitrary action. His lone action in any event could scarcely stem the flood of "qhadi", a particular kind of beer which had been unleashed by Basotho women returning from South African towns and mining centres. This new drink was popular with chiefs and commoners alike. By 1915, "qhadi" and "various other sorts of intoxicating drinks" which had "lately begun to be widely consumed in the country", were now seen as a serious problem by the colonial government.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴. Paragraph based on G. Tylden, The Rise of the Basuto, (Juta & Co., Cape Town, 1950), p.191; G. Lagden, Basutos: The Mountaineers, their Country, Being a Narrative of Events Relating to the Tribe From its Formation Early in the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day, (Hutchinson & Co., London, 1910) Vol.1 (p.300) and Vol.2, (p.576); E. Mphatsoe, "The Blue Cross Association in Basutoland", Basutoland Witness, vol.8, no.3, July-September 1954; idem. "The Struggle Against Alcoholic Drink in Basutoland", Basutoland Witness, vol.11, no.4, December 1957.

¹⁶⁵. Paragraph based on Leselinyana, 28 November 1912, 30 November 1911; LNA, S3/21/4/4, AC (Leribe) to RC, 24 October 1911; LNA, S3/5/11/6, "Memorandum on Drink Traffic in Basutoland" to HC, 14 July 1915.

Leribe was ahead of other districts in trying to combat the spread of canteens. When the new Assistant Commissioner for the district arrived in August 1914, he convened a mass meeting, or pitsa, "at the request of a few of the better class natives". Its purpose was to discuss the system which had been put in place by his predecessor, whereby those wishing to sell beer were issued with licenses on condition that there was no "drunkenness" or "brawling". He agreed to allow the system to continue operating, "warning them [those present at the pitsa] at the same time that if any violent conduct should result, I would at once stop the sale of joala".¹⁶⁶ However, as these conditions were not in fact met, in December 1915 the Assistant Commissioner convened another pitsa at which he declared that as "there had been so much drunkenness especially among their women", he was going to close down the canteens from January the 1st of the following year.¹⁶⁷ In this, he was responding to pressure from the Anglican and French missionaries, and from some members of the Basotho elite in the district. By contrast, ordinary people in the district sent him a petition, pointing out that beer sales brought them sufficient income to buy clothes and food and pay tax, and that the beer business was more lucrative than selling grain at the local traders' stores where prices were low. Petitioners also argued that Moshoeshoe only "requested that his nation may be protected from foreign intoxicants and not from the Basuto national beverages".¹⁶⁸

The Resident Commissioner in Maseru let it be known that he favoured the sale of leting, but not joala. As a result, the Assistant Commissioner then formed a "Camp Joala Committee", and on its recommendations and after meeting signatories of the petition, a compromise was reached in April 1916, whereby the number of canteens was restricted and their owners

¹⁶⁶. LNA, S3/21/4/4, AC (Leribe) to GS, 17 August 1914.

¹⁶⁷. Ibid., AC (Leribe) to GS, 19 January 1916.

¹⁶⁸. Ibid., petition to AC, 6 January 1916: a follow-up petition to the AC, 8 February 1916.

undertook to hand over those "guilty of uproarious conduct" to the police.¹⁶⁹

But the problem was not only in the district, but also at Ficksburg Bridge connecting Leribe to the Orange Free State. All had begun with the Major of Ficksburg convening a meeting early in February 1912 with the Ficksburg Chamber of Commerce, the municipality and Church ministers, and a petition subsequently sent to the South African Minister of Justice. The petitioned complained that "within a mile of the centre of the town of Ficksburg [across the Basutoland border], a building has been erected, and is being used week by week for beer drinking, dancing, etc., and that white women and girls from this town are frequenting this place, and as we have reason to believe, having sexual intercourse with natives". The other concern was "the disastrous effect that is being produced upon the natives in our locations, and the perilous position in which our wives and daughters are placed thereby".¹⁷⁰ The Minister then forwarded the complaint to the High Commissioner who in turn instructed the Assistant Commissioner for Leribe to investigate the issue. The Assistant Commissioner approached the principal chief of Leribe, Jonathan, who then suppressed all canteens save the two belonging to himself and his son, Matsarapane. The crisis then subsided, only to come up again in 1915 following an outcry in the white press.¹⁷¹

In November 1915 the Justice Minister indicated to the High Commissioner that "there are beer canteens where disgraceful scenes are witnessed and where the servants of the village [of Ficksburg] and neighbourhood congregate causing the inhabitants of the Free State great inconvenience by being either totally incapable on returning to their service on a

¹⁶⁹. Ibid., AC (Leribe) to GS, 29 April 1916.

¹⁷⁰. SAB, JUS 184, 5/33/13. Petition to Minister of Justice, 29 February 1912.

¹⁷¹. Ibid., Secretary for Justice to Imp. Sec., 17 June 1913; Magis. (Ficksburg) to AC (Leribe), 1 August 1913.

Monday morning or doing so in a drunken condition".¹⁷² In December Chief Jonathan, unable to withstand the pressure put on him, promised to close down his canteen. Border patrols and the monitoring of the canteens by the Basutoland Mounted Police were also increased, and Orange Free State Africans entering the district were required to show their passes.¹⁷³ In March the "Manager" of Jonathan's canteen and one "female servant" were arrested "for resisting the Police in the execution of their duty" in February, and were fined L5 or three months' imprisonment with hard labour and 5s, respectively. A "European woman and her daughter living an immoral life at Motsarapane's canteen" were removed to Ficksburg in that same period.¹⁷⁴ With Jonathan not fulfilling his promise, the Resident Commissioner rushed to Leribe in April 1916 to threaten him. In May the Assistant Commissioner for Leribe met the Ficksburg Resident Magistrate, putting the blame on the Free State's liberal policy of issuing passes to Africans who wanted to visit Lesotho.¹⁷⁵ However, intervention by the police led to the decline in the number of people frequenting these canteens; the number dropped from 638 people in February 1916 to 194 and 136 in March and April, respectively.¹⁷⁶

The sale of beer was also a problem in the southern part of Basutoland. Up until 1914, the Paramount Chief persisted in regarding brandy as the only cause of drunkenness in the country, contenting himself with appeals for the suppression of smuggling. He was, however, forced to act the following year against a canteen which was flourishing and operating in the middle of Mafeteng. According to Leselinyana, there were some "strange women from nowhere, who were seen wandering

¹⁷². LNA. S3/5/11/6, Minister of Justice to Imp. Sec., 25 November 1915.

¹⁷³. Ibid.

¹⁷⁴. LNA. S3/5/11/6, "Memorandum on Drink Traffic in Basutoland" to HC, 14 July 1915.

¹⁷⁵. Ibid., RC to HC, 8 May 1916.

¹⁷⁶. Ibid., AC (Leribe) to GS, 7 April 1916; AC (Leribe) to GS, 3 May 1916; AC (Leribe) to GS, 4 March 1916.

about in town, begging for money from [local] people".¹⁷⁷ This was part of the Sake and Mainyatso phenomenon discussed in Appendix III. At much the same time, the attention of the High Commissioner in Cape Town was drawn to the question of canteens in Basutoland by a complaint that appeared in the Friend of the Free State in June 1915. The ensuing investigation once again drew a distinction between leting, which "appears to be a wholesome stimulant and its use [sic] seldom leads to any abuse", and joala "which is simply used as an intoxicant". While recognising that the consumption of "qhadi" and other similar drinks was growing, the investigation's main emphasis rested on the suppression of the illicit trade in brandy. As before, the problem was seen as one of policing.¹⁷⁸

There were two considerations that made the suppression of the sale of beer difficult for the colonial authorities. Firstly, African labourers in the Orange Free State, many of whom came from Basutoland, imbibed leting and joala as food and nourishment, and recognising this, the police confined their action to preventing beer from being sold on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Secondly, as the British well knew, "these houses serve a real need of the travelling Basuto native public, many of whom arrive at Ficksburg by train and must sleep somewhere before proceeding journey". They therefore did "not attempt to shut them down, but merely prohibited the sale of beer by them".¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the term "eating houses" and "beer canteens" were used interchangeably by the Resident Commissioner when referring to these establishments.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷. Leselinyana, 14 May 1915: 11 June 1915.

¹⁷⁸. LNA, S3/5/11/6, "Memorandum on Drink Traffic in Basutoland" to HC, 14 July 1915.

¹⁷⁹. SAB, JUS 184, 5/33/13, Secretary for Justice to Magistrate (Ficksburg), 23 February 1917.

¹⁸⁰. LNA, S3/5/11/6, RC to HC, 8 May 1916.

In fact, the colonial authorities increasingly came to realise that they would achieve more by working behind scenes. The policy of working with the Paramount Chief was given an added impetus early in 1918 when the editor of Mochochonono criticised the Assistant Commissioner for Maseru over the way in which police raids against beer sellers were themselves of dubious legality. The editorial closed with a call: "Law! Law! Let us be governed according to law!".¹⁸¹ With the tacit approval of the Resident Commissioner, the issue was raised at the National Council sitting later that year. The preoccupation of a growing number of the chiefs with the drunkenness of their subjects was expressed by the National Council's rejection of the recommendation of the Select Committee on the Working of the Native Liquor Laws in the Transvaal that light spirits could be issued to African miners in the gold mine compounds of the Rand. The National Council, and later the French missionaries and the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce (BCC), all sent a petition to this effect to the High Commissioner. Some chiefs even threatened to prevent their men from going to the mines if such a recommendation was implemented. Besides the concern that this recommendation would lead to the "killing of the Basuto" and that it was against the wishes of Moshoeshoe, the chiefs were also worried that "it would be a great danger to our young men and all native tribes who have gone to work on the mines, because all the money they have earned would be spent on this drink, from which we natives have no power to abstain". "Drunkenness", declared the chiefs, "would spread among the different tribes to which these people will have to return".¹⁸²

During the same sitting of the National Council, a new law was passed after long debate. This Law 21 banned the sale of Sotho beer in all areas under the control of the chiefs. Debate initially spanned three positions. Some chiefs wanted

¹⁸¹. LNA, S3/21/4/4, "Basuto Beer Always!", 16 February 1918.

¹⁸². LNA, S3/21/4/3, BNC petition to HC, 11 September 1918; PEMS petition, 30 September 1918; BCC resolution, 30 January 1919.

to ban domestic production and consumption of beer, as well as its sale. At the other extreme were those who wanted the sale of beer to continue. They argued that its sale provided widows and the poor with income enough to purchase necessities and to pay tax. The third position, which was one the one finally accepted, was that only the sale of beer and not its non-commercial use should be suppressed. Sixty-nine voted in favour of the proposed law, eight against, six abstained, and 16, including Chief Jonathan, were absent. The Resident Commissioner immediately sent a circular to all Assistant Commissioners instructing them to implement the decision of the National Council. The Assistant Commissioner for Leribe received a petition against the new law, and one white trader in Teyateyaneng addressed an appeal to the Resident Commissioner, but this time the authorities were determined to act.¹⁸³ Their resolution was strengthened by the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce which sent a memorandum to the Resident Commissioner in May 1919 urging him to use Law 21 to get rid of "the nuisance of 'Beer shops' being carried on so near Trading stores" of its members. Drunkenness and "instances of assault" were having the effect of driving away their customers.¹⁸⁴

By the time that Law 21 came into effect, canteens had spread from the Camps and roadsides as far as villages right next to the chiefs' headquarters. Their location related to the routes used by the migrants to and from recruitment stations and the labour centres. Only Qachas Nek was said to be free of canteens. By 1920, one of the two canteens at Ficksburg bridge was popularly known as "Pretoria". The Medical Officer for Leribe, Neil Macfarlane, joined the crusade in 1920, blaming the two canteens for the spread of venereal disease.¹⁸⁵ In April 1922 the liquor Proclamation was amended to include "qhadi" in the definition of intoxicants. The Proclamation covered any liquor which had three percent

¹⁸³. Litaba, 1918, pp. 90-122; LNA, S3/21/4/4, GS' circular to ACs, 30 May 1919.

¹⁸⁴. LNA, S3/21/4/4, BCC to GS, 27 March 1919.

¹⁸⁵. Ibid., Macfarlane to AC (Leribe), 12 August 1920.

alcohol content, and this was amended in September to two percent.¹⁸⁶

The new law put the Resident Commissioner, supported by the Paramount Chief, in a stronger position against Chief Jonathan. The latter responded by notionally converting his canteen into a "butchery" as a cover-up. It was only in 1924 that Jonathan finally gave in. He even called a pitso at the vicinity of the bridge where he appointed men to help the police in closing down the two canteens. This was probably not unrelated to the fact that the Acting Assistant Commissioner for Leribe had earlier suggested to the High Commissioner that Jonathan should be threatened with forfeiture of his annual L400 allowance from the government if he continued resisting.¹⁸⁷

Simone Phamotse, a representative of the Basutoland Progressive Association, challenged Law 21 at the 1924 session in the National Council. The law was failing, he argued, because the people were against it. He also saw it as part of the colonial strategy to prevent Basotho from becoming traders. But the majority of chiefs were adamant. The sale of beer affected the turnover of men for tribute labour, letsema, farms, and attendance at the khotla. Money that could be paid as tax was squandered in these canteens. Even so, support for the law was weakening; 51 voted against the repeal of the law, and 32 voted for.¹⁸⁸ As for colonial authorities, the existence of canteens at such points as the Ficksburg Bridge affected border relations with the Orange Free State. The discipline of labour, particularly of Basotho commuters to the Free State borderline towns, also needed to be ensured. The security of white communities in both the Free State and Lesotho, required the control of drunken "natives". This was so as attacks on and the harassment of white pedestrians were not infrequent.

¹⁸⁶. Basutoland Proclamations and Notices, 1922.

¹⁸⁷. LNA, S3/5/11/6, Act. RC to HC, 30 July 1924.

¹⁸⁸. Litaba, 1924, pp.247-61.

There was little sign, however, that intensified police action was having any lasting effect on either the sale of beer, or on prostitution. In 1923 the Assistant Commissioner for Quthing reported an increase in the sale of beer in his district, and the difficulty he had in suppressing the business. By 1926 prostitution was rife in the district; four canteens were in operation in Qachas Nek, and at least four more were on the Matatiele side of the border. This was linked to the opening in 1924 of the railway line from Matatiele to a branch of the Pietermaritzburg main line. And despite the fact that the Paramount Chief was sending his "messengers" to the Camps and villages to spill beer and destroy canteens, little or nothing was achieved. In August 1926, for example, he sent three messengers, themselves accompanied by Jonathan's messengers, to destroy beer shops in the Butha Buthe sub-district. But all too often, such messengers, described as "persons of no standing" by the Deputy Assistant Commissioner for the sub-district, were corrupt and readily accepted beer bribes. One sub-chief, Mopeli, warned an Indian business associate, S.R. Naidoo, that messengers were way to his shop, and so the trader was able to hide his beer. On another occasion, Mopeli manipulated the messengers, using them to destroy a building belonging to one of his enemies. Similarly, another sub-chief, Matela, used the messengers for his own purposes, in this instance to destroy a butchery belonging to a woman who was an enemy of his son. Even when messengers actually did destroy roadside-canteens, their owners soon resumed business once the Paramount Chief's servants had departed. Other canteens simply sought the protection of sub-chiefs like Seitlheko who is discussed in Appendix III.¹⁸⁹

By 1928 the problem of prostitution was rife throughout the country. In his quarterly report for the period ended September 1927, the Assistant Commissioner for Maseru had

¹⁸⁹. LNA, QN 3/1/13, AC (Qachas Nek) to GS, 6 September 1926; LNA, S3/21/4/4, Inspector BMP to AC (Leribe), 8 September 1926.

raised the idea of erecting beerhalls in order to "protect" migrants from prostitutes and beer-brewers. He was worried that labour migrants, while waiting for attestation, would be tempted by "bad drink and worse women, and it is common story for them to get drunk and fall an easy prey to the disease ridden prostitutes which infest the Reserve". The situation was even worse, he added, with returning migrants or after workers had collected their deferred pay at the offices in Maseru. Beerhalls, he thought, would not only provide protection, but also facilities for accommodation, food and recreation.¹⁹⁰

The same Assistant Commissioner took the opportunity of raising the issue during a debate which was sparked off by an article in the Basutoland News the following year. The difficulty was not that of brothels per se, because "so far as I know prostitutes flock, in any country, to places where labour congregates en passant and has leisure and money". Rather, the problem was that, "prostitution [in the sense of nyatsi practice] throughout Basutoland is far too big a thing to be touched, it is firmly embedded in the National life, but we certainly could clear up the Reserves more than we do at present if we had the proper authority to do so".¹⁹¹ While the Resident Commissioner accepted that "drunkenness amongst the Basuto [men and women] has reached an appalling state", he was not convinced that the solution lay in erecting beerhalls. He thought that such a measure would be in conflict with the National Council's Law 21, and would necessitate new legislation, which would anyway depend on police enforcement. He also feared that Jonathan would find a good excuse to reopen his Ficksburg Bridge canteen. He preferred to find ways of controlling and ultimately eliminating prostitutes, all the time leaving the provision of shelters for migrants to labour agents whose legal responsibility it was.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰. LNA, S3/5/18/10, AC (Maseru) Quarterly Report ended September 1927.

¹⁹¹. Ibid.. AC Maseru to RC, 21 May 1928.

¹⁹². Ibid.

To this end, the High Commissioner passed a Proclamation in December 1928 making "vagrancy" and prostitution punishable crimes. Vagrancy involved "loitering near any place", a definition so broad that it covered almost every public space in the country, while the definition of "vagrant" included "any native woman leading an immoral life or found wandering from her village without lawful occasion or excuse". A fine of not more than L5 or imprisonment for a period of not more than three months, could be imposed on such persons. The law also empowered the government to deal with pimps and brothels. The sale of beer in the Camps could now only take place if permission had been granted by local authorities. This law marked a final attempt to combat the sale of beer and the spread of prostitution. In the past, the only way that the government had dealt with prostitutes was periodically to expel them from the Camps with the help of the police and headmen, but the women would simply return to their "beats" later on.¹⁹³ The passing of the law, therefore, reflected not only the seriousness of the problem but also the desperation of the colonial government.

The economically depressed 1930s were difficult years indeed. The problem of drunkenness even invaded the ranks of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society churches themselves. As a result, calls were made by leading figures of the PEMS to extend branches of the Blue Cross throughout the country.¹⁹⁴ Ashton observed in the 1930s that "violent intoxicating beverages, such as Barbeton, Skokiaan and 'Kill-me-quick', brewed in Union slums, where Basuto women have an unenviable reputation as Skokiaan Queens, are finding their way into the country, mainly in the villages near Government centres and chiefs' headquarters, where there is always a lot of coming and going of unattached men".¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³. Litaba, 1928, pp. 39-55; Proclamations and Notices, 1928; LNA, S3/5/18/10, AC (Maseru) to RC, 21 May 1928.

¹⁹⁴. T. Verdier, "L'Alcoholisme au Lessouto", JME, vol.1, 1930, pp. 290-295; Mphatsoe, "Blue Cross".

¹⁹⁵. Ashton, Basuto, p.95.

As ordinary men and women increasingly found the pressures difficult to cope with, so older social norms were transgressed, sometimes fatally. In August 1930, for example, an abandoned baby was found in Morija. It had been bitten by dogs. In February 1932, a woman in Mochales Hoek returned home from Johannesburg with a four-month baby; her husband assaulted her and the child so badly, that the infant died. Outright defiance by matekatse was also increasing. In May 1931 four prostitutes were rounded up in Mochales Hoek and taken to the Assistant Commissioner's office, where they were sentenced to prison for refusing to leave the area when they were ordered to do so. Another two were sentenced to six weeks imprisonment or a fine of L2.10s, which they refused to pay. Still others conducted their business with blatant disregard for the law. In Teyateyaneng in 1932, matekatse were openly "servicing" clients on a lorry transporting recruits to and from Maseru train station. Moving in big groups, the prostitutes accompanied these likoata to their lorry, where the men offered them in part-payment the bread they had been provided with by labour agents as provision for the road.¹⁹⁶ And in 1940, complaints by the African Methodist Episcopal ministers in Leribe sounded a familiar note. The problem, the local Assistant Commissioner was told, was women:

who go out in groups to meet mine boys at Commando Nek Siding [on the Bethlehem-Moorderpoort rail-line to Bloemfontein]. Men are robbed of their money by women who are not their wives. Many of these men who are arriving spend all their money with these women and subsequently have to return to the mines having only gone as far as Hlotse and before reaching their homes to give their earnings to their families.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶. Mochochonono, 3 January 1931; 6 January 1932; 10 February 1932; 24 August 1932; 20 August 1930; 13 May 1931; 27 May 1931; LNA. Leribe Collection, Box 70, George to AC (Leribe), 18 March 1939.

¹⁹⁷. LNA, Leribe Collection, Box 70, AME petition to AC (Leribe), 10 April 1940. A similar phenomenon was taking place in the southern part of Basutoland, where prostitutes accompanied migrants and carried their luggage between Quthing and Mafeteng, as far as Wepener station. See Appendix III.

In the course of the 1930s, efforts against matekatse mounted in intensity. They were hunted down by chiefs, police, headmen, the Assistant Commissioners, the Paramount Chief and even the Resident Commissioner. If caught, they were expelled, imprisoned or fined. But what frustrated the authorities at almost every turn was that matekatse would sometimes obey when they were ordered to vacate an area, but would reappear as soon as the trouble subsided. Or they would be sentenced to a prison term but continue with their business release. In 1936, Chief Sempe Nkoebe of Quthing, in a desperate move, resorted to fining, expelling and confiscating the property of matekatse. In an act of complete defiance, however, one woman approached the local Assistant Commissioner to complain and demand the return of her property!¹⁹⁸

To sum up this chapter so far, one can suggest that botekatse had a paradoxical nature. It was both essential to the functioning of labour migrant system, and at the same time, expressed the social collapse set in motion by migrancy itself. Arguably, botekatse retained a discretionary character until mid-1920s, but certainly in the course of the late 1920s and 1930s it reflected the accelerating breakdown of much of Basotho society. But while the spread of venereal disease and widespread drunkenness were all symptomatic of social breakdown, one key indice of tension was the deteriorating relationship between male elders and recalcitrant women.

Many matekatse in colonial Lesotho had originally been the "undesirables" repatriated from the Rand, and consequently they were extremely experienced when it came to brutal anti-beer raids. But for all that they developed their own forms of resistance, including passive resistance to their periodic expulsions by the police, even occasionally refusing to pay their fines. But there were no instances of the kind of

¹⁹⁸. Mochochonono, 1 August 1936; 22 March 1933; Leselinyana, 28 October 1936.

outright resistance noted in other parts of South Africa.¹⁹⁹ This may have been so because the option of simply relocating to a safe village was always there. The other loophole which matekatse could exploit was the legal status of non-commercial and domestic beer-brewing. This gave purveyors and consumers considerable room for manoeuvre. People could, for example, pay their money in advance or secretly, and pretend to be merely visitors who were being entertained.²⁰⁰ A triangular relationship between matekatse, beer and likoata, developed in the 1930s. This system had developed on the Rand, and spread to Basutoland. For a male migrant to be with matekatse and to drink, was now a normal part of being koata.

With unemployment growing in the country in the 1930s as the number of Basotho going to the mines was limited by quota, the number of pimps almost certainly increased. While pimping initially was the resort of men who saw the business as an alternative to mine work, later on it included men who saw it as their only chance of making easy money. They found recruits among women who were arriving in Camps and chiefs' headquarters from the villages, to look for employment, food or money. Despite the fragmentary nature of the sources on this, there were, certainly, a number of notorious pimps. In Leribe, for example, eight "persons" were found in one brothel, and four in another. It appears as if the owners were usually able to evade arrest by relocating to safer villages. Most of the prostitutes were in their twenties and thirties, with few in their forties. Fighting amongst migrants over the most famous prostitutes or among matekatse themselves, was becoming a feature of Camp and village life.²⁰¹ Matekatse, as the case of Sake and Mainyatso in

¹⁹⁹. See, for example, H. Bradford, "We Women Will Show Them': Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside, 1929", in Crush and Ambler, (eds.), Liquor and Labor.

²⁰⁰. Verdier, "L'Alcoholisme", p.15.

²⁰¹. I am drawing these generalisations from the Leribe Collection, Box 70, "Prostitutes and Vagrants" file. On famous prostitutes, see D.B. Coplan, "Fictions that Save: Migrants' Performance and Basotho National Culture", Cultural

Appendix III shows, were notorious for their sexually provocative mode of dress and for showing-off their thighs. This is a theme from a song sung by Basotho women recorded by Hugh Tracey in 1959 in Mofale's Hoek:

Women on the Rand are like vagrants,
They wear shoes without stockings!²⁰²

Together with likoata, they were renowned for their rude talk and abusive behaviour. And all of these symptoms were signs of the disease eating away at the core of Basotho economy and society.

Conclusion

The regular movement of Basotho migrant workers between South African mines and other employment centres made it possible for hitherto unknown diseases to reach Basutoland. An additional factor was the repatriation of miners found to be carrying syphilis or TB, as the gold mine managements wanted to cut expenditure on labour by transferring the cost of caring for the sick to the rural areas.

Growing numbers of Basotho women, especially those from poor households, in the face of the economic depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, opted for the commercial brewing of Sotho beer, and for the sale of sex. But becoming involved in beer-brewing and commercial sex was not only a symptom of breakdown of the Basotho society, it was also a way for many women to escape and challenge patriarchal control. And, as Luise White observed in her study of prostitution in colonial Kenya, prostitutes in such cases were not simply selling sex, but provided items and services necessary for the reproduction of male energies.²⁰³ Canteens and brothels provided the

Anthropology, vol.6, 1991, pp.180-83.

²⁰². Tracey, "Basutoland Recording Tour", p.73.

²⁰³. See L. White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990), especially pp.10-21.

Basotho migrant traffic with such services as sex, food, beer, music and dance, and accomodation.

CONCLUSION

This study has suggested that the 1920s and 1930s were a critical turning-point in the history of Lesotho and the system of migratory labour in that country. It was during these decades that the balance of power increasingly shifted in favour of the colonial state, as well as towards chiefs, traders, labour recruiters and, especially, mine employers. Although Basotho men had earlier oscillated between their homes and South African labour centres to rebuild their stock in the aftermath of wars and ecological disasters, by the 1920s growing numbers were migrating to the mines out of sheer necessity because of the worsening socio-economic situation at home. That labour migration by men was predicated on the prior subordination of women, as suggested by a number of scholars, may well be the case, but in the absence of female testimony, this study has been unable fully to develop this point. All that can be concluded from the fragmentary evidence adduced in Part I. is that women's experiences were ambiguous partly because they were refracted through different class positions, and partly because they were generational. Mounting dependence on migrants' wages led to intensified struggles over these earnings within homesteads, as well as between chiefs and the colonial government on the one hand, and migrants on the other.

But not all Basotho became reliant on migrant labour to maintain their homesteads. Members of the dominant lineages and privileged mission converts, benefited from the commoditisation of production and the monetisation of the Basotho economy. These were the social groups who survived wars and ecological disasters somewhat better than the majority of Basotho because of the concentration of stock, land, wagons and ploughs, in their hands. Some members of this elite even invested their wealth productively and later expanded into retail, taxi, and labour recruitment business.

while households dependent on migrants' earnings spent their income on food and clothing.

A particular feature of the 1920s and 1930s was that Basotho migrants gradually became concentrated on the Rand gold mines, as distinct from the diamond mines and other employment centres that were formerly important to them. In the course of this transition, Basotho men accepted longer and longer contracts that kept them on the mines even during ploughing and harvesting seasons; while those returning home stayed for shorter periods before taking new mine contracts. Over much the same period, Basotho migrants ousted other African migrants from several better-paying job categories. They turned to more dangerous jobs and worked in the deepest mines; and by the mid-1930s were already established as the best shaft-sinkers on the gold mines.

But Basotho migrants did so with their eyes open to the dangers of mine work. More than this, they devised ways and means of coping with, and rationalising, their experiences of migrancy and underground labour. Going to the mines was equated with going to war, and wages were regarded as "cattle". In this way, a koata culture emerged, and became entrenched in Basotho society. On the mine, Basotho workers devised ways of dealing with industrial forms of death, sickness and destitution. To a significant extent, they, together with other African miners, transformed the mine compounds which were intended to control them into homes in which they lived with at least some humanity and dignity. They introduced recreational activities from their rural homes, especially dances which were performed on Sundays and other mine holidays. They discovered and adopted new sports, especially cricket and soccer, and established mine-based teams and tournaments.

For a significant number of Basotho miners, conversion to Christianity was an important aspect of coping with compound and mine life. But as Chapter Five attempted to show, this process was never as subversive as some more recent studies

would like to believe, while it was equally clearly never as one-dimensionally "functional" to the needs of capital accumulation as some earlier accounts insisted. Mineowners benefited from the conversion of their African employees to Christianity as this religion instilled the workers with an ethic and discipline necessary for control and mine work, but their relationship with missionary societies and converts was not without its problems. And although South African mine compounds never experienced the conspicuous presence of religious sects such as the Watch Tower movement which briefly flourished in Southern Rhodesian and Copperbelt mines,¹ conversion to Christianity had multiple and contradictory significance for African miners. Church forums and activities not only provided leisure and space, but could also be harnessed by workers and used as one of several survival strategies. Converts with their organisations in the compounds, spiritually and materially supported each other, and developed a culture of their own. Conversion often involved imparting Africans with literacy skills for reading the bible, and could bring with it promotion and other benefits to miners. Some converts even took the new religion home with them at the expiry of their mine contracts.² But even where Christianity was in African hands, it was not necessarily very different from the missionary product. Many African evangelists and pastors, themselves products of mission education, despised African ways of life as much as their missionary superiors. On the mines, their views, and those of many of their converts, were moderate in the extreme.

¹. For these, see amongst others, van Onselen, Chibaro, pp.204-09; S. Cross, "The Watch Tower Movement in South-Central Africa. 1908-1945", (PhD. Oxford University, 1973); and T. Ranger, The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1930. (Heinemann. London. 1970), pp.143-47.

². One Mosotho migrant from the Maluti exclaimed to his compatriots on his return from the mines: "This is truly a mission... In Johannesburg I met a white missionary of the Protestant mission of Lesotho, who spoke Sesotho well, and again, today, back at home, in the midst of mountains, there is again a white missionary of the same mission that I met. I now believe in their work... It is a solid and true one...". See Journal des Missions Evangeliques, 1928, p.145.

Yet conservative as these convictions were, they were never entirely at the beck and call of the mining companies. Nor, in any event, were all African miners Christian. Consequently, mine managements, concerned primarily with labour productivity and profit, devised other strategies to keep their African workers as disciplined and hard-working as possible. One of these strategies was the ethnic compartmentalisation of the African labour force. This, in turn, contributed to the ways in which African miners themselves came to rely on chiefly structures, home-boy networks and ethnic sectarianism, for organisation and collective bargaining on the mines. This resulted in conflicting survival strategies and competition, which sometimes culminated in collective violence. Some historians and other social scientists have emphasised ethnicity in their analysis of these "faction fights", paying little attention to prior material conditions, or to the complex interaction of management and worker strategies as expressed through racial and class dynamics. The close analysis in Chapter Six of three "faction fights" at the Premier Diamond Mine demonstrated the need for a more macroscopic and longer historical approach to this phenomenon.

Moreover, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate at every stage, labour migrancy was more than simply the movement of men to the labour centres. The other leg of this process was the return of migrants to their families in Lesotho when their contracts expired, and the impact of labour migration more generally on Basotho society. Diseases brought from the mines, as well as the cynical repatriation of miners suffering from syphilis or TB, all of which transferred the cost of caring for the sick onto the rural areas, placed enormous pressure on Basotho families and the country's declining economy. One reason that these diseases, including smallpox, were rarely controlled during the period under review, was not because of the "ignorance" or "indifference" of Basotho as the colonial authorities claimed. Nor was the spread of syphilis due to "personal hygiene" and "immorality" as the Principal

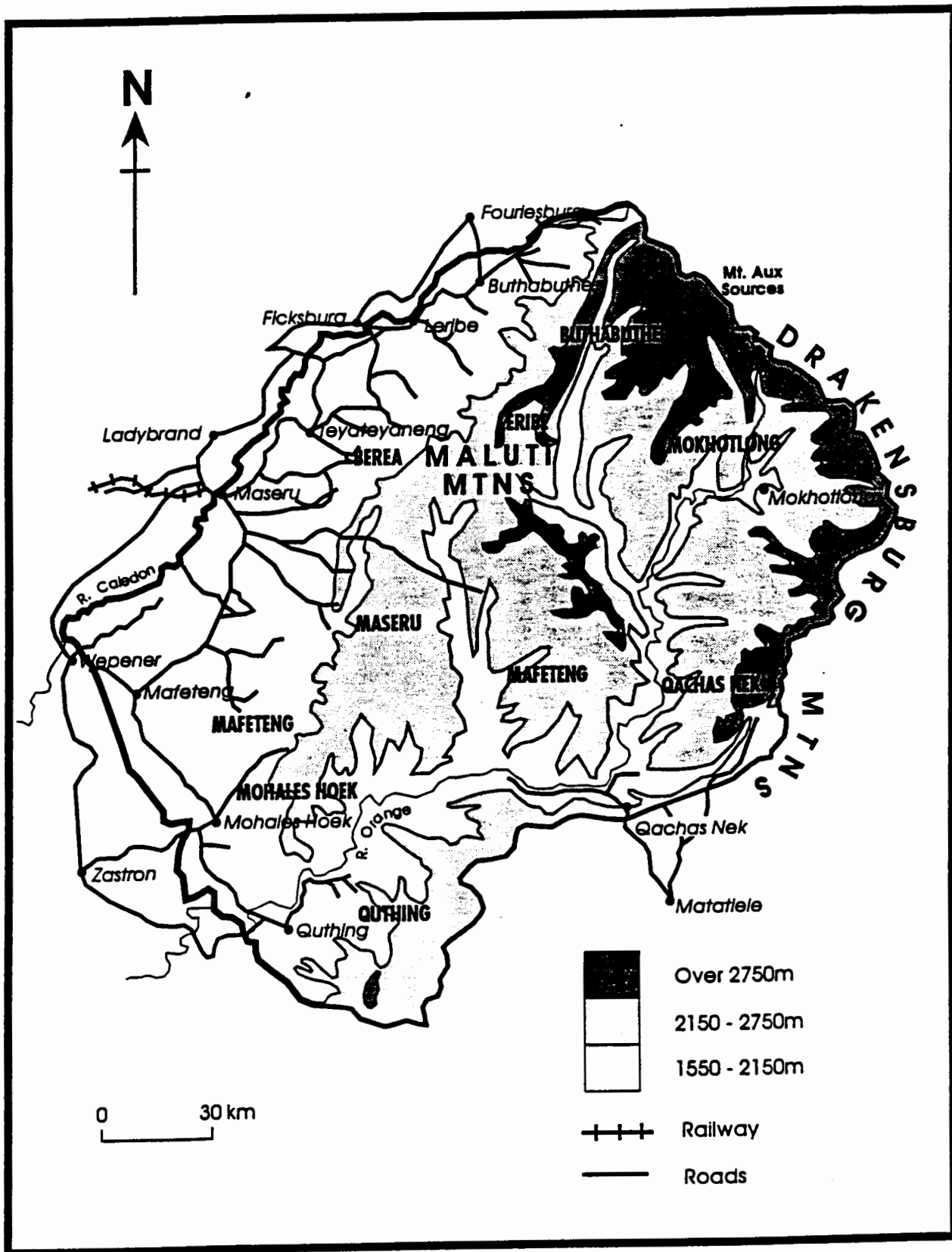
Medical Officer thought.³ The most critical factor was the constant arrival of newly contaminated Basotho migrants from the mines and other employment centres. Some of these diseases, especially syphilis and TB, continue to pose serious social problems to Basotho to this very day.

Basotho women, very largely excluded from formal employment and with their labour power used to subsidise migrants' earnings, were affected in a number of ways by the prolonged absence of their men. For some women, particularly younger ones, the erosion of chiefly and patriarchal power occasioned by the social changes of the 1920s and 1930s, provided an opportunity to escape to the towns. The majority of women in Lesotho itself, however, appear to have experienced a significant worsening of their material conditions of existence. A smaller, yet significant, number were drawn into prostitution and commercial beer-brewing.

In making these points, this thesis is well aware of the many holes which remain in the fabric of this subject. It is quite clear, for example, that one of the largest remaining gaps in southern Africa's historiography is the lack of a detailed economic and social history of Lesotho. While Chapters One, Three and Seven of this thesis go some way towards that goal, much more work, beginning where Eldredge's A South African Kingdom has ended, remains to be done. No less urgent is the need for a detailed history of the Premier Diamond Mine, and Orange Free State diamond mines, particularly Jagersfontein and Koffyfontein mines. And finally, for all that Harries, Moodie and this thesis have examined life in mine compounds, the resulting coverage remains impressionistic. It is neither chronologically comprehensive nor thematically complete. Once again, this thesis would suggest that a detailed study of independent churches and missionary societies, and sports and recreation in the compounds, might go some way towards addressing this gap.

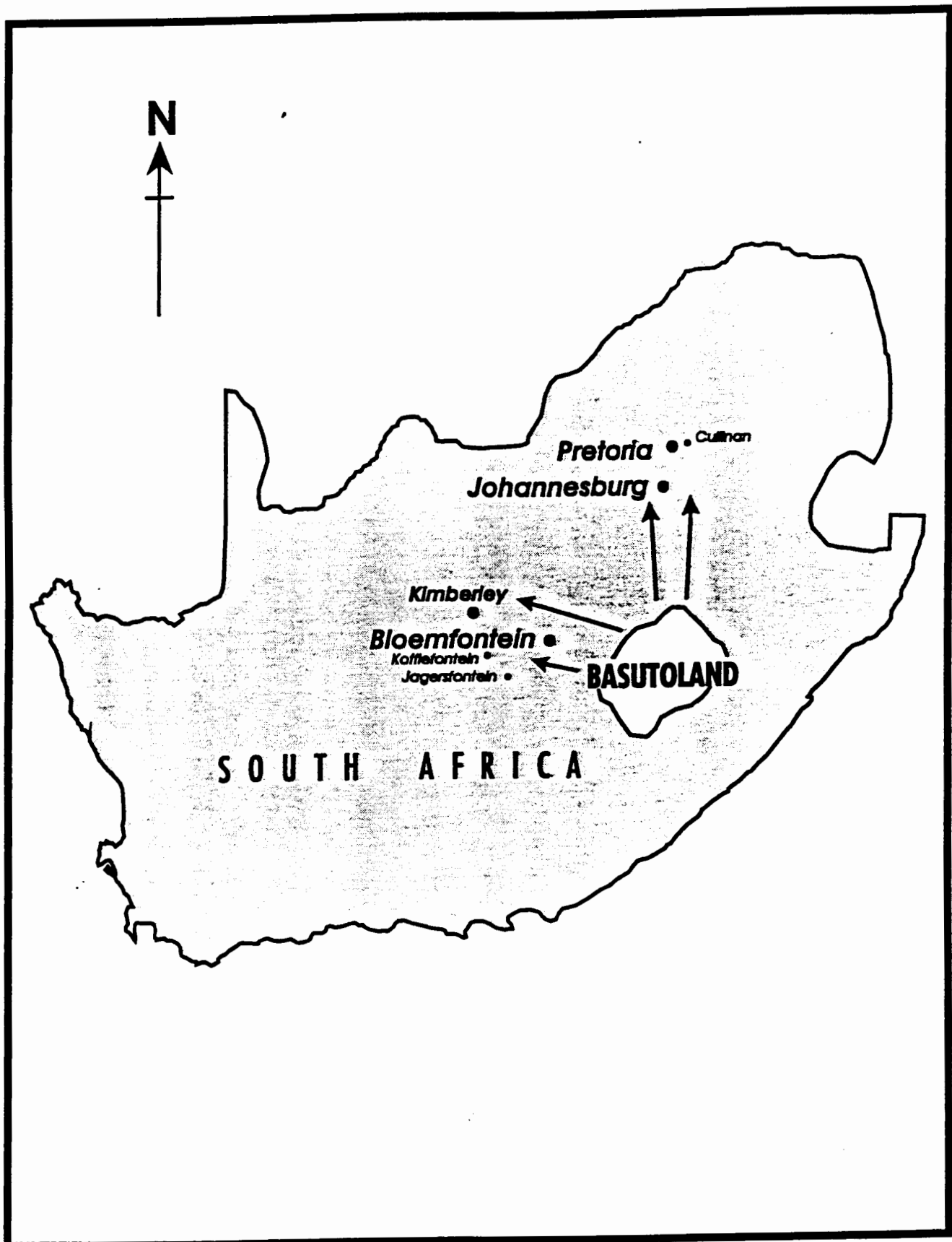
³. Macfarlane, "Some Observations", p.494.

Overall, then, this thesis has attempted to recover at least part of the history of Basotho labour migrancy, and in so doing contribute to a more rounded understanding of colonial Lesotho's past in the period to World War II. Yet, it has also tried to be more than just another case study, however important that aspect may be. Throughout, this thesis has argued, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, that the historiographical pendulum has swung too far in the direction of broadly cultural studies. While never arguing in favour of economism, this thesis does suggest that an historically informed combination of materialism and idealism offers a valuable perspective on the past. And finally, because many of the issues which this thesis has examined continue to pose serious problems for Lesotho and its people to this day, it is to be hoped that a critical understanding of their origins may contribute to finding lasting solutions.

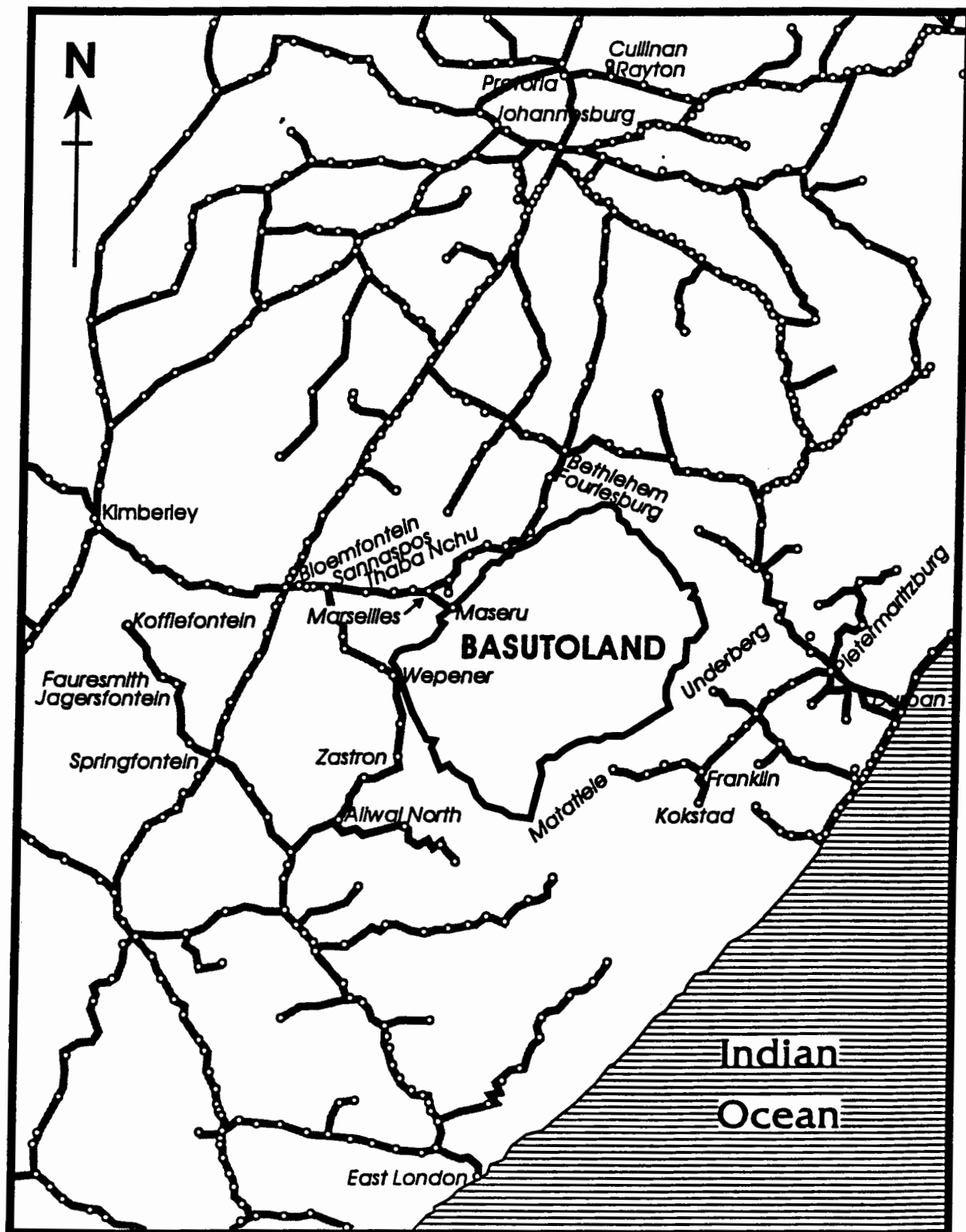


Map 2

Basutoland, showing the topography of the country



Map 3. Major destinations of Basotho migrants during 1900s - 1930s.



Map 4: Railway lines with major destinations of Basotho migrants, c.1930

APPENDIX II

TRAVELLING TO THE MINES

The expansion of the migrant labour system necessitated the improvement of facilities for and conditions relating to the movement of Basotho migrants. As Gordon Pirie has noted, the Randlords' efforts to tap potential sources of labour in the region led to the development and expansion of transport networks.¹

The earliest form of transport to the labour centres were the workers' own legs and feet. Thousands of Basotho men simply walked to mines, farms and towns. Individual men walked from their villages, waited at some common spot for others, and proceeded on the long journey in groups, sometimes in the company of a tout employed by a labour agent. Sleeping took place along the way, sometimes next to the footpaths and occasionally in villages which provided some security against robbery. Staying in a village also allowed migrants to request directions, food and water.²

A departing Mosotho migrant took with him the provisions that Basotho traditionally carried for long journeys and hunting expeditions. Lipabi is a dry, ground and fried maize, mixed with salt and sugar. It was preferred because in its desiccated form, it was easily preserved, portable, and consumable with water. Above all else, it filled the stomach very quickly! The other main item was magebekoane, a hard, maize dumpling, shaped to the size of a fist to make them portable and manageable. It remained edible for a long time

¹. G. Pirie, "Railways and Labour Migration to the Rand Mines: Constraints and Significance". Journal of Southern African Studies, vol.19, no.4, 1993.

². Interview with Solomon Mokoaleli, born 1914.

without rotting. These items were prepared by a sister, wife or mother. while a departing migrant visited friends, relatives and a diviner in preparing himself and his mind for the long journey. The preparation of lipabi even came to symbolise the act of leaving for the mines.³

The anxiety of preparing for departure is well captured in the following extract taken from Ntsane's famous poem "When we go to the Witwatersrand": the composition of which was inspired by the poet's work at one mine in Springs in 1940:

Our provision we had prepared,
 Prepared by the day before,
 Our baggage we had tied, we the poor dogs,
 Dogs of our chief, we who are always ready.
 Command, chief, we are ready.
 Ready to get into the hole of the mice,
 These mice are four-legged, they speak,
 They speak English, the language of the whites.

The night downed as we were waiting in vigil.
 Damned, awaiting wonders,
 For there are wonders in strange worlds.
 We woke up before sunset,
 When the whiteman's clock chimed.
 Chiming and scattering gatherings in the fields;
 What gatherings are there by those riversides?
 Riversides are places for grannies like 'Matshilontshile.

My mate gave up his mother, I gave up my grandmother.
 We gave up our relatives and left our ancestors;
 Where we are going we shall meet them.
 The ancestors in the mines do eat,
 They eat the mother's beloved child.
 Beloved by her as the only child,
 The only child is a thing to be cherished.
 He takes everything and ends the feast.⁴

As a matter of course, men visited diviners to be doctored for going to the mines, and this did not cease with the coming of trains and motor transport. One Mosotho informant told Jeff

³ Interviews with Tebello Mothai, date of birth not available (but he first went to the mines in the mid-1940s); Solomon Mosunyana, born, 1913. Details of all those interviewed are contained in the bibliography.

⁴ K.E. Ntsane, Mmusa-Pelo II, (A.P.B, Johannesburg, 1955), p.61; J.M. Lenake, The Poetry of K.E. Ntsane, (J.L. Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1984), pp.85-87. I am grateful to Nhlanhla Maake who assisted with the translation of the poem.

I think it is in Vereeniging. That place had a bush stretching from here to that place of Ntsane. We found that this place was not walkable and not clear. We just shoved ourselves because we were told that there was a way at the other end, and Transvaal mines were there.

They encountered a hyena, which they killed with a shower of stones.

...we [then] reached the end of the bush, and found a group of people working, digging out these trees. We asked for work there, and we got it. We took a month and continued. After a month we left; we had not yet reached our destination. We walked until we reached Cullinan where we wanted to go...

But the Orange Free State Boers were the greatest danger to these travelling men. They often assaulted migrants, and forced them to work farms. Mokoaleli remembered one incident:

...there were wild Boers who wanted to catch us while we were in Theunisen... They were riding in a motorcar... they alighted and called us; they were four of them. They asked us where we were going and what we were looking for, and we answered. Because we were young we did not have time for a Boer; our intention was to beat them. We were very naughty...! The eldest of these Boers ordered that we be caught and beaten. That was how we were provoked, and we started our thing. We said to one of us that he should stand next to this motorcar to prevent these people from getting into it to go and call others for help... We beat them, they fled and disappeared. It was towards sunset... we were now worried that now these Boers have done this, we will have to take care because now it was dark. We had to watch where we were going so as not to find ourselves in a bush. We decided to continue the following day at sunrise... We then slept, and while we were asleep there in the bush, we saw three motorcars approaching. One man among us said: "Do not look at those motorcars, because if you do so those Boers will shoot you as those [car] lights will shine on your eyes...". We then covered ourselves, when peeping we saw that they had passed us and we started chatting about our own things. Every time we saw a motorcar approaching we would cover our heads...⁹

Before the advent of trains and motor transport, horse carts and wagons known as "cabs", operated between different points

⁹. Ibid.

in Lesotho and South Africa. Going to the mines, men would use "cabs" as far as Bloemfontein or Thaba Nchu and continue from there by foot. The Rolong, Basotho and Boer wagon-riders who transported grain and other trade goods, also operated a regular "cab" service between Thaba Nchu, Bloemfontein and Maseru. Postal carts also offered lifts to individual migrants. Bloemfontein-Kimberley, Thaba Nchu- Bloemfontein, Wepener-Thaba Nchu, and Maseru-Thaba Nchu, were all common routes. One Mosotho in 1889 walked from Kimberley, obtained a lift from a postal cart on the way to Bloemfontein, and continued with a "cab" to Maseru. In the same year, two men took six days to travel by a "cab" from Matsieng (near Maseru) to Bloemfontein. Men from the south walked to Wepener where they caught "cabs" for the ten hour journey to Bloemfontein.¹⁰

Trains

The expansion of deep-level mining on the Rand was accompanied by the construction of railway lines linking the mines to the Transvaal's rural areas, Natal and the Cape Colony.¹¹ And during the South African War, the British, as part of their strategy to defeat the Boers, constructed additional railway lines in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. These lines all came to play a crucial role in post-war efforts to address the acute labour shortage on the gold mines. Lesotho could not escape this process.

The extension of the Cape Town railway line to Johannesburg in 1892 redrew the journey map for Basotho migrants from the southern and central districts. Men now travelled, either by foot or "cabs", to Bloemfontein station. The later extension of this Johannesburg line to Winburg shortened the route for men from Leribe and Butha Buthe, despite the problems of

¹⁰. Leselinyana, 1 July 1889; 1 December 1889; 1 October 1895; 15 July 1899; interview with Willy "Ramosoeu" Hawkins, born 1901.

¹¹. Pirie, "Railways and Labour Migration", p.716.

crossing the Caledon River. Migrants heading for Kimberley continued to walk from Bloemfontein until the opening of the Bloemfontein-Kimberley railway line in 1908. The Sannaspos branch from the Bloemfontein line (built during the war) was extended to reach Maseru in December 1905, and from this time many Basotho migrants left their country through this line, changing at Marseilles to take their connection. This Marseilles line was extended to Modderpoort to reach Bethlehem in 1907, giving the north of Lesotho a convenient access to Ficksburg, Gumtree, Generalsnek, and Fourisburg stations. In 1911 this Bloemfontein-Bethlehem line was extended from Sannaspos to reach Wepener through Dewetsdorp. The construction of the Aliwal North line to Zastron in 1916 and the further extension of this line to Wepener in 1924, connected the south of Lesotho to the East London line. The opening of Underberg station in 1916 linking Himeville to the Pietermaritzburg line via Donnybrook, provided migrants from Mokhotlong with access to this town through the Sani Pass. The railhead only reached Matatiele in 1924 to serve that area and Qachas Nek, completing the encirclement of Lesotho with the railway lines oriented towards the transportation of labour to South Africa (see Maps One and Four in Appendix I). A proposal had been made in March 1905 to construct 155 kms of railway track from Aliwal North through Mohales Hoek to Mafeteng, but this was turned down by the General Manager of the Cape Government Railways on the grounds that the proposed line would compete with a projected Aliwal North-Wepener line. In any event, such a line might have led to Basotho peasants competing with Cape farmers.¹²

The train from Maseru to Marseilles for onwards connection to Bloemfontein was an ordinary passenger train. On this line, there were no special labour trains (like the bombela used for

¹². On the construction of the railways, see Report of the General Manager of the South African Railways and Harbours, 1911-1928; Leselinyana, 15 May 1908. On the proposal to build the 155 km line, see Cape Archives Depot, CGR 2/1/4/35, 473/2/38793, General Manager (CGR) to Resident Engineer (Aliwal North), 7 March 1905.

transporting mine recruits from the Eastern Cape and the Transkei) for migrants. Recruits entraining at Maseru station were put in 3rd class coaches, the 1st class ones reserved for whites and Basotho chiefs and other members of the elite.¹³

The coming of rail transport introduced new factors and new challenges for both the colonial government and Basotho travellers. These revolved around the control of migrants as passengers; the provision of shelters at the stations; the exemption of chiefs and the Basotho elite from certain travel regulations binding the migrants; and the conflicting interests of the labour agents. The shelter erected at Maseru station in 1907 was rudimentary and very inadequate. The train bringing returning migrants arrived at 9 p.m., and this created a problem for those men who had long distances still to travel to their homes. Labour recruiters who were concerned with the popularity of their mines and companies, took the initiative and waited at the station to receive the returning men and give them temporary accommodation for the night. This led to competition among labour agents, each claiming the returning men to be "theirs". Traders also opened their shops at night in order to tempt migrants to spend their earnings, some even striking deals with labour agents. The Basutoland Chamber of Commerce appealed to the government in 1907 to act against those traders who were preventing "their" migrants from buying at other stores, but nothing could be done unless adequate shelter was provided. The Central South African Railways was asked to extend the shelter, but said that the L420 which it would cost must be met by the Basutoland government.¹⁴

Although few improvements were made to the shelter, conditions at the Maseru (and Marseilles) stations were still

¹³. LNA, S7/7/40, General Manager (Central SAR) to RC, 6 September 1907; S7/1/4/18, GM (CSAR) to RC, 19 July 1907.

¹⁴. LNA, S7/1/4/18, Sterley to AC (Maseru), 4 November 1907; GM (CSAR) to GS, 20 July 1907; S7/7/42, GS to GM (CSAR), 13 January 1908; CAR, 1907-08.

unsatisfactory, as a 1916 memorandum to the General Manager of the South African Railways shows:

A ... matter upon which I wish to approach you is that of accommodation for natives at Marseilles Station. Many Basuto chiefs use the train between Maseru and Ficksburg, and have to spend some time at Marseilles while changing. That place is very cold in the Winter months, and the native waiting room is of iron and wood and with a cement floor. I beg to enquire if, in view of the circumstances, you would be prepared to erect a larger room made of brick or stone...

Finally, I should be glad to know if you would be prepared to consider the erection of a better station building at Maseru, of the type of a second class station. The present building is small, cold, and not very impressive.¹⁵

While the response of the General Manager was partly determined by wartime shortages, it also clearly revealed the attitude of the railway authorities towards African passengers: "With regard to the waiting room accommodation at Marseilles; I am sorry I cannot seriously consider the provision of a new building in the meantime, but when labour and material is available, with the advent of more normal times, I am prepared to give the question consideration. The Maseru station buildings however, are, in my opinion, quite in keeping with requirements".¹⁶

Two years later the Assistant General Manager of the South African Railways wrote to the Resident Commissioner arguing that as "the native shelter provided by this Administration at Maseru Railway Station being but little used, and there being a great shortage of material, it is proposed to remove the building for use elsewhere".¹⁷ The Government Secretary protested, and pointed out that the waiting room facilities were actually inadequate, particularly as there was no accommodation for women and the "ordinary travelling native public".¹⁸ The Railways authorities' attitude to facilities

¹⁵. LNA, S7/7/67, RC to GM SAR, 4 October 1916.

¹⁶. Ibid., GM to RC, 23 October 1916.

¹⁷. LNA, S3/19/2, Assistant GM to RC, 21 September 1918.

¹⁸. Ibid, GS to GM SAR, 30 September 1918.

at the Maseru station was in line with South African perceptions of Lesotho as nothing but a labour reserve.

So little was spent on transporting migrants that this sometimes led to conflict between the railways and the mine and Basutoland authorities. The President of the Transvaal Compound Managers Association attacked the bombela at the Association's third annual meeting in 1921:

From every point of view... accommodation, lighting, sanitation, catering, - the return which Native passengers get for their money is scandalous. The coaches are nothing better than converted cattle trucks, probably converted because they were no longer good enough for cattle. I have it on good authority that Native mine labourers, travelling from Umtata for instance, have to remain in a standing or sitting position for not less than eighty-four hours.¹⁹

The mine authorities' expressions of concern were not, however, altruistic. They were concerned about the welfare of their African employees only insofar as it affected the popularity of their mines and the labour supply. They did not want recruits arriving at the mines suffering from exhaustion.

The bad conditions in the labour trains infuriated members of the Basotho elite when they were refused special treatment. In theory, chiefs, evangelists and "educated" Basotho, were exempted from the 3rd class coaches reserved for labourers and poorer sections of the community. One important condition for being granted exemption - besides education and social standing - was dress. Hence a Mosotho clerk was granted permission to board a 1st class coach in 1907 because he "was clean in his person, educated, and his dress neat and in good order".²⁰ For this reason he was not to be put in the "3rd class carriage set apart for the disrespectably dressed natives".²¹ But more often than not Maseru station staff refused to sell 1st class tickets to Basotho who qualified for special treatment; or put those carrying valid 1st class

¹⁹. Umteteli, 1 October 1921.

²⁰. LNA, S7/7/39, GS to GM SAR, 11 June 1907.

²¹. Ibid., RC to Maseru Station Master, 1 July 1907.

tickets in 3rd class coaches. This led to an outcry in the Basotho press from the local elite. Declining to be mixed with the migrants, their outcry was coded in attacks on segregation.²² One complaint was more direct:

What is this train here for in Lesotho? - I was fooling myself believing that it here for us Basotho, but the way I see it is that it is here for the men going to Johannesburg, for grain, for the wool from the stores, and for the whites in this country. As to an ordinary travelling Mosotho, no, it is not here for him.²³

Bridges and Motor Transport

The arrival of a railhead at Maseru and the building of the Mooderpoort-Bethlehem line, opened the way for the construction of bridges and motor roads in colonial Lesotho. The first bridge was built at the Caledon River to connect the railway line from Marseilles to Maseru. The second bridge connected Leribe to Ficksburg, making it easier for goods and migrants from Peka and Hlotse to reach Gumtree, Generalsnek and Ficksburg stations and Ficksburg town. Traders and the general public played an important role in facilitating this process. After the opening of the Mooderpoort-Bethlehem line a Road Communication Conference was held at Ficksburg and Fourisburg in September 1907, with representation from the Orange River Colony (the Orange Free State colony), Basutoland government and the Central South African Railways. Discussion centred on the road link between the Orange River Colony border towns and Lesotho. One of the proposals made was for the construction of a L1 500 road from Butha Buthe via the Caledonpoort to shorten the three-hour routes via Brindisi and Joel Drift. This proposal was motivated by the important

²². Leselinyana, 28 November 1912; 19 December 1912; 16 January 1913; 30 January 1913; 27 February 1913; 22 May 1913.

²³. Ibid., 28 November 1912.

trade links and growing migrant labour traffic between the two colonies.²⁴

From 1913 the residents of Butha Buthe petitioned the Assistant Commissioner for the construction of a bridge at Caledonpoort. Other petitions were sent in 1919, 1920 and 1926. The 1919 petition argued that a bridge was needed because "the Native Pass Office being at Butha Buthe Camp, and the nearest rail head, Fourisburg, there is a continuous procession of natives travelling to and from the mines, whose journeys are frequently interrupted by the river being full, and who are compelled by circumstances to go much out of their way to effect crossing".²⁵ The 1926 petition put this more dramatically: "Natives use this crossing continually when going to and from the mines in the Union, or to work on farms. Some lives have been lost, when the River was in flood".²⁶

While the colonial government was still considering whether or not to build the Caledonpoort bridge, people in the south also campaigned for bridges in their districts. In 1928 Leselinyana published an appeal that a bridge over Maphutseng River in Mohales Hoek should be the priority rather than at Caledonpoort. The Maphutseng River, the article argued, "is dangerous, floods very quickly, and has nearly taken the lives of many travellers, motorcars, carts and wagons".²⁷

The bridges at Caledonpoort and Makhalleng were finally built in 1936. Though the Makhalleng bridge made access to Zastron from Mohales Hoek easier, the greatest obstacles to movement in the south remained the crossing of the Orange River at the Seaka drift between Quthing and Mohales Hoek. Before the construction of a bridge there in 1956, a rope-pulled raft was used to cross the drift at very great risk. In Qachas Nek

24. VAB, CO 463, 4478/07, Director of Public Works (ORC) to Col. Sec., 8 October 1907; other related reports are attached to this correspondence; Leselinyana, 27 August 1910.

25. LNA, S3/24/7/3, petition to AC (Butha Buthe), 3 September 1919.

26. *Ibid.*, petition to AC (Butha Buthe), 30 June 1926.

27. Leselinyana, 14 September 1928.

private and government boats were used to cross the Orange and Tsoelike rivers to the Qachas Nek town and Matatiele, and to link with Mokhotlong in the north. A bridge at Tsoelike was built in 1930. Mokhotlong remained isolated due to its mountainous terrain where pack-animals continued to be the principal form of transport. Basotho migrants from Mokhotlong used to "trek for a week or more to reach a railhead and they have to make a longer rail journey way to the mines".²⁸

Travelling for Basotho migrants before bridges were built was dangerous, especially during rainy seasons when the rivers flooded, making crossing almost impossible. This theme comes through in one of the Basotho songs collected by Hugh Tracey in 1959. The following song was inspired by the experience of a mine deserter and the dangers he faced:

Basutoland is my fatherland,
 At Bushman's Nek, near Machacha, in the mountains.
 I joined up for work on the mines,
 But when I arrived I found myself in trouble.
 I was with Molelekoa, son of Smith.
 So I crossed the Vaal very early in the morning
 That was when I was nearly swept down with the river.
 Perhaps it was because I was running away,
 Running away and leaving my passes on the veld.
 I left mine in the western Transvaal,
 I left both my pass and my tax receipt!²⁹

As in Bechuanaland and central Africa where WNLA's efforts to build a northern "labour empire" resulted in the building of transport networks,³⁰ the NRC introduced its motor service in Lesotho in 1930. Within a few months, the Corporation's lorries were operating between Mafeteng, Mhales Hoek and the Seaka drift. The South African Railways began a bus service between Butha Buthe and Fourisburg in 1936, and in the south, between Zastron and Mhales Hoek and Zastron and Quthing. This development, together with the opening of the Makhalleng bridge

²⁸. Mining Survey, vol.6, no.2, June 1955.

²⁹. H. Tracey, "Basutoland Recording Tour, November 19th to December 3rd, 1959", African Music Society Journal, vol.2, no.2, 1959, p.73.

³⁰. J. Crush, A. Jeeves and D. Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines, (Westview Press, Oxford, 1991), pp.37-48.

in that year, shortened the routes for migrants from Quthing and Mohales Hoek and made the route to Zastron easier and more convenient.³¹ Parallel to this process, the NRC, like WNLA in the northern "frontier", built "rest houses" in the interior and "garages" at different points of its motor service. One "resthouse" was erected at Blue Gums and later removed to Seaka in 1932. Huts which were supplied with cooking and eating utensils, were erected on the Maluti for migrants travelling from Mokhotlong (under the escort of labour agents) for lodging at night.³²

But this development and improvement of the road and transport infrastructure had not been without contradictions. The absence of bridges and poor transport facilities provided avenues for Basotho entrepreneurs who operated taxis for migrants and ordinary travellers in the north and in Mafeteng. Of the ten boats operating at the Orange river in Qachas Nek in 1918, nine were owned by Basotho; and of the five operating at Tsoelike, four were in the hands of these men of Moshoeshoe. Of the eleven lorries running between Wepener and Mafeteng in 1931, seven were passenger lorries owned by Basotho; and by 1937 lorries had replaced wagons as a common form of transport in Quthing.³³

The opening of bridges and, more importantly, the arrival of motor transport, therefore threatened the interests of Basotho entrepreneurs. Complaints about the NRC's lorries and buses were raised in the Basotho press.³⁴ Competition appears to have been particularly rife in the north. By 1940, eighteen passenger motorcars and lorries operated between Butha Buthe/Hlotse/Peka and Ficksburg. In Mafeteng, Basotho taxi owners were in a stronger position, but they abused their

³¹. LNA, S3/5/18/3, NRC District Superintendent to RC, 12 May 1930; CAR, 1930; 1936.

³². LNA, S3/19/71, AC (Mafeteng) to GS, 21 January 1931; S8/2/2/28, RC to PC, 9 July 1932; S3/5/18/3, NRC District Superintendent to RC, 12 May 1930; Leselinyana, 24 April 1931.

³³. LNA, S3/26/7/4, AC (Qachas Nek) to GS, 7 April 1918; Mochochonono, 24 September 1938.

³⁴. Mochochonono, 24 September 1938.

strength by charging higher rates. In 1946 the people in the district campaigned against the 15s fare to Wepener, and requested South African Railways buses.³⁵

The encirclement of colonial Lesotho by railway networks and the construction of roads and bridges in that country, greatly facilitated the flow of labour to the gold mines. Although there were other factors at work, it undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the proportion of Basotho workers on the Rand mines increased from 3.17 percent of the total African workforce in 1910 to 10.53 percent in 1929 and 14.98 percent in 1939.³⁶ Moreover, Basotho recruits no longer arrived on these mines suffering from exhaustion. Nor were they still subject to harassment and assault by Free State farmers.

³⁵. LNA, Leribe Collection, Box 50, has a 1940 hand-drawn map showing road links and motor transport available (including the capacity and the owners) between the north (Butha Buthe, Leribe and Teyateyaneng) and the Free State bordering towns; CRA, 1936; Mochochonono, 19 October 1946.

³⁶. Van der Horst, Native Labour, pp.216-17.

APPENDIX III

SAKE AND MAINYATSO: THE CASE OF TWO WOMEN PROSTITUTES

Section Two of Chapter Seven discussed in detail the history and dynamics of commercial beer-brewing and the sale of sex in colonial Lesotho. These next few pages intend to use the case of two Basotho women prostitutes, Sake and Mainyatso, to illustrate the points raised in the chapter in question. As far as the migrants I interviewed outside Mafeteng were concerned, Sake and Mainyatso do not refer to historical figures. They were names applied to all prostitutes operating in Mafeteng. One of them referred to Sake and Mainyatso as "Managers" of Mafeteng matekatse.¹ What is remembered about these women is that they carried the luggage² of migrants at different points of their long journey between Wepener station and Quthing. Such women would spend time, even the night, with migrants in Quthing at the shelter provided by labour agents or the recruiting agency, performing domestic chores in the process. The women would then accompany the men up to Seaka drift. There, more women would take over until the next stop which was usually Mohales Hoek, where yet another group of women continued with the migrants until Mafeteng where the chain continued all the way to Wepener station. Returning migrants were similarly serviced. When the NRC established the Mafeteng-Mohales Hoek-Seaka lorry service in 1930 and opened a "resthouse" and "garage" at Seaka in 1932,³ matekatse adapted to the new situation by spending time with

1. Interview with Phomolo Matsabisa, born 1914.

2. Basotho women were used to carrying heavy loads on their heads, from their experience in carrying bowls of water from the river and loads from the fields. In the 1920s, in mountainous areas inaccessible to wheeled transport, women raised income by carrying fragile and liquid items from trading stores. They charged up to 3s per 25kg. See especially, R.U. Sayce, "Ethno-Geographical Essay on Basutoland", Geographical Teacher, vol.12, 1924, p.285.

3. See Appendix II.

migrants at these establishments and accompanying them to the lorries and buses.

But for all that "Sake" and "Mainyatso" became generic types, there is strong evidence to suggest that their origins were specific and individual. The following account, based on information from Willy "Ramosoeu" Hawkins,⁴ would seem to demonstrate that Sake and Mainyatso did once exist. Sake, according to "Ramosoeu", was from Mafeteng and by the 1920s was no longer staying with her family. She made a living by selling her body. It is not clear what pushed her into prostitution; her father was a relatively well-paid civil servant in the district colonial administration office. When Mainyatso, who left Thaba Bosiu to avoid harassment, joined her, Sake was already established and notorious with the local population. Sake and Mainyatso, together with other women, would wait for returning migrants at a store called "Raleting" (i.e. "Mr leting") situated on the way to Wepener. Sometimes they would leave quite early in the morning to meet returning migrants. Once a bargain had been struck, the women carried the migrants' luggage for a charge of about L2,⁵ and often taking them to their brothel at Seitlheko just outside Mafeteng on the road to Mochales Hoek. Their brothel was so famous, that Seitlheko became known as "Matshwaboleng" (i.e. where people are peeled off) and "*Pai la ihlatsoa la ba la ikaneha*" (i.e. "where a cloth washes and hangs itself [to dry]", meaning where men lose their money).⁶

Botekatse was particularly rife in Mafeteng during these years not only because chiefs tolerated the practice, but also because the colonial administration was weak. The Assistant Commissioner conceded in 1927 that "this Reserve has been much neglected; there was little or no order; the residents, white

4. Interview with Willy "Ramosoeu" Hawkins, born 1902. His father was a white trader who married a Mosotho woman, hence the reference "Ramosoeu" (whiteman). He has lived in the area all his life.

5. Interview with Solomon Mosunyane, born 1913.

6. Interview with Hawkins.

and black have been allowed to do as they pleased; drunkenness was steadily increasing".⁷

Sake and Mainyatso are also remembered for their mode of dress and behaviour. According to "Ramosoeu", they put on long and big "Victorian" dresses, and sometimes would go dressed only in their underwear:

They were drinking. They would wear [those big dresses]... They were so slender but would look very big! They bragged that they never buy blankets [like many Basotho]: "These [big dresses] are our blankets that we sleep with; this [dress] that I am wearing during the day is enough. These men [migrants] dress us in these clothes!".⁸

Sake, Mainyatso and their companions, moved in groups, surrounded by their likoata⁹ way to Seithleko. Always in the company of their likoata groups of between ten and fifteen men, they talked abusively, proudly and loudly about their business. One Tanka Madiba, from Quthing, who played a concertina, was often seen in their company. This may suggest that it was in such a context that famo and focho dances and music emerged.¹⁰

Sake, who was a bit older than Mainyatso who was in her 20s, died just before 1933. She was aged about 35 years old. "Ramosoeu" has this explanation about the cause of her death:

Truly speaking we can simply say that she died from cold, because coldness was already in her blood. She is a person who used to run even in the night! Today she would sleep here, the next day she would sleep that side at the cemetery with these likoata of hers. She would come from up there bringing some of these [likoata] here. The next moment she is waiting for those who are receiving their [deferred] pay... it was for this reason

7. LNA, S3/3/1/3, AC to GS, 21 Oct. 1927.

8. Interview with Hawkins.

9. For a discussion of the koata phenomenon, see Chapter Two.

10. Ibid. On these forms of dance and music, see Chapter Four.

that that place came to be called *ha Seitlheko, pai la itlhatswa la ba la ikaneha*.¹¹

The "coldness in her blood" probably refers to a venereal disease.

Surprisingly, Mainyatso later married one Sakease, son of Labane Lichaba, the local chief. But she did not change her ways. In the late 1940s, "she died a whore. What could be expected when she was running with young boys even when she was married. The old man [her husband] had but only to look".¹²

Many parents, particularly those who were Christians, warned their children against going near either Sake or Mainyatso and their likoata. But otherwise, the two prostitutes were usually left undisturbed. "Ramosoeu", for example, does not remember any instance of the police raiding the brothel at Seitlheko or arresting or expelling the Sake-and-Mainyatso group. The fact that Mainyatso was later married to the son of the local chief, and that many prostitutes relocated themselves to Mafeteng as early as 1915, serve as indicators that Labane Lichaba and his sub-chief openly tolerated these practices. Occasionally, though, the general rule was broken. From some of the lifela (i.e. migrants' song-poems; sing: sefela) collected by David Coplan, it would appear that at least some action was once taken against the Sake and Mainyatso group.¹³ Makeka Likhojane's sefela describes how

We arrived at Mafeteng camp;
Koenane¹⁴ drove out the prostitutes,
He left Mainyatso to Sakease,
That Sake he told her to push off.

This point is more developed in his other sefela:

11. Interview with Hawkins.

12. Ibid.

13. I am grateful to David Coplan for allowing me to use these lifela from his forthcoming book.

14. I have not been able to establish who this person was, but there is no doubt that he was one of the local authorities.

When Koenane expels prostitutes,
 He thus expels Sake and leaves Mainyatso (so as to marry
 her).¹⁵

Sake, he expels her, she moved on;
 She had finished the money of men,
 She had long been consuming half-crowns,
 Long finishing men's banknotes,
 Listen as I search out true reasons.

Yet Serame Thuhloane makes a rather different point, in the course of which implicating sub-chief Seithleko:

They are cruel, the women of Likhoele, at Ramapepe
 Kholokoe.
 Seithleko chased away prostitutes.
 Leaving behind Sake and Mainyatso,
 Sake used to brew intoxicating drink for him.

It is clear from his account that where expulsions of prostitutes were attempted, they were done half-heartedly, and anyway left Sake and Mainyatso untouched. The claim that Seithleko was being paid-off in drink by matekatse was possibly true.

Neither Sake nor Mainyatso had children. Their names are remembered nonetheless because, according to "Ramosoeu", they were the ones who introduced botekatse to Mafeteng.

It [botekatse] died with them [Sake and Mainyatso]. It ended with them because the [type of] botekatse that followed is still continuing to this day. It is not like that one that was "plain" [done in public]. They were seen by any person. She [they] even praised herself!¹⁶

They are also remembered because they were always more than simply prostitutes. In Thuhloane's sefela, they are given another role:

I had gone to them [Sake and Mainyatso] to be
 strengthened with medicines,
 I said I was looking for a charm to make me a
 foreman,
 But above all one that would make me a

¹⁵. This addition by Coplan is debatable. Mainyatso, as Makeka indicates in his other sefela, was married to Sakease.

¹⁶. Interview with Hawkins.

mine compound policeman.

Charms were used by Basotho migrants for protection against sorcerers and misfortune, and to control the external world (like bringing luck to one). Diviners were consulted for strength for the long road or to bring luck to those going to the mines.¹⁷ However, it is difficult to know whether these women were actually diviners. But the song confirms the point already made about their power and strength, and their centrality in the life experiences of Basotho migrants in the south.

Sake and Mainyatso, whether as individuals or type, were clearly an important part of migrant experiences. Their case demonstrates the multiple services that Basotho prostitutes rendered to their clients, and the significance of the labour of these women to the reproduction of the migrants labour system itself. Sake and Mainyatso survive today in the memories of some of the old migrants and the songs they remember. Men hated these women for robbing them of their money, but still loved them.

¹⁷. Ashton, *Basuto*, pp. 282-316; Dieterlen, "La Medecine et les Medecins", especially p.24.

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