Women, Class and Politics in Colonial Lesotho, 1930-1965

by

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To my family

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ABSTRACT

This study builds upon recent class and gender-sensitive research in Africa by focusing attention on the history of women in the economy, society, Christian churches and politics of Lesotho throughout the colonial era. It questions prevailing assumptions about women and gender in the historiography. These include the dualistic portrayals of conservative women and radical men, patriarchal chiefs and enlightened Europeans, female homemakers and male proletarians, reactionary Catholics and modern Protestants, and progressive Congress Party and regressive National Party. It also addresses the broader question of how the subordination and exploitation of Basotho women changed over time. That is, how was Basotho women's pre-capitalist subordination to men perceived and contested over by African and European males as new classes formed? How did Basotho women themselves perceive class transformation and take advantage of new opportunities? How did gender ideology and gender struggle come to assume strong political implications at the eve of independence?

A Note on Language and Abbreviations

Lesotho (pronounced Le-soo-too) is the country of the Basotho (singular, a Mosotho). Things pertaining to the country or the people take the adjectival form Sesotho, for example, Sesotho custom. Sesotho can also stand on its own to mean the vernacular or the culture in its entirety.

Like the other Sotho-Tswana languages spoken across the South African highveldt, Sesotho has different classes of nouns which are pluralized by adding the appropriate prefix, for example, letsema becomes matsema, pitso becomes lipitso. Sesotho also includes many words which are derived from Afrikaans and English as well as click sounds taken from the Khoisan. The latter is represented by a "q" (as in Senqu). For English-speakers, it is least pretentiously pronounced as a "k" sound.

There are two orthographies for Sesotho. The original was developed by French missionaries in the early 19th century. A more logically consistent one was then developed and imposed on the Basotho in South Africa by the Nationalist government in the 1950s. The main difference is that "li" and "lu" in the original orthography were changed to "di" and "du" in order to look more like how they sound. Thus liretlo in Lesotho (pronounced dee-ray-tlo) is spelled diretlo in South Africa. Other differences include "oa" and "oe" changed to "wa" and "we" respectively. Moshoeshoe is thus rendered Moshweshwe, the latter again a much closer rendition of its pronunciation.

This thesis retains the original orthography not only because it was most commonly used in the documentation of the period under study but also out of respect for the Basotho who take pride in their rich literature in the original orthography and who resent the South African version as a manifestation of apartheid. The most frequent alternative spellings of Basotho, Mosotho and so on which were used by the British (Basuto, Mosuto and so on) and French missionaries (Lessouto, Sessouto...) are retained in the text as they appeared in the original documents without special explanation.

The translations from Sesotho to English used in this thesis were made with the help of Thato Sibolla, with occasional advice from Stephen Gill. For the sake of maximum comprehensibility in Lesotho, I have translated all the French documents used into English, indicating wherever my translating skills came into play. For the sake of brevity, the original French is not included. All I can say about that is--faites moi confiance!

Abbreviations used in the thesis are:

ANC African National Congress
BAC Basutoland African Congress
BCC Basutoland Constitutional Commission
BCP Basutoland Congress Party
BNC Basutoland National Council
BNP Basutoland National Party
BPA Basutoland Progressive Association
CAR Colonial Annual Report
CRR Criminal Court Records, Lesotho National Archives
DAM Dechatelets Archives Microfilm, Ottawa
HC High Court Proceedings, Lesotho National Archives
JC Judicial Commissioner records, Lesotho National Archives
JME Journal des Missionaires Evangeliques
LEC Lesotho Evangelical Church
LLB Lekhotla la Bafo
LNA Lesotho National Archives
LNCW Lesotho National Council of Women
LSA Ladies of Ste. Anne
MFP Marema-tlou Freedom Party
MMO Missions de Missionaires Oblats
NUL National University of Lesotho
OFS Orange Free State
OMI Oblates of Mary Immaculate
PRO Public Records Office
PEMS Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
RCM Roman Catholic Mission
TY Teyateyaneng

Key Sesotho terms found in the thesis are:

bafo the people, commoners
bohali bride price, marriage, lobola
bahlalefi educated or wise ones, the "incipient bourgeoisie"
batsoelopele "civilized people," petty bourgeoisie
bolokolohi freedom, independence, emancipation
borena the chieftainship
chobeliso abduction or forcible elopement
hiki home brewed liquor fortified with noxious intoxicants
joala "kaffir beer," strong home brewed sorghum beer
jo kenela the levirate marriage
khotla (pl. makhotla) court
k'ore an interjection
leboella (pl. maboella) "spareveldt," land reserved for conservation
lebollo initiation
lefielo a "broom," a junior wife attached to the senior wife's

household as a servant
letekatse (pl. matekatse) prostitute, unattached woman
letsema (pl. matsema) tribute labour, corvée
lira the lands reserved for the chief's use
liretlo "medicine murder"
mafisa system of cattle ownership based on loans
makhomacha "the people in between," the lower stratum of the petty bourgeoisie
mofumahali queen, "chieftainess"
mohlanka (pl. mahlanka) a young man, servant
morena (pl. marena) chief
ho ngala for a wife to abscond back to her own family
ngoetsi (pl. lingoetsi) a junior wife "loaned" out to a friend or subordinate for hospitality, a "concubine"
ntlafatso "development" or "betterment" as in colonial or South African rural betterment schemes
nyatsi (pl. linyatsi) extra-marital lover or "paramour"
pitso (pl. lipitso) a meeting called by the chief or government to discuss public affairs
seantlo sororate marriage, when a man takes the sister of his deceased wife as a new wife
sekoata (pl. lisuata) "squatter," rowdy, unattached man
sethepu polygyny
setsualle extra-marital sexual intimacy
tsoelopele progress, civilization

Acknowledgements

I would like to express the deepest gratitude to my wife, Allison Goebel, for her unflagging but critical support in helping me to create this piece of work. Along with my daughters Jennifer and Adriane, both born in the very years it took us to put this project together, Allison taught me the meaning of analysis "grounded at the epistemological level of reproduction." Without this I quite simply could not have produced the pages which follow.

The same must be emphasized of the people of Lesotho and of Basotho women in particular. As the reader will soon discover, their struggles for survival and dignity form the basis of this thesis. I admit quite frankly that their achievements in often exceedingly adverse conditions deeply impressed me while their demeanour provided me with very necessary lessons in humility. I thank especially my informants, who not only tolerated but co-operated wholeheartedly with yet another rosy-cheeked foreign expert. Kea leboha haholo. My sincerest wish is that somehow some of the information which I garnered from you and present here may trickle down to contribute to the onerous tasks you face, not least of all, the construction of a democratic and more humane society in Lesotho and South Africa.

I would like also to acknowledge the assistance I received from Dalhousie University. In particular, I thank my supervisor, Jane Parpart, for learning along with me and for her profound contribution to my intellectual development over the last four years. I thank also John Flint, Mary Turner and Judith Fingard of Dalhousie's History Department for their support, advice and critical comments upon my work. Tina Jones and Mary Wyman helped me to grapple with WordPerfect and other mundane production matters.

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Finally, the World University Service of Canada and the Government of Lesotho offered me the invaluable opportunity of six months' in their employ. To the staff of St. Agnes High School and fellow historian Ntate Possa especially, kea leboha for welcoming me. Khotso, pula, nala!

Chapter One: Introduction

The Setting

Lesotho is a small country in southern Africa, smaller even than Switzerland, to which it has frequently been compared because of its mountains. In fact, Lesotho has the highest average elevation in the world. Its "lowlands," which occupy the western third of the country, begin to rise from 1,380 metres above sea level. They are characterized by looming, flat-topped hills reminiscent of the mesas of the southwestern United States. Indeed, with cactus and scrub and with horses tied up in front of dingy saloons, the villages of Lesotho more easily conjure up the image of the American Wild West than anything Alpine. Around the sprawling, dusty urban areas today, the wind blows plastic bags and candy wrappers like tumbleweed.

The mountains proper comprise the eastern two-thirds of the country. Approaching from the west, the Malutis appear to rise as suddenly as a wall. On top, treeless plateaux gouged by deep river canyons slant upwards as you head east to reach 3,800 metres above sea level before tumbling off in the mist-shrouded precipice which forms the border with Natal. The Malutis are so rugged that they were considered a virtually uninhabitable frontier until well into the 20th century. Now, villages cling to spurs along the mountainsides, facing northwards to catch the warmth of the sun.

The Malutis may be snow-capped for up to half of the year while even in the lowlands there may be killer frosts well into the planting season from August to October. In addition, there are frequent, violent hailstorms and serious droughts two or three years out of every decade. It is a bracing climate which ensures that the country is free from tropical parasites and malaria but which is too harsh to make agriculture a very secure endeavour.

Lesotho is also unique in that it is a land-locked country with but a single border--an enclave, totally embedded within the Republic of South

Africa. Fully 95% of its imports come from or through the Republic.[1] Indeed, South African dominance is visible even from the air as the western border provides one of the most striking illustrations of unequal development anywhere in the world. The sprawling, irrigated farmland of the Orange Free State ends abruptly where the brown tumble of Lesotho's eroded hills begin, hills which, in some districts, contain as many as 1000 people per square kilometer of arable land. Yet as the population has grown to nearly two million today, the fertility of the soil has diminished sharply. Crop yields by 1970 had already fallen to less than half of what they were in 1950.[2] Another indicator of how impoverished the land has become is that agriculture, by one estimate, provides a scant 6% of rural income.[3] Only about one third of the Gross National Product is produced domestically, making Lesotho one of the poorest countries in the world. It survives through a combination of one of the world's most generous foreign aid programmes and highest rates of migrant labour. At the peak of labour migrancy in 1960, over 200,000 Basotho worked in South Africa, that is, nearly a quarter of the de jure population.[4] Although tens of thousands of women were also (illegal) migrants, entire villages were depopulated of men between the ages of 18 and 54 and during the last four decades of colonial rule, the country as a whole had a sex imbalance of about seven and a half males to every ten females.[5]

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[1]. Lesotho, Socio-economic Indicators of Lesotho (Maseru, 1987), 40

[2]. World Bank, Lesotho: A Development Challenge (Washington, 1975), 38. Exacerbated by drought, this decline continued in the 1980s (Lesotho, Indicators, 46), while the harvest in 1992 was lower than in "the year of the red dust," 1933, hitherto the worst harvest in Lesotho's history.

[3]. Although fully 91% of the population is rural. A.C.A. Van der Wiel, Migratory Wage Labour: Its Role in the Economy of Lesotho (Mazenod, 1977), 88. Another estimate puts the contribution of subsistence agriculture to household income as high as 22%. Lesotho, Indicators, 53

[4]. Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons, "Introduction" in Palmer and Parsons, ed., The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, (London, 1977), 26

[5]. Lesotho, Census 1966 (Maseru, 1966)

Lesotho was not always so dependent, nor is it intrinsically poor. On the contrary, from the ashes of a devastating series of wars in the mid-19th century, the Basotho staged one of Africa's most remarkable comebacks. By the 1870s, they were the principal suppliers of grain for the Boer republics. During the Anglo-Boer War, they sold horses to the British and when the market for grain began to diminish in the early 1900s, they diversified production to include wheat, wool and mohair. They also originally controlled much of the export of these commodities as independent waggon drivers. Partly because of their business acumen, "the Jews of South Africa"[6] were much admired by the early missionaries: their "superior intelligence, that spirit of enquiry, and that craving for good government... reveal themselves in this people to a far greater degree than with any other in South Africa."[7] John Philip called the Basotho a "Godsend" in the 1840s as he perceived in them the qualities of industrious Christianity which could offset the evil of Afrikaner racism.[8]

The Colonial Office, reluctant at first to assume jurisdiction of the territory, soon came to share this favourable view as well. How could it fail to appreciate a colony which not only produced "a comparatively enormous amount of grain" but also (until 1946) allowed for sizable surpluses in the administrative budget? As late as 1942, Basutoland was described as "comparatively wealthy and progressive."[9] In the analysis of Sir Alan Pim in 1935, "this tranquil state of affairs" was such that

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6. G.M. Theal, Basutoland Records vol. 3B (Cape Town, 1964 [reprint of 1883 edition]), 876

7. With, added a Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) observer, "the possible exception of the Fingoes." Cited in R.C. Germond, ed., Chronicles of Basutoland (Morija, 1967), 325-6

8. As cited in Andrew Ross, John Philip: Mission, Race and Politics in South Africa (Aberdeen, 1986), 169. The first Protestant missionary, Eugene Casalis also compared their qualities as a race favourably to the "Boers" (cited in Germond, Chronicles, 266).

9. Lord Harlech (High Commissioner) to Clement Atlee (Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs), Report on Visit to Basutoland, 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/Y701/1/1

"conditions were in fact too easy."[10]

In addition to their productivity, the Basotho were also unique in southern Africa for having withstood imperial conquest. The British were defeated in a number of clashes with the Basotho in the 1850s. However, the founder of the nation, Moshoeshoe I, ultimately regarded the British as a lesser evil than the Afrikaners and he requested British protection from the latter in 1868. Hardly had this been granted when the Colonial Office handed the territory to the care of the Cape Colony (1871). When the self-governing Cape attempted to disarm the Basotho ten years later, the Gun War broke out. The Basotho humbled the colonial forces and compelled the Cape to abandon the territory. Three years of virtual anarchy later, Basutoland was formally disannexed from the Cape and given back to the Colonial Office (1884).

The Basotho correctly considered the Gun War to be a major military victory. While they still remained under colonial rule, the government in London was far away and little inclined to intervene in their affairs. The Gun War thus won for the Basotho an almost unparalleled degree of autonomy for a people in the British Empire in Africa. The Basotho chiefs were confirmed in power by the Colonial Office and, in 1903, given a forum to voice their opinions about the administration of the colony. The Basutoland National Council (BNC) was only advisory, but as early as 1909 it showed it had the power to influence colonial policy by making Basotho views known as far away as London. Indeed, Basotho opposition to incorporation with South Africa (as the British had first suggested in 1907 and then conditionally provided for in the 1909 Act of Union) was so strong and vocal that no British government was subsequently willing to carry it out. The Gun War therefore directly led to Pim's famous lament: "There was then [1884] and there is now, no rule either direct or indirect of the British government. The Nation is ruled by its chiefs and the

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10. Sir Alan Pim, The Financial and Economic Position of Basutoland, (London, 1935), 70 [hereafter The Pim Report]

government can merely proffer advice: this is not asked for nor welcomed."[11]

The Basotho "obsession" with independence which Sir Alan so heartily rued extended to a ban on European settlement and land ownership within Basutoland. This was a condition of the 1868 treaty of protection, upheld in 1884, which the Basotho were constantly anxious Britain would betray. Their fears were heightened in 1925 when responsibility for the territory was passed over to the new Dominions Office under the High Commissioner in Pretoria. Although this seemed to be a first, discreet step towards incorporation, South African expansionist hopes were never to be realized. Instead, despite considerable pressure from Pretoria in the 1930s, as well as the Dominions Office's own belief in the economic logic of incorporation, the British held onto Basutoland in the hope that eventually a liberal regime in South Africa would make it politically feasible to dispose of their responsibilities. This hope was finally dashed by the election of the overtly racist Nationalist Party in South Africa in 1948, after which incorporation was no longer politically feasible. Denied their preferred option, yet unwilling to pay the spiralling costs of colonial upkeep, the British then hurriedly conceded what Lord Hailey had described as "a fantasy" as late as 1963.[12] The administration of Basutoland was returned once again to the Colonial Office in 1964 in preparation for the granting of political independence as Lesotho in 1966.

Political Economy and Gender in the Historiography of Lesotho

Lesotho's extraordinary history and its present predicament have attracted considerable academic attention. Within the historical literature on Lesotho two dominant themes emerge: how the nation came to be and how it came to be so poor. The first focuses in particular on

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11. The Pim Report, 49

12. Lord Hailey, South Africa and the High Commission Territories (London, 1963), 128

Moshoeshoe I, and how he interacted with the other chiefs, the missionaries and the British to allow a motley collection of refugees and "Bushmen" to coalesce and thrive in the hostile environment of 19th century southern Africa.[13] This historiography is very much dominated by the Great Man school of thought, and, indeed, it is readily conceded here that Moshoeshoe I was one of the most able leaders in all of modern African history.

The second theme, which is more directly germane to this study, involves the exposition and interpretation of the forces which led to the country's dramatic decline "from granary to labour reserve." This historiography is dominated by versions of conspiracy or dependency theory--in B.M. Khaketla's words, Britain's "Great Betrayal."[14] Britain stands accused of betraying its moral obligations to the people of Lesotho in favour of a cynical policy of "benign neglect" or "laissez-faire" which profitted British companies and advanced their interests elsewhere in the region. As the High Commissioner unabashedly admitted, British policy rested primarily upon the deliberate cultivation of migrant labour for the benefit of the mining industry of South Africa and "to fertilize native territories for cash which is at once diffused for English goods."[15] To carry out this policy on-the-cheap, the British are held to have restructured the traditional Basotho chieftainship into a basically compliant and increasingly corrupt class of "compradors" and "discourteous

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[13]. For a review of the early historians of Lesotho, see Elizabeth Eldredge, "Land, Politics and Censorship: The Historiography of 19th Century Lesotho," History in Africa 15 (1988). See also Godfrey Ladgen, The Basutos: The Mountaineers and their Country, (NY, 1969 [reprint of 1909 edition]); G. Tylden, The Rise of the Basuto (Cape Town, 1950); Peter Becker, Hill of Destiny: The Life and Times of Moshesh, (NY, 1969); Leonard Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds, (London, 1975); Peter Sanders, Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Basotho, (London, 1975); J.M. Mohapeloa, Government by Proxy: Ten Years of Cape Colonial Rule in Lesotho, 1871-81, (Morija, 1971); Sandra Burman, Chiefdom Politics and Alien Law (NY, 1981)

[14]. Bennett Khaketla, Lesotho, 1970: An African Coup under the Microscope, (London, 1973), 122

[15]. Basutoland, Colonial Annual Report 1898-99 [henceforth CAR 1898-99], (London, 1899)

feudal fanatics."[16] After independence, the argument goes, these men, typified by the country's first prime minister, Chief Leabua Jonathon, then simply continued the processes which had bled the country of its manpower, its soil and its morale for the previous half a century.[17]

The reasons given for Britain's alleged perfidy or neglect vary widely. In the official version, Britain's honourable intentions were depicted as having been undermined by "embarassing" but unavoidable budget considerations.[18] Hailey largely accepted this view but also alluded to excessive "caution" on the part of British officials in Basutoland.[19] At the other extreme, British racism and greed were seen behind virtually every policy decision.[20] In a more sophisticated variation of this theme, Kate Showers, argued that early development efforts by the British were undermined by their lack of sensitivity to environmental factors and a technological bias arising from European culture.[21]

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16. In the inimical terms of Lesotho's radical press. See Basutoland Newsletter 21 May 1965 (Africa Bureau, Box 219/5, Rhodes House), Makatolle, and Mohlabani passim.

17. Elements of this thesis can be found in works by authors as ideologically varied as Khaketla, Lesotho 1970; Richard Weisfelder, "Defining National Purpose: The Roots of Factionalism in Lesotho" (PhD diss. Harvard, 1974); Jack Spence, Lesotho: The Politics of Dependence, (London, 1968); R.P. Stevens, Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland, (NY: 1967); L.B.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study, (London, 1990); Neil Parsons and Robin Palmer, "Introduction" in Parsons and Palmer ed., The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa, (London, 1977), 20-26; D.K. Kowet, Land, Labour Migration and Politics in southern Africa: Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, (Uppsala: 1978); Bernard Leeman, Lesotho and the Struggle for Azania, (London, 1985); and even, albeit faintly, in the Pim Report. For the post-independence period, when the international donor community as a whole was the "betrayer," see Ferguson's excellent deconstruction of the discourse of so-called aid--James Ferguson, The Anti-politics machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho, (Cambridge, 1990)

18. CAR 1939, 33

19. Lord Hailey, Native Administration in the African Territories, vol. V, (London, 1953), 100

20. Khaketla, Lesotho 1970; Leeman, Azania

21. Kate Showers, "Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho: Origins and Colonial Response, 1830-1950s," Journal of Southern African Studies 15/2 (Jan. 1989), and idem, "Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment: Soil Conservation in Lesotho in the 1930s-40s," Journal of

Some analysts, however, have absolved Britain of primary responsibility for Lesotho's predicament. To Pim, the innate intellectual or cultural limitations of the Basotho frustrated British good intentions at least as much as financial restraint.[22] Others have stressed the racist intransigence and aggression of South Africa.[23] Still others have accorded greater agency to the Basotho themselves by emphasizing the debilitating effects of internecine political and religious squabbling upon economic development.[24]

Undoubtedly, elements of truth exist in all of these interpretations. On the whole, however, and with the notable exception of Showers' recent work, the historiography of underdevelopment tends to dwell on Great Men to the detriment of broad social history. In the mid-70s, for instance, an inordinate amount of intellectual energy was expended upon a miniscule, largely masculine elite--the chiefs.[25] Radical historians have tended to follow this pattern, focusing narrowly upon political leaders. They have also tended to present "imperialist" forces in an undifferentiated manner.[26] Studies of popular movements

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Southern African Studies 18/2 (June 1992). The term "European" in this study is taken simply to mean anyone of European descent (including those born in South Africa, Canada or elsewhere).

22. The Pim Report, 6 and passim. This view, expressed in terms of Basotho "traditionalism" as a brake upon progress was echoed by G.M.E. Leistner, Economic Structure and Growth (Pretoria, 1966), 35-36. Sandra Wallman couched it in slighly different terms, blaming the migrant labour system for inducing the apathy, sorcery, drunkenness and pessimism among the Basotho which blocked development initiatives by the government. Sandra Wallman, "The Bind of Migration: Conditions of Non-development in Lesotho," in Wallman ed., Perceptions of Development, (Cambridge, 1979), 101-112

23. Spence, Lesotho, and Halpern, Hostages, among others.

24. Richard Weisfelder, "Defining"; Machobane, Government; W.J. Breytenbach, Crocodiles and Commoners in Lesotho (Pretoria, 1975)

25. In addition to the works by Sanders, Thompson, Breytenbach cited above, 1975 saw the publication of two other studies focused on the chiefs: Ian Hamnett, Chieftainship and Legitimacy in Lesotho, (London, 1975) and Jason Jingoes, A Chief is a Chief by the People, (Cape Town, 1975)

26. See, for example, Gabriele Winai-Strom, Development and Dependence in Lesotho: The Enclave of South Africa, (Uppsala, 1988); Leeman, Azania

(some of which involved significant numbers of women or posited radical changes to gender and class relations) also focus overwhelmingly on the views and actions of articulate male leadership.[27]

As a result, there has been little systematic analysis of political economy. Indeed, until Colin Murray's ground-breaking work in the late 1970s, the tangential treatment or outright avoidance of analysis of the material base of class and gender conflict is striking. Nowhere is this more blatant than in the World Bank report of 1975. There, Lesotho appears as a "traditional subsistence peasant society" with "a degree of equality [of income distribution] which is not matched in any other country known to this mission."[28] In actual fact, Basotho society is characterized by an enormous gulf between the rich and poor which was officially deemed worrisome as far back as 1935.[29]

Even when noted, however, class differences in Lesotho in the early colonial period have tended to be characterized in a simplistic fashion, a divide between hereditary, "feudal" chiefs on the one hand and commoners on the other, with the latter itself divided between the masses (undifferentiated peasants) and an educated or "middling" elite.[30] With a few exceptions, these divisions were presented as relatively static. As one study flatly asserted, there was "no social mobility between the classes."[31]

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27. Weisfelder, "Early Voices of Protest: the Basutoland Progressive Association and Lekhotla la Bafo," African Studies Review 17/2 (1974); Robert Edgar, Prophets with Honour (Johannesburg, 1988); Gordon Haliburton, "Walter Matitta and Josiel Lefela: A Prophet and a Politician," Journal of Religion in Africa 7/2 (1974)

28. World Bank, A Development Challenge, 1, 21

29. The Pim Report, 42. See also Hugh Ashton, The Basuto, (Oxford, 1952), 172-177. Ashton's research was carried out in the late 1930s in Mokhotlong, one of the last districts in the country to be brought into the cash and migrant labour nexus.

30. For example, Breytenbach, Crocodiles and Commoners; Hailey, Native Administration

31. V.G.J. Sheddick, The Southern Sotho (London, 1952), 42

As for gender relations and women, it is also noteworthy how little attention has been paid to them by social scientists.[32] For example, economic studies have tended to focus on male migrant labour or and male attempts to deal with the problems created by colonial neglect.[33] In general, women's economic activities were rarely or cursorily discussed, while their social activities or customs were presented in exotic terms.[34] Their political activism occasionally appeared in footnotes.[35] Periodization was almost always in terms of signal events in the lives of elite men, above all, constitutional changes.

This lack of interest in Basotho women is all the more telling because it contrasts so starkly with the reality of life in Lesotho. Basotho women's unusually high economic and political profile is readily apparent from the moment female customs officials first greet one at the airport. From the road, women can be seen driving trucks, pumping gas, doing roadwork, supervising roadwork. Basotho women also commonly sit behind big desks in government bureaucracies, manage factories and hotels, and run schools and hospitals. This is hardly surprising given that their literacy rate is nearly double that of men.[36] Women are the majority on

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32. With, as shall be discussed below, a few notable exceptions beginning in the mid-1970s. It must be noted that this lacuna was perfectly in keeping with social science elsewhere in Africa and, indeed, the world. Women and gender were not generally considered suitable topics for serious research anywhere prior to the last two decades. The lack of interest in women in the scholarship on Lesotho therefore simply reflects the dominant stream of Western academic thought and practice.

33. Van der Wiel, Migratory Labour; Leistner, Economic Structure; Chandler Morse, Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland: Report of an Economic Survey Mission (London, 1960); R.S. Porter, The Development of the Basutoland Economy (London, 1965)

34. For example, E.A.T. Dutton, The Basuto of Basutoland, (London, 1923); Hugh Ashton. The Basuto (Oxford, 1952)

35. For example, footnote 118 in Eugene Lapointe, An Experience of Pastoral Theology in Southern Africa, (Rome, 1986), 93

36. Lesotho, Basotho Women and Their Men: Females and Male in Lesotho: Statistics Divided by Gender, (Maseru, 1989), 19-20

village development councils and comprise a significant minority of the traditional chiefs (27.3% and growing in 1979).[37] They are also, as throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, predominant labourers in the fields and gardens, while up to almost three quarters of households are de facto headed or managed by women.[38] In recognition of their extraordinary ability to work and to sustain or initiate community development, the former prime minister, Leabua Jonathon, used to call them "breasted human bulldozers."[39]

British colonial officials noted the unusual independence and public activity of Basotho women over four decades ago, although, as this study will show, they rarely integrated this observation into their development planning. Similarly, scholars writing about Lesotho have tended when discussing women either to ignore the obvious or to take refuge in unsubstantiated clichés about women's "nature." Above all, this has included accepting and reifying the gender ideology that characterizes women as naturally domestic, religious and conservative. Women are also assumed to be "weak vessels," physically, emotionally, and politically. Any successes or political prominence which women have had are then explained as a result of men's absence or men's ambitions. It is almost as if Basotho women achieved their present status in spite of themselves.

These assumptions are ubiquitous in the early descriptive works on Lesotho by missionaries, travellers and polemicists. The first accounts of Basotho history barely acknowledge the existence of females even though one of the principle chiefs in the nation's formative period was a woman, 'Mantatisi. As ruler of the BaTlokoa clan, she reportedly led her people to defeat Moshoeshoe in battle on a number of occasions. While

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37. Judy Gay, "Basotho Women's Options: A Study of Marital Careers in Rural Lesotho," (D.Phil, Cambridge, 1980), 41

38. Gay, "Options," 34; Lesotho, Indicators, 29, 31

39. Interview, 'Masechele Khaketla. For information on this interview, and all subsequent oral interviews or personal communications which are cited in the text, see Appendix A.

Ellenberger's History of the Basuto describes 'Mantatisi as "a brave woman of great natural ability and force of character,"[40] later historians tended to treat her as a freak or curiosity (with "huge, pendulous breasts") who apparently ceased to exist the moment her son, Sekonyela, succeeded her.[41] A similar freakishness was attributed to the "prophetess" Mantsopha, a prominent early opponent of colonial rule and advisor to Moshoeshoe I.[42]

Ellenberger was also unusual among the early historians of Lesotho in that he mentioned how widows and wives often played decisive roles in the power struggles for the chieftainship. Such women, however, tended to disappear or be relegated to passing references or footnotes in subsequent retellings. Moshoeshoe's "great wife" 'MaMohato, for example, who was said by Ellenberger to have been left in charge of the capital Thaba Bosiu when Moshoeshoe travelled, was mentioned only once in Lagden's two volume account--and then serving food only.[43] Others noted her happy face and Moshoeshoe's deep love and respect for her. That he apparently killed her in a fit of anger at her infidelity is nowhere held against Moshoeshoe's reputation as a caring husband and peace-loving man.[44]

To those observers who were less concerned with history and more interested in current social conditions, the family and women were legitimate subjects of discussion. Missionaries were particularly voluble on the subject of women's role in daily life. Women's status was, however,

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40. D.F. Ellenberger and J.C. MacGregor, History of the Basotho, Ancient and Modern, (NY, 1969)

41. Becker, Hill, 1968, 39. Christina Qunta could be considered guilty of the opposite extreme, trivializing 'Mantatisi by characterizing her as an heroic, romantic figure. Christina Qunta, ed., Women in Southern Africa, (Johannesburg, 1987)

42. For example, Becker, Hill, 238; Thompson, Survival, 207; Sanders, Moshoeshoe, 276

43. Ellenberger, History (unpublished volume three as cited in Sanders, Moshoeshoe, 50); Lagden, The Basutos, 53

44. Ellenberger, History, cited by Sanders, Moshoeshoe, 50

almost universally interpreted by them in ways that reduced women to chattels or drudges. In Minnie Martin's view, Basotho women were "good natured and docile, slaves to their lord and master, acknowledging his complete power and superiority over them with perfect contentment."[45] Horror and amazement at women's apparent lack of standing in Basotho society pervaded 19th accounts. To the missionaries Gerard and Schumpf, girls were nothing more than "the greatest article of commerce" and "about the only trade of the country."[46] Christianized Basotho also added their voices to this chorus of disgust, informing the 1873 commission of enquiry into Basotho customs about the "slavery" of women and "woman-farming" for the "profit" of unscrupulous men.[47]

These Victorian views on women's passivity and powerlessness reverberate down even to some recent scholarship. For example, when discussed at all, the increasing number of women chiefs in the 1930s to '50s was generally attributed to their promotion by unscrupulous men seeking to exploit imputed feminine weakness and malleability for their own ends.[48] In other cases, women were simply subsumed under men.[49] Elizabeth Gordon was quite explicit in her description of Basotho women as "conditioned to dependence, passivity and lack of control."[50]

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45. Minnie Martin, Basutoland, Its Legends and Customs (London, 1903), 21. The author was in the territory as the wife of a colonial officer from 1891-1901.

46. Cited in Elizabeth Eldredge, "An Economic History of Lesotho in the 19th Century," (PhD diss., U. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1986), 251. Similar views, somewhat qualified, were expressed by Dutton, The Basuto, 79

47. Cape Colony, Report and Evidence on Native Laws and Customs of the Basuto [henceforth Native Laws and Customs] (Cape Town, 1873), 36, 40

48. Ashton, The Basuto, 199; Jingoes A Chief, 153

49. For example, the pedantic Seth Makotoko is given credit for dynamic public speaking when in fact it was his sister, 'Maposholi Molapo, who was the Marema-Tlou Freedom Party's star performer in the 1965 campaign. Halpern, Hostages, 159; Makatolle, Mar. 1965, 5; Interview, B.M Khaketla

50. And, as a result, implicitly lacking in "confidence and strength of character." Elizabeth Gordon, "An analysis of the impact of labour migration on the lives of women in Lesotho," Journal of Development Studies 17 (April 1981), 74

The historiographical treatment meted out to Paramount Chieftainess 'Mantsebo, illustrates how negative assumptions and stereotypes about women affect scholarship. Although she ruled as regent for nineteen of the country's most tumultuous years (1941-60) and she continues to be remembered with great respect among the Basotho, her role in the constitutional development of Lesotho is rarely mentioned in historical accounts of the period. Attention has been focused instead on the male politicians and chiefs whom, it was assumed, influenced or dictated to her. On the few occasions when 'Mantsebo is mentioned therefore, it is often with qualifying adjectives such as "weak" or "uneducated."[51] The American journalist John Gunther went so far as resorting to supernatural explanations to deny that she had any leadership ability.[52]

Generally, specious rationalization has tended to substitute for empirical research or honest observation of Basotho women. One wonders, for example, if Poulter had ever been to Lesotho when he wrote that Basotho women, as farmers, "are too weak to do more than scratch at the surface."[53] Ashton meanwhile opined that women, "being more conservative than men and jealous of their traditions have preserved [circumcision]," a custom which, we are assured, would otherwise have died out as the country adopted modern ideas.[54] Kowet, apparently without irony, stated that "most" women "were not only staunch Catholics but also traditionally

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51. See Leeman, Azania, 30; Halpern, Hostages, 145; weakness or incompetance is implied in Tylden, The Rise of the Basuto, 221, and Lord Hailey, Native Administration, 90

52. That is, Gunther recognized the great authority and respect which 'Manstebo had among her people but attributed this solely to her use of sorcery. He was unusually scathing in his description of her ("suspicious," "surly," "dowdy," "fat," "nervous, grunting," a face "the colour and almost the size and shape of a large baked potato"). John Gunter, Inside Africa, (NY, 1955), 577

53. Sebastian Poulter, Family Law and Litigation in Basotho Society, (Oxford, 1976), 27

54. Ashton, The Basuto, 57

oriented."[55] Even Weisfelder, an unusally gender-conscious political scientist whose work still stands as the definitive account of the development of Lesotho's political factionalism, rather blithely asserted that women "are generally more attached to the existing moral and social fabric."[56]

Female conservatism, and the undue influence which reactionary men are said to have had upon women, are held by most accounts of the first general elections in 1965 to be major factors in the unexpected victory of the conservative Basutoland National Party (BNP). Women supposedly voted for the party of "dull, uneducated and church-going old men"[57] in numbers large enough to "turn the tide" against the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), the party which men supposedly supported in droves.[58] Because this election set Lesotho on an authoritarian and neo-colonial path, women's conservatism is by implication one of the root causes of its present predicament. Women, "who appear to be conservative and concerned to maintain the economic link with South Africa"[59] or who were "extremely sensitive to real or implied threats against religion"[60] are portrayed in the literature as having either voted without rational thought or chosen narrow "bread and butter" issues over more high-minded issues espoused by the BCP. Bardill and Cobbe, while citing the inconclusiveness of the evidence for women's conservative voting behaviour, nevertheless repeat

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55. Kowet, Land, Labour Migration and Politics, 162. Catholics were in fact a minority of the total population--37.8% in 1966. Census 1966, 95

56. Weisfelder, "Lesotho," Potholm and Dale ed. Southern Africa in Perspective (NY, 1972), 135

57. Basutoland National Party. BNP: Portrait of a Party (Maseru, 1978)

58. Lawrence Frank. BNP: Traditional Authority and Neo-Colonialism in Lesotho (Denver, 1971), 9

59. Spence, Politics of Dependence, 44

60. Stevens, Lesotho, 81

this wisdom without attribution.[61] Machobane states baldly that the BNP was "basically a party of women" and that "few" women had political convictions which "overrode their fear of Church sanctions."[62]

The church being referred to in these quotations is, specifically, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM). The connection between it, the BNP and women illuminates another striking bias in Lesotho's historiography. Not coincidentally, this connection is made in ways which underscore women's putative irrationality. The RCM is, for example, widely charged with having directly intervened in the 1965 election with its "paternalistic attitudes of feudal barons,"[63] "excessively conservative,"[64] "phrenetic, compulsive anti-Communism."[65] Indeed, the list of its sins is so great that one is left to believe no sensible person could possibly have voted for the BNP, "the political extension" of the Catholic church.[66] That so many obviously did can then only be explained by the BNP's appeal to those archetypal non-sensible persons, women.

A possible explanation for the bias against the RCM in the literature is that the Catholic church, politically aligned with the traditional elites and possessing a non-democratic, often secretive corporate structure, found few international defenders. The charges against it went largely unchallenged or were compounded by a sensationalized and unbalanced presentation of internal church documents

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61. James Bardill and James Cobbe, Lesotho: Dilemmas of Dependence (Boulder, 1985), 34. The sole source which supports this (cited at a later point in the text) is Frank, whose mongraph was frankly pro-BCP and anti-Catholic.

62. Machobane, Government, 285 and 296

63. Weisfelder, "Defining," 141

64. Stevens, Lesotho, 56

65. Halpern, Hostages, 179

66. Leeman, Azania, 88

and rumours.[67]

By contrast, the Protestant missions produced most of the urban, intellectual and business elite of the country. The Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) was by far the most successful church in that regard. It members not only tended to support the BCP but also to show bitter hostility and condescencion towards the RCM.[68] They also tended to host and socialize with visiting observers to a much greater extent than did the Catholic elites. These visitors, who naturally identified themselves with the "modern" values of the Protestant churches, often echoed BCP attempts to explain or rationalize their political defeat in the watershed 1965 elections, much as they had earlier echoed the views of the colonial administrators.[69]

This bias in the sources could in part explain why an interpretation which links an irrational church with an irrational sex persists despite the fact that it has been rejected by the two researchers who actually

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[67]. Theresa Blanchet-Cohen, "The Corporate Structure of the Catholic Church in Lesotho, 1930-56," (M.Phil, London, 1976); Leeman, Azania

[68]. See the Protestant press for glowing accounts of the BCP leadership (eg., Leselinyana as cited in Basutoland Witness 14/2 1960). The Journal des Missionaires Evangéliques (henceforth JME) for the views of the Protestant missionaries towards their Catholic rivals (eg., JME 1942, 132). The ill-will, it should be stressed, was often reciprocal.

[69]. The kid gloves treatment accorded to the BCP leadership is nicely illustrated by Edward Muth, "African Philosophy and its Application to Basutoland" (PhD diss., U. of Ottawa, 1963), 202; Weisfelder, "Defining," 226 and passim, and is pervasive throughout Halpern, Machobane and many others. Part of the problem was that these authors had a clear tendency to draw upon ideologically similar and discursively "respectable" sources and to discount alternative sources. The polished and intellectual periodicals of the radical parties and the PEMS (Mohlabani, The Commentator, Leselinyana and so on) were favoured in most accounts above the often amateurish Catholic and BNP organs (Moeletsi oa Basotho, Nketu and 'Mesa-Mohloane), while Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, 1968), relied for his interpretation of the 1965 election result almost entirely upon The New York Times. This is reminiscent of John Gunther, who created a scandal in Basutoland in 1955 by openly attributing the major source for his slanderous account of "medicine murder"-his host for two weeks, the Resident Commissioner! (Gunther, Inside Africa, 917)

analyzed voting patterns by gender.[70] Weisfelder's explanation for women's voting also continued the pattern of denying autonomous female rationality or agency. The reason, he concluded, that women voted predominantly for the BCP was that "[male] migrant town dwellers would convey a sense of outrage to their wives" when relating their experiences in South Africa.[71]

The presumptions in favour of men's activities pervade marxist historiography as well. Marxists explicitly reject the Great Man bias of liberal historians, focusing instead on the material base or economic underpinnings of society. Among orthodox marxists, however, the Proletarian Man has tended to take its place as an historical fiction. This has resulted in the disappearance of women as workers and farmers.[72] Even in the more nuanced work of neo-marxists since the 1970s, the tendency remained to discuss organized labour and peasant or progressive farmers who were overwhelmingly male. Palmer and Parsons, for example, mentioned neither female migration nor their predominant role in agriculture in their analysis of underdevelopment in Lesotho.[73] Women, when they do appear in such accounts, tend to do so as pawns of male power-brokers--"commodities" and "objects" in Kimble's terms.[74] Men, on the other hand, are frequently slotted into reified "fractions" or structures with a terminology often inappropriately or uncritically imported to Africa from Western Europe. Diverse patterns of human

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70. MacCartney found virtually no co-relation between sex, education or church and voting behaviour, while Weisfelder's more detailed study discovered that women may actually have "leaned towards the militant BCP." J.A. MacCartney, "A Case Study: The Lesotho General Elections of 1970," Government and Opposition (1973), 478; Weisfelder, "Defining," 342

71. Ibid. 343

72. See, for example, Albert Nzula, I.I.Potekhin and A.Z. Zusmanovich, Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, Robin Cohen ed., Hugh Jenkins trans., (London, 1979), [reprint of the 1933 Russian edition]

73. Palmer and Parsons, "Introduction," 20-26

74. Judy Kimble, "'Runaway Wives': Basotho Women, chiefs, and the colonial state, c. 1890-1920," Women in Africa Seminar, SOAS (London, June 1983)

behaviour, decision-making and emotions have consequently tended to be reduced to formulaic calculations.[75]

In Lesotho, the few attempts to make women conform to marxist structures have been particularly awkward and unconvincing.[76] To Kimble, gender was originally of only marginal interest and, when discussed in her works, the actual historical experience of Basotho women tended to disappear in speculation about the "articulation of modes of production."[77] There was, in short, a shortage of empirical evidence within an abundance of ponderous theorization. More recently, Bardill and Cobbe managed to devote only six and a half pages (including a photograph) to "family life and the role of women."[78] In these ways, women have tended to be assigned by marxists to a sterotypyed and unchanging role for life.

A number of studies outside the discipline of history were the first to challenge the tendency to regard women as historically insignificant, most comprehensively by Colin Murray. In his examination of the social impact of migrant labour, Murray found that the apparent illogic and tenacity of the system of debts engendered by the bride-price payments

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75. These critiques are discussed in Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, "Radical History and South African Society," Radical History Review 46/7 (1990). That I accept them is not to deny the value of neo-marxist analysis to understanding the agency of the working classes in the development of capitalism in the region. Moreover, for all their structuralism and androcentrism, neo-marxists were among the first to draw attention to the ways that gender relations have been affected as (an incidental) part of the process of capital accumulation. See Harold Simons, African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa, (Evanston, 1969); Charles Van Onselen, Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, (NY, 1982)

76. For example, Seeiso Mofoka, "Some Notes on Class Formation: From 'Primitive Classes' to Classes Proper" unpublished paper from Southern African Universities Social Science Conference (Roma, 1981)

77. Gender or women are discussed only in Kimble's unpublished work: "Labour Migration and Colonial Rule in Southern Africa," (D.Phil Essex, 1985), pp.299-313; and "Runaway Wives." Her contribution to the debate about the value of the concept of "articulation of modes of production" is made in "A Case for the Defense," Canadian Journal of African Studies 19/1 (1985), 64-72

78. That is, out of 200 pages. Bardill and Cobbe, Dilemmas, 106-113

(bohali) could be explained to a large degree by women's rational strategies to deal with the extreme structural insecurities they faced. He concluded that the persistance of high bohali payments, despite missionary pressure and market logic, was better explained by "bargaining conducted by women over the earning capacity of men" than the traditional view of men exchanging women.[79] He also provided evidence to show that "the strength and resiliance of women, as managers of most rural households, are remarkable."[80]

Andrew Spiegel also documented the crucial importance of Basotho women's agency in the national economy. Specifically, he documented how their activities were the key to diffusing scarce cash resources throughout the country.[81] In another study, detailing the intricacies of Lesotho's "dual legal system," Poulter documented a great deal of female autonomy and assertiveness in the family which had, implicitly, important political and economic implications. "Wives have carved out for themselves a greater freedom of action... Widows too, have asserted themselves and gained considerable independence from the families of their deceased husbands."[82] Malahleha, in her study of liquor brewing, noted Basotho women's militancy. "Shebeen queens" in particular, were seen to exercise a "dominant role that is publicly instituted and approved."[83] Other studies by Judy Gay, Allison Goebel, David Coplan and Eugene Lapointe all questioned the assumptions that women are passive or powerless and that

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79. Colin Murray, "High Bridewealth, Migrant Labour and the Position of Women in Lesotho," Journal of African Law 21/1 (1977), 80

80. Colin Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho, (Cambridge, 1981), 150

81. Andrew Spiegel, "Rural Differentiation and the Diffusion of Migrant Labour Remittances," in Philip Mayer ed., Black Villagers in an Industrial Society, (Cape Town, 1980)

82. Poulter, Family Law, 329

83. Gwen Malahleha, "Liquor Brewing: A Cottage Industry in Lesotho Shebeens," Journal of Eastern African Research and Development 15 (1985), 53

men are more politicaily conscious.[84]

This is not to exaggerate the gender-sensitivity of the sociological, as opposed to historical research on Lesotho. Much of it is flawed. Martha Mueller, for example, relied upon "fuzzy" and "un-political" questions to extract information from her informants, with the result that her investigation of women's politics lacks acuity.[85] Moreover, Mueller did not examine women's church and other self-help organizations which are, as she admitted, probably the major avenue for women's political expression. In other words, her study rested upon a narrow, traditional, and essentially androcentric definition of politics in the so-called public sphere.

Mueller's conclusions are nonetheless of interest to historians. She has shown that Basotho women's apparent disinterest in public politics and withdrawal to domestic or family affairs does not constitute proof of their apolitical or conservative nature. Rather, she portrayed such withdrawal as a rational political choice in the circumstances where public politics were manifestly "impotent" or of "neglible" value. The "most effective strategy" to gain economic security for Basotho women, and hence a rational political goal, was to be "a loyal wife," a finding which was largely supported by the anthropologist, Judy Gay.[86] It concurs also with the concept of "exit" discussed by Fatton. Withdrawal from the public realm of politics and formal economy is, for African women, often "the preferred means of voicing discontent because it does not necessarily

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84. Judy Gay, Women in Development (Maseru, 1982), 78; Allison Goebel, "Women and Employment in the Third World: The Implications of a Lesotho Case Study for Development Theory and Practice," (M.A. diss, St. Mary's U., 1992); David Coplan, "Eloquent Knowledge: Lesotho Migrants' Songs and the Anthropology of Experience," American Ethnologist 14 (1987), 419; Eugene Lapointe, An Experience, 216

85. Martha Mueller, "Women and Men in Rural Lesotho" (PhD diss., Brandeis U. 1977) and "Women and Men: Power and Powerlessness in Lesotho," Signs 3/1 (1977)

86. Gay, "Options"

provoke the immediate exercise of state repression."[87]

The first thoroughgoing investigation of women in the history of Lesotho lent support to this interpretation. Elizabeth Eldredge described Basotho women's predominant role in agriculture and domestic production in the 19th century, as well as the role that missionaries and the technological innovations which accompanied colonial rule had in transforming women's labour.[88] In a later article, she showed how the colonial regime and the extension of capitalist relations of production "intensified the struggle over remaining resources" to the detriment of the poor and women. Women's behaviour, especially their supposed conservatism, has to be understood in the context where women who resisted "found themselves subject to severe restrictions imposed by colonialism, capitalism and racism."[89]

Judy Kimble also contributed to the history of gender and class in Lesotho. Despite the limitations of her structuralist approach, her work provided evidence of the role of gender struggle in the development of migrant labour. In "Runaway Wives," she focused on women's attempts to escape from patriarchal controls and the efforts of the colonial regime to thwart them.[90] Indeed, she argued that migrant labour and the present class structure of Lesotho could not be understood without first clarifying the ways in which the subordination of women (and through them, young men) took place in pre-capitalist society.[91] Kimble was also increasingly drawn to the view that men's control over women was a central

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87. Robert Fatton, "Gender, Class, and State in Africa," in Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt eds., Women and the State in Africa, (Boulder, 1990), 55

88. Eldredge, "An Economic History"

89. Elizabeth Eldredge, "Women and Production in 19th Century Lesotho," Signs 16/4 (Summer 1991), 730

90. Judy Kimble, "Runaway Wives"

91. Judy Kimble, "Some Aspects of the Penetration of Capitalism into Colonial Basutoland, c.1890-1930" in Class Formation and Class Struggle (Roma, 1981); and "Labour Migration"

aspect of the organization of capitalism and the maintenance of colonial rule in the region. Women, subjected to the "triple squeeze" of economic marginalization, the British desire for "efficient" administration and the opportunism of the traditional Basotho male elites, suffered from colonial rule in unique and intense ways.[92]

This is a theme taken up, but not substantially supported with empirical evidence, in unpublished works by Roste and Sexwale, Ntimo-Makara and Phoofolo.[93] Articles by Burman and Bonner in Women and Gender in Southern Africa begin to fill this empirical gap and to suggest avenues for future research by analyses of Basotho women's struggles to take advantage of new legal rights in the 1870s,[94] and of their illicit presence and activities in the locations of Johannesburg.[95]

All of this recent work on gender in Lesotho's history fits into a growing body of literature which not only regards women as historical actors but, in some cases, posits gender struggle as a central feature of the development of capitalism in Africa. Mann, for example, has shown how women's struggles in 19th century Lagos to attain, and manipulate Christian marriage conventions affected the process of class formation, the concentration and inheritance of wealth and, ultimately, international trade patterns.[96] Parpart and Staudt offer a collection of essays which

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92. Kimble, "Labour Migration"

93. Pule Phoofolo, "Kea Nyala! Kea Kyala! Husbands and Wives in 19th Century Lesotho," Mohlomi Seminar paper, National University of Lesotho (NUL), 1980; I.J. Roste and B.M. Sexwale, "Women in Lesotho: Some Research Priorities," Institute of Southern African Studies seminar, 1987; Matora Ntimo-Makara, "Women as Migrant Workers: Lesotho Case Study," Women in Africa Seminar, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Mar.4, 1985

94. Sandra Burman, "Fighting a two-pronged attack: The changing legal status of women in Cape-ruled Basutoland, 1872-1884" in Cheryl Walker ed., Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (Cape Town, 1990), 48-75

95. Phil Bonner "'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women?' Liquor, prostitution and the migration of Basotho women to the Rand, 1920-1945" in Walker, Women and Gender, 221-50

96. Kristin Mann, Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos, (Cambridge, 1985)

show gender struggle as being "at the heart of state origins, access to the state and state resource allocations."[97] For the colonial period, Chanock, Parpart, Schmidt and Walker have also shown how a "patriarchal coalition" or "curious alliance" of African and European men created traditions or reinterpreted customs to assert their control over women.[98] Jeaters has also shown how "the creation of perversion" was a "side effect" of the struggle between different elements of the settler elite for control of African labour and the uneven propagation of European sexual mores.[99] Staudt argues that the colonial state played an active role in "depoliticizing" women and women's issues as part of its effort to speed and smooth the penetration of capitalism in Africa.[100] Gaitskill challenges the view that women's church organizations were apolitical,[101] while White and Dunbar-Moodie have also contributed to the analysis of gender in African history by showing how ideologies of masculinity were

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97. Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt ed., Women and the State in Africa, (Boulder, 1989)

98. Martin Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia (Cambridge, 1986); Jane Parpart, "Sexuality and Power on the Zambian Copperbelt." in Sharon Stichter and Jane Parpart ed., Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and Workforce (Boulder, 1988), 115-38; Elizabeth Schmidt, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe," Signs 16/4 (Summer 1991), 732-56; Cheryl Walker "Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System, c. 1850-1930" in Walker, Women and Gender, 168-96. See also Marjorie Mbilinyi, "Runaway Wives in Colonial Tanganyika: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage in Rungwe District, 1919-61," International Journal of the Sociology of Law 16 (Feb. 1988), 1-29; and Theresa Barnes, "The Fight for Control of African Women's Mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939," Signs 17/3 (Spring 1992), 586-608

99. Diana Jeaters, "Marriage, Perversion and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1930" (D.Phil, Oxford, 1990)

100. Kathleen Staudt, "Women's Politics, the State and Capitalist Transformation in Africa," in Irving Markowitz ed., Studies in Power and Class in Africa, (Oxford, 1987)

101. Debby Gaitskill, "Devout Domesticity? A century of African women's Christianity in South Africa" in Walker, Women and Gender, 251-72

constructed and contested over time.[102]

What all of this research shows in piecemeal fashion is that women's economic activity and the efforts of the colonial state to control it have been of profound importance to the history of Africa. In Belinda Bozzoli's terms, domestic struggle "may in fact condition and shape the very form taken by capitalism in that society."[103] Pursuing this point, Frederick Cooper has offered a periodization of colonial African history which centres on state intervention to restructure the African family.[104] In Cooper's analysis, colonial states were attempting to ensure the cost-efficient exploitation of African labour and resources. At the beginning of the colonial era, Europeans sought actively to weed out the aspects of African society (such as slavery and the oppression of women) which, they held, impeded the spread of legitimate commerce and social justice. By the 1910s and 20s however, this effort had broken down in the face of the difficulties involved, not least of all due to the contradictions between the European "civilizing" mission, their need for forced labour and the resistance of the Africans themselves. The colonialists then attempted to control the damage created by their earlier policies (epitomized by women running away from the rural areas and engaging in illegal brewing of beer and prostitution). They proclaimed social conservatism as necessary to protect the bewildered, childlike African from the impact of modern ideas. At the height of what became known as Indirect Rule, traditions were invented to bolster the authority of tribal authorities.

This agenda itself quickly broke down, however, and, according to

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102. Luise White, "Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-59," International Journal of African Historical Research 23/1 (1990), 1-25; T. Dunbar-Moodie, "Migrancy and Male Sexuality," Journal of Southern African Studies 14/2 (Jan. 1988), 228-56

103. Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and Southern African Studies," Journal of Southern African Studies 9/2 (1983), 147

104. Frederick Cooper, "from free labour to family allowances: labour and African society in colonial discourse," American Ethnologist 16/4(1989), 745-65

Cooper, a new interventionism was underway by the 1940s which sought to create an industrial, urban class of Africans. This involved direct and sustained efforts to extend European control into the mode of reproduction, including family allowances and domestic education for girls which could provide the foundation upon which to build a new, "moderate" African elite (viz., a nuclear, consumer-oriented family). Ultimately, this was not successful, and, with the granting of independence, the effort was abandoned. The haste with which the imperial powers decolonized can therefore be explained in part by their failure to "Westernize" gender relations of the Africans, leading to mass nationalist movements against colonal rule.

Two other recent works are particularly useful for the light they shed upon the historical development of African culture and consciousness in the region. Both Belinda Bozzoli's Women of Phokeng, and John and Jean Comaroff's Of Revelation and Revolution posit that overt coercion and resistance comprised only a fraction of the colonial experience, and that less visible, day-to-day struggles in the sphere of culture were of crucial importance in determining the ways Africans reacted to colonial rule.[105] In that respect, Bozzoli, who draws innovatively upon oral history, has shown that women's assertion of "dignity, class capacity, cultural patterns and gender identity" played a key role in shaping the forms of domination in modern South Africa.[106] Bozzoli concludes that the concept of "domestic struggle" in historical context offers the most efficacious way to illuminate what colonialism and capitalism meant to the daily lives of a people "so intricately enmeshed in different types of domination" that class or race conflict may have entered their

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105. Belinda Bozzoli. Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983 (London, 1991); John and Jean Comaroff. Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa vol. 1, (Chicago, 1991)

106. Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, 3

consciousness only infrequently.[107]

Along a similar line, the Comaroffs show how gender was one of the principal areas of contest in the European effort to "colonize consciousness."[108] This contest over culture took place largely through symbols, rites and implicit language. The struggle to reconstruct the African household in these quiet ways was, the Comaroffs argue, one of the major battlefields of imperialism. It was a battlefield where African women were central and where the European triumph was much more equivocal than in the military or political sphere.[109]

Theoretical Approach, Methodology and Sources

This study will attempt to build upon such class and gender-sensitive research by focusing attention on the history of women in Lesotho. My starting point was a desire to question some of the prevailing assumptions and biases relating to women in the historiography described above. These include, principally, the dualistic portrayals of conservative women and radical men, female homemakers and male proletarians, progressive BCP and regressive BNP, reactionary Catholics and modern Protestants, patriarchal African chiefs and enlightened European colonialists. Through questioning these dichotomies, I was also asking the broader question of how did the subordination and exploitation of Basotho women change over time? That is, how was Basotho women's pre-capitalist subordination to men perceived and contested over by African and European males as new classes formed? How did Basotho women themselves perceive class transformation and take advantage of new opportunities? How did gender ideology and gender struggle come to assume the strong political implications it did at the eve of independence? In presenting

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107. Ibid., 14

108. Jean and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, 313

109. See also Jean and John Comaroff, "Home-made Hegemony: modernity, domesticity, and colonialism in South Africa," in Karen T. Hansen ed., African Encounters with Domesticity (New Brunswick, NJ, 1992)

the data I collected, I will test the applicability of Cooper's periodization to a territory where gender and class conflict were unusally pronounced.

These questions were inspired by the theoretical approaches drawn together under the rubric of socialist feminism and, in order to answer them, I adopted the approach which, in my view, has helped most to make gender and the private struggles within the domestic sphere legitimate subjects of historical research. Not surprisingly, this new area of research interest has coincided with the growing number of female social scientists in the past two decades. Specifically, frustration with the failure of marxists to take gender into account in a systematic way led to the elaboration of theoretical concepts which are implicit or undeveloped in classical marxism.[110] The following section outlines the principles of this gendered political economy approach, as well as the methodology which guided my research and a brief description of the sources upon which I drew.

Socialist feminism began as a critique of the androcentric tendencies of marxism discussed above.[111] It is, nonetheless, still marxism in that it assumes a materialist understanding of human nature. That is, people's activities, consciousness and even, ultimately, emotions are seen to be derive primarily from the need to satisfy material or physiological imperatives. "The sex drive" is one such imperative which,

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110. By "classical marxism" I refer to the scholarly and political tradition which emphasizes class as the predominant determinant of social relations. The classical marxist interpretation of how gender related to class was elaborated by such theorists as Engels, Bebel, Gramsci, and Reich. See Tom Bottomore, V.G. Kiernan, and Ralph Miliband eds., A Dictionary of Marxist Thought (Cambridge MA, 1983). See also Marc Epprecht, Marxism versus the Patriarchy, ISAS Gender Studies Series #1 (Roma, forthcoming) for a more focused review of socialist feminism's roots in classical marxist theory and practice. An excellent summary of the relationship between "culture, ideology and hegemony" appears in Jean and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, 13-39

111. Allison Jaggar. Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, NJ, 1983); Rosemarie Tong. Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction (Boulder, 1989)

it is accepted, is the same in principle as the imperative to eat and drink. What differs about the sex drive from culture to culture and from era to era is the ideological "superstructure" built around this need. That is, every society constructs its own unique understanding of "proper" sexuality, relations between the sexes, child bearing and child rearing. In this way, biological sexuality comprises only one aspect of a "sex/gender system" which assigns specific and interrelated meanings to masculinity and femininity.[112]

The sex/gender system itself is but one element of the worldviews, philosophies, common sense and so on of a people, the totality of which is known as culture. Culture is determined through a complex and dynamic process of dialectic between such factors as biology, the environment, technology, and ownership of the means of production. Ultimately, it is the latter factor, and the distribution of power in society which arises from it, which determines the broad direction of change and development of culture.

Where socialist feminism parts company with classical marxism is in the stress it lays upon gender relations as a factor to be considered in analyzing class struggle. The first socialist feminists took issue with the fact that even those marxists who were sincere on the "woman question" used patronizing language and "naturalistic" assumptions about women's reproductive or domestic role.[113] They regarded gender relations as a manifestation of the conflict between classes, with the optimistic view that male domination, like the state, would wither away under socialism.

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[112]. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Some Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" in Rayna Reiter ed., Towards an Anthropology of Women (NY, 1976), 157-210

[113]. Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production and Private Property" in Reiter, Anthropology, 211-34. Other important early socialist feminist texts include Zillah Eisenstein ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism, (NY, 1979); Michelle Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist-Feminist Analysis, (London, 1980); Lydia Sargeant ed., Women and Revolution, (Montreal, 1981) and Joan Kelly, Women, History and Theory, (Chicago, 1984)

This was unsatisfactory to many women, not least of all because of the evident persistence of patriarchal attitudes among socialist men.[114] In place of a theory which subordinates gender to class, therefore, socialist feminists sought to construct a theory which calls explicit attention to the centrality of gender in the formation and persistence of class structures.

An important element in this endeavour has been to "stretch" marxist terminology from being "gender-blind" to being sensitive to gender differences. The traditional marxist definition of "class" for instance assumes that wives, because they share their husbands' "family wage," would also share basically the same class consciousness. In reality, women may often have a different class position and consciousness than what might be predicted from their relationship to their husbands or fathers. This is especially true in Africa where the "non-pooling household" is the norm.[115] Women are also frequently petty capitalists in the informal sector, and thus, theoretically "class enemies" of proletarian husbands. Socialist feminists simply call attention to the fact that the household is not a unified or coherent unit but may be the site of considerable economic struggle. In this way they assert that gender ideology and the sexual division of labour can have deep repercussions in class formation and class struggle.[116] The class position of a family unit may also change over time as the "developmental cycle" and gender struggles unfold

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114. The term "patriarchy" which I employ hereafter refers to any sex/gender system that is characterized by structural male domination, and "patriarch" to any man who justifies the exercise of power on a gender basis. It does not imply that this is a univeral condition nor that it is essential to males.

115. Ann Whitehead, "'I'm Hungry Mom,' The Politics of Domestic Budgetting," in K. Young, C. Wolkowitz and R. McCullagh ed., Of Marriage and the Marketplace, (London, 1984), 88-111

116. For example, see Jane Humphries, "Class Struggle and the Persistance of the Working Class Family," Cambridge Journal of Economics 1 (1977), as well as the works of Bozzoli cited above.

within it.[117]

Another key term, "production," was defined by classical marxists in such a way as to ignore or minimize the reality of most women's lives. Housewives, because their domestic labour does not create "exchange value" and is not directly exploited by capital, were not considered to be engaged in production. Their domestic labour provides only goods and services with "use value" and so, although it indirectly enhances the profits which accrue to the capitalist, women's work was fuzzily defined (and reduced in theoretical importance) as "reproduction." By contrast, socialist feminism argues for an expanded notion of production which recognizes that women's domestic labour contributes fundamentally to the accumulation of capital. In this way, a woman's household labour, child-bearing and rearing and the sexual and emotional services she provides to bolster her alienated man's buffetted ego can all be considered productive. Indeed, by some accounts this "sex-affective production" is vital to the reproduction of a docile, cheap and disciplined working class. Without "the hidden half of capitalist organization and exploitation" capitalism could not function.[118]

Many of the gender-biased assumptions of classical marxism stem from the notion of a dichotomy between the private and public spheres. Socialist feminists challenge this notion by emphasizing the political ramifications of personal choices. By casting a critical eye upon the decision-making processes within the household or private sphere, they believe it is possible not only to deepen our understanding of public decision-making processes, but also to shed light on a whole new arena of struggle against oppressive features of the mode of production.

A key question remains, how does patriarchy, which appears in so

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117. Colin Murray, "Class, Gender and the Household: The Developmental Cycle in Southern Africa," Development and Change 18/2 (April 1987), 235-249

118. Hugh and Pat Armstrong, "Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex: Towards Feminist Marxism" Studies in Political Economy 10 (1983), 13

many different forms and historical circumstances, relate to the material base of a society? If it is neither essential (biologically) nor strictly functional (economically), why does female subordination persist so tenaciously from pre-capitalist right through to socialist societies? Socialist feminists have found a useful concept in Althusser's "relative autonomy" to address this question. They argue that gender ideology and class structures are formed simultaneously rather than one deriving from or depending on the other. Patriarchy and capitalism can then be seen as distinct but symbiotic systems. Thus, those elements of pre-capitalist patriarchy which obstructed the accumulation of capital in the specific circumstances of capitalist development in a given society, tended to "wither away" while those which were conducive to profits tended to be preserved or strengthened. Patriarchal values are reproduced generation after generation through male-controlled structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and the socialization of children in a dialectical and "relatively autonomous" manner with the material base of society.

These patriarchal and capitalist structures reinforce each other to "overdetermine" our belief that the sex/gender system is somehow natural.[119] This accords with Gramsci's concept of "hegemony," that is, an ideology which is so widely accepted among a people that it is taken-for-granted as natural or essential. Hegemony is an invisible construction of hierarchies and systems of domination which pervades culture to the benefit of those who hold political and economic power. That hegemony changes over time is not seen as the result of long-term capitalist planning or imperialist conspiracy, but as stemming from an ad hoc process determined in part by the intensity of gender struggles within the household.[120]

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[119]. Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, (NY, 1974)

[120]. Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare and G.N. Smith ed. and trans., (NY, 1971); Carl Boggs, The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism (Boston, 1984); See also Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power: Towards a

In all, socialist feminism provides an analytical approach which accords respect to the agency and struggles of oppressed peoples within a hegemonic system, as well as sensitivity to the contradictions and consciousnesses of the oppressors. It allows both the elitist notion of "false consciousness," often used to disparage the alleged conservatism of women, and the conspiratorial or teleological notion of "function," to be dispensed with. In their place, socialist feminism enables us to see and analyze both oppressed and oppressors, women and men, as historical actors and human beings riven with complex emotions and motivations. Bozzoli and others have shown in the case of southern Africa, marxism and feminism together provide a powerful analytic tool for revealing the historical development of capitalism in the region.

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Before proceeding, it is important to consider that socialist feminism has its critics. The first critique which is relevant here is an old one. It is nonetheless still valid if major theoretical and methodological errors in the pursuit of gender research are to be avoided. This is the classical marxist warning that feminists, by de-emphasizing or in some cases completely abjuring the concepts used in class analysis, run the risk of over-emphasizing gender, demonizing men or positing a male conspiracy against women, idealizing women's solidarity, or positing a single "standpoint of women." These tendencies, some of which are arguably present in the works of Gay, Malahleha and Qunta cited above, have been scathingly criticized by both classical marxists and "third world" feminists such as Chandra Mohanty.[121]

In the interest of avoiding such pitfalls, this thesis draws on the

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Feminist Historical Materialism (Boston, 1985) and Jean and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution for useful explications of the Gramscian analysis of culture, hegemony and ideology.

[121]. Chandra Mohanty, "Introduction," in Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres ed. Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Bloomington, 1991), 11

conceptual framework which argues that class and gender structures have developed in a dialectical relationship with each other but, in the final analysis, class tends to override gender consciousness. The solidarity women gain through shared experiences of biology and male domination is ultimately contingent upon women's relationship to the means of production and the contradictory lifestyles and interests this entails. Thus, "while all women suffer from patriarchy, rich and poor bear its burdens unequally and differentially."[122] This approach avoids the tendency to romanticize or over-emphasize women's struggles. It also provides a theoretical space for sensitivity to the fact that men, including imperialist men, are legitimate subjects of gender research whose lives were shaped, frequently in oppressive ways, by historically constructed notions of masculinity. It is most pertinent that this gendered political economy approach is the preferred approach of many "third world" women.[123]

A second critique of gendered political economy also has important lessons for socialist feminist research. "Postmodernism" insists that the grand visions of the world and human nature which arose from the Enlightenment (including liberalism, marxism and feminism) are all "totalitarian."[124] That is to say, in the quest for a universally applicable doctrine such as reason, class struggle or patriarchy, modern "metanarratives" necessarily suppress discourses or alternative viewpoints which undermine their authority. As captured in Foucault's slogan that "knowledge is power," the words and concepts which define reality do so in

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122. Fatton, "Gender, Class, and the State," 49. In short, I accept Fatton's "old-fashioned plea for the analytical primacy of class in analyzing society, the state and gender."

123. Mohanty et al, Third World Women; Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria," Feminist Studies 14/1 (Spring 1988), 81-107

124. See Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism and Postmodernism," New Left Review 78 (1989), 5-28; Linda Nicholson ed., Feminism/Postmodernism (NY, 1990); Tong, Feminist Thought; and Jane Parpart, "Who is the 'Other': A Postmodern Feminist Critique of Women and Development Theory and Practice," (unpublished paper, Dalhousie University), for succinct and balanced critiques of the postmodern debate.

ways which control, limit and channel people into preferred or expected behaviour. In academic practice, this has resulted in class, gender and ethnocentrism whereby the assumptions of the researcher are imposed upon the subjects.

In this view marxism, with its emphasis on production and "scientific" analysis, is attacked for representing a narrow "episteme" or mode of thinking which is specific to Western, industrial culture. Western feminists also come under attack for their insensitivity to alternative experiences of sexism and women's varied life experiences. They are particularly attacked for their assumptions, presumably drawn from their own Western, bourgeois backgrounds, about the cultural importance of mothering, the oppressive nature of tradition or religion, and the benefits of modernization.[125] Postmodernists demand that such assumptions be "deconstructed," and argue that categories or "structures" such as class, race and gender are so inherently subjective that, if used at all, they must be "framed by a historical narrative and rendered temporally and culturally specific."[126] The deconstruction of discourse and cultural subjectivity will enable the researcher to be sensitive to the power relations implicit in the language he/she employs and to discover the "subjugated knowledge" of colonized groups.

Taken to the extreme, postmodernism denies the validity of class and gender oppression and asserts that each individual experiences the world so differently that no unifying theory, and hence no coherent political strategy, is possible. It seems also to assert that words are more meaningful than guns, wealth and systematic sexual violence.[127] A more

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125. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" in Mohanty et al, Third World Women, 51; Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference"; Parpart, "Who is the 'Other'

126. Nancy Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, 34

127. This intellectual conceit partly explains the vehemence of some marxists' attacks upon postmodern theory. See Bryan Palmer, Descent into Discourse, (Kingson, 1990); Alex Callinicos, Against Postmodernism: A

moderate interpretation of the postmodern critique of marxism and Western feminism is not, however, incompatible with either historical materialism nor political activism. On the contrary, it is reminiscent of Marx's own virulent attacks on the "ready-roasted pigeons of absolute knowledge" which bourgeois philosophers, and, as Engels later admitted, he himself were formulating.[128] A "moderate" postmodernism is valuable, therefore, to the extent that it encourages greater awareness of the specifics of each situation, of the assumptions and bias of the researcher, of the need for nuanced analysis, and of the ultimate need for socialist transformation. It offers a valuable antidote to the cultural and intellectual hubris to which researchers (like myself) are prone, reminding us that research should aim, not at absolute truth, but "to produce less partial or perverse representations."[129]

In sum, this thesis accepts that feminist political economy, "grounded at the epistemological level of reproduction"[130] and sensitive to the androcentric nature of much of Western epistemology and language, provides the methodological tools to develop scholarship that can contribute to the struggles of oppressed peoples for dignity and survival.

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Feminist political economy suggests specific methodologies which can assist a researcher to apply her or his research skills in ways that are sensitive to the gender bias inherent in our language and traditional

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Marxist Critique, (Oxford, 1989)

128. Karl Marx. The Letters of Karl Marx ed. and trans. Saul Padover, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 19790, 30; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works in One Volume (NY: 1968), 694

129. Sandra Harding, "Feminism, Science and the Anti-Enlightenment Critique" in Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism 100. Again, this is simply restating what classical marxists have always claimed as desirable but frequently not done.

130. Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, 259

research methods.[131] In addition, a postmodern consciousness of my own specific limitations as a male, Western, middle class researcher helped me to minimize their distorting impact upon my interpretation of the data I collected. The methodology which I ultimately employed was therefore part of a conscious effort to resist the rip-tide of ethno- and androcentrism which exists both in the primary sources and deep within my own epistemology, ontology an so on.

An important element of socialist feminist methodology is to conduct participatory research, that is, to attempt, by active involvement in the work or community of the subjects, to bridge the experiential gap between academia and "the real world." My limited attempt at this in Lesotho began by working as a teacher in a high school outside of the town of Teyateyaneng (TY). During this period of orientation, I was able to study Sesotho and familiarize myself somewhat with the culture, the country and the politically-charged experience of "development" work. The suppression of the national teachers' strike of May-September, 1990, convinced me to retire from such work earlier than planned. I then devoted my remaining five months in Lesotho to a broad search through the archives in Morija and Roma and to conducting as many interviews as possible. I completed my archival work in Oxford, London and Ottawa.

Archival sources on Africa generally present a problem to feminist researchers in that most documents found there were authored by male colonial officials, missionaries or journalists. In Lesotho, these gentlemen did not normally discuss women and gender relations except to the extent that females disrupted the smooth running of the protectorate and the spread of civilization as they knew it. Information pertaining to

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131. For a detailed discussion of the principles of socialist feminist research methodology, see Sandra Harding ed., Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues (Bloomington 1987); H. Roberts ed. Doing Feminist Research (London, 1981); Liz Stanley ed., Feminist Praxis: Research Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology (London, 1990); Gisela Boch, "Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History," in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall ed., Writing Women's History: International Perspectives (Bloomington, 1991)

women therefore generally appears in snippets and scraps only, often buried in reports on such subjects as health, education and migrant labour. Moreover, these scraps were often couched in a discourse which, purposely or not, hid direct reference to women or sexuality. For example, "Mosotho," "Native" or "person" were virtually by definition male. "Everybody should attend these pitsos on pain of prosecution" a circular advised the chiefs in 1953. "All women and children should also attend."[132] While there were infrequent debates or discussions on specific issues such as the legitimacy of women as chiefs, more often one comes across only cryptic or passing references to matters which vitally affected the lives of women. Reading between the lines is therefore an essential aspect of gender research.

The recorded views of Basotho men often reflect greater sensitivity to the reality experienced by Basotho women. Even here, however, great care must be taken to sort out actuality from the wishful thinking which these men often presented as fact or "tradition" to naive Europeans. There is also the need to remember that the main written sources of Basotho men's views are the Basutoland National Council debates and the press. Both of these sources, in a largely illiterate and undemocratic society, represent very small elite groups.

A further potentially distorting factor in the bulk of the sources I drew upon is in the translation from Sesotho to English. For example, where the Sesotho pronouns oa or o can mean he or she, it is almost always rendered "he" in the English translation even when it clearly designates a woman (as was frequently the case with teachers, farmers and "headmen").

The voices of Basotho women themselves did manage to survive in written form in a few select places. Prior to the 1950s, the principal source for the expression of women's own views in English is in the civil court records (kept in the national archives in Roma). Roman Catholic mission diaries were kept by the priests but the Sisters' views are

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132. Liretlo file, LEC Archives

preserved in their correspondence with the Oblate Fathers (in the Dechatelets archives in Ottawa). 'Mantsebo, in her deep distrust of the British, also insisted upon a written record of her discussions with them (the Public Records Office, London). Other correspondence relating to her can be found in the file of colonial officers located in Rhodes House, Oxford.

During the 1950s, Basotho women were afforded opportunities to have their views published. Women chiefs began to participate in the BNC debates, while articles, written by educated Christian women, began to appear in church magazines. Finally, a rich documentary source of women's political (and social) views can be found in the verbatim record of the Basutoland Constitutional Commmission in 1963.

An essential antidote to the androcentric obsessions of the great bulk of the written sources is oral history. The interviews I conducted ranged over a broad spectrum of society (short biographies and interview details appear in Appendix A). By no means was this a systematic survey. Nonetheless, I believe that these interviews provided me with an invaluable sense of direction and critical awareness with which to handle the archival material. Where possible, and recognizing the dangers of relying on human memory, I have given the oral recollections of Basotho women priority of place in the relevant chapters.

In conducting my interviews, I chose deliberately not to use a tape-recorder. Although I did my utmost to assure my informants of the integrity of my research and of my respect for their confidentiality, the sensitive nature and the current political implications of many of the topics I was exploring made me suspect that my informants would feel constrained by the knowledge that their voices were being recorded. I was aware also of the observation by both feminist and non-feminist oral historians that the presence of a high-tech device between the researcher and the researched can change the relationship for the worse. Given that I was starting my research from a position already culturally and

linguistically distant from my interviewees, I decided that the less I did to alienate them further, the better. After initial informal discussions, often with my children present to break the ice (if not the furniture), I therefore conducted my interviews with pen and paper only. I asked open-ended questions and discreetly jotted down the replies in short-hand. Immediately following the interview, I wrote these up in long-hand which captured, if not a strictly verbatim record, an accurate reconstruction. In a small number of cases, I submitted a list of questions first and received written replies. These are all preserved in a written archive for future reference.

Where feasible, I submitted a copy of the "transcript" to the interviewee for his or her approval or dissension. In the single case where my record of the interview was challenged, I corrected it in consultation with my informant. In a minority of cases, a young Mosotho woman interpreted for me and then double-checked my "transcipt." Due largely to constraints upon me of time and money, however, most of my interviews were conducted in English. This resulted in a distinct class bias among my oral sources, as well as raising all kinds of potential misunderstandings. Nonetheless, I remain totally convinced of the utility of oral history in even this limited fashion. I have simply treated my interviews, like the written sources, with great caution.

Many feminists are skeptical that men can do feminist research. In my experience, I never felt that my maleness significantly alienated my informants. On the contrary, I found most of the Basotho women whom I interviewed very forthcoming with me, glad perhaps that someone was finally giving them the attention that they knew they deserved. The same could be said of sympathetic men, such as the priest whose evident awe at the "redoubtable... formidable" women he had known over the course of three decades dominated our discussion. With other men, mainly politicians who had good reason to be suspicious of an outsider, the fact that I was a man may well have helped me, not least of all as I was "only" asking

about women. In short, my experience confirms that men can do socialist feminist research, at least to the extent, as I hope to have done, of providing a base from which future researchers may deepen our understanding of the historical development and workings of patriarchal capitalism.

Chapter Two: Gender Relations in Pre-colonial Society

In 1873 the new colonial government launched a commission of enquiry to determine what constituted Sesotho tradition in order that this could be codified and enforced as "customary law."[1] Despite the small number of witnesses called to testify (all male), the range of views on women's place in society was broad and controversial--so much so that it was not until thirty years later that a supposedly definitive statement of customary law was finally promulgated. Contention over "tradition" did not cease, however, with the publication of the Laws of Lerotholi in 1903. On the contrary, throughout the history of colonial rule in Lesotho often diametrically opposed views of "tradition" continued to be appealed to in debates over diverse social and political issues.

Part of the reason for these debates was that the Basotho were a new people, scarcely a decade in existence when the first Europeans missionaries arrived in 1833. Up to 32 different "clans" had come together in the 1820s, retaining a notable degree of political autonomy and cultural integrity under Moshoeshoe I's suzerainty.[2] "Traditions" were in an active state of flux and invention as part of the process of jockeying for political power among these groups. For example, large-scale polygyny was unheard of prior to Mohlomi of the Bamonaheng in the late 18th century. Moshoeshoe I, whose BaKoena still comprises only a minority of the total population, also introduced many cultural innovations when they suited his political purposes. A number of these centered around his efforts to consolidate BaKoena rule through dynastic control over women. Many of the more exotic marriage arrangements adopted by the chiefs in subsequent years (and defended as immemorial custom) stemmed from Moshoeshoe's innovative sexual politics in the mid-19th century.

It must also be recalled that, as elsewhere in Africa, the

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1. Cape, Native Laws and Customs

2. Breytenbach, Crocodiles; Eldredge, "An Economic History," 55

missionaries and colonialists had their own gender agenda when they recorded Sesotho. In order to justify the propagation or imposition of European, middle-class morality upon the Basotho, they tended to portray Sesotho customs surrounding gender relations in the most unfavourable, "barbarous" light. Missionary accounts were consequently filled with hyperbole, prurience and poetic licence.[3]

When discussing Sesotho therefore, it is essential to recognize that in practice "traditions" were frequently innovative, localized and contested. The declarations upon custom which were recorded to become the basis of law or policy were therefore quite often little more than self-serving efforts by senior men, Basotho and European, to justify their personal behaviour and ambitions. The following section is an attempt to sort through the sometimes dizzying rhetoric around the "traditions" of gender relations in order to clarify the choices which were available to Basotho women and men as the colonial era began.

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Despite local variations, most sources agree that many customs pertaining to gender relations were held roughly in common among the majority of the Basotho prior to the onset of colonial rule.[4] Taken

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[3]. Comaroff, "the image of empire"; see also Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th century colonial cultures," American Ethnologist 16/4 (Nov. 1989). This theme will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

[4]. Sesotho customs were first recorded by missionaries of the PEMS in the 1830s-40s, some of whose observations can be found in Germond, Chronicles, and which are drawn upon in the following pages. These, like later studies, must be regarded with particular caution because of their use of the "ethnographic present" and implication of an ahistorical continuity to an "exotic" culture. While I do not wish to repeat that error, the lack of accessible contemporary data led me to rely upon colonial and even post-colonial descriptions of "tradition." In my attempt to hypothesize what pre-colonial gender relations may have been like, I made use primarily of Ellenberger, History of the Basuto; F. Laydevant, Etude sur la famille au Lesotho (Roma, n.d.); Ashton, The Basuto; Poulter, Family Law; Gay, "Basotho Women's Options" and S.M. Seeiso, L.N. Kanono, M.N. Tsotsti and T.E. Monaphathi, "The Legal Situation of Women in Lesotho" in Julie Stewart and Alice Armstrong ed., The Legal Situation of Women in Southern Africa (Harare, 1990) as well as information garnered in oral interviews. Future researchers may find this an exciting area to explore.

together these comprised an objectively oppressive situation for Basotho women. Under traditional patriarchy, women were subjected to innumerable restrictions and the theoretically almost absolute authority of men.[5]

Men's power over women in pre-colonial society stemmed from several sources. First, women were banned from owning, touching, or even talking about the most productive asset of the nation, cattle. Second, women were considered legal minors, subject to the will of their senior male relatives until marriage and, thereafter, to their husbands. As "children," they could not own or make independent decisions about property, including how or what to cultivate on the fields they worked. Even senior women, who commanded respect on account of their age or successful careers as prolific mothers of sons, were still considered minors. Widows, although given greater latitude for autonomous decision-making and entitled to take part in some public affairs, could be compelled to dispose of their deceased husbands' property as demanded by their male in-laws, younger brothers, sons, and even more distant male relatives. To preserve men's control over property and fertility, widows were not allowed to remarry outside of the family, a "tradition" emphatically restated by Paramount Chief Griffith in 1938.[6]

Male control over women was assured through the custom of bohali or bridewealth. Bohali was an amount of cattle or other beasts which was delivered from the family of the groom to the family of the bride. This

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5. This point bears re-iterating in view of the natural aversion of most historians to the racism of the missionaries who first made it: Basotho women today do not romanticize traditional patriarchy and, indeed, often echo the missionary view of women's oppression before the arrival of Christianity and colonialism in a similar discourse. Notwithstanding an often strong nostalgia for a pre-capitalist sense of community, and an equally strong critique of women's legal, economic and other disabilities in present-day Lesotho, the Basotho women whom I interviewed stressed with striking unanimity that their legal rights and social status have "improved in almost every way" over traditional patriarchy (Interview, 'Me Mohloboli). See also, Jeff Guy, "Gender Oppression in Pre-colonial Southern Africa," in Walker, Women and Gender, 33-47

6. Basutoland National Council, Report of Proceedings [hereafter, BNC] (Maseru, 1938), 186

exchange took place with a number of ceremonies over a sometimes extended period of time. Traditionally, bohali was set at 10-20 head of cattle, however the amount was negotiable. The daughter of a chief, for example, would normally warrant more, while a daughter who was "spoilt" by pre-marital pregnancy would get less. Because of this, the parents had every incentive to guard closely their daughters' behaviour and could demand "compensation" (normally five beasts) if a daughter were seduced or abducted before marriage.

Upon marriage and the payment of the first installments of bohali, a Mosotho woman was required to leave her own family and move to her husband's village. There she was to produce children for him and to perform both domestic and agricultural labour for his family. In effect, she married the family, not the man himself. Consequently, if he died she could be "inherited" by the man's most senior brother (ho kenela or "kenelaed"). If a man died before even getting married, his family could still "buy" him a wife who, now "married to the grave" (ho lebitla), produced heirs for the family by taking lovers as directed. If a woman died before producing children, the man's family had the right to demand a younger sister she might have to take her place (ho seantlo), although in such a case they would usually have to negotiate a supplementary bohali payment.

In theory, the Mosotho groom acquired an absolute power to control his wife's sexuality. A man might swap wives with another as a sign of friendship (ho kenyana matlung) or "loan" a junior wife as a "concubine" (ngoetsi) to another in reward for services rendered. He also had the theoretical right to beat his wife, even to death, if she slept with another man without his consent. Any child that she bore, regardless of whether it was by him or by an adulterous relationship, belonged to him. A man also had the right to more than one wife (provided he could pay bohali). A woman, by contrast, was expected to serve her menfolk, raise the children and not complain. She was required by strict rules to show

deferential respect to her seniors (hlonepho), including never saying her father-in-law's proper name.

The two features of Basotho patriarchy which most amazed and scandalized the early missionaries were bohali and the extent of polygyny (sethepu). The Europeans saw both as proof of the degraded status of African women. The important chiefs were especially prone to amassing wives, with Moshoeshoe said to have had as many as 200, and his successor Letsie, 500.[7] To the Europeans, this was a major source of immorality, not only because it allegedly contributed to the licentiousness of the chiefs, but also because it led to young women, perhaps legitimately frustrated at being married off to an aging dotard, taking not-so-secret lovers. It also scandalized the missionaries that chiefs appeared to dole out their wives and daughters as sexual hospitality or to make cynical political alliances. Moshoeshoe himself admitted to this when he recognized sethepu ("to extend my influence by marrying many women") as one of the three most important lessons he had learned from his mentor, Mohlomi.[8] Bohali, in the eyes of the early missionaries, facilitated "woman farming" by turning marriage into "a mere commercial transaction" and reducing women to the status of any other "property."[9]

Basotho women's oppression, however, needs to be understood in more of the Biblical than the radical feminist sense of the term patriarchy. In the first place, junior men were also denied many freedoms. Senior men, as lineage and household heads, not only had final say in the marriage arrangements of their children but, partly as a result of that, also controlled the allocation of economic resources and political power. Land, for instance, was not individually owned or inheritable but vested in the

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7. Thompson, Survival, 8; G. Weitzecker, "La Donna fra i Basuto" typed ms., translation from a 1901 published article, LEC archives

8. Ellenberger, History, 108; See also Germond, Chronicles, 516. The other two lessons were never to have witches killed and to "relieve the distressed."

9. Cape, Native Laws and Customs, 36; Germond, Chronicles, passim

hereditary chiefs who had the power to redistribute the fields worked by individuals. Of the three fields a man was entitled to, two were specifically for the use of his wife and children and he was not free to dispose of them. Under normal circumstances, neither cattle nor fields were given until a man was a "real man," that is, had been married according to his parents' will. Often this did not happen until a man was into his late twenties.

Similarly, large herds of cattle were owned by the chiefs and loaned to their male subjects through the mafisa system. By this, commoners could use the beasts for draught power and keep the manure and milk but could not slaughter them for meat. A portion of the offspring belonged to the chief and any beasts could be recalled by him. A commoner or subordinate chief thus did not have any absolute right to the land or cattle he was given, and his entitlements could be revoked for a number of reasons. These included lack of loyalty to the chief, neglect of the fields and neglect of his moral obligations to support his family. In the latter case, a proportion of the production from a man's fields (as high as five-sevenths) could be taken from him compulsorily by the chief to provide for his family.[10]

A father also exercised control over his son by paying bohali. Dependent upon senior men to get a wife, fields and standing in the community, young men were thus subject to arranged marriages, required to perform labour in their father's and chief's fields, and generally expected to do as they were told. They could be summoned by the chief at any time to perform services such as carrying messages or going on cattle-raids. They could be told to perform "women's work" such as threshing or weeding. Even after initiation, marriage and paternity, when they had definitively ceased to be boys, men were still expected to show hlonepho to their elders, including elderly women. It is no accident that the

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10. P. 'Mabathoana's considered the above proportion to be traditional in his testimony in BNC, Report of the Select Committee on the Liquor Proclamation (Maseru, 1961), 35

Sesotho word for "young man" (mohlanka) is synonymous to "servant."

Traditional Basotho patriarchy also needs to be understood in light of its mitigating features for women. While Basotho women's objective or legal oppression was real, and there may well have been cases where women were exchanged like chattels and compelled to marry or to stay in an abusive marriage against their will, a whole host of informal understandings, entitlements and obligations by men to respect women's dignity served to protect them from gross abuse or neglect. Thus, while it was true that men ultimately controlled women's sexuality and a that man in theory had the right to discipline his wife physically if she had an affair, women also had the recognized right to be satisfied sexually. If a husband failed to do this, his wife was within her rights to demand a divorce or to humiliate him by making her grievances known publicly. More commonly, she would commit adultery, a practice facilitated by the fact that her hut was physically separate from her husband's. Her adultery in such cases, provided it was discreet, was to a large extent excused or even condoned by the family and community:

> Immorality has indeed always been penal by law and usage, but that has hardly checked it. Public opinion winks at it, and it is thought no disgrace for a man or a woman to have setsualle (intimacy) with a person of the opposite sex. If they are caught by the woman's husband, a cattle payment is indeed exacted from the man, but there is no social stigma left on either party.[11]

Any children born as a result of such setsualle were not considered illegitimate but belonged to the husband on the principle that children were "belched by the beast," that is, their actual paternity was irrelevant beside the fact that the husband had paid cattle for their mother. Indeed, provided that bohali had been paid or promised, neither consummation nor even the formal handing over of a bride were necessary to

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[11]. Ellenberger, History, 279. Phoofolo also asserts that extra-marital sex for women was "common" (Phoofolo, "Kea nyala!" 36). Ashton observed (in the 1930s) that a woman's in-laws may have even favoured her taking a lover if her husband, their son, was absent and failing in his duty to support her. By becoming another man's nyatsi (concubine or "paramour"), the woman relieved her in-laws from some of their responsibilities for her upkeep. Ashton, The Basuto, 85

validate a marriage. On this principal: Mosali ea nyetsoeng ha a tsoale sekhaupane, "a married woman cannot have a bastard."[12] Conversely, if a man had not undertaken to pay bohali, he had no rights over his offspring. When an unmarried or unpledged woman had been seduced, the children were raised by her and belonged to her family.

A woman could also veto kenela marriage if she chose to, although this was probably rare. Kenela, however much it repulsed the middle class sensibilities of the missionaries, offered greater security to women than did widowhood as it re-inforced the family of her deceased husband's obligation to support her. It was therefore in her interest to marry her brother-in-law. Nevertheless, refusing kenela was not unheard of and the fact that it became increasingly common in the late 19th century was simply not an issue of public concern.[13]

There were a number of reasons why Basotho women may have been increasingly opting against kenela. While these co-incided with missionary propaganda against the practice, such refusal stemmed originally from women's customary rights. First, even if a woman chose against kenela, the family of her late husband still had continuing obligations to ensure her welfare. Above all, they were not allowed to "eat up" her house, that is, they were required to allow her to retain two fields and any other productive resources necessary for her upkeep. Her brothers-in-law would still be expected to plough for her. If she had daughters, bohali payments for their marriage would accrue to her.

Secondly, a widow was considered as close to an adult as a women could ever be. Although she was still expected to consult with her male relatives, she could at last make her own decisions about the fields or marrying off her children. She could also take lovers. Indeed, since any

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[12]. S. Poulter, "Marriage, Divorce and Legitimacy in Lesotho," Journal of African Law 21/1 (Spring 1977), 75

[13]. By 1911, nearly one sixth of all women of marriagable age were unattached widows. Census 1921, 10

children who ensued belonged to her deceased husband's family, her active sex life was in the family interest. If she were beyond child-bearing years and if she had the resources, she could herself "marry" another woman. That is, she could pay bohali to the family of a young girl who would take a lover to produce children who then belonged to the widow's household.

Given all these options and rights, it was almost unknown for a widow to remarry outside the family in traditional society. If she remarried in any way other than kenala, a Mosotho widow foreited her two fields and any other rights she could expect from her late husband's family. She was also required to repay to them the bohali which her husband had originally paid for her. Furthermore, upon remarriage, she surrendered to her new husband the near-adult status she had attained by widowhood. Clearly it was in a woman's self-interest, as well as the interests of her ex-husband's family, that she not remarry outside the family.

Likewise, for a young woman to chose not to marry at all was virtually unheard of. Not only would she be pressed to marry by her family (including by her brothers whose own marriages might depend on the bohali she brought into the family and who would be responsible to maintain her if she had no husband), but she would gain economically by direct access to two fields. In sum, as well as benefitting from an ideology which accorded great respect to women as wives and mothers, women had strong material motivations to get and stay married.

It is clear also that women did not consider themselves chattels because of bohali. On the contrary, they were by almost all accounts fervent supporters of the practice. Some have attributed this to their natural conservatism and their irrational sense of being "more married" when cattle are exchanged.[14] In fact however, there were concrete benefits for a woman in a marriage with cattle. Above all, bohali gave her

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[14]. Poulter, Family Law, 333

a guarantee against mistreatment by her husband in that it gave substance to her right to protest against legitimate cases of neglect or abuse. Specifically, an aggrieved women could return to her family (ho ngala) where she was entitled to stay until her husband came crawling to ask for her back, paid a fine to her male relatives, and promised to behave himself better in the future. If he did not do this, the husband not only lost a wife but also forfeited his or his family's investment in her. Fear of this (as well as of the public humiliation entailed in having to fetch his wife back) was a powerful restraint upon him exercising his theoretical autocracy. Bohali was thus an effective protection against "frivolous" divorce which, prior to the colonial regime, was almost unheard of:

> With bohali I doubt there was ever a conflict since it is something we Basotho want, even now. It was a protection for the girls. They could not return home for frivolous things but for something serious their families would support them. It was very serious for a man to beat his wife and if she left him, the family did not have to return the cattle.[15]

Bohali also served to bring two families together in a profound way. The negotiations, rituals and payments could last for years and, although this sometimes resulted in dispute and litigation, it also forged social links which served, on the whole, to reduce the isolation and vulnerability a woman might otherwise feel in a strange new village. In her extended family, her maternal uncles were particularly important guardians. Her brothers also had a strong vested interest in her marital stability and could be expected to intervene on her behalf against an abusive or negligent husband. It was often they who supported her in the case of ho ngala.

Bohali also had the effect, in a patriarchal society, of enhancing the value of female children. That is, because daughters represented a potential source of gain to the family, they were cherished and, to an extent which unsettled the authoritarian ideals of Victorian observers,

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15. Interview, 'Me Lethunya

coddled.[16] While a son could carry on the family name and defend the interests of the lineage, daughters were, in the Sesotho aphorism, "the bank of the nation."[17] Daughters, knowing their value, were in some cases able to assert their will upon their parents in ways which, again, often disturbed the colonial rulers who saw it as proof of extremely slack" parental discipline.[18] Girls could in extreme cases even refuse the marriages their parents had arranged for them: "That is a terrible thing to do but luckily our parents are very meek and mild. In the end, if we stand firm, they will never allow a break in the family."[19]

As for polygyny, without denying that it was rife with conflict and indignities to women, it could also have real advantages to women. First of all, polygyny provided husbands (and thus secure access to fields) to women in a society which, as a result of nearly half a century of intermittant war after the 1820s, is likely to have had a decided sex imbalance. This imbalance continued even after "pax Britannica" was imposed largely as a result of the exceedingly high mortality rate in the mines to which the men migrated. Secondly, a senior wife would normally benefit from the labour of junior wives or concubines. Indeed, one type of the latter was known as lefielo or "the broom," a young woman who was attached to the household of a senior wife to perform domestic labour.

Women may also have had greater autonomy in polygynous households compared to monogamous ones. In the former, a certain degree of rivalry between houses gave the woman an important role in defending or promoting the interests of her house. The amount of power she gained by successfully promoting a son as heir was enhanced by the opportunities of involving her

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16. See, for example, Martin, Legends and Customs, 43

17. Leselinyana 22 May, 1961, 4

18. Dutton, The Basuto of Basutoland, 79

19. Interview, Sister Hilda. For a Protestant analysis of alleged Basotho sloth and apathy arising from the decline of "family discipline," see JME 1938/2, 511 and JME 1951/1, 64

own family in her husband's affairs. In a monogamous household, by contrast, the wife was "submerged" in her husband and her family had no legal powers to influence him.[20]

Finally, a senior wife who was barren or who had no sons could benefit from a second wife who could bear the children that the household needed for labour and for inheritance. There are cases recorded in the earliest colonial period where the wife actually urged her husband to take a second wife, even to the point of paying the bohali herself.[21]

The image of the polygynist as a hedonistic autocrat is also misleading. The man had a strong moral obligation not to neglect his senior wife or "play favourites" with his new wives. He absolutely could not "eat" the resources of one household for use in another, for example, by taking cattle from one to pay bohali for the sons of another. Where he did, a woman could appeal to her family or to the chief and even take recourse to ngala.

The protections and rights which women in pre-colonial society enjoyed were backed up by their economic power. The basic fact was that happy, hard-working wives and daughters could enrich a man significantly. Although women could not help with the cattle, their labour in the fields (hoeing, weeding, scaring birds, harvesting, winnowing) was essential to the household's welfare. Women not only worked her husband's fields but, by "strong customary and moral obligation," she was supposed to be consulted about their cultivation. A woman also had usufructory rights to a field of her own plus a garden plot attached to her hut where the husband had no right to interfere. She could also raise her own poultry

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20. Murray, Families Divided, 151

21. 'Ma-Mathetsa, for example, told the courts in 1875 that she had paid for three wives for her husband. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 63. In any case, the extent of polygyny in Basotho society was definitely exaggerated by the missionaries. In 1911, it was found that about one in five married men had more than one wife but of those, 80% had two. Much of this was accounted for by kenela. Grand polygyny, that is, more than four wives, was practiced by 178 men in the country, a scant 0.03% of the total married male population. Poulter, Family Law, 70

and pigs, the latter being known as "women's cattle."[22] Women ground the grain, prepared food, collected fuel and water, dug for salt and the red ochre used in decorating houses, made clay pots and certain kinds of baskets and mats, washed clothes and even built certain types of hut.[23]

One of the most important traditional tasks for women was the brewing of leting and joala (sorghum beer). These mildly alcoholic beverages were an integral part of every family gathering and celebration. They were both the main staples of Sesotho hospitality, as well as a way for a man to attract other men to assist him in his agricultural tasks. That is, a husband could direct his wife to brew joala and "could thus exchange the woman's labor for the labor of other men, effectively decreasing his own workload."[24] It was the loss to the family of all this productive labour of young women which was held as the rationale for bohali. The cattle which a bride brought to her family upon marriage were seen as compensation for her moving away.

Politically, women did not have a public voice as men only were allowed to address public gatherings (lipitso). There were, however, institutions as well as private channels for the expression of women's views on broadly political matters. First, there was the "women's court," usually presided over by the senior wife of the chief.[25] Although this often dealt with exclusively female issues (such as girls' initiation), women could bring grievances against their husbands here. For example, if a husband neglected his wife or favoured a junior, or if a son neglected his widowed mother she could sue him. Men could also be disciplined or

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22. Eldredge, "An Economic History," 136

23. Ibid, 128, 223

24. Eldredge, "Women in Production," 722

25. This was known as the thakaneng according to Sheddick, The Southern Sotho, 90

fined "anything up to a beast" for rude behaviour towards women.[26]

Inheritance and bohali disputes were dealt with in the family court or lekhotla la lelapa. This was presided over by senior men but senior women or those directly involved in a dispute were allowed to participate. They were observed to be very influential at these,[27] and "[e]ven if they do not actually attend the meeting they will nearly always be consulted by the men."[28]

If the lekhotla la lelapa failed to resolve a dispute, it could then be taken to the chief's court (khotla). Here, a woman would normally be represented by a male relative. As mentioned above, if the chief found in the woman's favour that her husband was negligent, he was empowered to impound up to five/sevenths of the total production from a man's fields to support the woman and children.[29] More commonly, the man would simply be publicly chastised and ordered to mend his ways. A woman could, through her male relatives, pursue her grievance right to the court of the Paramount Chief.

Informally, women also had means to influence men's politics. Mantsopha is the most renowned example of a "prophetess" who had a major role as advisor to Moshoeshoe I. In the early 1850s, she "travelled up and down the country" as an organizer of the military campaigns against the British.[30] She would go into a trance, bothekethe, where she railed against Christianity, European clothing, and tax receipts. Among less prominent women, bothekethe was a "spiritual" recourse available to them to demonstrate in public their unhappiness or neglect. Such a fit could only be cured by special attention so that some men came to regard it as

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26. Hugh Ashton, "Notes on Native Authority and Native Courts," May, 1936. PRO DO 119/1073

27. Poutler, Family Law, 40

28. Ashton, "Notes," PRO DO 119/1073

29. BNC, Commission on Liquor, 35

30. Sanders, Moshoeshoe, 276

a cynical tactic by women "to get meat."[31] Nonetheless, the spirits had to be appeased and the woman so possessed (mothuela) usually got solicitous attention to her problems, if not a hearty meal. Missionaries observed that some women used botheketheke as a tactic to win consent from their husbands to convert to Christianity or even to win sexual attention.[32]

Basotho women also had recourse to the time-honoured means of witholding the domestic or sexual services that most men depend upon. Moshoeshoe's lament to the missionary Eugene Casalis is telling in that respect:

> you cannot imagine how these women afflict us with their mutual quarrels and the rivalries which they foment amongst our children! See, in spite of all my cattle and my hoard of grain, there are days when I run the risk of dying of hunger, because all my wives are sulking and refer me from one to the other, 'until', as they say, 'until you find your favourite who will certainly have a juicy morsel in store for you.'[33]

A final point to make about pre-colonial gender relations regards child socialization. Primary responsibility for infant care was, of course, with the mother and her female relatives--the husband was not even allowed to see the child until several days after birth. Very young boys and girls could play together but, by the age of four or five, they began to learn their vocations separately. Girls helped around the house while boys were taught to care for the cattle. Among the older boys, this latter responsibility could involve long periods away from home up in the highland pastures, exposed to the dangers of predatory animals and cattle thieves and forced "to endure extremes of temperature and rain as well as hunger and solitude."[34] Thus, where girls learned "patterns of co-

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31. Ashton, The Basuto, 285

32. Perrot, Claude, "Les sothos et les missionaires europeens aux XIX siècle," Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan (ser. F, tome 2), 161-2; "Report on Mathuela" Vinculum 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948)

33. Cited in Germond, Chronicles, 515

34. Gay, "Basotho Women's Options," 59-61

operative work and labour pooling" in the village, boys were socialized towards "self-contained isolation which does not encourage them to demand or give close emotional support."[35] One result of this was an ideology by which men were supposed to be able to endure pain silently. In Jingoes' words, "a man is a sheep, a woman is a goat. A woman always cries no matter what you do to it; you can cut the throat of a sheep and it does not make a sound."[36] However skeptical we may be of this claim, it is a fact that in colonial times, Basotho men were valued as workers in the mines for their extraordinary ability to endure physical pain.[37]

Initiation school (lebollo) was traditionally designed in part to mitigate the anti-social implications of this type of stoicism. Although later feared for producing wild and violent young men, lebollo is supposed to have included lessons for initiates on how to treat a future wife with respect and the limitations of male authority.[38] Girls' initiation school also included lessons on how to please their future husbands. This involved learning both domestic chores and hlonepho, as well as, reputedly, how to give both their husbands and themselves sexual pleasure.[39]

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35. Ibid

36. Jingoes, A Chief, 89

37. Arbousset found this "impassivity" to pain notworthy in his travels in the 1830s (Thomas Arbousset, Missionary Excursions [David Ambrose and Albert Brutsch, ed. and trans., Morija, 1991], 73) and it remained a continuous source of frustration to colonial medical officers a century later--see the Annual Report of the Medical Director (Maseru, 1949), 29. According to the chief medical officer of the territory, Basotho men were "amazingly indifferent" to disease, contributing to the difficulties the government was having in controlling the spread of tuberculosis and gonorrhea (Medical Report 1941, 2). It is interesting to speculate whether colonial education, which emphasized corporal punishment as a means of "building character" for boys, had any influence in stimulating such attitudes among elite Basotho men.

38. Contrasting views of lebollo can be found in F. Laydevant, The Rites of Initiation in Basutoland (Mazenod, 1971) and Ashton, The Basuto

39. Weizacker, "La Donna Fra I Basuto." A contemporary, academic perspective on this is offered by Judy Gay, "'Mummies and Babies' and Friends and Lovers in Lesotho," Journal of Homosexuality 11/3-4 (1985), 93-116

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Given the lacuna of contemporary written sources, and the ethnographic biases of both these and later studies, it is impossible to draw from them any definitive statement of what pre-colonial gender relations actually were. Nonetheless, several tentative conclusions can be offered from a critical reading of these sources for the purpose of providing background to our understanding of gender struggle in later years. First, by almost any sense of the words, it appears that women in pre-colonial Lesotho were oppressed and exploited. A Basotho woman was generally not free to choose her marriage partner and constrained from remarrying if divorced or widowed, was subject to her husband's or senior male relatives' will, and was expected to show hlonepho in the face of even the greatest indignities. The surpluses created by her productive labour were largely appropriated for the use of her husband, his family and his chief. Her children belonged to her husband and his family and could, in theory, be disposed of according to their wisdom. She had no say in political fora and no right to litigate for herself beyond a very narrow range of "women's concerns."

It would be wrong, however, to judge this pre-colonial condition by current, Western ideals of gender relations. The great majority of early missionaries and colonialists did precisely that, fuelling their urge to emancipate the "chattels" with grim portrayals of Basotho women's suffering. In that urge, they seem to have underestimated how much the "moral economy" balanced the oppressive or exploitative features of the political economy. The second point to be made about pre-colonial gender relations is that there was an intricate web of kinship and chiefly obligations which largely protected women from abuse and gave them a significant amount of autonomy and dignity. Once that began to break down, the missionaries were among the first to appreciate the dangers for women and to express nostalgia for the passing of strictly traditional patriarchy. The retrospective words of the PEMS missionary Duvoisin in the

1880s are eloquent in that respect:

> Whatever reproach one may level against the ancient social system of the natives, it was nevertheless an order of real value... By the importance which it gave to all the family kin, by the meticulous care with which it regulated the mutual relationship, as well as the rights and duties of every member of the community, this patriarchal organization was a mighty rampart against every kind of irruption. If it tolerated many things which are reproved by divine law; if the sacredness of the matrimonial bond, in particular, was disregarded; if it even closed its eyes to certain positive violations of the seventh commandment [adultery], at least the evil was confined within well defined limits which it was not allowed to transgress; young men were subjected to an almost Spartan discipline, the conduct of young women was strictly controlled... 'marriage by cattle', was in this order of things, a guarantee of morality.[40]

What Duvoisin and others clearly failed to appreciate was that such a patriarchal system, based as it was on the control of reproduction, left "a crucial autonomy and integrity with the possessor of fertility."[41] In their nostalgia for traditional patriarchy, therefore, proponents of stricter parental and patriarchal authority in the period of parallel rule failed to realize that these were to a large extent undermined by "tradition" itself. That is, women's own understanding of social justice, of their rights as women and of their autonomous productive capabilities was a source of strength and inspiration in their efforts to emancipate themselves from male domination. How Basotho women employed both "tradition" and modernity to protect or advance their material interests under colonial rule will be the subject of the following chapters, commencing with an examination of the changes that began to unfold in the political economy in the late 19th century and their implications for gender relations among the Basotho.

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40. Duvoisin, cited in Germond, Chronicles, 540

41. Jeff Guy, "Gender Oppression," 46

Chapter Three: Class Transformation and Gender in the Early Colonial Period, 1868-1935

Gender relations, already in flux in the 1830s with the dislocations of war and migration, began to change in the late 19th century to a degree which caused observable gender conflict among the Basotho. These changes arose as a result of the impact of Christian ideology, the spread of cash into the economy, class formation and colonial policies. This chapter will examine the changes to Basotho society which arose specifically from the monetization of the economy in the periods of Cape and parallel rule. It will provide the background and context to our understanding of gender struggle as colonial rule and capitalism underwent profound transformation between 1868 and 1935.

Early Forms of Class Differentiation in Lesotho

Pre-colonial Lesotho was a class society, that is, the chiefs (marena) appropriated the surplus product from the labour of their subjects (the commoners or bafo) and self-consciously reproduced themselves as a distinct, privileged group over time.[1] Specifically, the marena controlled the distribution of fields and could command their subjects to perform "tribute labour" (letsema). Marena generally reserved the best lands for themselves as well as controlled the exploitation of special resources such as fields of grass for thatching, reserved lands (maboella), trees, reeds and clay. Cattle, obtained from raids or fines, accrued to the chiefs who only loaned them to their loyal subjects through the mafisa system.

In all of these ways, marena acquired the resources to "buy" the best wives for themselves, gaining control through polygyny over a disproportionate amount of the productive and reproductive labour of Lesotho's young women and thus ensuring their continuity and consolidation as a class. The BaKoena lineage was by far the most successful "fraction"

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[1]. Judy Kimble, drawing on Phillipe Rey, terms this the "lineage mode of production" in "Clinging to the Chiefs" and "Labour Migration." See also Jeff Guy, "Gender Oppression," for his analysis of the pre-colonial class structure in southern Africa.

of the Basotho chiefs in this regard, with, as mentioned in the previous chapter, its leading patriarchs marrying dozens if not hundreds of women with varying status and employment as wives. The marena also kept for themselves the fines levied in court arising from any disputes among their subjects. They could also call upon men for compulsory military duty, primarily raiding the neighbours for cattle or defence against the same. In times of plenty, men were expected to give informal gifts (limpho, usually some joala or a portion of their produce) as a sign of respect and appreciation of their chiefs.

That said, the marena were by no means a feudal aristocracy in the European sense. First of all, they lived among the people. Even after Moshoeshoe I's consolidation of power and his acquisition of extraordinary wealth, the Paramount Chief's huts and lifestyle were not ostentatiously different from the mass of his subjects.[2]

Secondly, morena ke morena ka sechaba, "a chief is a chief by the people." In other words, the Basotho held as a central tenet that chiefs be both accessible and accountable to the people. In that way, their powers were closely circumscribed. Matsema could only be called for certain specific lands (lira) and commoners could legitimately refuse an order to work any others. The lira (which means "enemies") were specifically intended for communal use, especially to amass a stockpile as protection against war or famine. In peacetime, lira crops were used to feed the poor and distressed. During a letsema, the workers expected compensation for their time and labour with, primarily, cooked food and beer. A chief's wealth and prestige were measured not by personal consumption but by the extent that he offered adequate compensation on such occasions, as well as generous relief to the poor and ostentatious hospitality or feasts to his subjects.[3]

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[2]. See Arbousset, Missionary Excursions, Germond, Chronicles, 516-7 and passim; Thompson, Survival

[3]. Jingoes, A Chief, passim

Custom also limited the powers of the marena. It dictated fairly strict conformity to set fines which continued to be honoured long after monetization (and inflation) had altered the value. For instance, it cost a transgressor six head of cattle for seduction and ten for murder, the same in 1873 as in 1948.[4] Custom also accorded commoners the right to appeal a decision by their chief to a higher level. Male commoners of even the meanest standing could challenge the decisions of the chief at a pitso, a public gathering which chiefs were expected to call to discuss affairs of state and garner people's opinions prior to affecting changes to policy. The freedom of speech allowed at these lipitso made them, by all accounts, highly democratic (for men), with even Moshoeshoe at times humbled by the criticism of his subjects.[5] From a later period, Jingoes describes a chief cowering in his hut while his brother was sjambokked by irate villagers after announcing a new tax at a pitso.[6]

By custom, commoners also had an informal veto power over the inheritance of the chieftainship. Arbousset, for example, described with some amazement how commoners compelled the rightful heir to the BaKoena chieftaincy to step down peacefully in favour of his younger brother (Moshoeshoe I's uncle).[7] In the period before acute land shortages, bafo could also "vote with their feet" against a unsatisfactory chief, moving their homesteads and pledging their loyalties to a neighbouring chief. Under such conditions, "Chiefs therefore competed for subjects, giving them a strong incentive for displaying justice and generosity."[8]

The redistributive functions of the chiefs helped to ensure that

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4. BNC 1948, 457. The impenetrability of cattle to market values is analyzed in Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine.

5. Thompson, Survival, 212

6. Jingoes, A Chief, 178

7. Arbousset, Missionary Excursions, 112. Jingoes also describe another case of commoners vetoing the rightful headman in favour of his younger son. Jingoes, A Chief, 183

8. Eldredge, "Economic History," 354

there was little differentiation among the commoners. Traditional land tenure reinforced this since fields were not inheritable and so remained in the possession of a family for a limited time only.[9] There was thus little incentive to improve or even preserve the land. On the contrary, noticeable improvement was likely to invite the chief's exactions (upon labour) and covetousness (for the improved fields). A man also risked incurring the envy of his neighbours by showing "excessive" prosperity.

Despite his cultivation of a relatively democratic political economy, Moshoeshoe I actually enhanced the gulf between the chieftainship (borena) and the commoners during his reign through extensive control over cattle. His personal herd was estimated at 12-15,000 beasts in 1840,[10] and was subsequently reputed to have grown considerably larger. His innovative marriage arrangements also concentrated the nation's wealth in the hands of the BaKoena lineage. The most efficacious and most commonly emulated means for this was through cross-cousin marriage. The reason for its popularity is captured in the Sesotho aphorism, "Cousin, marry me, that the cattle return to my kraal."[11] In such a marriage, bohali would be paid from one branch of the family to another rather than leaving the lineage.[12]

The BaKoena strategies to consolidate themselves as the ruling dynasty with enhanced powers over the other lineages were given a fillip by colonial rule. The British after 1884 strengthened the formal powers of the paramount by condoning the practice of "placing," that is, the placement of a direct descendent of Moshoeshoe over the chiefs of distant

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9. The first study of this found that 18 years was the average length of possession. Douglas, A. and R. Tennant, Basutoland: Agricultural Survey 1949-50 (Maseru, 1952), 90

10. Arbousset, Missionary Excursion, 133

11. Ashton, The Basuto, 63

12. Women are also said to have favoured this type of marriage as it tied them closer to the male relatives traditionally most responsible for their protection--maternal uncles (now in-laws as well). Gay, "Options," 39

wards.[13] The British also provided chiefs with new means to enrich themselves. Marena were given the responsibility of collecting taxes and, as incentive to be efficient, were allowed to keep 10% of the total take. They were also allowed, if not encouraged, to confiscate the cattle or lands of tax defaulters. Through their domination of the BNC (where, until the reforms of 1938, chiefs held 95 of the 100 seats), they were able to influence colonial policy in ways which protected their class interests. This they did in part by consistently vetoing liberal reforms which might have facilitated the development of a rival elite of commoners.

The opportunities and enticements to corruption among the chiefs were likewise greater under colonial rule. For example, given that the chiefs now had the power to confiscate a man's herd for non-payment of tax, a man had every incentive to bribe the chief to avert this catastrophe. Limpho gradually changed in nature from voluntary gifts (which could be expected to be recycled when the chief in turn showered hospitality upon his village) to attempts to grease the wheels of justice. Alcohol was a widespread lubricant in that respect, contributing to the abuse of justice and scandal at the chiefs' courts. As the Assistant Commissioner for TY observed in 1880, "Most of the principal chiefs are drunk nearly every day and totally unfit to attend to the affairs of the tribe."[14]

In the early years of Cape Rule, observers had already begun to note that some chiefs were turning their traditional rights and privileges towards the pursuit of personal financial advantage.[15] They ordered matsema for cash crop production, and increased or arbitrarily imposed

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13. Thus, although the major marena had originally stood in an almost confederal relationship to each other as allies rather than subordinates to Moshoeshoe I, placing served to demote them. By 1938, 27 of the 32 ward or principal chiefs were BaKoena. Hailey, Native Administration, 74-5

14. Cited in James Walton, Father of Kindness, Father of Horses: The Story of Fraser's Ltd. (Morija, 1958), 30. This is supported by Duvoisin's observations as well, cited in Germond, Chronicles, 404

15. Leselinyana 1872, cited in BNC 1947, 455

court fines. Young men were compelled by their chiefs to migrate to South Africa, to pay taxes or to pay tribute directly to the chiefs. Some chiefs began to exploit maboella lands for personal profit, while unjustly redistributing fields to ensure the maximization of tax receipts. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, this latter development hit widows particularly hard. Men, however, as cattle owners, felt subject to the increasingly blatant and predatory actions of chiefs through stock theft. By the 1930s, such abuses were rampant, and the "cupidity" of the chiefs was held by missionaries, the government and vocal elements of the commoners alike to be "leading the country to destruction."[16]

While most of the chiefs continued to live in modest circumstances, the wealth they were accumulating showed up in bank deposits across the border. Letsie II caused some surprise when he died in 1913, willing £20,000 to his widow, while the ward chief of Berea, Chief Jonathon, allegedly left an even larger amount in 1926.[17] By 1946, a commoner, Dinizulu Maime claimed that "about ten chiefs" owned all the sheep in the country and refused to sell to local people.[18]

This concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the senior chiefs, the Sons of Moshesh, was not only detrimental to the welfare of commoners. It also effectively disenfranchised and impoverished many lesser chiefs and headmen in the process. Thus, while the number of marena increased from 197 in 1911 to 1,340 in 1936, the chiefs as a class became increasingly fractured. Minor chiefs, and the widows and junior sons of

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16. Louis Mabille, PEMS submission to the Pim commission, 18 Oct., 1934. (Pim papers, Rhodes House). This same document calls for the abolition of the chiefs altogether. For other diatribes against the them, see Basutoland News 24 March, 1937, or Leselinyana, 2 Sept., 1930, where a colonial official is quoted blaming starvation and venereal disease on "the wealthiest stock owners." Jingoes, A Chief, also gives anecdotal evidence of the chiefs' apparently irrational obsession with cash in this period, particularly pages 191-2. Kimble analyses this obsession, which she terms the "thirst for cash" in "Labour Migration," 394.

17. Hailey, Native Administration, 16; J.H. Sims, "The Story of My Life," 88, (unpublished autobiography, Rhodes House)

18. BNC 1946, 423

such men, were in increasingly frequent cases reduced to begging and criminality to survive.[19]

Both Pim and Ashton, writing in the 1930s, attributed a number of "unfortunate social consequences"[20] to the fact that the ownership of livestock was "tending to be in fewer hands."[21] Ashton, for example, noted that "avaricious" chiefs were contributing to the "decay of customs" by neglecting their moral obligations to support the indigent and to redistribute their wealth through hospitality.[22] Moreover, with the population growing to the point that there was little land available in the lowlands, people's freedom to migrate away from a bad chief or to go in search of new fields declined. Popular dissatisfaction with the chiefs allegedly resulted in increasing social disharmony, violence and the general discredit of colonial rule.[23]

In addition to corrupting the relationship between the chiefs and commoners, cash also disrupted traditional society by contributing to the growing autonomy and "insubordination" of junior men. Among the sons of chiefs, "young bloods" flouted customary respect for elders and showed a brazenly exploitative attitude towards their subjects, including, allegedly, raping or kidnapping young women with impunity.[24] Among the sons of the poor, increasingly rebellious acts took place. Sometimes this was motivated by economic pressure for, as the wealth of the nation became concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, it became more difficult for fathers to acquire bohali for their sons. This forced men to delay

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19. This was discussed frequently in the BNC in terms of the hardship inflicted on chiefs' widows. See BNC 1932, 61; 1949, 349

20. Ashton, The Basuto, 176

21. The Pim Report, 42

22. Ashton, The Basuto, 206-220

23. This interpretation will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

24. Hugh Ashton, "Some Notes on Native Authority," May 1936, 8. PRO DO 119/1073; see also BNC 1931, 89-91

marriage until their thirties (turning to prostitutes in the meantime).

An increasingly common recourse for the impatient young man was to commit chobeliso, the abduction of a bride without paying bohali. Parents and chiefs regarded chobeliso as a scandalous act of rebellion by youth against their elders, but, by the 1930s, a quarter to a third of all marriages began this way.[25] The chiefs in the BNC proposed draconian measures in an attempt to put a stop to chobeliso.[26] In practice, however, little could be done. Young men either simply absconded from the country or, in most cases, mitigated their crime by eventually paying the requisite bohali themselves. They did so with cattle purchased in South Africa with money earned by their own wage labour. In this way, they not only acquired the power to choose their own wives but freed themselves from dependency on mafisa cattle. The independent access to cash by young men thus enabled them to escape from both the dictates of their parents and subservience to their chiefs.

Although unmarried men legally remained minors, in practice even the colonial state encouraged this assertion of independence by young males. In its enthusiasm to collect tax, the government deemed any male who went to work, be he 15 or even less, "a man." Despite the government's intentions, such men not only often spent the money they earned in defiance of their seniors' wishes, but, if remitting back to Lesotho, would send it to friends or their wives' rather than their parents. As Sayce observed in the early 1920s, "the marked growth of individualism" had reached the point that the "social bond of a common blood seems to have largely broken up" and that demand for the introduction of private property was widespread.[27]

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[25]. Ashton, The Basuto, 65; Poulter, Family Law, 107

[26]. See, for example, BNC 1931 89-91 and BNC 1934, motion 27.

[27]. R.E. Sayce, "An Ethnographic Essay on Basutoland," Geographical Teacher, 12/1924, 288. The effects of a cash economy and individualism upon Basotho women in particular are discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

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Before analyzing the class structure as it emerged in the early colonial period of Lesotho, it is important to stress that marxist terminology reflects presumptions in favour of male activities and does not, therefore, strictly "fit" Basotho women's historical experience. Women's relationships to the means of production were fundamentally different from their husbands' and fathers', first and foremost, because of the restrictions on women's ownership of property. Lack of independent access to tools, fields and livestock meant that women's welfare largely depended on men's moral obligation to ensure it. A woman, regardless of her husband's class, was therefore vulnerable to destitution as market forces undermined those moral obligations. Indeed, a woman in the senior ranks of the chieftainship was in danger of a life of poverty almost as much as was the wife of a peasant or migrant labourer if her husband and children did not meet those moral obligations. The danger of this happening was increased by lack of fertility at key points in the developmental cycle. Consciousness of this led several of my informants to modernize the Sesotho aphorism that a "woman has no chief" to, roughly, a "woman has no class."[28]

Class is nonetheless relevant to understanding Basotho women's lives in three main ways. First, it can reveal how economic power was distributed in Basotho society and thus where the major opportunities or dangers for Basotho women lay. Second, an understanding of class structures allows us to identify certain trends in the distribution of wealth and power over time which arose in part from the struggle of men to control or secure access to scarce resources. Changes in class structure over time can then shed light on why both colonial policies and women's strategies for survival also changed. Finally, marxism provides a vocabulary with which to place Lesotho in the broad context of global

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[28]. See also the caution against the "vulgar" employment of class analysis in Colin Murray, "Class, Gender and the Household: The Developmental Cycle in Southern Africa," Development and Change 18/2 (April 1987), 235-49

capitalism and to draw upon a vast literature for comparative purposes. In this way, we can see that many of the struggles of the Basotho are reminiscent of capitalist transformation elsewhere.[29]

To begin with, the class with by far the dominant influence in the early colonial economy was not the borena but the "bourgeoisie," the European merchants. Prior to the 1880s, there had been many small, often itinerant traders, many of whom were Afrikaners. The Gun War, and the business tactics of the better-connected English traders, eliminated most of these men and began a process of concentration of capital. By the 1920s, the Fraser family had virtually monopolized the commercial life of the nation, with most of European traders, bankers, speculators and labour agents connected corporatively to Frasers.[30] Only in the Butha Buthe district did trade escape monopolization, remaining largely in the hands of a small "Mixed and other Coloured" community (mainly East Indians).

These European merchants exercised an inordinate degree of economic power. Not only did they have the resources to buy out or co-opt their commercial rivals, but, as "the unofficial economic advisors" of the

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[29]. A useful general summary of the vocabulary and debates within marxism is found in Bottomore et al, A Dictionary of Marxist Thought. Of historiographical interest in this regard (but also relevant to Lesotho because of the "Communist" connections of the sundry political parties there from the 1920s to 60s), see Karl Marx, "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon" in Marx and Engels, Selected Works; V.I Lenin, The Development of Capitalism in Russia (NY, 1966), and Mao Tse-tung, "The Debate on the Co-operative Transformation of Agriculture and the Current Class Struggle" and "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung vol. V, (Peking, 1977). For a comprehensive application of marxist theory to Africa in general, see Bill Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society Since 1800 (Bloomington, 1984)

[30]. Timothy Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920" Journal of Southern African Studies 12/3 (1985), 201; Edgar, Prophets with Honor, 15. Hagiographical, but still revealing, accounts of the Frasers can be found in Walton, Father of Kindness, and Christopher Danziger, A Trader's Century: The Fortunes of the Frasers (Cape Town, 1979). In the 1920s, there were altogether approximately 250 European men in commerce. Although there are also cases recorded of female traders in the early period of pre-colonial commerce, these seem to have disappeared by the 1920s, at least to the eyes of census-takers.

government,[31] they urged, and generally won, colonial policies favourable to their interests. The European merchants had a number of more subtle effects upon Lesotho's development as well. For instance, while some traders were paternalistic towards the Basotho, others had a nakedly exploitative attitude which made the chiefs, however corrupt, look good in comparison in the eyes of the commoners.[32] The chiefs led popular boycotts against the traders on a number of occasions in order to win better prices for the produce of their people, as well as complained about them in the BNC.[33] It was Chief Joel who insisted on allowing Indians to settle in Butha Buthe precisely as a means to break the European monopoly there.[34]

Perhaps the profoundest impact the traders had upon Lesotho, however, was by assisting the diffusion of cash and commodities into even the remotest parts of the territory. In 1908, Lesotho imported £250,000 of consumer goods, indicating, as the former Resident Commissioner optimistically put it, a "multitude of contented taxpayers...who possess all they require."[35] Integrally connected to the spread of these goods (and the commodity relations which accompanied them) was the differentiation of the commoners into several distinct classes by the early 20th century.

Economically the most successful of these classes was the "petty

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31. Kimble, "Labour Migration," 50

32. Even the government later admitted this when it agreed to one of Pim's recommendations to legislate protection for Africans against the exploitative practices of the traders (CAR 1938, 59). Despite these protections, two decades later the government estimated that the local merchants were costing the Basotho an estimated £1 million per year in excess retail prices. Background paper to Sir Patrick Ashley-Cooper's visit, 18 Nov. 1952. PRO DO 35/4461/154/11/1

33. Keegan, "Trade," 209; Walton, Father of Kindness, 31

34. Rosenthal, African Switzerland, 196

35. Lagden, The Basutos, 641-2

bourgeoisie."[36] These men have also been termed the "middling class" (Hailey) "modernized elites" (Weisfelder), "educated elite" (Freund) and "stooges of colonialism" (Makatolle). In Sesotho, they were known as batsoelopele, the "civilized ones."[37] They were chiefly characterized by the fact that they were neither capitalists nor proletarians, and that they possessed a self-conscious awareness of their separation from the traditional political economy.

The value-laden terms applied to the batsoelopele reflect the ambiguous nature of their class position and their diverse relationships to the means of production. In Lesotho, a wide variety of professions and vocations have tended to be indiscriminately lumped together into this class--teachers, clerks, "progressive farmers," evangelists, artisans, traders, and even the "labour aristocracy" of waged employees. The vagueness of its definition is reinforced by the fact that these men normally continued to do subsistence and/or commodity agricultural production along with any salaries or wages they earned. Their economic activities were also constantly in flux, with, for example, a tendency to move from salaried or waged employment into speculation or trade, and back again.[38]

The defining characteristic of the people of this class was not so much their education or marginal relative prosperity as their ability to survive by generating cash income within Lesotho. In addition, these men tended to share an ideological commitment to free enterprise. Encouraged

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36. This is the term used by Kimble, "Labour Migration," and Bardill and Cobbe, Dilemmas. It is also widely employed with thoughtful definition in the marxist literature on South Africa. Particularly noteworthy and relevant in that respect are Phil 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 in South Africa, (London, 1982), 270-314; Helen Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa 1924-1930, (New Haven, 1987); and Alan Cobley, Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950, (Westport, 1990)

37. Machobane, Government, 137; Interview, Mosebi Damane

38. Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa, 148

by the teachings of the Protestant churches and colonial ideology alike, the "middling" men believed that by furthering their own advancement they would advance the nation's welfare as a whole. They often adopted the outward attributes of tsoeolopele ("civlization" or "progress"), including Western dress and houses, the English language, and the nuclear, monogamous family without bohali. Through their political arm, the Kopano ea Tsoelopele (Basutoland Progressive Association or BPA, established in 1907), these men pressed for land reform and a more democratically constituted advisory council. The BPA argued that the introduction of private property and inheritable land ownership, together with the cultural changes associated with missionary propaganda and commoner representation in the advisory body of the administration, would free the productive energies of the people from the dead hand of the past, that is, Sesotho customs and the chiefs. In short, the men of this class aspired, by virtue of their education or other attributes of modernity, to financial success within local colonial structures.[39]

The diversity of the economic base of the aspirant elite makes it possible to distinguish two "fractions" within it which came to have increasingly vocal differences, expressed, after 1918, through rival political organizations. The actual "incipient bourgeoisie,"[40] were those who possessed a limited autonomy in their economic activities or decision-making powers, mainly "farmers" (using "modern" agricultural techniques as opposed to "peasants" using "traditional" methods), traders, speculators, ministers, school masters, and government clerks. These bahlalefi, "wise ones," were small but growing in number. For example, in 1911 there was but a single Mosotho "farmer" and a single Mosotho "gardener" in the

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[39]. For that reason, this class is referred to hereafter as the aspirant elite synonymously with petty bourgeoisie.

[40]. As Freund hesitantly calls them, The Making of Contemporary Africa, 151. I shall adopt the term used by Cobley, the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie.

country.[41] Agriculturalists deemed worthy of these descriptions had, by 1958 grown to 176 in number.[42] Similarly rare were the 21 "traders" in 1911.[43] These men held specialized licences which essentially limited them to the scraps of commerce not desired by the large retailers. Only three of the 194 general traders in the country were Basotho in 1934.[44] In total, the bahlalefi, if defined by their employment, numbered less than 500 in 1911. If defined by membership in the BPA, they numbered 1,500 in 1924.[45] In either case, they were still less than 1% of the total population.[46]

An distinct lower stratum of the petty bourgeoisie became increasingly apparent by the late 1910s. These people were the "incipient proletarians," including school teachers, printers, labour agents, police, domestic servants, salesmen and other waged employees. Although they often shared many of the same assumptions and aspirations as the bahlalefi (as well as the access to cash without recourse to migrant labour), their relatively greater poverty, insecurity and often abyssmal conditions of their wage or salaried labour tended to make them more critical of the ideals and potential of tsoelopele. These were the makhomacha, the "people in between" or "dressed people," men and women with closer ties to the traditional economy and customs than the bahlalefi yet engaged in a similar struggle for economic and social advance in the colonial

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41. Census 1911, 43

42. CAR 1960, 10

43. Census 1911, 43

44. The Pim Report, 60

45. Machobane, Government, footnote 20, 329

46. One possible indication of how few of petty bourgeoisie enjoyed real financial security or prosperity was hinted at in the appearance of a new category of employment in the 1936 census--"household duties." That is, unlike the vast majority of Basotho women, the women so categorized were not engaged in agricultural or garden work. The number of Basotho men who could afford to keep an ornamental housewife, that ultimate signifier of petty bourgeois success, was only 525. Census 1936, 23

structures.[47] Defined by their employment, they numbered approximately 4,000 in 1911 and 6,000 in 1936.[48] Defined by their membership in the alternative political organization of commoners, the Lekhotla la Bafo (LLB), they numbered approximately 2,000. Again, by either definition, they remained less than 1% of the total population.

Both groups within the aspirant elite found themselves in a frustratingly ambiguous position in the early colonial period. Their aspirations were blocked by both the chiefs, who were the most obviously threatened by the emergence of a rival elite, and the colonial administration. The ambiguity of the British towards the batsoelopele, however, was a source of great disappointment and bitterness for this class. Although the British in theory encouraged capitalist enterprise and favoured modern agricultural or industrial practices, in practice they relied too heavily upon the borena to countenance the types of reforms which either the BPA or LLB requested. Land reform above all would have undermined the chiefs' power base and rendered more difficult the collection of tax and the maintenance of law and order. So too, although to a less openly acknowledged degree, would have any attempt to legislate an end to polygyny and bohali. The British therefore demurred upon such reforms, limiting the BPA to a single seat in the BNC and freezing out the LLB altogether. Educated Basotho were not promoted to responsible positions in the administration until well after World War II.[49]

Another reason why the British could not countenance the aspirations of the most educated and anglicized sector of the population, however, is

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[47]. David Coplan, "The Emergence of an African Working Class," in S. Marks and R. Rathbone eds., Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa (London, 1982), 364. Bradford argues provocatively that the relative organizational success of petty bourgeois nationalists in rural South Africa in the 1930s was due largely to these men, "organic intellectuals" in the Gramscian sense of not having allowed their education to alienate them from their community roots. Bradford, ICU, 64

[48]. Census 1911, 1936

[49]. See footnote 56 below.

that these men also posed a threat to the oligopolistic position of the European merchants. As the Catholic church and even the government were later to find out, the Frasers et al were able to block efforts to enact economic and social suggestions which could have fostered the development of an African middle class with a real economic base. They were able, for example, to restrict tightly the number of trading licences available to Africans, limiting the Basotho to itinerant or other restricted sales. They could even bring pressure to bear, through the government, to prevent "Native Traders" from employing white clerks.[50] Moreover, for artisans who aspired to market their wares in the camps, cheap foreign goods were "flooding the place" and driving them out of the business.[51]

South African policies exacerbated this. A huge increase in state subsidies to white farmers in the 1930s effectively eliminated the possibility of grain exports from Basutoland, undercutting the potential of the progressive farmer there by removing the major market incentive for his productivity. Moreover, since this had already happened in South Africa's "reserves," where poverty and ecological damage were so advanced that they threatened to cause a rural exodus, the government of South Africa sought to increase the opportunities for work and accomodation for its own Africans in the towns. One element of this strategy was to limit the number of "alien natives" allowed into the Union and, consistent with that, the Basutoland authorities were requested to reduce the flow of voluntary Basotho labourers to South Africa by 50%.[52] This, plus

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50. Assistant Commissioner, Mafeteng, to Resident Commissioner, 13 Jan. 1932. LNA S3/19/77

51. While Japan was singled out for so contributing to the demise of traditional crafts, the profits from imported merchandise generally accrued to the local merchant oligopoly (as almost gleefully reported by Lagden, The Basutos, 642). See also, H.V. Meyerowitz, Report on the Possibilities of the Development of Village Crafts in Basutoland, (Morija, 1936), 26

52. Native Affairs Dept. to High Commission, Jan. 1931. LNA S3/5/18/4. That action to restrict the number of labour passes to a precise quota was taken upon South African reresentation was conceded by the Resident Commissioner to Pim in 1934, PRO DO 119/1051, 12

"rationalized" transport policies of the mining companies, combined in 1930-31 to wipe out the thriving enterprise of independent Basotho lorry drivers.[53] Reflecting the decline in the fortunes of the batsoelopele, membership in the BPA began to decline in the late 1930s. Lord Hailey was apparently oblivious to this history when he observed in the 1950s that:

> It is...noticeable that this class (unlike the "middle" class in West Africa) is not yet being reinforced to any considerable extent by successful traders or artisans. Though there are an increasing number of trading licences taken by Africans, they are mostly of the "restricted" type, and only in rare cases seem to lead to the earning of profits of any magnitude. The better class of artisans seem to find more profitable employment in the Union than in Basutoland.[54]

To the frustration of their economic hopes was added the fact that the British clearly distrusted educated Basotho who, as elsewhere in Africa, often and vocally questioned imperial or racial privileges. Consequently, regardless of how politely they broached their requests to the administration, BPA members like Thomas Mofolo tended to be treated as "Bolshies" by the British.[55] Their class and cultural pretensions were meanwhile often dismissed with patronizing contempt.[56] This the British justified to themselves with the argument that "over-educated" Africans were an alienated elite divorced from the reality of the mass of the population.[57] Among the missionaries, educated African men were for a

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53. Letter from TY lorry drivers to Gvt. Sec., Dec. 15, 1930. LNA S3/19/75

54. Hailey, Native Administration, 17

55. Assistant Commissioner, TY to Resident Commissioner, June 18, 1929, LNA S3/19/72. In the same letter, the official boasted of having made Mofolo apologize for his "insolent" attitude before even speaking to him.

56. See for example, Martin's scathing mockery of a Christian wedding, Legends and Customs, 87. As late as 1948, the Resident Commissioner calmly informed the members of the National Council that he was unable to Africanize the administration because "the standard of integrity and the standard of discipline [are] sadly lacking amongst the Basotho in general." BNC 1948, 406

57. In the Resident Commissioner's words, an "unbalanced section of the community." Letter to High Commissioner, 8 Jan. 1931, LNA S3/12/1/11-13. Reluctance to create a "mandarin class, divorced in income and interest from their fellows" was cited as the main reason for denying pay raises for the Basotho in the administration in 1959. Surridge, Report of the Salaries Commission cited in Mohlabani 5/11-12 (Dec. 1959), 7

long time distrusted and their advance in the church hierarchies was blocked by paternalistic or racist attitudes.[58]

Nonetheless, enough educated Basotho achieved sufficient prosperity and relative high standing in their churches, business enterprises, or the colonial administration that faith in tsoelopele remained high in the early years of the century. As this faith came to be tested, for example, by the racist treatment meted out to Basotho soldiers in World War I, the frustration of the ambitions of the aspirant elite led to political schism within its ranks. While the BPA continued to make reasoned and polite appeals for liberal reforms, Josiel Lefela formed the LLB in 1918 to press, in ardently anti-colonial and anti-missionary language, for a much more radical platform. Lefela was a teacher who also owned a bottle store and butchery. Throughout the history of his association he found his support strongest among the underpaid and frustrated lower ranks of teachers and civil servants. LLB followers also included a noteworthy number of apostates from the mainstream churches, some of whom established and led their own Zionist congregations. These were the people most clearly caught between Christianity and paganism, between middle class and peasant, and between colonial progress and tradition.[59]

The LLB propagated a seemingly contradictory vision of social and economic justice based upon revivified traditions, stressing, above all, the democratic nature of the traditional chieftaincy. Lefela blamed Lesotho's problems on the corruption of the chiefs which, in turn, he blamed upon the British, the missionary influence and the spread of capitalist values. For that reason, he drew some high profile support from the South African Communist Party. Yet his appeals to rebuild the

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58. This is discussed in the following chapter.

59. In the urban context, see Coplan, "Emergence." Specific studies of the LLB can also be found in Weisfelder, "Early Voices of Protest;" Haliburton, "A Prophet and a Politician," and Edgar, Prophets with Honour. Colonial correspondence and police reports on the LLB in the 1920s and 30s are found in LNA S3/22/25.

chieftaincy and restore the integrity of traditional culture led others, especially the Catholic church, to denounce him as simultaneously a "communist agitator" and a dangerous "reactionary."[60] This contradiction was not so apparent to the growing spectrum of society which was alienated by colonial rule. On the contrary, Lefela's "progressive traditionalism" struck appeals to minor chiefs, migrant workers, wage labourers and women, as well as elements of the incipient proletariat (which continued to provide most of the LLB's leadership). By the late 1920s, its annual conferences at Thaba Bosiu were drawing several hundred people and Lefela was regarded as dangerous enough for the British to consider whether to jail or ban him. They eventually chose the former, in 1939, on the grounds of sedition. He resumed his harangues against the British and the missionaries in the 1940s and 50s after his election to a seat in the BNC.

This radical tradition among the lower stratum of the aspirant elite was later to play a significant role in shaping the nationalist movement in the 1950s when Lefela's successors sought to enlist the support of the mass of the people in the anti-colonial movement. This mass was defined as the "peasantry" which, according census figures, remained a remarkably stable proportion of the economically active population from 1911 right up to independence--90%.[61] Beneath this apparent stability, however, dramatic changes were taking place with the result that, by the 1930s, there were in fact three distinct types of "peasant."

The first type consisted of those people who continued to rely for their living predominantly upon subsistence agriculture or pastoralism. Their numbers remained fairly steady between 1880 and 1930, largely because, as the lowlands became densely populated and their soils eroded

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60. See "Communism in Basutoland," Vinculum 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948). One member of the colonial administration settled this apparent conundrum by declaring Lefela to be, simply, "a fanatic with a screw loose." Assistant Commissioner, Berea, 3 June, 1930. LNA S3/22/25

61. Census 1911, 1921, 1936, 1946, 1956, 1966. The World Bank report of 1975 reiterates the same proportion as well. World Bank, A Development Challenge, 1

or exhausted in this period, people were able to migrate up into fertile highland valleys such as Semongkong. After the 1930s, however, this pre-capitalist way of life quickly disappeared and, by the late 1940s, cash was in circulation even in the remotest highland villages.[62]

The second type of peasant supplemented his or her subsistence production with small-scale commodity production. This was facilitated in the early 20th century by the high world price for wool and mohair which brought relatively easy profits to even the most casual sheep and goat owners. Such peasants did not need to adopt "modern" farming techniques, nor even pay attention to the quality of their livestock or pastures. In bad years they could also supplement subsistence by despatching young men to work in South Africa. In an economy where women's productive and reproductive labour was so vital, this was actually an efficient deployment of the labour resources at a patriarch's disposal. That is, men's labour, except at key points in the agricultural cycle, was fairly easily replaceable and migration in this early period of colonial rule did not, therefore, significantly detract from peasant production.[63] Much to the dismay of progressive farmers and government officials alike, therefore, small-scale commodity production remained a viable and rewarding economic activity for probably the majority of the population prior to 1929.[64]

By the early 1920s, however, the situation had already begun to change for the worse. First, with the deterioration of the lowlands, all but the meagerest levels of subsistence production required increasing and expensive inputs to maintain, namely fertilizer, tools and transport. Second, the ability to earn cash from a short stint in South Africa was

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62. BNC 1948, 384-7

63. Herding cattle, for example, could be done by younger boys. See Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland, c. 1870-85" in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation, 119-41

64. See Chapter Seven for an examination of colonial and batsoelopele attitudes towards Basotho peasants.

becoming restricted. After the 1913 Land Act in South Africa, for instance, tenant farming for the Basotho was greatly reduced, while wages at the mines were continuously pressed downwards. By 1922 they were a third lower than they had been in 1889.[65] Under such conditions, longer and longer periods of absence were necessary for a man to earn enough either to pay his taxes, to acquire bohali for a wife, or even to sustain his family from his fields. As a result, the average length of contracts among the Basotho miners rose from three to nine months over the period of 1900-30.[66] Compulsory migration thus became a fact of life to a growing minority, particularly in the lowlands. By 1921, border districts such as Leribe were sending nearly one in four males out to work, a figure which rose in the 30s to one in three.[67] In the mountains districts, comparable figures were much lower but also showed a dramatic rise over this period. In Mokhotlong, from one in twenty in 1921, the number of male migrants to South Africa had risen to one in seven in 1936.[68]

The migrant mine worker was neither allowed to bring his family to stay with him in South Africa nor could he renew his work contract there without first returning to Basutoland to be re-recruited. The compulsory migrant was thus neither a peasant nor a proletarian but, for most of the productive years of his life, shuttled back and forth between the two worlds of sub-subsistence agriculture and sub-subsistence wage labour.

The men who comprised this third type of "peasant" have been more accurately termed "oscillating migrant labour" (Wolpe), "a rural-based proletariat" (Murray), or "peasantariat" (Parsons).[69] Despite their

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65. AIM, Migration and Development (Maseru, 1986), 13

66. Kimble, "Aspects," 152

67. Census 1921, 6; 1936, 5

68. Ibid

69. Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid" Economy and Society 1/4 (1974), 425-56; Murray, Families Divided; Jack Parsons. Botswana: Liberal Democracy and Labor Reserve in Southern Africa (Boulder, 1984), 26. My own attempt to

access to cash, theirs was a life fraught with poverty, danger and insecurity. A healthy man with a strong wife and mature children stood the best chances of survival or attaining a modicum of comfort upon retirement. If he had worked hard and been lucky, he could retire from the mines to add his labour to that of his wife and teenage children, enhancing production with fertilizer or tools purchased with savings or with cash remitted from grown migrant sons. But what if the man were injured in the mines and incapable of labour on his fields? What if the fields were exhausted beyond resuscitation? What if there were no sons to support him upon retirement? Or worse, if there were sons who indebted him with bohali payments but then neglected to remit money in return? What if the daughters ran away and or got pregnant without bringing any bohali into the household? Most catastrophically for women, what if the husband died young leaving her without a finished house, with debts and with responsibility to raise young children on two or even one tired field?

In all of these cases, increasingly common by the 1920s, the class position of the migrant labourer and dependents was extremely insecure. Often, only the generosity of relatives and chief protected them from sliding into absolute poverty or petty crime. That generosity came under increasing strain as people's economic options narrowed or disappeared in the 1930s and a growing number of Basotho had access neither to land nor migrancy. For men in the rural areas in such a situation, there were possibilities of "farm labour," mainly herding livestock. However, normally they were paid in kind, or, if given cash at all, their wages tended to be so low that it was impossible for them to acquire the resources to pay bohali. A mature man who remained in Lesotho doing such work was therefore unlikely to attract the interest of a marriagable girl or ever to escape the trap of poverty.

A man without fields, family or hope of employment might also end up

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illustrate the class commonality of these people while respecting the gendered nature of migrancy, is to opt for the term "migrant labourers and their dependents."

as part of a "lumpenproletariat" which survived in the nascent urban areas by begging or petty crime. Those who remained in Lesotho were known as likuata ("squatters") while those who abandoned the country for good to eke out a living in the slums of South Africa were known as sebhunu moroa.[70] Among women in a similar situation, there was prostitution, brewing and selling liquor. They became known as matekatse (literally, "wanderers"). By the time of the first effort to enumerate them (1949), the landless within Lesotho accounted for over 7% of all households while between 1936 and 1956 as many as 150,000 Basotho left the country permanently to settle on the fringes of South Africa's industrial centres.[71]

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To summarize, several trends can be determined from an analysis of the class structure as it emerged in Lesotho in the early 20th century. The most salient of these are: 1) the growing monopolization of commerce by a European (and to a much lesser extent "Coloured") "bourgeoisie," 2) a rapidly increasing number of chiefs and headmen (marena) with, at the same time, increasing differentiation between the most powerful and the minor lineages, 3) an increasing proportion of compulsory migrant labourers, 4) a decreasing proportion of true peasants, 5) a small but ambitious class of aspirant elites (petty bourgeoisie or batsoelopele) whose frustrations with colonial rule contributed to increasing divisions between its upper stratum (bahlalefi) and its lower stratum (makhomacha), and 6) a small but growing number of landless people (likuata, matekatse, sebhunu morao). These trends were well-established by 1930 and were increasingly manifest in the political and social behaviour of the Basotho in subsequent years. Before seeking to determine what bearing these class

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70. Literally, "buttocks to the back" meaning "they show only their asses to Lesotho." Coplan, "Emergence," 365

71. Douglas and Tennant, Agricultural Survey, 79; World Bank, A Development Challenge, 6

struggles had upon women in particular, however, it is important to examine the wider context within which they unfolded.

The Imperial Context

Nothing in the history of Lesotho's development can be properly understood without placing it in the context of the development of gold mining in South Africa. Gold was discovered two years after the Colonial Office assumed jurisdiction over Basutoland, with its production rising to account for 40% of the world output in 1913).[72] Britain's original and half-hearted strategic interest in Basutoland was superceded by its need to co-ordinate, where possible, with the different regimes and "fractions" of capital in South Africa as they jostled to maximize their political and economic interests there. This section will examine two factors about the imperial context which held particularly important implications for the development of class and gender relations in Lesotho. These were, first, the changing and contradictory nature of labour control in South Africa, and, second, the unique jurisdictional position of Basutoland within the British Empire.

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To begin with, for various reasons and not for want of trying, the British were unable to monopolize control over gold production or to impose their optimum production methods or system of labour control.[73] The absence of hegemonic power in Transvaal by the British brought the various colonial administrations in the region (and the mining capitalists to whom they were most closely allied) into acute conflict with the Africans, the Afrikaaner farmers and the white working class alike. Jostling between these groups to acquire the abundant and cheap labour

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72. Van Onselen, Studies, vol.1, 1

73. Rick Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold, (Halifax, 1976), 17-20. See also Robert Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-60 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1979); Dan O'Meara, "The African Mine Workers' Strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics (July 1975); and Van Onselen, Studies

they desired then led in a fitful and inconsistent way to the development of South Africa's "uniquely pernicious" labour laws.[74]

The dominant trend throughout the period under study was towards the intensified control over and exploitation of Africans. The very inconsistency of labour laws and the bureaucracies established to enforce them, however, offered African men and women opportunities to shape new economic and social arrangements for themselves. For example, even after their military defeat and effective disenfranchisement in the newly created Union of South Africa (1910), Africans retained enough residual power to make themselves felt politically. Thus, African women thwarted the attempts of the OFS in 1913 (and again of the Transvaal in 1918) to force them to carry passes.[75] Throughout the 1920s there was also widespread resistance to government "development" efforts in the rural areas, including the destruction of cattle and sheep dipping tanks.[76] In the case of Basutoland, chiefs and commoners alike retained the power to embarrass the colonial government and, by public protest through the BNC, the media, and even deputations to London, to thwart official intentions.

The greatest obstruction of British plans in southern Africa by Africans, however, was caused by the fact that African men in general were reluctant to sell their labour under the conditions being offered. This was originally due to the fact that African men retained economic options to wage slavery. In late 19th century Lesotho, Basotho men could still rely on relatively prosperous agriculture, could work as tenant-farmers in the OFS, and, to a much lesser extent, find work as domestic servants. The Basotho had also established a reputation on the mines for skills and

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[74]. Davies, Capital, 1

[75]. Cheryl Walker, Women's Resistance in South Africa, (London, 1982); Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, (Johannesburg, 1985)

[76]. William Beinart, "Women in Rural Politics, Herschel District in the 1920s-30s" and Helen Bradford, "We Are Now the Men: Women's Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside," in Belinda Bozzoli ed., Class, Community and Conflict (Johannesburg, 1987)

literacy which enabled them to withold their labour to win relatively high wages. Of all the African workers at the mines, the Basotho were among the most notoriously independent, staging sit-down strikes, mass desertions of mines with poor conditions or wages and refusing to sign the long-term contracts favoured by the mining companies. Basotho men preferred to "free lance" as much as possible and were also most recalcitrant in accepting what they perceived as colonial encroachments upon their right to dispose of their wages as they themselves desired.[77]

This recalcitrance has led many observers to assume that Basotho men (and women) were "proletarianized" by the experience of work in South Africa.[78] In fact, however, a closer examination of this experience reveals that the specific circumstances of labour control and oscillation militated against the development of a typically proletarian consciousness among Basotho men. As Basotho women's struggles were crucially affected by the changes their men were going through, it is important to consider the impact upon Basotho men of the increasingly rigorous and humiliating conditions of worker control imposed by mining capital in South Africa from the early 1920s.

For migrant Basotho men, the 500 kilometres journey to the mines of the Rand often started with a hike of several days over mountain passes. It was commonly embarked upon by boys as young as 14 or 15, motivated both by a desire to obtain money and material goods and by a fear of ostracism in the village if they did not:

> No girl would want to be married by such a coward who feared to go and face the white man's machines. My aim was to make money and settle down.[79]

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77. For example, only 4% of the Basotho miners deferred their wages back to Basutoland in 1919 compared to 31-72% among the other"tribes." Judy Kimble, "Aspects," 153

78. Kimble, "Labour Migration," and "Runaway Wives"; Leeman, Azania; Weisfelder, "Defining," among others.

79. Palesa Sebilo, "What do the Miners Say?" B.A. diss, NUL, 1976, 41. Pim also believed that women's desire for a husband who could provide well was a primary motivation for men to migrate--he reported women refusing to

Potential recruits could walk down either directly to the railheads in Natal or to the "camps" in the lowlands of Basutoland. At the camps, the men gathered to wait to be selected by labour agents or "touts." Despite the heavy demand for Basotho labour, it was possible to fail to find employment, especially as health standards came to be applied in the 1920s. Fear of rejection was so high that men enjoined themselves to sexual abstinence for at least a week lest intercourse cause them to lose weight and fail to make the minimum requirements.[80] Beginning in the 1920s, recruits were also subjected to mass public strippings prior to commencing work. This was again ostensibly for health inspection and the welfare of the men, among whom tuberculosis was rampant. It became known among the Basotho as mothetho moholo, the greatest regulation, as it placed youths naked beside family patriarchs, circumcised "heathens" beside uncircumcised Christians.[81] It could also occur up to four times between Maseru and the mines as well as again, in some cases, each pay day. At any point, a man could be rejected and summarily sent home.

For a young man to return to his village in rejection could occasion such mockery by girls and family alike that he would go to great lengths to avoid it. Back in the camps of Basutoland, the reject would often join those who had been robbed or otherwise lost their cash advances and had been unable to proceed to the mines: the caves of the hills around Maseru were full of men waiting until they could find a less choosy recruiting agent to hire them.[82]

Successful recruits were the majority, however, and once signed up they were given a pay advance. With as much as a pound in hand, high

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marry men who did not go to South Africa. The Pim Report, 41

80. Sebilo, "Miners," 41

81. T.V. Ramahapu, "Towards a Study of Basotho Labour in the Orange Free State Gold Mines: Mechanisms of Social Control" B.A. diss, NUL, 1977, 44

82. AIM, Another Blanket: Report of an Investigation into the Migrant Situation (Roodepoort, 1976)

spirits predominated among them. Loaded into trucks or entraining in Maseru, the men sang lifela or praise songs boasting of their masculinity and independence. To many, the journey to the mines became equated with lebollo, initiation into manhood, and the lifela hid their anxieties. They had reason to be anxious. On average 400 miners a year died underground and thousands more were injured or contracted fatal lung diseases (phthisis or tuberculosis). Compensation and pensions were minimal (and frequently disputed by the companies), so that men often left the mines after decades of dangerous and backbreaking labour with little to show for it but a broken body. Indeed, until 1938 the Basotho had the highest mortality (and mutilation) rate of any "tribe" at the mines.[83] This was partly due to their refusal to seek medical treatment for disease or injury until they were totally incapacited and uncurable (as the government maintained), and partly to the Basotho preference for the most dangerous (and "manly") work in the mines.[84]

In addition to physical tests of endurance, racial humiliation and savage beatings by white overseers were common. When Basotho miners at Jagersfontein sat down to protest against the murder of a comrade by an overseer in 1914, the police were called in and 13 more were killed.[85] Overseers were regarded as cannibals (malimo) eating the men alive, and the mines as a kind of hell, the ultimate test of the traditional Sesotho notions of masculine virtue.[86]

The kind of work which most Basotho men did in the mines did not enhance their skills in any meaningful way.[87] Nor did the alienating

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83. Medical Director H. Dyke to the BNC, 1940, 4

84. Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, "Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft-sinking on the South African Gold Mines," Journal of Southern African Studies 14/2 (1988)

85. Kimble, "Labour Migration," 245

86. Coplan, "eloquent knowledge," 423

87. Sandra Wallman, "The Bind of Migration"

conditions of labour and life at the mines encourage "modern" consciousness or thrift. Rather, aside from parochialism, they tended to evoke an almost fatalistic or self-destructive escapism through alcohol. After work, the men were locked up inside fenced areas and housed in dreary hostels with no privacy. There, young men were commonly coerced into homosexual servitude to their seniors.[88] Recreational facilities, beyond a canteen where weak beer was served and fights abounded, were almost non-existent. For the minority who had employment outside the mines and lived in the locations, the living conditions were frequently execrable.[89]

On days off, the miners were encouraged to participate in "tribal customs" such as dancing to let off steam. With the hostels rigorously separated by so-called tribe except on these occasions, "faction fights" were common. As long as they were not excessively murderous, supervisors tolerated or even abetted these fights. Certain Basotho clans, however, gained notoriety for forming gangs. Most feared of all were "the Russians" (BaRashea) who were blamed for such irruptions as the 1957 riot that left 42 dead.[90]

The Basotho, proud of their independence and their reputation as the most highly skilled and fearless workers, also tended to show an aggressive parochialism to other African men which made them difficult to

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88. Dunbar-Moodie, "Migrancy and Male Sexuality"; AIM, Another Blanket

89. The township of Klipspruit, for instance, was situated so that it was almost surrounded by the "sewage farm" of Johannesburg. Blacks in the urban area contributed to this through the noisome "bucket" system until the 1970s. See Cobley, Class and Consciousness, 17-35

90. Mohlabani 4/6 (Aug. 1958). Later studies to determine who the BaRashea were found no political connotations to their name or activities. On the contrary, other Africans blamed them for strike-breaking. Their reputation was so fiercely criminal that they caused the Paramount Chieftainess to request police protection at the mere rumour that a group of them were coming to see her. "Russians" file, June 1957, PRO 35/4421/112/251/1

organize.[91] The spirit of defiance among Basotho workers did not, therefore, constitute a nascent proletarian consciousness in the marxist sense. On the contrary, far from being predisposed towards progressive political action or social change, Basotho men were regarded as almost the least politically engaged of all the migrant workers in South Africa.[92] The alienation and violence which Basotho men suffered in the mines and hostels also contributed to an idealized and assertive traditionalism among the men. As will be examined more closely below, this reasserted traditionalism was frequently turned against women, who travelled the trains at their peril and who had to deal with men who returned from the mines full of anger.[93]

One of the reasons gangs such as the Russians formed was to protect the men who ventured out of the hostels into the nearby locations on Saturday night. Since no women were allowed in the mine compounds, travel to the locations offered the only opportunity for sex over the period of the contract (six to nine months). Young recruits from the territories who ventured out to avail themselves of the opportunities were, however, visible and vulnerable targets for professional thieves and jealous local men.[94] Also, when South African workers struck and mass nationalist protest in South Africa began to swell in the 1940s and 50s, Basotho men were subjected to attacks for betraying the strikers and boycotters.[95]

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91. Guy and Thabane, "Technology." See also Jingoes, A Chief, for a personal account of the Basotho in the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in the 1920s.

92. This was the assessment of the Catholic church, which was keeping a close eye upon such matters. See "Communism in Basutoland" Vinculum 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948), 2

93. This theme will be explored further in Chapter Eleven as the radical nationalist party attempted to win the votes of migrant workers in the 1965 general election.

94. BNC 1956, 63. See also Philip Bonner, "The Russians on the Reef, 1947-57: Urbanization, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilization," paper presented to the Southern African Research Project workshop, Yale U., Oct. 1990

95. BNC 1954, 517; BNC 1956, 63

In all, given the conditions which prevailed for working Basotho men on the Rand, it is hardly surprising that, "all the men who return from the mines, above all the boys, are truly crazy."[96] The missionaries saw migrant labour producing almost the worst possible combination of effects upon the Mosotho male, a revivified "heathenism" made more pernicious than ever by the influence of European "neo-paganism."[97] The "unquestionably bad" effects of migrant labour, particularly upon men, were noted in the Native Economic Commission in South Africa and echoed in the Pim Report two years.[98] To Ashton, it appeared in the 1930s that the men, "floating" between wage labour and peasant farming, miss the full benefits of both":

> As mine or industrial workers, their intermittant employment makes them difficult to organize and so reduces the opportunity of bargaining for better wages; their instability keeps their productivity and therefore their wages low, and their life in the towns is squalid and unhealthy, both physically and socially. On the other hand, the knowledge that they can always get temporary, if ill-paid, work, deprives them as peasants of any great incentive to farm properly or to make the most of their lands and pastures, while their absence from home disrupts and impoverishes their social and economic life.[99]

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Basotho women also travelled to South Africa, where conditions for them were bad but significantly different. Those that worked legally, did so predominantly on the farms and as domestics. Their wages were invariably less than men's--as low as 5 shillings a month in 1932.[100] As the NEC reported in that year, conditions were especially bad in the

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96. "Communism in Basutoland," Vinculum 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948), 2 [my translation]. A similar assessment by the Protestant church can be found in JME 1939/1, 393 and elsewhere.

97. JME 1930/2, 180

98. South Africa. Native Economic Commission [henceforth, NEC] (Pretoria, 1932), 8-10 and passim; The Pim Report, 38-42. Interestingly, Pim considered that the mother-child relationship "was not seriously affected" by migrant labour.

99. Ashton, The Basuto, 176-77

100. That is, less than half men's wages and less than one quarter the estimated minimum cost of living. CAR 1932, 15; NEC, 196

OFS (where the Basotho found most of their farm jobs). Men there were frequently required to supply their wives' and daughters' free labour at harvest or other peak times.[101]

In the locations around the cities to which increasing numbers of Basotho women were drawn, "almost all, even Christians" resorted to brewing and selling beer, frequently supplemented by prostitution.[102] Living conditions were normally squalid and insecurity was paramount. Not only were the women subject to police repression and client violence, but, with the Urban Areas Act of 1923, the very presence of the women was frequently illegal. Women had to be on constant vigilance against police raids and informers.[103]

On the other hand, however, African women were not required to carry passes and therefore had a degree of freedom of movement which African men did not. Furthermore, they had the advantage of being in relatively low supply but high, even "unlimited demand."[104] With a total market of over 60,000 thirsty and lonely Basotho mine workers, Basotho women stood to earn "considerable profits"[105] as brewers, prostitutes and "paramours" (linyatsi, women who engaged in a long-term menage without marriage). They could also acquire consumer items which were unattainable back home. As a result, there were strong attractions for women to life in the cities, despite its many dangers and indignities.[106]

Officially, the attitude of the South African state towards these

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101. NEC 196

102. L. Mabille, JME 1934/1, 352 (my translation)

103. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women"; Coplan, "Emergence"

104. JME 1934/1, 640 (my translation)

105. JME 1933/1, 312 (my translation)

106. Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng; Mueller, "Women and Men," 314; Coplan, "Eloquent knowledge," 424

women remained fairly constant over the period under study.[107] That is, African women were supposed to remain in the reserves doing subsistence agriculture and providing, thereby, justification for the low wages paid to men. They were also welcome on the farms of white South Africa as agricultural labourers. In the urban areas, however, their presence was held to be detrimental to profits and social stability. In the first instance, the presence of African women in the locations would tend to "stabilize" the African men and would undermine the lucrative logic of migrant labour. It would also require the state to provide expensive urban services such as housing. Moreover, the urban environment was deemed to be inherently corrupting of African morals. In this view, the presence of women only exacerbated the breakdown of "traditional" African social cohesion by "detribalizing" the African male and exposing him thereby to immorality, disease and criminality. To prevent this from happening, therefore, the African male worker in the city needed to be rooted in the country by the continued presence there of his wife, a principle of state policy almost equally valid in 1932 as in 1972.[108]

This relative continuity of official discourse, however, disguises significant shifts and contradictions in South African policy over time. First, despite legislation designed to enforce gender segregation among Africans, it was simply too costly to police with consistency. This cost was both financial and in terms of the resentment it incurred among

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107. Walker, Women's Resistance; Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng. There is also a growing body of literature upon an analagous situation in colonial Zimbabwe which examines state policies towards urban women. See Chapter One, footnotes 97 and 98.

108. That is, from the NEC to the height of apartheid policies. This attitude towards "tradition," the very soul of Indirect Rule, persisted in South Africa long after it was abandoned by the British and other colonial powers, due to the fact that the government there was largely beholden to a rural-based white electorate. Afrikaner farmers, in addition to their racist notions about Africans, could not tolerate policy changes which would endanger their labour supply or raise costs by enabling women to move more freely to the cities. Cobley, Class and Consciousness; Walker, Women and Resistance; Davies, Capital, State and White Labour; Cooper, "from free labour"

African men who in many cases did not want to see the state assert control over "their" women.[109]

It is also apparent that influential elements in South Africa not only tolerated but may have positively favoured a degree of freedom for women to move to the locations. For the mining companies, the presence there of a limited number of women was believed to calm the workers, with some going so far as to argue that the mass prostitution of African women was desirable in that it protected white women from lusty African males.[110] More concretely, women in the locations provided a strong inducement to the men to extend their contracts in the mines, either because the men established long-term relationships with location women or because they were "fleeced" of all their earnings in the shebeens and unable or too ashamed to return home.[111]

The mine companies also favoured replacing the "houseboys" who did domestic service in European homes with African women. Primarily, this was desired as a means to reduce the demand for male labour outside the mines and allow the mines to cut wages. The lower cost of female domestics would also, they argued, reduce the cost of reproducing the white work force.[112] The 1913 attempt to issue passes to women in the OFS was primarily intended for this purpose, that is, by seeking to compel African women to abandon illicit activities in favour of domestic service.[113]

Finally, local businesses in South Africa appreciated the effect which African women had of recycling mine wages into their pockets. There

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109. The NEC specifically warned against passes for women as a potentially worrisome provocation of African men (NEC, 108). This was also the case in a comparable situation in Southern Rhodesia, as described by Jeaters, "Marriage, Perversion and Power."

110. Barnes, "The Struggle for Women's Mobility," 608

111. The Pim Report, 44

112. Van Onselen, Studies vol.2, 22; Davies, Capital, State and White Labour

113. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women," 242

was a "rather lucrative trade" in the townships of both consumer items and, to a degree which caused a missionary from Basutoland to remark bitterly upon the hypocrisy of the South African government, of the raw materials needed by women for liquor brewing.[114] The Catholic church viewed the government as not so much interested in stopping women's brewing as in "taxing" it through arbitrary raids and fines.[115] The merchants of Ficksburg actually had the audacity to complain to the Basutoland administration about a hotel on the British side of the border whose prostitutes were drawing business away from their own side.[116]

As a result of these contradictions within South Africa, the official policy of influx control for "alien native" women often elided into an unofficial reality of allowing such women into the Union. The Basutoland authorities, when seeking to appease the official demands of the South African government, often found this ambiguity frustrating. Especially so was the "sloppiness" of Union officials in upholding their own laws.[117] These were gradually tightened up in the 1930s-50s, however, it was not until 1963 that South Africa finally imposed effective restrictions on the movement of African women. Until then, therefore, the risk of being deported from the urban areas of South Africa was sufficiently low that it did not dissuade determined Basotho women from moving there. Indeed, life in the townships, despite frequently appalling living conditions, police harassment and social insecurity, offered such opportunities for "adventures and fortune" that it became a strong

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114. G. Martin, "Les Basotho dans les centres miniers du Transvaal," Les Bulletins des Missions 18/1 (1939), 62 (my translation)

115. Ibid

116. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women," 246. Presumably, the presence of Basotho women prostitutes on Ficksburg side would have stimulated commerce in a more acceptable manner.

117. For example, Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner 23 Sept. 1923. PRO CO 417/523; H.D. Elliot memo on the "Native woman menace," n.d. (1944?), PRO DO 35/1178/y847/1/1. See also Kimble, "Runaway Wives," for some other early examples of this.

attraction to Basotho women. The reminiscences of one such woman who travelled there in 1932, paint a picture of an almost Golden Age before the crackdown began:

> K'ore, at that time it was very nice, so nice, because these things of nowadays, passports, they were not there at all. It was warmth. The country was warm from when you left your home... Yes, before we went anywhere, just walked around... Then there came into being that thing like that of saying 'do not go past here, go there, your colour should come this side.'[118]

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Lesotho's unique position within the British empire is germane to Basotho women's historical experience because it affected the nature of the colonial state there. This, in turn, set some of the parameters of class and gender struggle in Lesotho. For example, the Basutoland state was heavily involved in the economy through its enforcement of the terms of the contracts offered to African workers by the mining companies.[119] It took on this task since the migrant labour system enabled men to pay the taxes upon which it depended for approximately half of its revenue and was directly responsible for a remarkable (£100,000) surplus of assets over liabilities.[120] Moreover, until 1931 the office of the High Commissioner was held by the Governor-General of South Africa, an obvious conflict of interest in which Basotho interests were unlikely to prevail. Given their dependency and subordination to South Africa, as well as a fear of incurring the wrath of the Treasury in London should a budget deficit occur, the Basutoland authorities had strong structural reasons to be content, if not positively cheery, about the status quo. Anything which

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118. Roste and Sexwale, "Research Priorities," 7

119. The Basuto Native Labour Proclamation of 1912 gave the state primary responsibility for catching and punishing deserters and for regulating recruitment practices. Through this law, a £10 fine or six months' hard labour could be imposed on any Mosotho who broke his contract or accepted an advance from another labour agent while on contract. Until repealed in 1942, this proclamation and the prosecution of tax defaulters comprised the majority of the total criminal court cases heard in Basutoland. Proclamations and Notices; LNA CR passim

120. CAR 1933, 27-8

disturbed the flow of migrant labour which produced this happy state of affairs therefore was, from the point of view of the men on the spot, tantamount to a budgetary deficit and the potential loss of their own jobs.

The Basutoland authorities tended as a result to be highly solicitous to South African demands and generally willing to concede to almost any request politely and expeditiously. Such requests mounted in the late 1920s and early 30s. Thus, the administration sloughed off the appeals of Basotho lorry drivers for support to resist the Union transport monopolies.[121] They urged the chiefs to discipline Basotho workers when in South Africa.[122] They even allegedly promised the Union government that they would seek "to inculcate in the inhabitants ideas favourable towards transfer [to South Africa]" and an appreciation among the Basotho for their great "debt" to the Union.[123] The Basutoland administration publicly defended the labour policies of South Africa, steadfastly maintaining the benefits of low wages for Africans even after the Dominions Office had begun to argue against them.[124] As the High Commissioner drily observed at that time, "one thing that has alarmed the Basutoland authorities from time to time is that the Union might take steps to deport to Basutoland all the natives they can lay their hands on."[125]

In addition to these structural reasons, there were qualitative reasons why the Basutoland authorities sometimes appeared to act more South African than the South Africans. The majority of them had close personal ties in the Union, including owning land and travelling across

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121. Note of Resident Commissioner's communication to the Paramount Chief, 15 Dec. 1930. LNA S3/19/75

122. Kimble, "Labour Migration," 244

123. Discussions with the Union, 80 and 63

124. BNC 1946, 479; Despatches from Lord Harlech, 1941-44. PRO DO 116/8

125. "Russians" file, n.d., PRO DO 35/4421/112/251/1

the border for shopping and social intercourse. Many had been born in there, including the Resident Commissioners Aubrey Forsythe-Thompson and A.G.T. Chaplin. By 1948, nearly a third of the colonial staff were South African officials seconded for duty in Basutoland, including prominent magistrates and police officials entrusted to the most sensitive liretlo cases.[126] Possibly because Basutoland was widely expected to become part of South Africa in the near future, it remained a "sink" career-wise,[127] a pleasantly parochial backwater where colonial officers commonly stayed for decades.[128]

While in Basutoland, whites comprised a tight community centred around social clubs, gin, cheap servants and occasional rustic adventures in the mountains. They maintained a strict colour bar, which was policed to the extent of deporting European men who openly consorted with Basotho women.[129] Almost none in the administration bothered to learn the vernacular.[130] As for their wives, "surrounded by cheap servants and little distraction," they appeared as late as the 1960s as

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126. Of 80 officials in that year, 25 were South African citizens. Sir Charles Dundas and Hugh Ashton, Problem Territories of Southern Africa, (London, 1952), 37; Jones, Medicine Murders, 58

127. Or so observed Frank Russell, an officer of the Minister of Overseas Development, in his official report of his secondment to Lesotho after its independence. Russell file, 86, Rhodes House

128. Observing the racism, incompetance and redundancy of his fellow officers in the early 1950s, Patrick Duncan noted that "the life of white Basutoland was perhaps even more pleasant than the life of white South Africa." (C.J. Driver, Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African [London, 1980], 44). Even an English-speaking South African, otherwise quite favourable to British rule, saw fit to comment upon the luxurious life-style of Basutoland officials and the "Pukka Sahib tradition which prevails" among them (Rosenthal, African Switzerland, 196).

129. G.C. Greyling of Qacha's Nek was so treated for being "a danger to the peace, order and good government of the Territory" in 1932. The local Assistant Commissioner recommended at that time an absolute prohibition of inter-racial cohabitation. 9 Mar. 1932, LNA S3/14/9/7.

130. Hamnett found that of the men charged with interpreting and administering customary law, the Judicial Commissioners, only one made the effort to learn Sesotho (Patrick Duncan, who served from 1950-52). Ian Hamnett, "Some Notes on the Concept of Custom in Lesotho," Journal of African Law, 15/1971, 268

"uncomprehendingly arrogant Memsahibs."[131] White women as nurses or clerics enjoyed significant financial and social advantages to their black co-workers and adamantly refused to tolerate such things as shared accomodation with African nurses.[132] As a Mosotho chief put it:

> In practical terms the British liked apartheid. Only very, very rarely could we sit together with a white. Oh yes, the British were worse than the Boers.[133]

Criticism of such behaviour became stronger as nationalist passions rose in the 1940s and 50s. The editors of Mohlabani, for example, referred to the men of the administration as "pampoenfontein-born bumpkins" living their pre-retirement years in a "White Man's Paradise."[134] Such criticisms did not come from Basotho only, however, but from bureaucrats visiting from other ministries,[135] and even the High Commissioner himself.[136] Thus, while there were undoubtedly men of conviction in the Basutoland administration, on the whole they tended to be "officers of the old school, strict disciplinarians, but lacking inspiration and a

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131. Halpern, Hostages, 228. Although Halpern is clearly partisan, his observation is strongly supported by the descriptions of expatriate society offered in J.H.Sims' unpublished autobiography as well as the appalling views expressed by the wife of a colonial official at the turn of the century-- Martin, Legends and Customs, especially 114-17

132. See in particular the report of the Select Committee on Salary Scales and Conditions of Service of the Basutoland Civil Service (Maseru, 1961)

133. Interview, Matete Majara

134. Mohlabani 17 April 1957, 18. ("Pampoenfontein" is a mocking reference to a rural village or "dorp" in white South Africa). Even less kindly, Makatolle attacked the expatriates in the administration as "the dirt collected from the slums of whichever country... rubbish" (Mar. 1965, 4) and "grave-entrant Scottish scum." (19 June, 1965, 17)

135. "The general standard [of the colonial officer in Basutoland] appears to be far lower" than elsewhere, observed Russell in 1966. Russell file, Rhodes House, 86

136. "The spirit of Lugard, Clifford, Cameron and Hailey has not yet reached them. They are in some cases too set in their old ways to change in their declining years." Lord Harlech, Visit to Basutoland, 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/y701/1/1

progressive outlook."[137] Long after colonial reform was in motion elsewhere in Africa, the local representatives of imperial authority and the modern world in Basutoland were still seen in the eyes of their superiors in the Dominion Office as "an inherent brake on the wheels of true progress."[138]

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Several important points can be drawn from this overview of the socio-economic background to gender struggle in colonial Lesotho. First, the evidence supports the view that pre-colonial Basotho society was one of the most equitable and democratic in the region. "Tradition" in this respect was by no means oppressive or "backwards," as Europeans tended to assume of any African people. Conversely, those features of imperialism and capitalism which are normally associated with modernity and progress were not necessarily so in the context of a migrant labour reserve. Wage labour and industrialization in South Africa, for example, did not create an unambiguously proletarian class in Lesotho. The aspirant elite were unusually restricted or undermined by the position of Lesotho inside South Africa. In addition, the colonial officials tended to be excessively conservative in their outlook. Subsequent chapters will show that colonial rule and capitalism did bring some progressive changes to Lesotho, however, it must be emphasized that they did so in an atypical manner from other African colonies, rife with contradiction and conservatism. The next chapter will focus specifically on how the Christian churches sought to mitigate some of the worst aspects of these contradictions by the propagation of contrasting ideologies of "development" and "proper" gender relations.

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137. Background paper to Sir Patrick Ashley-Cooper's visit, 18 Nov. 1952. PRO DO 35/4461/154/11/1

138. Lord Harlech, Visit to Basutoland, 1942. PRO DO35/1172/y701/1/1

Chapter Four: Protestants and Catholics: Gender and the Dynamics of Christian Rivalry

Of the many changes taking place in Lesotho in the early colonial era, the introduction of Christianity was by many accounts the most divisive, more important even than class. This was due in part to the fact that the two major churches, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) and the Roman Catholic mission (RCM) represented "extreme forms of Christianity"[1] whose "stiff-necked" approach to winning souls exacerbated existing divisions in Basotho society.[2] There was not only a strong de facto alignment of the two missions with rival elite groups but also, in the lead-up to independence, with rival political parties. In addition, Christianity has been blamed for exacerbating gender struggle by encouraging women's rejection of their traditional subordination to men, another issue which, as will be discussed in Chapters Nine and Eleven below, acquired a bitter divisiveness among the political parties in the early 1960s. This chapter will examine these assertions about the role of the churches in Lesotho's early development with a focus on the ideological underpinnings of Christian sectarianism and their implications for Basotho women.

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[1]. Jones, Medicine Murder, 27

[2]. Nearly 80% of the population today considers itself Christian, with close to 80% of that belonging either to the or the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC, the successor to the PEMS) or the RCM. The third major church, the Anglican or Church of England, accounts today for approximately 10% of the total Christian population. It is "moderate" in the sense that while considered Protestant, it was theologically closer to the Catholics than the PEMS. With its missions located at or very near to the camps, its missionaries tended to be geographically as well as socially and politically close to the colonial administration, so much so that the church suffered attacks from the Basotho during the Gun War. During the period under study, the Anglican congregation tended to be found in the nascent urban areas and to include many prominent members of the aspirant elite, particulary among the few Basotho in the administration. The other minority Christian churches were mainly African Zionist, which, while sometimes possessing quite radical doctrines surrounding issues of gender relations, tended to be small and highly ephemeral. Their social and political influence was noticeably less in Lesotho than in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent. Weisfelder, "Defining," 125-47; personal communication, John Gay

The Roots of Protestant-Catholic Rivalry

The first Christian mission in the country was established by the PEMS in 1833, at a place they called Morija, in the lowlands not far from Moshoeshoe's capital. The PEMS missionaries were originally quite warmly welcomed by Moshoeshoe I who saw them as a means to acquire the diplomatic connections and military hardware necessary to consolidate BaKoena power.[3] The missionaries meanwhile regarded Moshoeshoe very favourably and the Basotho as a whole as a "tribe" with greater potential to become Christian than almost any other Africans in the subcontinent. With a political culture and a peasant economy that made them more amenable to Christian ideals than most other southern African peoples, the Basotho quickly became the focus of one of Africa's most sustained and profound evangelizing efforts. Traditional Basotho cosmology and myths were also unusually close to those of the Bible, including even a Christ-like legend.[4]

PEMS missionaries were French and Swiss Calvinists who believed, among other things, that discipline, self-denial and achievement in this world were signs of predestined salvation in the next. They perceived it as integral to their mission to foster the cultural traits among the Basotho which had, in their view, led to prosperity among the Protestant populations of their own countries. They believed that progress towards that goal (tsoelopele) would be made through the leadership and influence of a Christianized, Westernized Basotho elite. Tsoelopele also meant "civilization," which, in that era, was considered to be virtually

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3. It is then arguable that in this way, and by acting as a conduit to the agricultural technology which so benefitted the Basotho in the late 19th century, the early missionaries played a crucial role in preserving the survival of the nation. This was certainly the view of the missionaries themselves (as often claimed or alluded to in, for example, church propaganda such as Leselinyana and V. Ellenberger, A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland [Morija, 1938]). Such an interpretation is to a large extent corroborated with more scholarly judgement in such works as Ross, John Philip; Sanders, Moshoeshoe; and Thompson, Survival

4. Lapointe, An Experience, 37-54

synonymous with the values of industrial capitalism.[5] To the PEMS, financial success obtained by moral means (hard-work, good sense, and thrift) was, by extention, "salvation."

Towards that goal, the PEMS missionaries stressed education, "scientific" reasoning and self-reliance, emphasizing literacy so that each convert be able to read and understand the Bible on their own. The first PEMS missionaries, particularly Eugene Casalis, spent long hours in a futile attempt to persuade Moshoeshoe to convert by rational argument.[6] They also made mass appeals. After translating the Bible into the vernacular, a printing press was established to publish it. Between 1860 and 1864, the PEMS also established a grammar school in Morija and commenced printing one of Africa's most venerable weekly newspapers, Leselinyana. In subsequent years, the PEMS sent the cream of its graduates to Lovedale College to produce some of southern Africa's most accomplished and literate elites, including the author Thomas Mofolo and Lesotho's first medical doctor, Dr. Motebang. In 1918 his daughter, Laura Motebang, became one of the first two African women in the region to enroll at university level.[7] Later still, an average of 10-20% of the student population at Fort Hare University came from Basutoland, with Leselinyana referring to it in the 1930s as "our university."[8]

The PEMS missionaries also favoured the growth of a progressive farmer class. This, they argued, could only come about by radical changes in the land tenure system. Most importantly, they believed that the introduction of private property and the right to inherit land would

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5. Comaroff, "images of empire"; Cooper, "from free labour"

6. See Casalis as cited in Germond, Chronicles, passim, as well as Arbousset, Missionary Excursions.

7. Alexander Kerr, Fort Hare 1915-46: The Evolution of an African College (Pietermaritzburg, 1968), 31

8. Leselinyana 18 August, 1937, 3

stimulate improved farming and conservation methods.[9] They also favoured the use of money ("makes people far more industrious").[10] Casalis went so far as to defy the explicit instructions of Moshoeshoe not to pay wages to his Basotho workers, reasoning that "otherwise, how could they progress?"[11]

Aside from traditional land tenure, four main social obstacles stood in the way of tsoelopele as far as the PEMS was concerned: polygyny (sethepu) and associated "exotic" marriage customs or arrangements (such as the levirate, kenela, and sororate, seantlo), bride price or marriage by cattle (bohali), initiation school (lebollo), and the brewing of "kaffir beer" (joala). These customs were believed to promote immorality, laziness and debauchery. From the onset of their mission, therefore, the young zealots of the PEMS agitated with impressive consistency against them, ruling emphatically that no one could join the church without first renouncing them. Thus, a polygynist was required to divorce all but his senior wife before he could be admitted to the PEMS. Women, if married to a polygynist, were required to seek a divorce before they could be considered (an almost unheard of act of rebellion under traditional patriarchy). No cattle were allowed to be transacted in a Christian marriage. The missionaries also urged the chiefs to ban initiation schools and preached against the evils of alcohol even to the point of suggesting that Christian women were within their rights to refuse to obey their husbands when ordered to brew joala.

Despite the dogmatism of their approach and the often unpalatable message they preached, the first Protestant missionaries were actually

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9. Alina Brutsch, "Agriculture et Mission," JME 1949, 247

10. Leselinyana 6 March 1931, 3

11. Cited in Elizabeth Eldredge, "The Role of the Societé des Missions Evangéliques in 19th Century Economic Change in Lesotho," unpublished paper, Nov. 1979 (LEC archives). Casalis' frustration with Moshoeshoe's edict is also evident in his account cited in Germond, Chronicles, 511. Without cash, he rued, it would be "impossible to train workers."

quite successful in winning converts. Two of Moshoeshoe's wives sought and were granted divorces by him so that they could join the church,[12] while some of the most prominent BaKoena chiefs renounced wives and customs to become Christian.[13] Partly this was out of respect for the evident willingness of the PEMS missionaries to endure hardship and their quick facility with Sesotho. The PEMS also showed their dedication to the political cause of the Basotho by publicly standing against the incursions into the territory by both the Afrikaners and the British in the mid-19th century. The PEMS also made very early and significant moves towards the Africanization of the mission, appointing the first Mosotho evangelist in 1864 and establishing a democratically-organized synod (the Seboka) to run mission affairs. Not only was the Seboka conducted in Sesotho but, after 1922, it was dominated by the Basotho members. Although the chiefs were suspicious of an institution which allowed commoners to rise to positions of authority, the evident commitment of the PEMS to the development of an African educated elite was very attractive to commoners and outweighed much of the paternalism of the European missionaries.

Ironically, one result of this openness to African advancement within the church was the adoption by Basotho evangelists of ever more dogmatic positions against Basotho customs, the Basotho converts striving to demonstrate their convictions by the most extreme and literal adherence to church doctrine.[14] Thus, it was not until 1954, more than a century after the mission had begun, that the penalty of excommunication was dropped against those who practiced bohali.[15]

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12. 'MaSekhonyana (his senior wife in 1841) and 'MaMosebetsi. Despite their divorce, Moshoeshoe continued to live up to his moral obligation to support them, despite considerable criticism from his subjects. Thompson, Survival, 92-4

13. Including Moshoeshoe's second and third sons by his senior wife, Molapo and Masopha. Thompson, Survival, 99-100

14. Weisfelder, 'Defining," 134

15. Poulter, Family Law, 34

Such dogmatism, combined with the poverty of the church, contributed to the PEMS' loss of many converts in the late 19th century and its relative stagnation in the early twentieth century. Moreover, its very success in propagating capitalist ethics was having the contradictory effect of undermining some of the principal virtues which had originally made the Basotho relatively attractive as a potentially Christian people. As early as the 1870s PEMS missionaries were already expressing misgivings about the pace of economic and social change they had helped to unleash, specifically, how cash seemed to undermine "the good old ways" like family loyalty and mutual assistance.[16] Nonetheless, the bias in favour of capitalist logic remained profound. Thus, for example, Leselinyana reacted with equanimity to the wiping out of the Basotho transport industry in the early 1930s ("les conséquences inévitables du progrès...Rien ne peut s'y opposer").[17] A Swiss missionary who arrived in Basutoland around that time defended the ambiguous record of the mission in this respect in the following terms:

> [We] produced more educated people in those days. We had about 80% of the civil servants--a British officer told me--and more businessmen because we always tried to encourage individual responsibility. For example, we had from very early on insisted that each congregation be self-supporting. The annual contribution was very small, about three shillings when I came, but it taught a greater spirit of initiative. People today criticize us for having neglected co-ops and such compared to the Catholics, but we were the church of free enterprise. Tsoelopele, as in the Kopano ea Tsoelopele [BPA], could also be translated as "development," so you see, we were also involved in a different kind of development.[18]

The first Roman Catholic missionaries to arrive in Lesotho were also French, perhaps attracted by word of the relative success of their "Huguenot" compatriots. They belonged to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), an ecclesiastical order which had been established thirty years

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16. Eldredge, "The Role of the Societé," 11-12. See also expressions of regret in Germond, Chronicles, 534 and passim

17. "The inevitable consequence of progress... nothing can oppose it." JME 1931/1, 157

18. Interview, Rev. Albert Brutsch

before to evangelize the impoverished and brutalized elements of post-Napoleonic French society. Abetted by the BaKoena, who desired a balance between their Christian "cows" and limits to the increasing and potentially dangerous influence of the PEMS, the OMI from the beginning adopted a competitive approach to conversion which the PEMS highly resented. The long historical animosity of French Catholics and Protestants was thus introduced among the Basotho, since, to many of the Catholic missionaries, the Protestants were "descendents of the serpent of Old," morally worse than the "heathens."[19]

To save the Basotho from this perdition, the RCM quickly adopted a mission strategy that showed a relatively more tolerant attitude towards the Sesotho customs most vehemently opposed by the PEMS. In 1888, for instance, the Bishop stated explicitly that bohali was not a sin as long as the traditional wedding ritual was accompanied by a church ceremony as well.[20] Indeed, bohali was not simply tolerated but it came to be regarded by the RCM as a positive good in that it provided a vital "safeguard" against divorce, increased polygyny, wife abuse, and the degradation of women as concubines (which, in Catholic eyes, were the natural tendencies of liberalism and Protestantism). This attitude remained remarkably consistent throughout the period under study, with the advantages of bohali enumerated by church leaders in much the same language in the 1960s as it was in the 1860s.[21]

The Catholics also proved more flexible on the issue of sethepu than the PEMS. Although the RCM adamantly denounced polygyny, it not only welcomed the wives of polygynous chiefs but also baptized the chiefs themselves provided they promised to cease cohabiting with junior wives.

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19. Bernhard Ahbers, "Father Joseph Gérard, OMI: Apostle of the Basotho," Vie Oblate Life (Dec. 1982), 240

20. Ashton, The Basuto, 73

21. P.G. Martin. "L'Eglise Cathcliique au Basutoland" (1934), Deschatelets Archives LS 4003.B33R 10; P. 'Mabathoana, "Lobola," African Digest 13 (1961), 28

It was widely believed that the church then turned a blind eye to de facto polygyny, especially among the important chiefs.[22] Certainly, many Catholic missionaries regarded polygyny as decidedly better than some of the likely alternatives. They believed, for example, that without polygyny rampant prostitution was the predictable outcome of the long period of abstinence traditionally required of a husband after his wife gave birth.[23]

The RCM also adopted a tolerant attitude to alcohol, regarding the consumption of joala, provided it did not lead to excessive drunkenness, as a tradition which contributed to social cohesion. As such, they may at times have actually encouraged women's brewing, for example, to mark festivals and church celebrations.[24] PEMS missionaries noted, with disgust, how malt was one of the biggest selling items in the Catholic co-operatives in the 1930s.[25]

Despite this tolerance of certain aspects of Sesotho culture, RCM missionaries originally took a dim view of Sesotho culture as a whole ("depravity" in Gérard's words) which mirrored in many ways the disapproval expressed by the PEMS.[26] Again, this may reflect the similar

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22. Priests were enjoined to solemnize a polygynist's marriage only when they had "moral certainty" that the man, at that time, would honour Christian custom. If he subsequently lapsed, it was the polygynist, not the priest or the Church, who had to answer to God. (Matrimonial cases, DAM 12). In Basotho eyes, the distinction may have been too fine since the "anulled" wives of many polygynists commonly remained in the same huts they had lived in before. Interview, Rev. Brutsch

23. Felix Baerlocher, Bertha Hardegger, M.D., Mother of the Basuto: Excerpts from her diary (Sackville, NB, no date), 26

24. Lapointe, An Experience, 93-94. Their opposition to the commodification of strong liquors, however, was adamant. See, for example, Martin, "Les Basotho dans les centres miniers," among a number of articles on the subject in Bulletins des Missions, 18/1 (1939)

25. Interview, Rev. Brutsch. A visiting South African journalist saw the Catholic attitude to alcohol somewhat differently. Commenting on the French Canadian priests, Rosenthal wrote: "The Basuto like them, for they have a fundamental friendliness which extends enough to allow them to be present at Basuto tribal feasts, and even to enjoy refreshment from pots of beer brewed by the women." Rosenthal, African Switzerland, 157.

26. Ahbers, "Father Joseph Gérard," 240

national and class backgrounds of the missionaries of both churches. The Catholics tended, like their PEMS counterparts, to come from the lower middle classes of a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing France. They consequently favoured many of the same prescriptions for development or social improvement, such as the use of money, and the importance of punctuality and thrift.[27] In 1923, however, this began to change with the arrival of the first French Canadian missionaries, Odilon Chevrier and Gérard Martin. These men pressed for, and in 1930 won, the transfer of the administration of the RCM to the OMI of the Eastern Province of Canada. This was to prove a turning point in Lesotho's history as, by 1936, the French ancien régime in the RCM was superceded by the Canadians, most of whom came from the province of Quebec. At that time, Quebec was a much more rural and tradition-bound society than was France or almost any other part of North America. As far as culture went, these men and women tended to be much less judgmental about a peasant society which in some ways was reminiscent of their own, (or, at least, idealized visions of their own). Regarding women's "superstitions" surrounding birth, for instance, which had been denounced by earlier churchmen as barbaric, the first Canadian bishop considered that they were on the whole beneficial to the women.[28]

One area where the RCM stance remained constant over this period of the changeover of mission personnel, was on the issue of lebollo. Here, the RCM adopted a consistently hardline approach, waging battle against male initiation in particular with such tenacity and outspokenness that it earned the bitter hostility of Basotho nationalists in the 1920s. French and Canadian missionaries alike argued that lebollo ceremonies were not only bloodthirsty but taught "scorn of women and hatred of the white

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27. Lapointe, An Experience, 58-75; Jerome Sekhakhane, "The Oblates in Southern Africa," Etudes Oblats 35 (1976), 111-119

28. Gérard Martin, "L'Eglise catholique au Basutoland." The Canadians' Old Testament attitudes towards patriarchy in general are discussed in more detail below, pp. 129-37.

people."[29] In RCM eyes, the liretlo murders (which included a Catholic missionary among their number) and the excesses of nationalist rhetoric could alike be attributed to the indoctrination boys allegedly received during lebollo. The publication of a diatribe against lebollo by the church's press, with explicit descriptions of alleged sexual and other "obscene" practices, then fueled the political tensions of the 1960s.[30]

Despite LLB and BAC/BCP efforts to portray the RCM as uniquely oppressive to the Basotho, however, this hardline on lebollo did not significantly derogate from the church's image of being on the whole more accepting of Sesotho tradition than its rival churches. In the first place, the practice of lebollo had long been in decline, with Moshoeshoe I himself having spoken against it. Moreover, the RCM's intolerance of it was shared equally by the other missions. Nationalist attacks upon the RCM may even have won it sympathy from the chiefs, to whom commoner (and largely Protestant) associations, such as the BPA and LLB, were much more insidious. In all, the RCM was able to continue to attract a number of prominent converts away from the PEMS, most importantly, Griffith Lerotholi. A year after his conversion in 1912, Griffith became the Paramount Chief and, by the 1960s, nearly all of the Sons of Moshesh were Catholic.

In addition to not having to renounce several fundamental Sesotho customs, it was both intellectually and financially easier for a Mosotho to become a Catholic than a Protestant. Unlike the PEMS, there was no fee to join the Catholic church. Nor was literacy essential. On the contrary, literate Catholics were actually dissuaded from reading the PEMS

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29. Francois Laydevant, "The Rites of Initiation in Basutoland," (Mazenod, 1971)

30. Lebollo (Mazenod, 1963), debated in BNC 1963, 1090-1105. The Lekhotla la Bafo (LLB) made the RCM its preferred target after the colonial government from the 1920s onwards largely because of the church's "teaching contempt of Sesotho." In the 1940s, the LLB accused the church of using confession to extract the secrets of lebollo and subvert women's loyalty to their husbands. "Communism in Basutoland, Report from Sion" Vinculum 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948)

translation of the Bible for fear that they might misinterpret it.[31] Bishop Bonhomme stated the reason for this in the baldest of terms in his circular to the mission in 1942: "Ignorance is preferable to error."[32]

As a result of such an attitude, the RCM was slow to develop its commitment to academic education. Until 1910, it lagged behind even the much smaller Anglican church in the number of schools it operated.[33] The quality of its education was also poor and its teaching staff notoriously inferior. This stemmed in part from the fact that many of the Sisters, to whom the bulk of the teaching job was entrusted, were francophone. As they could themselves barely speak the language they were supposed to be imparting to Basotho children they simply refused, when pressed, to teach above the level of Standard IV.[34] Ironically, this may have contributed to an increased emphasis on teaching simple, domestic and practical skills to girls, one of the few points about Catholic education which the colonial administration found consistently praiseworthy.[35]

Despite the stinging criticism of the government's education commission in 1905, the low academic standards which RCM schools offered were not regarded as especially worrisome by the church hierarchy until the 1930s. Prior to that, opportunities for intellectual achievement were of scant concern to the majority of the Catholic congregation. On the contrary, to many of the chiefs and the great bulk of commoners, Western-style education was frequently seen as a positive liability. Chief Solomon Mapathe's lament in the Basutoland National Council is telling in that

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31. Interview, Rev. Brutsch

32. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 185

33. Ibid., 180-81

34. Bishop Bonhomme to Mother Provincial of Sisters of the Holy Family, 3 Feb., 1933 (DAM 76). The 1946 Commission on Education criticized the RCM again on this language issue. Sir Fred Clarke, Report of the Commission on Education in Basutoland [henceforth, The Clarke Report] (Maseru, 1946), 35

35. Annual Report of the Director of Education (Maseru, 1929), 4; The Clarke Report, 5; CAR 1950, 42

regard:

> Although education is so good but on the other hand I think it is useless. I do not know if the fault lies with us natives. Many people have educated their sons but these sons are the most useless, mannerless and they are worse than those who have not been educated. Most of them wander about and are drunkards.[36]

Poor education was consequently only regarded as a decided disadvantage among the incipient bourgeoisie. Despite the threat of excommunication therefore, those Catholic parents who aspired to social advancement often withdrew their children from Catholic schools to enroll them in PEMS or Anglican schools.[37] It was the fear of losing converts that finally drove the RCM to begin to upgrade its educational standards in the 1930s.

That drive, however, was to a large extent undermined by the freeze on government grants which forced all of the missions to cut costs to the minimum from 1940-1947. The RCM, with the most unaided schools, was the hardest hit by this freeze and the most apt, in consequence, to hire the least qualified and cheapest "manpower"--Basotho "girls" fresh from Standard VI. Unqualified female teachers still remained a problem more than a decade later,[38] when the RCM was embarrassed into more serious educational efforts by its inability to find enough Catholic high school graduates to fill the classes of its own university. As a result, Catholics had an historical disadvantage in gaining positions in the colonial administration. As this continued well into the 1960s, it contributed to the appearance of synchronicity between church, class and political affiliation in the elections of 1965.

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One early constraint upon the RCM was that the Basotho regarded its views on celibacy as bizarre. Voluntary abstinence from sexual relations

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36. BNC 1935, 157

37. Bishop Bonhommme to Mother Provinicial of the Holy Family Sisters, 3 Feb., 1933, DAM 76

38. CAR 1959, 56

for both men and women was not only considered abnormal in traditional society but downright unhealthy.[39] For most Basotho men, but for the chiefs in particular, foregoing marriage was also economically and politically nonsensical. The requirement of celibacy for religious orders was therefore a major obstacle in the recruitment of a native clergy and, as a direct result, the first Mosotho priest was not ordained until 1931, that is, nearly half a century after the first Mosotho minister was ordained in the PEMS.[40] As late as the 1960s, Basotho priests continued to be regarded by many Basotho with suspicion, so improbable did it seem that a Mosotho male could abstain from sex.[41]

There was also strong, often violent opposition from families to their daughters joining the vocation: a young woman becoming a nun meant a loss to the family of the 10-20 head of cattle in bohali payments which were normally expected to follow upon her marriage. Many of the young women who joined convents were consequently runaways seeking "asylum" from family pressure to marry someone against their will.[42] Their families did not always accept the fait accompli gracefully, and stories abound among Catholics and Anglicans of irate male guardians or grooms charging into convents to physically abduct "their" women.[43] The women did not always take this prospect of abduction lying down. Some hid or successfully appealed for mercy while others fought back. Sister Corsini of Ottawa, touring the mountains in 1947, noted with approval one nun's

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39. Gay, "Basotho Women's Options," 227; Andrew Spiegel, "Christianity, Marriage and Migrant Labour in Lesotho," in T.D. Verryn ed., Church and Marriage in Modern Africa (Groenklof, 1975), 479

40. Weisfelder, "Defining," 135, 139

41. Baerlocher, Hardegger, 64-76; interview, Philomena Lesema

42. This was reported in the year of the first arrival of nuns in Lesotho. Bishop Allard, "Tableau of Mission of the Apostolic Vicariate of Natal, Apr. 1, 1864" DAM 44

43. Interviews, Sister Margie, Sister Hilda, Sister 'Mota; Corsini, Thirty Days, 197

use of weapons to defend herself and drive her abductor away.[44]

Yet as strange as nuns were to Sesotho culture, they had become generally accepted, if not revered, by the early twentieth century. By the 1940s, after the arrival of dozens of Canadian sisters from five new orders, nuns were known affectionately as "les mamans du Canada."[45] Today:

> People respect nuns very much. It was a long process for them to understand but it began 125 years ago and gradually, gradually people have come to see them as great women. The nuns have dedicated their lives to the service of the people and to God. They build schools and convents, they help the poor. That sacrifice is very important since it is not the government but the church, especially the nuns who initiate and educate the children. It was the church that was carrying the people. It was the backbone of the nation. And the nuns in a quiet way were the backbone of the church.[46]

In addition to schools, the nuns operated dispensaries and provided mission support (cleaning and gardening, for instance). They also provided a unique role model for young Basotho women. Nuns ran their institutions under contract to the vicarial administration. As such, they had considerable autonomy in day to day matters of administration and authority, so much so, in fact, that Bishop Bonhomme was led to complain soon after his arrival in 1933 that "the Sisters seem to own everything."[47] In addition, convent life offered something rare for Basotho women in secular life--time:

> I began to admire the way the Sisters lived. I liked the way they had time to sit together and pray. When I saw the way the sisters were free to do that, not having children, I wanted to do that also.[48]

By 1932 there were 65 Basotho nuns, who, by 1966, had grown to 500

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44. Corsini, Thirty Days, 197

45. Joseph Bonhomme, Noir Or: Le Basutoland, Mission Noir, Moisson d'Or (Montreal, n.d), 177

46. Interview, Ceclia Makuta; this view was widely confirmed in many of my other interviews, including those with Catholic priests, Protestants and political leaders.

47. Bonhomme speech to the Sisters (no date but possibly 1935), DAM 47

48. Interview, Sister Raphael Monyako

in number.[49] The first convent run by a Mosotho woman was in 1939, reflecting the fact that the Africanization of the RCM was much more advanced among church women than church men.[50] Free from subordination to the will of husbands or male relatives, these women were able to move among the people to proselytize by word and deed. They could be seen on horseback, wending their way up to the remotest villages, or labouring in the fields of the poor they visited.[51] Moreover, unlike the wives of PEMS ministers, nuns lacked their own class ambitions which tended to alienate educated Basotho women from the mass of the commoner population which, as will be discussed below, was an admitted problem of the PEMS. Much of the nuns' work was charitable and involved the practical demonstration of solidarity with the poor by, for example, helping widows set out a garden. One innovation of theirs was to offer special courses for Basotho women who had been unable to complete regular schooling. These "marriage preparation courses" focused almost exclusively on providing simple but practical household, gardening and income-generating skills. In all, the nuns offered services and adult education which were more attuned to the real needs of rural women, giving the RCM in Basutoland, as in a similar situation in Nyasaland, "an important advantage in evangelization by working through the female population and its leading women."[52] The gender imbalance in the churches was also telling in this regard. Where 60% of the pupils who had been educated in PEMS schools were female in

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49. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 257

50. Ibid

51. Interview, Sister Victoria 'Mota; Corsini, Thirty Days; Un Soeur de St. Joseph, Un Voyage au Basutoland (St. Hyacinthe, 1946). See also Moeletsi and J.D. DesRosiers, Basutoland (Namur, 1947) for photographs of nuns at work.

52. Ian Linden, Catholic, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, 1889-1939 (London, 1974), 168

1921, the comparable figure for the RCM was 72%.[53]

It is noteworthy also to consider the background of the European nuns who came to Basutoland. The first order, the Sisters of the Holy Family, came from Bordeaux in France. As mentioned, however, after 1935 the majority came from the province of Quebec. The Catholic church in that province had, since at least the 1840s, actively promoted itself as the pre-eminent defender of French-Canadian nationalism.[54] It had done so, on the one hand, by adopting the most conservative, ultramontane dogma as a strategy to set itself against anglophone imperialism and its liberal francophone allies. The Roman Catholic church in Quebec avidly embraced the papal condemnation of liberalism, "that baneful doctrine," as "a mortal sin."[55]

On the other hand, the Catholic church in Quebec pursued the notion of the survival of the French "race" in North America through "la revanche du berceau"--the revenge of the cradle. Quebec women were enjoined by the church not only to have abundant children (and so demographically avenge the military defeat of 1763), but to subordinate themselves completely to the needs of the "race," defined, of course, by churchmen and the male politicians whom they brokered in power. Quebec women were, in consequence of this, noticeably more restricted than in the rest of the country. Indeed until the so-called Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Quebec women were years behind in the type of legal, social and economic advances being pressed and won by feminists elsewhere.[56] In such a climate, joining a

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53. Census 1921, 9. This disproportion did tend to even out over time so that, by the 1950s, there was scarcely any difference in the proportion of girls to boys in either missions' schools.

54. Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil: An alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920, (Toronto, 1987), 22

55. Danylewyzc, Taking the Veil, 32

56. For example, women could not vote in Quebec elections until 1940 and could not practice law until 1941. Ibid., 57-60. Married women were legal minors to their husbands until 1964. Clio Collective, Quebec Women (Toronto, 1987), 265, 321

convent was one of the few opportunities available for women to develop or exercise their intellectual, artistic, managerial and even mechanical skills. As such, "taking the veil" could be considered an act of "incipient feminism."[57]

The five orders of nuns who came to Basutoland from Canada in the 1930s had a long tradition of struggling for the advancement of women in their own society. In the 1920s and 30s they were at the height of their popularity and prestige in Quebec. Many were also notably and publicly sympathetic to lay women's feminism, including adopting a pro-suffrage stance in the 1920s which earned the disapproval of the Bishop. While it is important not to exaggerate the "incipient feminist" element among their number, nor the amount of discretion which nuns were given within a highly patriarchal and hierarchical church structure, it is essential to balance prevailing assumptions about the passivity and selflessness of the nuns. This theme will be taken up in the following section.

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As mentioned, a major breakthrough for the RCM in Basutoland came in 1912 when Griffith Lerotholi, after a drunken orgy and hallucinations of Moshoeshoe I, converted to Catholicism.[58] Thereafter, as Paramount Chief, he used his authority and influence thereafter to facilitate the RCM's rapid expansion, frequently in controversial if not scandalous ways.[59] In the next two decades, over 100 Catholic schools were opened and the number of Catholic adherents rose from roughly 12,000 to nearly 100,000.[60] The number of Catholics, so declared to the census-takers,

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57. Ibid., 160

58. DesRosiers, Basutoland, 19

59. For example, he granted land for Catholic missions closer than legally-allowed (three miles) or provocatively within well-established Protestant districts. Many chiefs converted to Catholicism under pressure from Griffith. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 198; Interview, Rev. Brutsch

60. Lesotho Catholic Information Bureau, Centenary: The Catholic Church in Basutoland, 1862-1962 (Mazenod, 1962)

surpassed the number of Evangelicals for the first time in 1936.[61]

This rapid expansion made the church more attractive in the eyes of the mass of Basotho commoners, not because the bafo simply followed their chiefs but because the church now adopted methods of proselytization which appealed directly to the mass of the people. The "very exacting" demands upon catechists which the original missionaries had imposed were slackened and the net for converts was cast wider:

> The emphasis was placed on religious practice, attendance at Mass on Sundays, grandiose celebrations of feasts of all kinds, Baptism, Easter, Christmas, ordination, or the opening of a new church. An extraordinary popular piety was developed which favoured great crowds of people and presented a magnificent spectacle, filled with joy with its splendid singing by all the participants, a spectacle which attracted people to the Chruch, called forth admiration, gave the Church an image of joyous and powerful confidence and security. Devotion to the rosary, the way of the cross, medals of all kinds, especially of the Virgin Mary, were extremely popular everywhere. A Catholic could be recognized anywhere by a medal or rosary worn proudly around his neck.[62]

By contrast, the PEMS tended to appear as an austere and intellectual church, denouncing Catholic ceremonies as idolatry and relic-worship.[63]

The Protest vision of tsoelopele and the attainment of capitalist prosperity through self-discipline (which tended to reflect the colonial administration's ideological preferences) also contrasted sharply with the RCM vision of progress and development in the 1930s. The RCM in Lesotho, as in other parts of Africa, had little faith in the development of an industrial culture or a modern, capitalist elite. Rather, it saw the country's best hopes in a restructured peasantry and an enlightened leadership with roots in the community (viz., the chieftaincy). Fundamental to this was an end to the migrant labour system and the redistribution of wealth so that farmers would receive "a just share of

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61. 112,000 to 87,000, Census 1936, 27

62. A negative aspect of this strategy, as this Catholic theologian and historian admits, was that Canadian missionaries had a tendency to "oversimplify" the gospel. Lapointe, An Experience, 93-94

63. Interviews Rev. Brutsch, Ntate Sekhesa; See also Jones, Medicine Murders, 27

the profits" of industry.[64] Stable (and "moral") family and community life would then be protected by the guaranteed access of every man to sufficient land for his family's subsistence needs. Because this had been the essence of pre-colonial society, the RCM, in contrast to the PEMS, had no basic quarrel with communal land tenure. Rather than encouraging the growth of an acquisitive, progressive farmer class to which private property would accrue at the expense of the poor, the RCM saw the traditional chiefs as having a vital economic function to protect the poor and prevent the emergence of class conflict.

By the 1920s, however, it was increasingly evident that "traditional" chiefs no longer existed, the majority having been to varying degrees co-opted by the colonial regime or corrupted by the ethics of capitalism to the detriment of the poor. Indeed, some of the church's most virulent criticism against chiefs was directed upon those with the most ostentatiously "modern" attributes rather than those with reactionary views of society.[65] In a manner strikingly similar to its bitterest enemy, the LLB, the RCM began to argue in favour of restoring the traditional functions and integrity of the chieftaincy. This Catholic preference for a restructured "feudalism" over migrant labour and capitalist exploitation thus contributed to the impression that the mission possessed a romanticized view of pre-colonial social harmony and has led to such descriptions of RCM missionaries as "feudal barons."[66]

Undoubtedly such an attitude did exist among some of the Catholic missionaries, particularly those who lived in the seductively idyllic surroundings and isolation of the Malutis. It needs to be stressed, however, that the RCM was never a monolithic organization and that heated

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64. Moeletsi 20 Feb. 1945, 3

65. See, for example, Mairot's description of the RCM missionary LeBihan's running battle with the "millionaire" John Sephula in the 1920s. Mairot, Centenary Guide, 72-74

66. Weisfelder, "Defining," 141

debates about policy and vision often took place within it. The change of guard in 1930 was an important moment in that respect as the "feudal" element was superceded by the "dynamic" leadership of the Canadian Oblates. For all the conservatism of Quebec society, and their general empathy with Sesotho patriarchy, these men and women were still North American, possessed of a project-oriented, often technocratic approach to problem-solving. The dominant viewpoint of the RCM from 1930-65 was, therefore, not "conservative" in the sense of seeking blindly to preserve traditions or protect the rights of senior men but, rather, centered on the perceived need for a number of radical changes.

To begin with, the Canadians attacked the "patrician" attitude of some of the church leaders.[67] The Canadians also recognized that, given the de facto corruption of so many of the chiefs, changes to land tenure were essential. They therefore argued for the introduction of inheritable property rights with, crucially, state provisions against excessive ownership or monopolization of land. They also argued for changes in production in order to obviate migrant labour, notably by introducing dairy products and small-scale industry. Much of the development which these Canadian missionaries favoured stressed the importance of state planning to protect the majority from the excessive greed of a minority. They also tended to favour technocratic solutions to poverty and injustice, including the introduction of electricity, the construction of roads and the propagation of progressive farming and conservation methods along much the same lines as those rhetorically favoured by the government. In the clearest exposition of these views made in academic discourse, Rev. Brossard asserted that the mission's developmental aim

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[67]. Bishop Bonhomme's campaign against missionary paternalism in the 1930s was primarily directed against the ancien regime of the mission, however, it was re-iterated in the 1960s as, apparently, the Canadians themselves succumbed to the temptations of bourgeois comfort. See Bonhomme Correspondence, DAM 48; Vinculum 16/2 (1960), 54.

"should be to approach somehow the Alpine farming system of Switzerland."[68]

The OMI, both French and Canadian, was well-suited to promote such a society. The order had been established with the specific mandate of helping the poor (oblatum is Latin for "gift"). Priests and brothers of the order were explicitly enjoined by its constitution to demonstrate "abhorrence of riches" and "contempt of worldly vanities."[69] OMI missions around the world were directed to the "hard-working labouring classes and the poor, often among those in dire need."[70] They could be found in the industrial slums of Ireland and England and among the aborignal population of the Canadian far north. In Quebec since the 1840s, they had established a reputation of populism in sharp distinction to the elitist Jesuits.[71] Preaching the Gospel was their paramount objective but, towards that end, charity and "social action" to improve the quality of life of the poor had always been an intrinsic element of their mission.[72]

In Lesotho, one manifestation of this approach was the conscious construction of Catholic missions away from the camps or other centres of relative wealth in order to concentrate efforts among the rural poor.[73] Priests were subjected to harsh and humiliating discipline ("obediences")

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68. Giles Brossard. "The Food Problem in Basutoland" (D.Sc.Agric., Pretoria, 1958), 197. These same themes pervade the RCM weekly, Moeletsi. See in particular the series "Government and Church" 9 January to 20 March, 1945. For a similar interpretation of Catholic hopes for the peasantry in colonial Zimbabwe, see Terence Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe, (Oxford, 1985)

69. Missions de Missionaires Oblats 1940, 53 (henceforth MMO)

70. Ibid., 370

71. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 29; Interview, Rev. Hall

72. MMO 1933, 38; Lapointe, An Experience, 62-63

73. Interview, Rev. Blanchard; Lapointe, An Experience, 213. This bias also made the RCM slow to send missionaries to the Rand--the first priest among the miners was not sent until 1937, nearly a decade after the PEMS had done so. Gottfried Wellner, "Mission and Migrant Labour," Ministry 10/1 (1970), 6

for "even the appearance of wealth, of bourgeois comfort."[74] Among the women religious especially, the quest for poverty and asceticism was regarded as a positive good. In some cases, priests were even admonished by members of their congregations for being too generous in giving away their money to charity.[75]

It would be naive to assume that the actual behaviour of OMI members adhered to their ideology in a pure and consistent manner or that these men were any less prone to temptation or abuses of privilege than other people. Indeed, the very fact that anti-patrician campaigns appeared to be on-going up into the 1960s indicates that the mission hierarchy had difficulty maintaining the requisite discipline among its priests. This problem was a sensitive one, particularly as those priests commonly administered a relatively enormous and basically uncontrolled influx of funds from abroad.[76] Even if priests resisted the easy temptation to use such funds for personal gain or comfort (as the majority certainly did), it would have been difficult for the Basotho to believe. The aura of wealth which came to surround the RCM created the impression among many Basotho that the Catholic priests were themselves rich and, as such, objects of either envy or adulation as a new type of marena.

By contrast, the PEMS ministers often lived in very humble circumstances and, because they were largely dependent on the direct support of their parishoners, had little to tempt them within the mission. Many PEMS missionaries also made care for the poor a central aspect of their mission. Yet the PEMS philosophy that earthly rewards would attend virtuous behaviour at times created problems for the Protestant church, particularly as its ministers were prone to attempt to turn their superior

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74. Vinculum 13/3 (1957), 87; Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 40

75. Interviews, 'Me Makuta, 'Me Lesema

76. Blanchet-Cohen discusses the financial aspects of the mission in considerable detail, including the surprising and arguably unethical business enterprises of individual OMI priests back in Quebec. "Corporate Structure," passim.

education to material advantage in secular society.[77] While this point should not be overdrawn, the evidence does suggest that there was a fundamentally different attitude towards the acquisition and employment of wealth in the two churches. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, the OMI ideology underpinned an alternative vision of development to both the PEMS and the colonial state which had specific appeals to the poor and to Basotho women.

Christian ideologies and praxes of gender

In addition to differing ideals of progress and mission strategies for proselytization, the PEMS and RCM held quite different views about the "proper" role and behaviour of women. These stemmed from their differing interpretations of the Bible, their visions of development and the different cultural and class backgrounds of their missionaries. To the missionaries, these differences were sometimes of paramount importance and fueled the bitter rivalry between the churches.

Any analysis of Christian gender ideologies must, however, be prefaced with the fact that to the mass of the Basotho the differences between the major churches were generally too arcane or subtle to be either important or interesting. For most women, powerful constraints held back the adoption of European mores, let alone attention to nuances among them. Material considerations (such as poverty and male absence), traditional gender ideology and the strengthened authority of traditional patriarchal elites were three of the main ones. Thus, for example, while the PEMS favoured divorce rights for women and the colonial administration provided the legal channels to pursue them, only a handful of such cases were brought in the first fifty years of colonial rule. Conversely, Catholic women and men wishing to divorce often proceeded with apparent disregard for the fact that their church considered this a cardinal sin,

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77. Thus, for example, the PEMS evangelists despatched to work among the miners had such a disconcerting tendency to acquire property and alternative, more lucrative employment in Johannesburg after the 1930s that the Seboka had to establish rules against it. Wellner, "Mission and Migrant Labour," 5

compelling their priests to "stretch" church dogma to accomodate widespread practice.[78] Likewise, 120 years of PEMS opposition to bohali was simply ignored by all but a tiny, elite fraction of the congregation. Women's desire to be "really married" was strengthened by the insecurity of the migrant labour system, forcing the mission hierarchy to turn a blind eye to the "sinful" practices of the majority of its congregation.

The fact that most Basotho were not responsive to the exhortations of their ministers and priests on key gender issues, often re-inforced paternalistic or racist assumptions by missionaries about the "childlike" nature of the Basotho. In frustration, the PEMS missionary George Mabille declared in 1947 that the Basotho, "like most Natives, have no ability to distinguish between religions."[79] From the point of view of Basotho women, however, there was in fact frequently little of meaning to distinguish:

> Women's oppression comes from the Bible's teaching them to respect and be humble even to the stupidest men. So in that way it is much the same as traditional education.[80]

The materialism of the Basotho woman (that is, their lack of sentimentality about love) also sometimes dismayed the European missionaries. In Dieterlin's words (1912): "Marriage is for her largely made up of chores and duties and she enters into it without illusions or emotion."[81] Indeed, the female initiation ceremony could be understood (but not tolerated) in the light that it was "almost the only illusion which brightens the threshold of the married life which awaits them, so devoid of love and happiness, so full of weariness, of disappointments, of

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78. "Matrimonial Cases" DAM 12

79. Basutoland Witness 1/5 (1947), 5

80. Interview, 'Me Sibolla. Interestingly, the view that there was no "moral" difference between the churches for the mass of Basotho is also expressed The Clarke Report, 35

81. Cited in Ashton, The Basuto, 66

unpleasantness."[82] In other words, Basotho women were unwilling to accept European ideals about gender relations wholesale, or to abandon those aspects of traditional culture which eased the hardships of peasant life or migrant labour.

Responding to this resistance, the churches adopted more modest and less inappropriate objectives. Above all, they sought to mitigate Basotho women's perceived oppression and "tame" Basotho men's unruly behaviour by developing the traditional domestic skills of Basotho women. In all three major churches therefore, the overwhelming thrust of social teaching was towards the glorification of women as mothers and their satisfaction as happy homemakers. All of the major women's church organizations emphasized this goal. In the words of the editor of the Protestant weekly Leselinyana, "There's no job so great as the raising of children, so special that women should be satisfied with it."[83] To Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, who later became the first Mosotho Catholic bishop, "In the past our women were mainly confined to the home and I hope that in the future they will continue to do so [sic]."[84]

For the mass of women, therefore, the message of all three mainstream churches was essentially the same and remained so throughout the period under study: "The queen of the home and the educator of the children" (Catholic), showing the qualities of "humble acceptance, calmness, modesty, lowliness, trust and perfect obedience" (Anglican), could serve the church and society "but only as servant to men" (PEMS).[85]

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82. Basutoland Witness 4/3 (Sept. 1950), quoting Dieterlin's 1912 Livre d'Or. Ashton contends that this remained the case in the 1930s when he noted that a "placid, uncomplaining and unromantic attitude towards marriage still persists." Ashton, The Basuto, 66

83. Ben Masilo (a prominent trade unionist and radical politician), Leselinyana 22 May, 1961, 4

84. Moeletsi, 12 July 1951

85. The quotations are from, respectively, Miss L.P. Vilikazi, of the Catholic African Union, Molisana, April 1931; G.M. Gann, chaplain at the university in Roma, Ministry 8/1 (Jan.1968); and Lydia Kubay of the PEMS Theological School in Leselinyana (10 Feb. 1962). These views were

For the poor and uneducated women living in "debauchery" in Johannesburg, the PEMS established a mission in 1933 to teach hygeine, child-care and sewing. The explicit goal of this mission was to get the women to return to Lesotho.[86]

The similarity of the churches for the mass of Basotho women in this regard meant that women who switched to their husband's church at marriage (as was normal) did not encounter any particular culture shock.[87] On the contrary, adapting to a few new rituals and learning new hymns was much less significant to them than the need to acquire a new circle of manyano women friends.

Nevertheless, ideological differences about gender did exist between the churches which were significant for the aspirant elites (who were, for the most part, Protestant). At that level, the two churches had quite different expectations of their converts, the PEMS demanding a relatively much more rigorous demonstration of sincerity and profundity in the adoption of European Protestant mores. The PEMS thus encouraged Western liberal ideas of women's emancipation, and indeed took pride in their achievement, acknowledging that some women had skills and affinities which could be expressed with equal accomplishment to men in the public sphere. From the beginning, therefore, the church possessed very capable and impressive European missionary women who were welcome and indeed encouraged to speak up at meetings, to write in the missionary journals and to criticize, in a democratic way, the church leadership. Although the Seboka remained overwhelmingly male, women in the PEMS were encouraged to develop their own careers as teachers, doctors, professors and even as

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remarkably similar to those of the secular European elite, the colonial officers. See below Chapter Seven for a discussion of colonial gender ideology and almost any edition of Basutoland News for expositions of it (for example, "The role of Women" Basutoland News 4 July, 1961).

86. "Parmi les femmes Bassoutos du Johannesburg," JME 1936/2, 548

87. Interviews; Ashton, The Basuto; Spiegel, "Christianity, Marriage and Migrant Labour"; interviews, 'Me Khaketla, 'Me Mokokoane, Rev. Brutsch, 'Me Mosala, 'Me Phohlo

ministers. A "deaconess" was appointed to the onerous task of proselytizing among the Basotho on the Rand in 1932 while the first African woman minister graduated from the Morija Theological Institute in 1961.[88] Women missionaries called publicly for improving women's education and legal rights and expanding their employment opportunities under the rationale that "No nation can develop by leaving its women behind."[89] In line with its general belief in meritocratic tsoelopele, Ellenberger proudly pointed out that in PEMS schools, "boys and girls, agriculturalists and sons of chiefs sat together obeying equally and for the first time the same rules and subject to the same discipline, all equal before God."[90] To the headmistress at Morija Girls' School, the desire of all PEMS missionaries was that the girls "study their profession, learn to use their initiative, accept responsibility and be independent and useful women."[91]

As in the West, however, this type of liberalism was full of contradictions. Most importantly, women were still expected to be good wives and mothers first and any efforts to depart from that role were sharply criticized. In line with this thinking, Alice Bowie, headmistress of the PEMS Thabana Morena Girls' School, lamented the "fatal tendency" of educated girls becoming so "proud and conceited" that they resisted manual (that is, domestic) labour.[92] The PEMS also endorsed the Colonial Office's 1925 report on girls' education which concluded that schooling was "a curse rather than a blessing if it makes women discontented or incompetent" at their traditional domestic tasks.[93] Contrary to the

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88. Lydia Kubai was not a Mosotho, but was educated in Morija. The first female Mosotho minister was not appointed until 1965.

89. For example, Jean Liddel, Basutoland Witness, 13 Jan. 1962

90. V. Ellenberger, A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland, 310

91. Basutoland Witness 4/3 (Sept. 1950), 1

92. Leselinyana, 4 May, 1935, 3

93. Leselinyana, 5 August 1931

claims made by the headmistress cited above, education for PEMS girls was consequently designed, if not always implemented, with the very narrow objective of improving women's domestic skills. Aspirant Basotho elites welcomed PEMS education as providing a "finishing school" which would make their daughters desirable for marriage by evangelists or other upwardly-mobile Basotho men.[94] In the marriage ceremony, the Protestants invoked precisely the same New Testament quotation as the Catholics to solemnize women's subordinate status to her husband:

> Brethren, Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: for the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the Church. He is the saviour of his body therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things.[95]

Nor did the PEMS particularly foster self-confidence in its later efforts at training Christian women leaders. At a meeting with 50 educated Basotho women in January, 1950, Marie-Louise Martin first "took great pains to show the mothers where they go wrong in the education of their children [and] how African mothers can remedy the great harm often done to children through ignorance and carelessness."[96] She then went on to harangue them about the evils of pride:

> Our ministers' wives are sometimes like little queens who like to be ministered to by other women.[97]

Basotho women's efforts at running their own "little news paper" were also patronized: "Sometimes what they say is very good, but more often it is of small value."[98] Yet while their efforts to achieve <u>tsoelopele</u> were sometimes mocked, Protestant women were enjoined to renounce those aspects of Sesotho which had customarily protected women

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94. Martin, "Educating the Sotho," 181

95. Cited in A.M. Granger, <u>Marriage Preparation Course</u> (Montreal, 1945), 162; See also Comaroff and Comaroff, "Home-made Hegemony," 11

96. <u>Basutoland Witness</u> 4/3 (Sept. 1950), 14

97. <u>Ibid</u>. 15

98. <u>Basutoland Witness</u> 3/2 (March-April 1932), 17

from excessive male domination. Protestants could be excommunicated for exchanging cattle for marriage and for allowing their children to undergo lebollo. They were also commonly chastised for partaking in those harmless women's "games" or rituals which smacked (to the male leaders of the mission) of paganism.[99]

The contradiction between the ideals of emancipation and the reality of sometimes intensified domestic subordination to men and isolation was sometimes difficult to swallow for educated women, including European missionaries. A telling insight into what this meant to one of the latter is revealed in the words of Suzanne Christeller, a teacher at the PEMS Housecraft school at Cana:

> The life of a housecraft school is made up of a lot of small, monotonous things; sewing, cooking, keeping house; keeping house, cooking, sewing, and then (perhaps more than any other school) the fatigue that comes from always having to demonstrate once again... One starts anew, with a fist in one's pocket and a smile on one's lips... I whiled away the tasks of each day by running over melancholy thoughts. "Are you going to fill your life passing your finger along the mantle to see if it was well dusted and to twist your spine trying to discover some grains of dust under the piano? Poor you! Here you are yoked to housework without even having the compensation that other women find in a husband.[100]

Luckily, the poor young woman came to her senses quickly:

> But suddenly, my horizon enlarged; I realized that in accomplishing all these routine little things of life with conscientiousness and gaiety, one can find a certain pleasure, and then I take the decision that they shall not suffocate me.[101]

For the educated Basotho woman this contradictory message meant that, for all her achievements she should continue to confine herself to the usual housework plus praying and "encouraging" or "helping her husband in his work."[102] She should offer the kind of companionship and desire for material goods which would hopefully restrain her husband's wilder

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99. For example, the spoon game. Interview 'Me Sibolla

100. JME 1935/1, 211 (my translation)

101. Ibid.

102. Miss Kubay, Leselinyana 10 Feb. 1962, 5

instincts. To cure any feelings of inferiority which might creep in, she was enjoined to perfect what she could already do well in her domestic sphere and to join women's organizations where she could let off steam.[103]

One aspect of gender ideology which was held in common by missionaries of all the major churches, colonial officials and many Christianized Basotho men alike, was the assumption that Basotho men needed to be restrained. "The African [male] has failed dismally" asserted a Catholic Mosotho man, who traced this failure to his gender's susceptiblity to "barbaric lusts and selfishness which impede our progress as a nation."[104] Irrespective of his level of education, the Basotho male was seen to possess an "exasperating" childlike impetuousity ("nearly always so contrary to what we call common sense")[105] which made him prone to drunkenness, violence and whoring, a prediliction which may have actually increased with higher education.[106] Hence, for the PEMS, the attentions of a suitably polite, domesticated and conversationally adroit African female were deemed essential to preserving, let alone advancing the causes of sobriety and civilization among educated men.[107]

The Catholic church was little concerned with providing genteel companions for its male elites who were, in any case, not only much fewer in number but, as seminarians, intended for a life of celibacy. As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, this was regarded by the church as a serious problem which demanded urgent attention in the 1950s. Until then, however, the differing ideals for men between the rival churches had implications

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103. Leselinyana 9 Sept. 1961

104. "The African [male] has failed dismally" asserts a Mosotho man in the Catholic Moeletsi 20 March, 1965, 7

105. Basutoland Witness 1/6, Nov. 1947, 13

106. JME 1937/1

107. This was explicitly the logic behind admitting women to Fort Hare. Alexander Kerr, Fort Hare, 1915-48: The Evolution of an African College (Pietermaritzburg, 1968), 31

for Basotho women. As in Quebec, whence came the majority of Oblates, the pinnacle of achievement for a lay woman was not to be a civilizing influence on an achievement-oriented husband, but to be a prolific breeder and competent mother. Bishop Bonhomme, for example, describes "to be fecund" as a family "obligation" in his sermon to the mission in 1941.[108]

It is worth quoting extensively from A.M. Granger's definitive tome on marriage, which was used as the basis for the marriage preparation course offered by the RCM in Lesotho in the 1960s, in order to gain a sense of Catholic patriarchy in Lesotho. In his candid words, first published in 1945, the Rev. Granger adjured the young woman:

> to accustom herself to a free and loving subordination, to a faithfulness that is beyond question, and to an unselfish devotion if later, when her call has come, she wishes to be the companion, spouse and mother she ought to be.[109]

To Granger, once a woman had become a wife, her "obligatory" conjugal "debt" demanded that she not only "fear her husband" but learn as well "to hide certain feelings of repugance" against him, quelling her understandable revulsion at the sexual act to which she must submit without demonstrating pleasure.[110] For the man, his power over his wife should be tempered by love, self-control, discipline, and resolution, the want of which would reduce him to "a mere woman...a weak and spineless character."[111] The problem of modern immorality was, for Granger, both that men failed to live up to such rigorous demands and that shameless modern women would:

> forget their proper place, their own role. Carried away, as they are, by a modern mentality towards a false freedom, an unbridled liberty, they have stepped down, of their own accord, from the pedestal to which the Church has raised them and where she wishes them to remain. For everyone knows what woman was

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108. 13 April, 1941. DAM 47

109. Granger, Preparation for Marriage, 18-19. This was adapted to Sesotho as Bophelo bo bocha (Mazenod, 1962) by Gabriel Manyeli, a founding member of the BNP and Lesotho's first minister of education.

110. Ibid., 32

111. Ibid, 90

> before the Church came to place the crown of dignity and respect upon her brow.[112]

Granger asks rhetorically,

> How much more homage and respect would women receive from the 'stronger sex' if, instead of trying to resemble them, they would endeavour to remain the 'weaker sex.'[113]

Following this ideology of humble domesticity, the Sisters in charge of educating Basotho girls did not seek to create an elite of Basotho womanhood but rather a thoroughly competent and healthy housewife and mother. That competence would not only reflect "God's will" but also had the pragmatic side benefit of addressing the "food problem" in a number of ways. First, a dutiful wife and mother could increase subsistence production. She could also make the home attractive enough for a man to want to stay there. This would have direct and indirect economic benefits since the man would contribute more labour to farm production and, simply by being present, would help to discipline and would provide a settled role model for the next generation of farmers, his sons. Moreover, because "young wives were taking more and more liberties with regard to family management," a submissive and obedient wife would remove one of the major sources of family conflict. Finally, if young girls were thoroughly drilled in Catholic modesty, they would not expose the boys to life-damaging humiliation by their superior education.[114]

A good homemaker in Oblate eyes could also mitigate the depredations of capitalist enterprise in the protectorate. As early as 1864, two of Bishop Allard's main arguments in favour of the education of Basotho girls centred on equipping them to avoid exploitation by European merchants. That is, a Catholic education for girls would enable them to clothe their future families without having to buy from the shops, and to sell prepared wool to the traders (rather than raw wool which the latter purchased at

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112. Ibid. 121

113. Ibid, 124

114. Brossard, "The Food Problem," 114

exploitative prices).[115] The Legion of Mary initiative in the 1950s, which will be examined in Chapter Nine, had a similarly pragmatic intent in stressing Basotho women's role as mothers in the creation of a male Catholic elite.

Another prominent difference between the missions was that the RCM, unlike the PEMS, believed that girls and boys should be educated separately. Co-education beyond primary levels was deemed by the Catholics to expose both sexes to unnecessary distraction and moral temptation. The Catholic Education Secretary argued before the Clarke Commission on Education in 1945 that co-education "was extremely alien to the traditional beliefs" of the Basotho and a danger to the "family which existed before the State and was the fundamental unit of Christian civilization."[116] This policy was strenuously attacked by the PEMS and other modernizing elites as creating excessively passive women and "psychopathic" men.[117]

The Oblates in Lesotho were meanwhile notoriously patriarchal in their relations with the sisterly orders and routinely, unquestioningly exploited these women as cheap labour. Prior to 1912, the Sisters received no salaries. In 1939, the Catholic Education Secretary noted with satisfaction that "A teaching Sister costs me only six pounds a year whereas a lay teacher costs me forty to fifty."[118] Given that discrepancy, and the belief that many nuns apparently enjoyed ascetic conditions, it is hardly surprising that the Rev. Blais went on to explain his guiding principle as "lay teachers were wherever possible replaced by Nuns." By 1953, a Brother on average earned five to seven times the amount

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115. Tableau of the Missions of the Apostolic Vicariat of Natal, 1 April, 1864. DAM 44, page 95

116. Moeletsi 22 May, 1945

117. LANTA Echoes 2, 1964

118. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corportate Structure," 162

of a Sister.[119]

The Sisters were required to show "docile submission to the Father" at all times,[120] for "the will of the Superiors is the will of God even if we have to crush our hearts."[121] Thus, to incur the displeasure of the Bishop was theoretically tantamount to incurring the wrath of God. A Sister of the Holy Cross was actually transferred out of the territory for having the audacity to drive an automobile. As the Bishop veritably thundered: "I would never thought also that the dignity of a sister would allow her to be the driver of a motor car. I will never permit that in my vicariate."[122]

Among the European Sisters, a current of disenchantment with the exploitation and double standards applied to them ran through their comments. While on the whole they accepted the sacrifices of their vocation and the notion that the bulk of their remuneration would come from God, not the Bishop, the Sisters increasingly began to stand up for their rights. They negotiated improved salaries and working conditions, sent letters of grievance directly to the Bishop or Apostolic Provincial, and even conducted "strikes" or threatened to strike.[123] When the new

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119. Ibid., 171

120. A 1939 directive to the Head Nurse at Rome quoted in Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 155

121. So intoned Emile Pageau in 1953, attempting to soothe a furious Mother Provincial, DAM 41

122. Bonhomme to Sister Dominic Goebel, 22 March 1936, DAM 76. Although no evidence came to light in the course of my own research, it is entirely conceivable that the authoritarian attitude of the OMI gave rise to serious abuses of power which were covered up by the church. In that respect, recent revelations about systematic physical and sexual abuse of native children in OMI-run boarding schools in the Canadian north during this same period (1930s-50s) are important to keep in mind. Similarly, while I did not find concrete evidence of sexual impropriety on the part of the Canadian priests, it would be naive to accept at face value OMI professions of innocence. Suffice it to say that Catholic men were regarded by Basotho women in much the same way as Protestant men were--they were men and understood to be sexual beings.

123. Letter from Fransisca Clara, Mother Provincial of the Holy Cross Convent, Dec.2, 1966, DAM 41

Canadian Bishop arrived in 1933, he was astonished to find that "certain abusive practices had crept in the Vicarariat," including, above all, that the Sisters:

> seemed to remain under the impression that they could live and develop themselves according the ancient customs of the Vicariat, customs which have been modified according to the needs of the times.[124]

One of Bishop Bonhomme's first acts was, therefore, to reassert his proper authority over the Sisters. Through a series of stern warnings and specific instructions, Bonhomme and the other Canadian patriarchs who ran the RCM may have hoped to induce greater docility from their female compatriots. There is ample evidence, however, that this did not occur. While professing apologies "for this independent attitude of ours,"[125] the nuns continued to produce a litany of complaints against the Oblates through the channels available to them in the administration. The Sisters at Sebetia, for example, protested that they suffered the "displeasure and abuse of [the] intolerable Blais regime."[126] "[H]e doesn't understand the Sisters and is not understood by them," complained another;[127] "he ignores the Superior in the Community,"[128] "He cannot work together with the Sisters."[129] To the Superior at Emmaus mission,

> nobody has to say anything, he is the morena [big chief]... School business is very difficult in this way. He scarcely speaks to me [and] I scarcely dare speak to him as I am afraid

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124. That is, autonomous decision-making and ownership of some of the most productive assets of the mission. Bishop Bonhomme's address to the Sisters of Basutoland, 1935. Bonhomme Correspondence, DAM 48

125. Sister Dominic Goebel to Bonhomme, 30 Mar. 1936, DAM 76

126. July 12, 1953, DAM 41

127. Letter to the Mother General of the Grey Sisters in Ottawa from the Bishop of Basutoland explaining to her the tense situation at her new convent in the territory, n.d. (1932?), DAM 76

128. Sister M. Pauline to the Bishop regarding Father Ménard, 13 Oct, 1943, DAM 41

129. Fransisca Clara to the Provincial-Mazenod regarding Father Gielen, 25 Jan. 1965, DAM 41

of Rev. Fr. Lalumière.[130]

For his part, Father Benoit refered bitterly to the Holy Cross Sisters as "Prussians" and their school as a "concentration camp."[131]

There is evidence that the Oblates, both Canadian and Basotho, appealed to the Basotho Sisters and their Basotho congregations as allies against the "modern" tendencies of the European Sisters. For example, the Sister in charge of Sebetia mission accused the "unbearable" Father Lefevre of "taking the affairs of the [Basotho] Sisters to the pulpit" and of "familiarity with the girls."[132] Sister Fransisca Clara of the Holy Cross Convent was likewise disturbed by Father Letsie who "stirred up the pride of the Sisters and made them dissatisfied and rebellious."[133] His replacement was not much better, "giv[ing] very bad advice to our Sisters and Postulants and undermin[ing] our authority."[134] A year later, two more Oblates had aggrieved her:

> Our Parishpriest [sic] is speaking in Church against the Sisters. He instigates the boarders against us and makes them congress. He helps them to get their correspondence off secretly by letting them type their addresses in his office. We cannot run a boarding school under such circumstances... Also in Emmaus the sisters suffer a lot. Rev. Fr. Montreuil interferes in community matters and undermines the authority of the local Superior.[135]

The European Sisters' complaints neither endeared them to the Bishops nor won them support from the Basotho. Indeed, at times of conflict the Basotho Sisters tended to side with the priests. This was a natural allegiance given that the Canadian priests not only held power, but that Bonhomme in particular spoke so forcefully against any manifestations of racial prejudice. In one instance, at the Holy Cross

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130. Letter from Emmaus mission to the Bishop, 26 July 1943, DAM 41

131. Letter of 19 May, 1950, DAM 41

132. Sister Ann Maureen to Emile Pageau, August 16, 1951, DAM 41

133. Sister Fransisca Clara to the Bishop, 27 Nov. 1960, DAM 41

134. 25 Jan. 1965, DAM 41

135. Sister Fransisca Clara to Father Boivert, 2 Dec. 1966, DAM 41

Convent, the Basotho Sisters went so far as to protest to the Bishop that the European Sisters showed "lack of respect" to the priests. "They make a strike and refusing [sic] to go to confessions," the women wrote, urging the Bishop that he discipline them![136]

However oppressive OMI gender ideals may sound to the modern ear, and however abusive or hypocritical individual priests may have been, it must be remembered that in fundamental ways the Old Testament view of women's proper place in society which predominated in the RCM was considerably less offensive to Sesotho customs and more relevant to poor Basotho women than relatively enlightened PEMS views were. For lay Catholic women, to the ideals of hard work and suffering in silence was added the injunction of being fruitful and multiplying. Large families were prized, divorce was not admissable and women who fled abusive husbands were normally advised to return with due humility.[137] None of this was strange or threatening to Sesotho custom. On the contrary, as we have seen, the ideology of women's submission to men could at times be useful to Basotho women. In the case of women religious the appearance of passivity and obedience was in some cases a successful strategy to gain increasing autonomy from their immediate superiors, European nuns. The RCM, with the Sisterly orders, offered Basotho women a secure and potentially rewarding avenue of escape from marital drudgery which the PEMS did not.

A theme that will be explored further in Chapter Nine is that lay Catholic women, exactly like lay Protestant women, exercised an autonomy or assertiveness which, while couched in the discourse of submission and tradition, far surpassed the intentions of the good Fathers. In other words, Basotho women were quite capable of simply ignoring the injunctions

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136. Bishop Bonhomme to the Mother Provincial of the Holy Cross Sisters, Aliwal North, relating a letter he had received from the "Native Sisters," 15 Jan., 1934, DAM 76

137. "Matrimonial cases," DAM 12

of their priests when they saw fit. The contrast between official and folk doctrines of "Mariology" is a case in point. Here, where the priests propagated the Marian ideal of saintly purity, humility and unquestioning obedience for women, Basotho women themselves venerated a carnal, tough, and determined Mary, a single mother who raised her child in a tribal and agricultural society without the help (or hindrance) of a husband.[138] The Mary of African women was most certainly not a submissive and smiling doormat--"she did not always confine herself to her room but sometimes came forth into the public" to fight as "the defender of the rights and dignity of womanhood."[139]

Finally, in the lived reality of most Basotho women, there were also practical, sensible reasons to fear the consequences of PEMS gender ideology. For example, co-education was not only anathema to custom but also potentially dangerous to the parents. Mothers in particular had cause to fear that co-education increased the risks of their daughters "falling pregnant" without securing bohali, an occurrence which could be both socially and economically onerous to the household. Similarly, the right to divorce was, for the majority of Basotho women, a two-edged sword since it exposed them to abandonment by men. Any such "emancipation" which threatened the stability of the family tended to be, in the context of most Basotho women's economic and social vulnerability, a blow to their hard-won and precarious security.

Contrasts between Christian ideology and Basotho women's practices could be found in all three mainstream churches. Later chapters will take up this theme to show how women's ability to create an empowering space within the church came to have particularly important political ramifications with respect to the RCM. Before going on to examine how this came to be, however, it is important to show how Basotho women were

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138. Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 41-44; Interview, 'Me Lesema, 'Me Makuta

139. L.P. Vilikazi, "Women's Part" Molisana April 1931, 5-6

responding to colonial rule and the spread of cash. Specifically, it needs to be determined whether colonial policies played a role in making Basotho women (and men) increasingly and positively responsive to the RCM's sustained and unique development efforts.

Chapter Five: Basotho Women and Colonial Rule, 1868-1935

From the available evidence it appears that male control over women's productive and reproductive activities was a crucial determinant of the manner in which classes formed in Lesotho. Even before colonial rule, it facilitated the consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of the senior chiefs, the Sons of Moshesh. After the introduction of parallel rule in 1884, this process continued, spurred on by the British desire to maintain cheap, "efficient" rule in the territory and to regularize the flow of cheap male labour to the mines. This chapter will focus on how, on the one hand, the colonial state sought to take advantage of male control over women's labour, sexuality and reproduction inherent in Sesotho custom and how, on the other hand, Basotho women resisted, subverted and otherwise frustrated the policies of the state in the early periods of colonial rule.

Cape Rule and Gender Relations

When Basutoland first became a protectorate in 1868, British social policies were strongly interventionist in principle. They were based upon the belief, prevalent in England and the Cape Colony at the time, that there were certain specific "evils" in African society which blocked the material development of Africa and peaceful government. These were, primarily, the slave trade, the lack of a capitalist work ethic, the belief in sorcery, the tendency towards autocratic rule, and the oppression of women, all held to be prevalent in African society and as such, they comprised the primary obstacles to African development and peaceful government. Phasing them out by the active application of liberal, culturally assimilationist policies was thought to be the most efficient way of guaranteeing successful colonial rule. Also, in this view, the British interest in universal humanitarian concerns, by happy coincidence, would result in Britain's own material gain. That is, an assimilated or "civilized" African population would constitute a lucrative

market for English goods.[1]

In Basutoland, where there was no slave trade and where there was a remarkably democratic political culture and a profit-responsive peasantry, the major obstacle to the colonial and missionary enterprise was the supposed slavery of women. The assimilationist view during the period of Cape rule therefore began by stressing the need to emancipate Basotho women from traditional controls and "superstitions." The argument rationally went thus: Christianized women upholding or aspiring towards European standards of propriety and comfort could provide a powerful stimulus to the greater appreciation of the dignity of labour in African men. Polygynists, for example, would no longer be able to rely on the labour of their many wives to sustain their supposedly slothful lives, while Christianized women in nuclear families would demand the consumption of cloth and domestic wares imported from England. To acquire the accoutrements of civilization, African men would then have to go to work for wages, something they otherwise resisted. It was also believed that African boys would be better socialized for wage labour in a disciplined, Christian household. African girls would also be weaned from "native sensuality" in preparation for the bourgeois ideal (domestic drudgery and sexual servitude to their future husbands <u>only</u>). In Comaroff's irreverent phrase, the Cape ideal of assimilation involved "upward mobility for men, upward nubility for women."[2]

The first High Commissioner to assume jurisdiction over Basutoland, Sir Philip Wodehouse, was clearly influenced by such thinking and, specifically, by the recommendations of the PEMS missionary Emile Rollard. Rollard advised Wodehouse in a long memorandum that the new colonial

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1. Cooper, "from free labour"; See also Ross, <u>John Philip</u>, and John Comaroff, "images of empire, contests of conscience: models of colonial domination in South Africa," <u>American Ethnologist</u> 16/4 (1989) for specific reference to the missionary and liberal, interventionist view that was prevalent in mid-19th century South Africa.

2. Comaroff, "images of empire," 666

government could best advance its interests in the territory by launching an all-out assault upon the power base of the chiefs, viz., their control over women.[3] Wodehouse's temporary regulations for the new colony, issued at a national pitso in April, 1868, reflected this advice. They established the principle of a dual legal system, using customary and Roman Dutch law, which sought to reward Africans who abandoned custom in favour of European mores. While Christians automatically fell under Roman-Dutch law, even non-Christians could theoretically have benefitted from this legal dualism in that, once the actual administrative apparatus was put in place (in 1870) they were free to appeal a decision from the "Native courts" to the colonial courts. A Mosotho could, therefore, providing he or she had the money, go over the head of even the Paramount Chief by taking his or her case to a magistrate (later, Assistant Commissioner). A decision at this level could, in turn, be appealed to the High Court in Maseru (presided over by the Resident Commissioner) and, ultimately, to the Privy Council in London.[4]

Specific new laws enacted during Cape rule recognized Christian marriages (without bohali) as legally binding and equal to customary marriages, girls as legal majors at the age of 16 (and boys at the age of 18), and the equality of women and men before the law (including the right of widows to remarry and of women, even girls, to refuse to submit either to arranged marriages or to lebollo). Widows or single mothers were also granted the right of custody over children.

When the first administration was actually set up in early 1871, these temporary regulations became the laws of the land. They accorded

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3. Sandra Burman, Chiefdom Politics and Alien Law (NY, 1981), 53-55. Rollard himself later became a magistrate in the Cape administration.

4. The latter happened on one occasion only (in 1948). In 1928, as the Resident Commissioner became overburdened with cases, a new position was created--the Judicial Commissioner. This was a judge who travelled around the territory hearing appeals and interpreting customary law. Ian Hamnett, "Some Notes on the Concept of Custom in Lesotho," Journal of African Law 15 (1971)

magistrates wide powers to intervene in Basotho marital affairs. For example, they could grant divorces in any form of marriage, and could punish "bigamists," that is, men who married by cattle after they were already married by Christian or civil rites. In addition, certain acts which were seemingly tolerated by the Basotho but were held by the British to be "offensive to natural law" were criminalized, notably abortion, infanticide and child concealment.[5] The magistrates, who showed remarkable confidence in view of their inability to speak Sesotho and their lack of formal legal training, barged into Basotho society like the proverbial bull in a china shop.[6]

Colonial attempts to restructure the Mosotho family along the lines desired by the Protestant missionaries had a disruptive effect on Basotho society. First, the very fact that women were accorded the right to appear in court was a blow to traditional patriarchy, and the chiefs made it clear, as early as 1870, that they were aware of and resented the implications of these changes. Their suspicions were given substance over the next ten years as a number of cases were tried which undermined their ability to control women and, hence, to control subordinate men. For example, widows appealed to the magistrates and successfully resisted the claims of their deceased husbands' families to take custody of their children. Matsediso (sic), an unmarried woman, also successfully sued for child custody in 1875.[7] One Christian woman, Nthakala, took her husband to court to prevent him from taking a second wife.[8]

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5. Cape, Native Laws and Customs; Burman, Chiefdom Politics

6. The only magistrate who could actually speak the vernacular was the former missionary, Rolland. The others had either a military background (in India and in the Cape-Xhosa wars in Major Charles Bell's case) or as traders and administrators (among the Khoisan in John Austen's case). Burman suggests that Austen was assigned to Basutoland by the Cape government partly to avoid embarrassment over his illegal activities there. Griffith, the Resident Commissioner, had been a magistrate for 15 years among the Xhosa. Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 53-55

7. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 69

8. Ibid, footnote 9, 350-51

The good magistrates of Basutoland were quite confident that they were succeeding in their goal of women's emancipation. Scarcely two years after colonial rule had begun, John Austen was boasting of having sparked a veritable revolution:

> Many girls asked me for protection, and I stopped many forced marriages. Women who had been ill-treated by their husbands, and his relatives, also came for protection. The result is that at present a forced marriage is seldom or ever attempted, nor do you hear of many cases of flagrant degredation or oppression of women. Men of all tribes and classes are found with their hoes side by side with their wives cultivating or weeding the fields.[9]

Major Charles Bell, magistrate of Leribe district, took the state's interventionist duties even more seriously, pressing for the establishment of compulsory, secular education for girls (with European teachers).[10]

The Cape Colony was constrained, however, from realizing its "civilizing" intentions or even applying its laws to the fullest by the simple fact of its more pressing intention not to incur undue expenses. Thus, only four magistrates were appointed to cover the entire territory (population, approximately 200,000). Notwithstanding the fervour of these men, therefore, there simply were not the resources to allow principles to be turned into consistent practice. The first woman to be found guilty of infanticide (1874) was given a suspended sentence on the grounds that there was no facility in the territory to incarcerate her.[11]

The first Resident Commissioner, Charles Griffith, also appreciated the need not to incur the opposition of the chiefs. He therefore trod somewhat cautiously in enforcing the new laws which, he feared, could cost the administration dearly if they incited a reaction from the chiefs. Thus, while agreeing in principle with the Protestant missionaries that polygyny and <u>bohali</u> served in ways that were "most injurious to the

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9. Cape, <u>Native Laws and Customs</u>, 65. Austen, for all his efforts, suffered decapitation at the hands of the "rebels" during the Gun War.

10. Mohapeloa, <u>Government by Proxy</u>, 91

11. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 73

people, morally, socially, and politically, and to retard them in the progress of civilization," Griffith criticized the missionaries for an overzealousness in challenging traditional male priviledges.[12] He did not seek to legislate them away but, he claimed, merely "to ease the path" for those Basotho who desired to adopt European mores. He believed that a Christianized elite would, if given legal support, quickly develop of its own accord to supplant the traditional elites and pave the way for "civilization" and "progress."[13]

Boasts and intentions aside, therefore, the administration did not in practice really press the chiefs on women's emancipation. For example, the lipitso to publicize the new laws pointedly did not discuss women's new legal rights.[14] Moreover, the administration quietly backed down in the face of chiefly objections to these rights. The age of majority, for instance, was raised to 21 in 1877, while the obligatory fees to register marriages (in effect, a tax on polygynists) were abolished.[15]

These compromises were possible because, fundamentally, neither the magistrates nor the missionaries disagreed with the chiefs on the principle of female subordination to men. On this, legal dualism represented not so much two sets of laws in opposition to each other as two variants of the same thing. Women's emancipation, in the understanding of the colonialists, was limited to allowing women the freedom to become efficient housewives in monogamous, consumer-oriented households. In Austen's words, "Education alone can place the woman in her proper

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12. Cape, Native Laws and Customs, 5; Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 95

13. Ibid. This early version of the trickle-down theory of morality was elaborated in full detail three decades later by the former Resident Commissioner, Godfrey Lagden. Making the case for greater respect for "tradition" and Indirect Rule, he held that "Booker Washingtons are few and can go on their own." If not "hunted down by ardent reformers," the elites would, by "evolution," naturally adopt Western mores so that "new ideas and aspirations will in the consistent order of things slip into their place to become popular." Lagden, The Basutos, 648-9

14. Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 95-97

15. Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 97

position... the centre of domestic comfort and happiness."[16] The girls' school established by the PEMS in Thaba Bosiu in 1871 was explicitly limited to cultivating "womanly arts" such as sewing and infant care.[17] Far from seeking to facilitate women's independent decision-making powers, the laws enacted by the Cape administration were intended simply to allow exceptional cases of women to contribute, by their influence upon husbands and sons, to the development of a progressive, male bourgeoisie.

Women who took emancipation to mean more than this were disciplined by the state. The case of 'Ma-Mookho (1877) offers a telling example. Despite having been awarded custody of her children under Roman-Dutch law, despite being a widow and a Christian (thus legally an adult), and despite the evident stability of her relationship with a new man after her husband's death, the magistrate eventually accepted her father-in-law's appeal to rescind her rights over her children on the grounds the she was living "an immoral life and in vice," that is, she was having sexual relations outside of institutionalized marriage.[18] While the judges sometimes professed sympathy for women who had suffered neglect and expressed their indignation at the injustice of custom, they nevertheless were required to, and in the majority of cases did, uphold men's customary rights over property, children and women. Not only was it fairly difficult to prove unambiguously that Roman-Dutch law deserved to take precedence over custom in any specific case, but Roman-Dutch law itself was highly ambiguous about women's emancipation. The concept of "community of property," for example, upheld the husband's power to dispose of his wife's property without her consultation, a regression, in principle, from the moral obligations inherent in Sesotho custom.[19]

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16. Cape, Native Laws and Customs, 66

17. Mohapeloa, Government by Proxy, 90

18. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," footnote 10, 351

19. Seeiso, et al, "The Legal Situation of Basotho Women"

To most Basotho men, this essentially cautious approach, and the emphasis on morality and domesticity for Basotho women, served to outweigh the undesirable implications of a small number of women taking advantage of legal changes to assert their independence from male relatives. Indeed, to the extent that colonial and missionary ideology favoured further securing women in the household, it was not incompatible with Sesotho custom at all, and, as classes began to coalesce, positively suited the preferences of the majority of Basotho men. For the the man who migrated to South Africa, a woman at home ensured that his fields would not be forfeited during his long absence. This profitted the chiefs as well, for the presence and fidelity of a woman at home ensured the return of the migrant (with tribute and tax money). For aspirant elites, forgoing bohali (or at least, publicly appearing to forgo it), sending daughters to "finishing school," and displaying a wife who could bake and serve sponge cake, could win kudos in the eyes of the administration. For all classes of Basotho men, the Christian emphasis on monogamy and "virtue" added an ideological element of control over women which enhanced men's power. That is, the validity of Basotho women's traditional right to sexual satisfaction was denied by Christianity as it was preached in early colonial Basutoland.

The type of Basotho woman or girl who took advantage of the limited and contradictory emancipation being offered by the colonial government was largely determined by her class. Since information about women's new legal rights was largely left to the missionaries to disseminate, only the Christian minority tended to be aware of them.[20] Even were Christian women convinced of the advantages of colonial-style emancipation, however, court costs were beyond the means of the vast majority of them, or any of the population. The same is true of education, which required fees, uniforms and sometimes boarding expenses. Among the chiefs who could

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[20]. There were approximately 2000 Christians in 1875. Lagden, The Basutos, 636

afford these things, there was such deep distrust of mission education that even sixty years later there were virtually no children of chiefs, girls or boys, at school.[21] Colonial-style emancipation, whether by education or through the courts seeking divorces, child custody and inheritance rights, tended to be for the daughters, wives and widows of the new men of property only.

For the vast majority of women, besides lack of knowledge of their legal rights and the expense of court cases, there were powerful disincentives to seek the legal protections offered by colonial rule. Abandoning a custom such as bohali (which in itself was a non-sensical move to women who benefited from its protection), frequently entailed social ostracism and even physical violence by the aggrieved males. As the Colonial Office heard when it finally got around to investigating whether African women were actually taking advantage of their new legal protections:

> All the forces of a patriarchal society may be against her, the elders of the village because her action is, in their eyes, a protest against traditional authority, the men because she is attacking their position of dominance, her family because she is disobedient to their will. If the girl has the strength of will to continue her resistance, she is free to lay her complaint before the Commissioner of the Province or the Native Authority, [knowing, however, that] great stigma, resentment and ostracism will result.[22]

It is also likely that some women observed the inconsistency of the magistrates on the issue of women's emancipation and correctly understood that European men could not necessarily be trusted as allies in their struggles with Basotho men and the weight of custom. With all the evident

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21. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 31 July 1931, LNA S3/12/3/1-7

22. W.T. Southern (Gambia) to W. Ormsby-Gore, 17 Aug, 1936. PRO CO879/139. Similar views were also expressed by other governors from around the continent. The fact that fifty years of legal "emancipation" were seen by them to be of such little practical value is relevant to understanding Basotho women's perception of colonial law. The fact that this investigation did not take place until fifty years after new legal rights had been extended to African women is also an interesting indication of how little concern they were to the administrators of the empire.

contradictions of colonial-style emancipation, it is not surprising that as late as 1911 there were only eight (8), divorcees in the entire country.[23]

Basotho Women's Responses to Cash and Colonial Rule

As discussed in the introductory chapters, many observers attributed Basotho women's reluctance to embrace colonial emancipation to their "natural" (hence irrational) conservativism. This argument cannot be sustained, however, by even the most cursory examination of their role in social and economic change in the early colonial period. Before detailing how colonial policy shifted from an interventionist to "laissez-faire" approach toward Basotho society, it is therefore essential to examine the ways in which Basotho women responded to the new opportunities created by the spread of a cash economy. As this section will make clear, these responses began even before 1868 and continued throughout the colonial era to surprise and frustrate missionary, colonial administration and many Basotho men alike. That is, rather than uncritically accepting the colonial ideal of emancipation, Basotho women began to emancipate themselves from male control, building upon a confidence born of their prominent role in production, and manipulating traditional relationships, cash and legal opportunities to advance their material interests. Simultaneously, and sometimes contradictorily, they clung to those aspects of tradition which offered a buffer against intensified exploitation.

To begin with the purely economic aspects of Basotho women's responses to colonial rule, women were "the motivating force behind agricultural expansion" and innovation in the late 19th century.[24] Women's structural vulnerability in pre-colonial society made them the first to experience food shortages and, as a result, made them keen proponents of new technology, crops and livestock (such as the donkey)

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[23]. Census 1911. The total population that year was 404,507.

[24]. Eldredge, "Women in Production," 708

which could earn cash to protect them from famine or neglect. By 1891, it was said that women were refusing to marry their prospective husbands until they obtained ploughs (and knew how to use them).[25] By the turn of the century, the grain exported from the country was brought to the border trading centres and mills by "troops" of women.[26] It was "principally sold by women."[27] Women were also demanding greater participation by men in the production process, a demand made feasible by the widespread adoption of a new crop (wheat) which was not laden with traditional notions of proper work for men and women. Men, as Austen had observed, were increasingly seen helping women with threshing, harvesting and even weeding.[28]

Increases in production and relatively minor changes in the sexual division of labour, however, did not fundamentally tip the gender balance of power. On the contrary, women's workload generally increased because the plough greatly expanded the area under cultivation. While women benefitted from this by increasing the general prosperity of the household, men retained ultimate control over income and decisions about investment or production. Thus, much of the surplus created by women was invested by their husbands in technology which reduced male labour. For example, while thousands of ploughs were imported to make a traditionally male job easier, the harrow, a tool which would have reduced women's labour time weeding, was hardly imported at all.[29] Moreover, men's contribution to work in the fields began to decline again as their absences due to migrancy became more and more prolonged.

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25. Ibid., 725

26. According to a retrospective lecture on the wondrous influence of "Trade and Money" delivered to PEMS churchmen at Morija, Leselinyana 6 March 1931, 3

27. BNC 1903, 34

28. See above, page 141. See also Eldredge, "Women in Production," 723

29. Ibid, 725

The cash earned by women's increased production did not necessarily reach their pockets. A disproportionate amount of it was spent on consumer items of interest to men, some of which increased women's household labour in the bargain. European clothes, for instance, which were widely adopted by the late 19th century, relieved men of their traditional task of sewing (skins) while burdening women with laundry (cotton). The "Basotho blanket," manufactured in England, was for long a prestige item for Basotho men, as well as brandy, guns and even, to a certain extent, cattle.

A great deal of the cash income obtained by Basotho men went straight to the government as taxes. Only men paid tax but their paying of it had a direct impact upon women, sabotaging women's efforts to accumulate cash through productive labour. Most painful was the requirement to pay their taxes immediately after harvest (when the price for their cash-crops was at its lowest). Many households were then forced to purchase re-imported grain, at inflated prices, in the lean months before the next harvest came in.[30] The government's and the merchants' collusion to maximize their own take from the agricultural labour of the Basotho thus explains why Lesotho, although it was still producing a significant surplus, began importing grain as early as 1903.

Despite the limited access of women to the fruits of their labour, cash did begin to have a profound impact upon gender relations in Basotho society as its use spread throughout the country. Cash, unlike cattle, could be carried in one's pocket. This fact alone tended to remove the main physical barrier to women's accumulation of wealth and opened an array of non-traditional avenues for women to escape patriarchal controls. The commodification of women's labour, sexuality and non-agricultural production (particularly housecrafts and <u>joala</u>) had revolutionary consequences for women.

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30. Eldredge, "An Economic History," 336; See also Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment," 196-216

The first opportunities to earn cash independently were available across the border, originally as farm labourers, domestics and hawkers. In 1898, nearly 1000, or 1/3 of the total number of migrants from the border camp of Mafeteng were women.[31] Given the extremely low wages that were being offered in employment, much of women's earnings was probably used for the purchase of subsistence items. In other cases, however, women used cash to ease their work burden or to finance direct challenges to the status quo. As early as 1876, a woman is reported to have earned enough cash by selling needlework in the Orange Free State to pay off her husband's debts.[32] Cash was also used to buy property (normally in their eldest son's name), to buy cattle for their sons' bohali, to refund the bohali paid to her family in order to escape an abusive husband and to finance court cases, and to acquire "brooms" (mafielo, either junior wives for their husbands or, if they were widowed, "wives" of their own). By the 1920s, women could also support themselves independently within the territory by portering goods for the European traders. Sayce reports women carrying loads of 40-50 pounds, 20-30 miles to isolated mountain stores. They earned 3 shillings a trip--a very large amount of money for a day's work at a time when twenty shillings was considered quite adequate for a month's salary.[33]

Farm labour was also a small but growing option for women as the number of "progressive farmers" and large-scale stock-owners in the country increased. Although the wages were extremely low, such work represented the beginnings of a revolution in that women were breaking a central taboo of Sesotho culture by assuming the unequivocably male task of herding cattle. In 1911, there were 52 women "herds" and twenty-five

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31. Kimble, "Labour Migration," 198 (footnote 32)

32. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 63

33. Sayce, "Ethnographic Survey," 285

years later, over 800.[34]

The potential of cash to buy women's autonomy is illustrated by changes in the nature of female migration to South Africa. The first women to migrate to the neighbouring colonies generally went with their husbands and worked together with them as tenants on the farms of the Free State. It was not long, however, before women who were still under the guardianship of their fathers and husbands began to slip away independently. These women came to be known as matekatse, literally "wandering" women (but most commonly translated as "loose" women, with the implication of sluts or prostitutes). Some matekatse began their wandering as an act of rebellion against husbands who refused to let them supplement their meagre wages with menial work around the baas's house:

> When I say, "I am leaving," I leave and go. My mother and father, I am going to the wheat farms. Can I afford to stay with a man here looking each other in the face, while he refuses me permission to work? I went alone.[35]

While some of these women found employment relatively close to home in the OFS, others began appearing on the Rand as early as the 1890s. Of these, some travelled in search of husbands who had not returned. Others were escaping families which sought to send them back to abusive husbands or relatives. Others went, at least by the 1920s, out of a desire for "adventure and fortune,"[36] and possibly to earn money to buy consumer goods that they could bring into their marriage household. The acquisition of such a "proto-dowry" gave women a greater say than was traditional in

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[34]. Census 1911, 43; 1936, 25

[35]. Matora Ntimo-Makara, "Women as Migrant Workers: Lesotho Case Study" Women in Africa Seminar, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London (March, 1985), 29

[36]. Madamme Henderson-Ramseyer, "Parmi les femmes Bassoutos de Johannesbourg" JME 1936/2, 477 (my translation). See also Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, 89-91, for Bafokeng women's explicit assertion that "adventure" and "a sense of freedom" were more important than economic necessity in motivating their migration to the city in the 1920s.

the choice of their marriage partners.[37] Still others made the trip to earn school fees for their children.

Once at the locations, where at the turn of the century there was a sex imbalance of up to nine men for every woman, Basotho women found their traditional skills of brewing joala and taking care of lonely, domestically incompetent men in high demand. Basotho women quickly "acquired a sad reputation" as brewers of the most potent "poison." on the Rand.[38] Their ability to outfox the authorities was also noted. In the words of A.G.T. Chaplin, who later became the Resident Commissioner, Basotho women were "cleverer and more enterprising than the average urban African woman."[39]

Matekatse need not have gone as far as Johannesburg however. There were opportunities to earn cash closer at hand at the "camps" and border posts. The camps were set up on special "reserves" granted to the British by local chiefs. They were supposed to be home to the government officials, labour agents and their employees only, however, they were big enough in area to house an illicit population of matekatse as well. So many men passed through the camps on the way to and from the mines, many with cash in their hands for the first time in their lives, that there was a natural market to be exploited by women--"o ile campong" came to mean that a woman had gone to prostitute herself.[40] Brewing, however, was probably even more lucrative work. This was particularly so since, while brandy shops flourished on the Free State side of the border, European-style liquor was expensive there and illegal in Basutoland. Women brewers,

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37. Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng, 97. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, 1934, also mentions mothers "hiring themselves out" for just long enough to be able to buy a trousseau for her daughter. PRO DO 119/1051

38. JME 1934/1, 312 (my translation)

39. Memo on migrant labour, 1 Sept. 1942, PRO DO 35/1178/Y847/1/1

40. Literally "she has gone to camp." Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, 1934. PRO DO 119/1051

often with special recipes learned at the Rand to boost the intoxicating effects of their product, were alleged to be "looting" the migrants on their way home from the mines.[41]

The successful "shebeen queen" was not regarded with such opprobrium by the Basotho as she was by the colonial authorities. For all of society's disapproval of the excessive alcohol consumption and adultery which were the mainstays of her trade, the Basotho largely accepted the shebeen queen as providing a valuable service--a man could get comparably drunk on sixpence worth of "Hlotse special" as on 15 shillings' worth of store-bought brandy.[42] She was also an example of admirable enterprise who might even employ men in her business,[43] and not even the patriarchs of the National Council could blame a woman for turning a sack of sorghum worth three shillings into a pot of joala worth three pounds.[44] The contradictory nature of Basotho perceptions of these women is illustrated by the alternately admiring and disapproving words of an Anglican nun:

> Many women own shebeens and rob lots of men (laughter). This is bad. It robs other families since men go there until they are blind and stupid. You could always see them coming across at the bridge at Ficksburg where the women wait. After, the men are so ashamed to be empty-handed that they go straight back to the mines without even seeing their families. It's not fair but you can see how it is profitable to women. We don't know how to stop it since the men insist.[45]

Becoming a letekatse, however, was the most dramatic means available for a woman to assert her independence from patriarchal controls. It was not only scandalous but, given the notorious roughness of "Babylon" on the

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41. The Pim Report, 29

42. Select Committee on the Liqour Proclamation, 47

43. Malahleha, "Liquor Brewing: A Cottage Industry in Lesotho," 46. Some Basotho chiefs actually complained later about the wealth of some of these women: "They are proud and praise themselves and sometimes you will find that they have employed people." BNC 1952, 173. See also BNC 1953, 325-6

44. No studies were done at the time, however, Gay found in the mid-1970s that women brewers earned on average four times as much as domestic servants. Judy Gay, "Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women," South African Labour Bulletin 6/4 (Nov. 1980)

45. Interview Sister Hilda

Reef, also frequently dangerous. The number of matekatse therefore remained quite small until economic desperation in the 1930s left many women little alternative. Prior to that, a much more widespread form of female rebellion was the growing incidence of elopement (chobeliso), Parents, missionaries and colonial officials alike rued that young men, their egos boosted with cash in hand, were using force to abscond with helpless females, even organizing gangs to carry out the kidnapping.[46] Such a view was supported by the Basotho tendency, in matters of sexual misconduct, to blame the man. There is no reason to assume, however, that the victimization of girls was really the dominant tendency of chobeliso. On the contrary, there is evidence that the girls themselves frequently abetted the practice, eloping with their lovers "to throw their parents overboard and to have their own way."[47] As Dieterlen complained:

> In former days a Mosuto's marriage was an affair arranged between his parents and his prospective bride's, without any one regarding himself bound to consult the young people concerned... [Nowadays the young people] have taken from our European customs only that which would be harmful to them, placing the accent on liberty... They have no thought but for their flirtations. They write love letters to one another, which are all stereotyped and which we look upon as unmitigated nonsense. They talk together, they make plans for the future, they see each other home, and then one fine day, the youth informs his father: 'I am grown up,' in other words, 'I am old enough to marry.' And in many cases the poor father thinks it is his duty to toe the line with his son and to say yes and amen to whatever the two lovers may have organized.[48]

One Mosotho man, defending himself in court in 1876 for the hasty and uncustomary way he had married off a niece, claimed that he did it to pre-empt her since "the modern girl" simply elopes or cynically "gets in the family way among the pots" to force her preference for a husband upon her parents.[49]

Basotho women were also conscious of possessing rights (both to

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46. BNC 1931, 89

47. PEMS missionary Henri Dieterlen, cited in Germond, Chronicles, 531

48. Cited in Germond, Chronicles, 531-2

49. Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 57

support and to sexual satisfaction) which were inherent in customary marriage but which were directly threatened by colonial-style emancipation. Basotho women were aware, for instance, that colonial policy, by abetting male migrancy, was emancipating them of the presence of their husbands. Rare was the woman who saw this as an advantage in and of itself, however much Basotho women as a whole desired the goods which could be obtained by migrant labourers' cash. Rather, they perceived male migrancy as contributing to marital instability and, hence, their own economic insecurity (not to mention to their loneliness). Moreover, as the missionaries were quick to realize, Basotho men often treated Christian marriage "as something like a joke," a means to acquire a wife "for free" while saving up to pay bohali for a second, real wife.[50] Thus, Austen's boasts notwithstanding, the majority of women remained cautious, and selective, when it came to accepting the benefits of Christian or colonial emanciptation. Even women who broke with their families to become Protestants generally insisted on bohali despite the threat of excommunication against them and their husbands.[51] By the mid-1870s, a widespread reaction against Christianity was being led by women prophets such as 'Mathunya.[52]

It is also important to note that, while much of their traditional labour conformed to the domestic sphere, Basotho women were skeptical of the domestic role chosen for them by the colonial regime and missionaries. For one thing, Basotho women were accustomed to having to fend for themselves. The notion that a husband could be relied upon to support a non-productive wife or to surrender traditional privileges over his wife out of a spirit of altruism (or English chivalry) was quite alien and,

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50. Louis Mabille as quoted in Burman, "Two-pronged attack," 68. See also Phoofolo, "Kea Nyala," 13

51. Interview, Rev. Albert Brutsch. See also Colin Murray, "High bridewealth," 79-96

52. Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 104

probably, laughable.[53] Basotho women did not, therefore, easily accept missionary admonitions to make themselves more dependent on men than they were already. For example, they correctly perceived that reducing their labour outside the home (in the fields, brewing beer and the like) in favour of more strictly "ladylike" activities would increase their vulnerability in a marriage and society in general.[54] Consequently, all but the most pretentious petty bourgeois women continued to do labour in their fields.

Finally, given the evident bias of the colonial courts and colonial policy, it is not surprising to find that women also appealed to or invented customs to protect themselves from it. No where was this more clearly demonstrated than in the case of 'Ma-Oshenea who stabbed a court messenger to death in 1931 while her husband was absent. She refused to come to court on the grounds that she was a "child" and had to be represented by her closest male relative and guardian (her brother-in-law). This sparked a debate about whether it was in fact custom for women accused of a crime to avoid appearing before the khotla. The court finally decided that there was no basis in custom for her claim and found her guilty of murder.[55]

Parallel Rule and Colonial Patriarchy

As it transpired, the Cape government's interest in "civilizing" the Basotho via a limited emancipation for Basotho women got lost in the turmoil of the rebellions which began in 1879. Over the period of 1881-84, the territory was virtually abandoned by the Cape authorities while Anglican churches and trading stations were destroyed. The senior chiefs re-asserted their authority with violence while championing a reaction

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53. A hint of Basotho women's skepticism of the first Christian missionaries is given in Arbousset, Missionary Excursion, 101

54. The Basotho attitude towards domesticity and "homemaking" is explored more fully in Chapter Nine below.

55. LNA CR/1273/1931

against the social changes favoured by the Cape and the Christian churches. By the time colonial authority was reasserted after the Gun War, the liberal, interventionist view of the previous decade was utterly discredited in Colonial Office eyes and it was clear to the new administration (and the trading community) that the future stability and profitability of Basutoland depended upon strengthening, not undermining, the authority of the chiefs.

Yet how to assure the loyalty of such an unruly group, who neither trusted nor were trusted by the British? Traders sent the senior chiefs expensive gifts,[56] while the Colonial Office sought to demonstrate its sincerity to the chiefs by recognizing and even enhancing their powers. With the proclamations of 1884, the British in Basutoland anticipated by over a decade the policy of Indirect Rule supposedly pioneered by Lugard.[57]

One of the clearest signals that the Colonial Office wished for harmonious relations with the chiefs was Section 61 of the new regulations. Basotho men's authority over women, including Christian women, was explicitly affirmed by a statement of principle:

> No native woman residing in the Territory of Basutoland shall leave the said Territory without the consent of (a) if she be married according to European law or according to native law or custom of her husband and (b) if she be unmarried of her father or natural guardian.[58]

Magistrates' willingness to intervene in domestic affairs was also circumscribed. Customary law, finally codified in 1905, became something to support assiduously rather than to fulminate against. Consequently, the

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56. The Frasers were particularly adept at "assiduously courting alliances." Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation," 207

57. See Cooper, "from free labour." While pre-figured in the princely states in India and with the Zulu chiefdoms in Natal, rule through the chiefs was not formally adopted elsewhere in Africa before 1900 (in Uganda), followed by northern Nigeria between 1902 and 1906 and in the Belgian Congo in 1906.

58. As cited in BNC 1952, 467. This was not legally binding until enacted so in 1915. See below, page 26.

number of cases of women being awarded custody of children by colonial magistrates dropped sharply as much stricter criteria for the application of Roman Dutch law were applied. The state also turned a blind eye to the chiefs' "concerted campaign" to revive lebollo and to curtail the spread of Christianity (and, hence, one of the main options for women to emancipate themselves).[59] They even turned a blind eye to attempts by Basotho men to retrieve by force runaway women from across the border.[60]

At the same time, and undoubtedly encouraged by the British attitude, the senior chiefs began to make increasingly strident demands for direct assistance from the government to reassert control over "their" women. The chiefs had begun complaining as early as 1892 that Section 61 was not helping them either to prevent or retrieve runaway wives and daughters.[61] It was not until the Masupha incident of 1897, however, that the British realized that the matter had potentially serious consequences. To prevent the reoccurence of a runaway woman triggering a vastly more dangerous act of rebellion, the British undertook to consider ways of dealing with runaways in a peaceful manner. The matter was raised on the occasion of the very first sitting of the National Council, in 1903, when the Paramount Chief appealled to the Resident Commissioner for help:

Another thing which I am afraid may cause trouble between us

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59. Judy Kimble, "Concepts in transition: Labour Migration in Southern Africa, 1890-1910" Seminar on Peasants, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (1980), 13

60. Bonner incorrectly implies that the case of Chief Masupha's son, who had unsuccessfully attempted to abduct a runaway woman from across the border, shows that the British were willing to use force to protect women's rights. On the contrary, the British did not intervene in the case on behalf of the woman but to punish Masupha for assisting in his son's escape from jail in Ladybrand. Masupha compounded this criminal act by declaring that he would resist any British attempt to recapture his son, raising an army of 20,000 men to prove it. The Masupha rebellion of 1897-98 was not, therefore, over the principle of using force to control women (which the British accepted), but over the principle of loyalty to the crown and its preferred local ruler. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women," 228; Burman, Chiefdom Politics, 183

61. CAR 1892 cited in Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women," 228

> and the Orange River Colony is the matter of women running over to that territory. We also call your attention to it, and ask you to see into it for us, Chief, and also about those women from Bereng's place, who are now in Bloemfontein and who you have been promising to fetch.[62]

The Resident Commissioner replied that he had had "great difficulty in trying to get them back because they refused when sent for."[63] Although he had written to the Lt. Governor of the neighbouring colony to assist in this matter, he admonished the chiefs that, without a specific law empowering the government to arrest women, the chiefs themselves would have "to do something to prevent their women from running away for this sort of thing led to the Masupha disturbance."[64]

In the event, the Orange River Colony did agree in 1908 to cooperate with Basutoland by rounding up and bringing to the border as many "illegal" Basotho women as it could catch. Soon after the creation of the Union, however, this promise was rescinded, leaving the Basutoland authorities to ponder the Union government's stern advice as it passed the buck: "urge Basuto men to take matters to native court."[65] The chiefs already knew what useless advice that was since the women simply:

> deny their husbands when they have gone to [South Africa] to bring them back. This is an important matter to the Basotho, one of my wives has lately deserted, she was seen in the very train by which I came to Marseilles.[66]

Eventually the government came up with what appeared a more efficacious solution, "making a law that would make it an offence for a girl or a woman to leave the country without the permission of her father or husband."[67] This proposal was greeted with cheers by the Council members

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62. BNC 1903, 19

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid, 55

65. BNC 1914, 7

66. Chief Motsoene, BNC 1914, 7

67. As in Natal, he added, "but more directly against the women themselves." BNC 1914, 7

and praise for the Resident Commissioner as "deliverer of the Basuto." It was then promulgated as "expedient to prohibit native women residing in the Territory from leaving the Territory against the will of the husbands, fathers or natural guardians as the case may be," requiring women to obtain written permission from their chiefs before they could be given passes to go to South Africa, and, for those found guilty of infraction of this new law, imposing a fine of "£5 or in default of payment to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a period of three months."[68]

In practice, the chiefs were to be disappointed by the criminalization of women's mobility. Not only did the government lack the resources to go searching for and to capture the accused but transporting her back across the border against her will remained illegal.[69] Even if the dirty work were done by the concerned Basotho men, and the truant woman was produced in a Basotho court, it proved virtually impossible to secure a conviction against her. Explaining his powerlessness in this regard to the Paramount Chief in 1929, the RC asserted that Proclamation 3 of 1915 could only be enforced "provided the applicant himself has been blameless in the matter." Thus, if the husband had given his wife cause to desert (such as neglect, adultery or "causing her to be the village whore"[70]), the woman was within her rights not only to leave but even to take her children with her. The law, as framed, also did nothing to address the problem of "bad women" and "loafers" flocking to the camps within the territory.[71]

Further complicating the matter was the fact that Basotho men were

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68. Basutoland Native Women's Restriction Proclamation (Number 3 of 1915). A similar proclamation was issued in 1923 to be applied to runaway boys under the age of majority.

69. Resident Commissioner to District Officer, Peka, 28 May, 1929, LNA S3/5/1/24. It was also problematic in that the OFS had a labour shortage and wanted Basotho women to stay.

70. As happened in the specific case the Paramount Chief was enquiring about. Resident Commissioner to PC Griffith, 18 June, 1929, LNA S3/5/1/24

71. Resident Commissioner, BNC 1916, 6

far from unanimous in their opposition to women's mobility. Thus, runaway women could often get their fathers to testify on their behalf, sheltering them from the claims of their husbands. It led one chief to complain bitterly that:

> Our wives elope with our people and go to Johannesburg, and when we inform Your Honour, you say the running after them is not the work of your Officers. In the days of my fathers, when a woman had run away she was sent back to her husband; the present day Chiefs keep their deserting daughters.[72]

The number of passes issued to women also shows that many chiefs routinely gave their permission for women to leave the country. Official statistics record the passes issued for women to go to South Africa rising by over sevenfold between 1911 and 1936, from 2,972 to 22,669.[73] This represents an increase from 5.8 to 15.3% of the de jure population, or, to put it another way, the virtual doubling of the female component of the migrant labour force to 22.4%. Unofficially, the numbers were undoubtedly higher as many women did not register their departure, either fording the Caledon River (which is easy to do in the dry season), or using a shopping visit to a border town as a springboard to make their way illegally to the cities of the north.[74]

That the numbers of women "flooding" out of the territory in the 1920s were greater than pass statistics indicated is suggested by the fact that, while men continued to receive double or triple the number of passes, the towns of the Rand were swelling with women at a rate on average twice as fast as the urban male population grew.[75] In the OFS and towns like Vereeniging and Brakpan, the "massive jump" in the female urban population after 1925 was due, according to the Director of Native Labour,

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72. BNC 1932, 64

73. Census, 1911, 1936

74. Roste and Sexwale, "Research Priorities," 11-12

75. Walker, "Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System, c.1850-1930" in Walker, Women and Gender, 188

head."[83] In a context where traditional sexual and marital mores were under heavy strain because of high levels of male migrancy, alcohol consumption by both men and, increasingly, women, contributed to the Mosotho's alleged natural proclivity to infidelity and violence. The accessibility of cheap and strong liquor was therefore seen to be the cause of unending social problems and marital conflict. Drunken brawls after matsema became common enough, and often deadly enough, that they were added convincingly to the ammunition of those progressive farmers who sought a ban on compulsory work parties. As the Director of Medical Services gravely intoned to the BNC:

> it is clear that unless the Basuto exercise control in sexual matters and in the consumption of alcohol, the tribe is going to suffer.[84]

Liquor was also seen as a factor contributing to the further corruption of the chiefs. This was not just because of the chiefs' evident enjoyment of the services of "loose women" but also because it contributed to a general undermining of respect for authority. The administration thus saw control over women's brewing as a policy which promised to have direct political benefits. After proposing the banning of the sale of beer, the Resident Commissioner appealed to the chiefs in these words:

> My object in bringing up this matter was not in any way to weaken the chieftainship but to urge the chiefs to consolidate themselves in the only way that can be lasting, namely by constituting themselves as the most enlightened portion of the community, the most progressive and the most deserving of respect.[85]

Finally, there was the question of health, the dramatic decline of which during the Depression was attributed directly to the perceived shortcomings of Basotho women. The early 1930s saw an enormous jump in infant mortality and the spread of deadly diseases such as typhus,

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83. T. Verdier, "L'Alcoholisme au Lessouto," JME 1930/1, 291 (my translation)

84. BNC 1942, 56

85. BNC 1928, 58. The motion was defeated.

to the influx of single women "principally from Basutoland."[76] By one estimate at least, it was felt that by the early 1930s there were as many women as men from Basutoland on the Rand.[77]

The colonial administration saw this exodus of women from the rural areas as dangerous in several ways. First, the presence of Basotho women at the Rand reduced the social and sexual incentives for Basotho men to return to the territory. If they could find a "wife" in the locations, so the argument went, why should they return to Basutoland, a country where their chances of obtaining fields to support a wife adequately were in any case declining? As Pim observed in 1935, Basotho "prostitutes" in Johannesburg "played a considerable part in inducing men to stay abroad for long periods."[78] The danger to the Basutoland administration in this was that such "detribalized" men were lost as tax-payers. The actual cost of failing to anchor Basotho migrants in Basutoland by keeping their women home was assessed in a confidential government report on the problem in 1942: £100,000 of lost tax revenue, £250,000 of lost voluntary remittances and deferred pay, and up to £500,000 lost in the value of goods brought back to the territory each year by migrants--a total amount worth about 200% of the annual administrative budget. Not only would the administration be bankrupted by such losses, but, the report estimated, the territory would be depopulated by over half in a massive, immediate

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76. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women," 230

77. Report of the PEMS conference of 1933, JME 1/1934, 294 (my translation). Perhaps less panicky was the estimate of the Catholic priest on the Rand in 1939, who put the number of Basotho women from the territory at 30,000 (verses 70,000 men). P.G. Martin, "Chez les Bassoutos de Transvaal" MMO 1939, 332. Government figures are almost certainly underestimations. Its 1942 estimate, for example, was simply the numbers of passes issued. A.G.T. Chaplin to Resident Commissioner, 1 Sept, 1942 (PRO DO 35/1178/Y847/1/1). The figure quoted in the 1946 census is ludicrously low (9,475), not surprising as it was based on Basotho women's voluntary admission to Union authorities of their illegal status in the Union. This consistent underestimation seems to suggest that the government did not particularly care to admit, even in confidential correspondence, the true extent of female migration.

78. The Pim Report, 45

efflux of at least a quarter of a million people.[79]

It did not really require a worst-case scenario to make the administration pay attention to the need to control Basotho women's outmigration. Even for those Basotho men who continued to pay tax and intended to return home, the presence of women in the Union was a powerful temptation to spend their few extra pounds inappropriately. If the workers in the mines spent all their wages, pitiable to start with, on "bad drink and worse women," there would be nothing left to remit to Basutoland.[80] It threatened a vicious cycle: if women starved in Basutoland, they would leave for the Union and, when they did, Basotho men would have less reason than ever to come home.

Colonial officials also regarded women brewers as a cause of lost revenue which, with the Depression, they desperately needed.[81] The British looked enviously at the hostels in Durban where men drank in "cages," that is, barred rooms which dispensed weak government-brewed beer only. This was seen not only to protect the men from unscrupulous women (and offered the potential of "a side development into a kind of village club with a reading room and recreation"), but it could also generate "high profits" for the government.[82] To do so, however, the competition from women brewers had to be eliminated. In all, they were seen as responsible for a kind of haemorrage on the flow of scarce resources into the proper pockets.

Women's beer brewing and selling had consequences in the rural areas as well. "They go into the fields, purportedly for their work there, with a child on their back, a little one in hand and a jug of beer on their

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79. G.T. Chaplin, "Labour emigration: Conditions on the Witwatersrand" 17 Aug. 1942. PRO DO 35/1178/Y847/1/1

80. Assistant Commissioner, Quarterly Report, Sept. 1927. LNA S3/5/18/10

81. Government revenues from "Native tax" and other local sources declined by 25% from 1929 to 1934--a drop of £80,000 and the cause of the first ever consecutive budgetary deficits. CAR 1934, 27

82. Assistant Commissioner's Quarterly Report, Sept. 1927 LNA S3/5/18/10

head."[83] In a context where traditional sexual and marital mores were under heavy strain because of high levels of male migrancy, alcohol consumption by both men and, increasingly, women, contributed to the Mosotho's alleged natural proclivity to infidelity and violence. The accessibility of cheap and strong liquor was therefore seen to be the cause of unending social problems and marital conflict. Drunken brawls after matsema became common enough, and often deadly enough, that they were added convincingly to the ammunition of those progressive farmers who sought a ban on compulsory work parties. As the Director of Medical Services gravely intoned to the BNC:

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83. T. Verdier, "L'Alcoholisme au Lessouto," JME 1930/1, 291 (my translation)

84. BNC 1942, 56

85. BNC 1928, 58. The motion was defeated.

pellegra, and, for the first time in history, bubonic plague. These were alleged to arise from the "indifference and carelessness on the part of the Native," especially the African woman. Clearly, as the Director of Medical Services officially informed the world, not much could be expected of women who wore underclothing which "may not have been washed for weeks."[86] The good doctor went on to explain that:

> In the transition period through which they [the Basotho] are pasing from their primitive to the civilized state, though they have copied the European in matters of clothing, housing, etc., they have not yet absorbed the elementary laws of hygeine and sanitary cleanliness.[87]

Moreover, ignorance of basic nutrition on the part of Basotho mothers was seen to lie behind the rampant malnutrition in the country. Babies were purportedly dying because Basotho women were too stupid or superstitious to feed them three square meals a day--the traditional injunction against pubescent girls eating eggs was cited as a typically destructive superstition.

This sudden discovery of the inadequacy of Basotho mothers overthrew the previous five decades of "laissez-faire" based, presumably, upon confidence in native mothercraft. As such, it required some impressive doublethinking to avoid addressing the real issues. For example, the same Director of Medical Services who so bemoaned Basotho women's lack of proper mothercraft skills also took note of the direct co-relation between, on the one hand, the establishment of British-owned mills and, on the other, the decline in the nutritive value of the average Mosotho diet.[88] Yet he utterly avoided any suggestions of curtailling the activities of the European businessmen who profitted from the popularization of highly refined grain. Rather than dealing with the health problem at its admitted source, he urged the training of Africans

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86. Basutoland, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report (Maseru, 1933), 16

87. Ibid.

88. Annual Medical and Public Health Report, 1947, 7. This is also, somewhat elliptically, conceded in CAR 1946, 43

for the purpose of "instilling into [Basotho mothers] correct ideas and methods of diet, cooking, mothercraft and the elementary rules of social welfare, hygeine and sanitation."[89]

Another administration anxiety about health was that the proliferation of prostitutes was, predictably, accompanied by the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. According to the Report of the Native Economic Commission of 1932, the Basotho were "much more heavily syphillized than the Union labourers on the mines."[90] This had serious consequences not just for the health and social fabric of the nation but, more importantly for the British, for the bottom line. Beginning in the 1920s, men who arrived in South Africa with syphillis were rejected for work in the mines and the costs of treating or repatriating them assumed by the recruiters. Furthermore, after 1929, the government of South Africa decreed that it would no longer pay for the treatment of men who contracted the disease while in South Africa. The numbers of Basotho involved were as high as 1000 per year, which, at a cost of £2-3 per head, amount to a significant expense that was now passed on to the recruiters. The labour agents in Maseru howled for financial aid. The government, reluctant as ever to incur expenses itself, demurred, promising instead to do all it could to "safeguard" the men from "women and beer."[91] This was in keeping with the cool advice from South Africa to the Basutoland authorities: "you would be well-advised to adopt the most stringent measures... to protect natives contracting venereal disease en route to the Mine."[92]

The government's view of venereal disease was that it arose because

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89. Ibid.

90. Between 25 and 30% of all Basotho recruits, compared to only 2% of Xhosa men. NEC, 214

91. Resident Commissioner response to E.H. Stephens Ltd., 20 May, 1929. LNA S3/5/18/2

92. Union Director of Native Labour to Resident Commissioner, 23 April, 1929. LNA S3/5/18/2

of the naivity of Basotho youths who, flush with cash for perhaps the first time in their lives, were "easy prey to the disease-ridden prostitutes who infest the Reserves."[93] As the Director of Medical and Health Services explained to the National Council, gonorrhea:

> was much more prevalent than previously realized, particularly among young men. This I ascribe to the number of beer shops conducted largely by women who have no morals...[94]

The assumption was that the men's natural instincts were being inflamed and exploited by shameless women for, unlike the Basotho, the British blamed male sexual misconduct on the female. The courts, for example, tended to hold women responsible for inciting male sexual violence against them--a girl's large breasts mitigated, in colonial eyes, an assaulter's guilt.[95] Widows, in particular, were "a nuisance and a danger to the community on the Reserve."[96] Not only did they brew "noxious" concoctions and harbour prostitutes but they were themselves often young, "attractive but neglected grass widows" whose "temptations to immorality...almost completely stultify the efforts of the missions to teach them a higher ethical code."[97]

With such assumptions prevalent in the colonial administration, the focus of efforts to control venereal disease lay primarily with trying to keep the combination of men, women and money apart. Proclamation 25 of 1922 enabled police raids to round up anyone in possession of liquor with over 2% alcohol content. The contraband, usually called "Hiki," was destroyed and the women either fined (up to £15) or imprisoned (for up to

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93. Assistant Commissioner's Quarterly Report, Sept. 1927. LNA S3/5/18/10

94. BNC 1942, 56

95. That is, in that they caused a man "to lose control [and act] somewhat more violently than usual." So opined the highest court in that land as it reduced the fine imposed in the Native Courts against a man for sexually assaulting a "buxom girl." LNA HC 50/1949

96. So noted the District Commissioner of Maseru, 23 Mar., 1928. "Quite true," replied the Government Secretary in his marginal note to the memo on what to do about them. LNA S3/5/1/22

97. Resident Commissioner submission to the Pim Report, PRO DO 119/1051

three months with hard labour). Proclamation 32 of 1928 was also useful in harrassing women in that it forbade a woman to "wander from her village without lawful occasion or excuse."[98] If a woman could not produce proof of her husband's or guardian's permission to be away from home, she was presumed to be "disorderly and idle" and hustled back to the rural areas. There, Paramount Chief Griffith's "great activity and considerable ruthlessness [to] suppress canteens" earned him the warm appreciation of the British.[99]

As in South Africa, however, there were many problems with this strategy of repression. It was not only costly but, given the limitations of the state's coercive apparatus, it was largely ineffective. "Our present means of dealing with these women is hopelessly inadequate," complained the Assistant Commissioner of Maseru in 1928.

> It is the proceedure [sic] here--a periodical clearing out by the headman and police of the prostitutes--and these return at night. It is a most unsatisfactory and undignified performance.[100]

A decade later the Resident Commissioner explained that "police have had a very difficult time in this work because whenever they closed this beer shop today another one was opened the next morning and the following day again another one."[101] There were also occasional embarrassments caused by the arrest or harrassment of women who were legitimately passing through the reserve.[102] Both chiefs and "respectable" African men complained that their daughters and wives were being subjected to indignities. One cannot escape the impression that to the British all

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98. Proclamations and Notices, 1928

99. 21 June, 1928. LNA S3/5/18/10. It was a job well done, too, considering Griffith's own "insatiable thirst for alcoholic beverages of every variety." High Commissioner to Sec. of State for Dominions Affairs, 2 Dec. 1927, LNA S3/5/14/2

100. Quarterly Report, 21 May, 1923. LNA S3/5/18/10

101. BNC 1938, 183

102. For example, LNA CR 45/1945

Basotho women looked the same.

The government also increasingly turned its attention to rectifying the behavioural "shortcomings" of Basotho men. Here they trod carefully, anxious both of provoking a reaction from the Basotho (and so disrupting the free flow of labour to South Africa) and of offending "certain Union interests."[103] This caution meant that the most obvious solution to the dearth of cash in rural Basutoland was never attempted. The introduction of compulsory deferred pay was strongly favoured by many of the District Officers, the missionaries, the chiefs and the labour agencies themselves under the following logic:

> I am certain that the crime of desertion would disappear, Brothels and Beer Shops would be entirely wiped out, and syphillis and gonorrhea would not be spread all over the territory, as now, the health of the native would be greatly improved by the abolition of the brewing of poison, and the advances would reach the families of labourers which is the intention of the law.[104]

Compulsory deferred pay, however, was never implemented by the colonial government. The Resident Commissioner deemed that it was simply "out of the question."[105] Even to exercise "strong influence" to get Basotho men to remit more was "quite impossible."[106]

Making Basotho men fulfill their obligation to support their families therefore depended primarily on moral exhortation. Throughout the 1920s the British were constantly enjoining the chiefs to use their influence to persuade the men to remit voluntarily. Then, in 1932, the administration established its own presence on the Rand, the Native Deposit and Remittance Agency. Originally this had been intended to track

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103. F.H. Dutton to Resident Commissioner, 18 Feb., 1931. LNA S3/19/76. That is, the merchants, including the Frasers after they moved their headquarters to South Africa and opened a giant department store in Johannesburg.

104. National Recruiting Corporation to Resident Commissioner, 22 August, 1922. LNA S3/5/18/7

105. BNC, 1928, 24

106. BNC 1929, 19. The British actually left it to independent Lesotho to do the bloody work of imposing compulsory deferred pay in 1974.

down tax defaulters but it very quickly

> began dealing with the domestic affairs of the Basuto on the Witwatersrand, encouraging them to save money, giving them home news, counteracting as far as possible the temptations of their environment, repatriating those who are indigent and, generally, giving advice and assistance to them whenever required.[107]

This policy of propaganda (and surveillance) quickly appeared to have the desired effect. Although the Basotho continued to remit less than other African workers, there was a dramatic increase in the amounts of money being sent from the mines to Basutoland. From approximately £30,000 in 1929, the total value of remittances to the territory rose to an estimated £600,000 in 1946, a period during which real wages actually declined.[108]

Another "success" in this period, also achieved in a relatively painless (cheap) manner by the colonial adminstration, was to stabilize the number of cases of syphillis and gonorrhea. Beginning in 1936, a massive nation-wide campaign of penicillin injections was undertaken which had resulted by 1941 in a decline in the incidence of these diseases.[109] They may have continued to be "devastating" to the lives of the people infected, but they quickly faded as a significant economic concern to the administration.[110]

The British, while taking much of the credit for these successes, also took to defending the virtuous behaviour of Basotho men. "By nature irresponsible and happy-go-lucky" in the 1920s,[111] Basotho men had

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107. CAR 1938, 31

108. BNC 1937, 10; CAR 1946, 17-18. Real wages per annum (adjusted for inflation and estimated in 1970 rands) dropped from a high of 75 in 1936 to 67 in 1946. AIM, Migration and Development, 13

109. Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1942, 2

110. Felix Baerlocher (ed. and trans.), Bertha Hardegger, M.D., Mother of the Basotho: Thirty-Four Years of Medical Service in Africa (Sackville, NB, n.d.). See, for example, pages 21 and 26

111. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commissioner, PRO DO 119/1051

metamorphisized in the rhetoric of the administration into caring family providers by the late 30s. The Superintendant of the National Recruiting Corporation paid public tribute to their "generosity"[112] and the Government Secretary to the "very good work" done by the majority of Basotho men in "behaving properly towards their wives."[113] The Resident Commissioner went so far as exonerating those men who did not remit money with the argument that "their wives have had children by other men in their absence."[114] By implication this was, of course, a defence of the migrant labour system and a sign of the government's satisfaction with the socio-economic status quo. It is not surprising that the chiefs remained skeptical of the sudden transformation of Basotho manhood and continued to demand the introduction of compulsory deferred pay to help them control the exodus of women from the rural areas.

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If the chiefs were disappointed by the ineffectiveness of the imperial writ to control their "children," the British were also increasingly frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the Basotho chiefs. In 1930, the Resident Commissioner warned the chiefs that unless they clamped down on the behaviour of women and youths, "the future of Basutoland was dark."[115]

Why were the chiefs so "useless" in controlling "their" women? In the first place, despite the chiefs' constant complaints about runaway

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112. BNC 1937, 10

113. BNC 1938, 310

114. Submission to the Pim Commission (1934), PRO DO 119/1051. It is interesting to compare this "blame the woman" attitude to the Basotho perception. In rejecting the the defence given by Moroesi for failing to support his wife, Jingoes upbraided him: "That your wife is a whore is your own fault,' I said to him. "You should have spoken to her about that before. At the moment we're not talking about her habits; that's your problem. Whatever she is, she's your wife, and she needs money. You haven't divorced her. She's known as your wife, and she has to look after your children." Jingoes, A Chief, 113

115. Patrick Duncan, cited in BNC 1932, 161

women, it is clear that they had material and social reasons not to be too strict in the enforcement of their legal authority to stop women from leaving. On the contrary, in many instances the marena directly abetted the exodus of women from their lands. For example, a chief was responsible for the care of his father's widow or, in the case of a polygynist, up to dozens of dependents. Some of these women may well have been involved in court intrigues against him while, as widows, their comparative sexual licence caused scandal and the proliferation of "illegitimate" children. While these children belonged to the chief regardless of their natural father, the fact that they could have commoner blood added a dangerous element to succession disputes and the preservation of the Koena dynasty. In such cases, a chief would be relieved to see his father's widows leave the territory and might encourage them to do so by neglect or active abuse. Thus, in an impassioned debate on the subject of neglected women, Leloko Lerotholi inveighed against his fellow chiefs:

> I don't understand a woman roaming about as if she is a pig... Women should not be neglected for no reasons [sic]. A daughter of a Chief has to return to her people, what a disgrace it is when she gives birth to an illegitimate baby. This child will claim that he is the heir because his mother was not divorced. Troubles begin, and ill-feeling because people know that he is not of their blood. All this is the result of neglected women. I do not refer to the children of Chiefs only; at present in all villages of Basutoland you find a loose woman who has deserted her husband... Our country should not be turned into a country of whores.[116]

Chiefs also stood to gain by evicting widows from their fields in order to redistribute the land to tax-paying men. In such a case, however, the chief remained ultimately responsible for the welfare of the destitute woman. If she stayed in the village she was, potentially, a nag whom the chief traditionally could not turn away without some food. Likewise in cases where husbands or sons disappeared or otherwise failed to support their wives and mothers, the chief was normally called upon to help them. This explains the chiefs' insistence on compulsory deferred pay from migrant labourers and their proposals for draconian punishments against

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116. BNC 1932, 61

men who failed in their familial obligations. Because the government was not willing to accede to their requests, however, it was in the chief's financial interest that destitute women either remove themselves from the district or support themselves by whatever means. The chiefs were therefore among the most vigorous defenders of the rights of poor women, especially widows, to brew and sell liquor.[117]

The nature of the judicial system under colonial rule also gave chiefs an incentive to maximize their income by hearing cases or appeals by women which had hitherto been dealt with in the women's court. "Developing the money making side of his office," a chief might encourage women to litigate so that he could reap fines in cattle.[118] For all their apparent traditionalism, therefore, the chiefs consistently appeared as allies of women both against the colonial state's efforts to regulate or eliminate illicit shebeens and against abusive or negligent husbands.

The chiefs also took advantage of the services of the shebeens. Their sometimes scandalous consumption of liquor caused the government to worry that the colony "is in danger of becoming what it was in the eighties."[119] Even more disturbing to the government, however, was that some chiefs in those areas which contained or abutted reserves were directly profitting from the economic activity generated by illicit brewing and prostitution. They did this by demanding "gifts" from the shebeen queens to ensure their freedom from harrassment. This was one element of the administration's grievances against the chiefs, adding to its growing belief that the chieftainship was "pretty rotten at the core."[120]

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117. Along with the LLB.

118. Jones, Medicine Murders, 41

119. Unsigned memo, urging "urgent" action to solve alcohol abuse, 21 June 1928 (LNA S3/5/18/10). The 1880s were a period of extreme debauchery.

120. Memo on Native Authority, W.C. Clark (no date, possibly 1947), PRO DO 119/1376

The accusation that some chiefs were profitting from women's "looseness" or deliberately and cynically neglecting their traditional responsibilities towards women was made by many aggrieved women in the courts, especially the widows of chiefs. One of the most notable such cases was launched by Mofumahali Tholoana J. Molapo in 1928, who accused Chief Motsoene of "eating her up."[121] The LLB made the defence of such women one of its more important issues, undoubtedly a major reason for its popularity among women.[122] Josiel Lefela was particularly conscious of the fact that the LLB stance on protecting widows against exploitation won him very vocal and widespread support.[123]

Yet the accusation of neglect was also widely made against chiefs by the chiefs themselves. To an extent this reflected the growing split between the minor and the senior chiefs. The latter, who dominated in the BNC, could more easily afford to argue principles and to bemoan the practices of their increasingly impoverished colleagues. Thus, when Chief Goliath Mohale moved in the BNC that "Chiefs should not be allowed to neglect their wives," his fellow councillor Tebesi Makobocho agreed that such neglect "frightens us... The people are beginning to take the example of the Chiefs who live with loose women."[124] The senior chiefs urgently requested the British to legislate an end to the neglect of female dependents.

Given the class nature of such neglect, it is not surprising to see that women chiefs, who were beginning to carve out a niche for themselves

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121. Molapo to Assistant Commissioner, Leribe, 20 Jan. 1929. LNA S3/5/15/6. See also S3/5/15/3 for details of her long legal battle against Motsoene, the administration's preferred candidate for succession to the ward of her deceased husband. Despite her threats to "create disturbances," she eventually lost her case.

122. A fact noted by the police in their reports of LLB meetings (LNA S3/22/2/4) as well as visiting observers: see the section on "Radical women" in Chapter Ten below, and Kimble, "Runaway Wives," 18

123. In 1951 he went so far as to propose himself as a "sectional representative" for women in the BNC. BNC 1951, 535

124. BNC 1932, 57

in all ranks of the borena, were also guilty of dispossessing widows. "Queen" Semema Mohokaqala struggled for nearly a decade to reverse her eviction from her hut and lands by a female "headman," Makhetisa Manama Molapo.[125]

Another factor contributed to the chiefs unwillingness or inability to re-impose their patriarchal authority. That was, quite simply, fear. The behaviour of some of the women involved was so outlandish and unruly, and breakdown of traditional hlonepho or respect so great, that many Basotho men were confounded. Women in the camps carried knives and used them.[126] They swore, and they brazenly mocked authority. "In the villages, young girls speak bad words and this language is heard by the Chiefs," complained Goliath Malebanye, appealing for the government's assistance in moving the beer shops away from his court.[127] The sense of helplessness against such women was also expressed by Chief Moketsi Mokhele, who pleaded to the Resident Commissioner, "I would be thankful if something would be done to those people who sell beer, because when we try to speak to them, they ignore us.[128] To a PEMS missionary on the Rand, the Basotho women he found there "grow fierce and lawless, even more so than the men."[129]

The number of cases of women assaulting or even murdering men which appeared before the courts attests to their willingness to fight back physically against abuse or exploitation. Sometimes a poor woman could even ruffle the feathers of a man of property, as in the case of a woman who was fined 10 shillings for brandishing a sickle at a man who let his

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125. From 1921-30. LNA S3/5/11/10

126. For example, it was reported in 1930 that a woman brewer killed a customer for not paying for his beer (JME 1930/2, 261, my translation). See also BNC 1948, 467

127. BNC 1950, 287

128. BNC 1949, 229

129. Basutoland Witness 7/4 (1953), 54

donkey eat her vegetable garden at the top of her voice and threatening: "Ke tla u faola."[130] Even today, a folk mythology exists among Basotho men and women which portrays women resorting to murder and castration, sometimes in groups. Whether or not the stories are apocryphal, the fact that they are so commonly repeated, even by European missionaries, is suggestive of a perceived assertiveness of Basotho women which far transcends their supposed down-trodden nature.[131]

Undoubtedly more common was the threat of a woman's abusive tongue. As Chief Malebanye explained by way of justifying fair laws for women, "Women are very weak people and if there should be any differentiation in their treatment they will soon begin to grouse and you will hear the noise that will be made."[132] At times this constrained even the most powerful chiefs in the country from discussing matters pertaining to women in the BNC. For example, in the a debate about whether to distribute rat poison to farmers, during which many members expressed their fear that women would use the poison against their husbands, a number of chiefs worried that their words would return to haunt them. Chief Sekhonyana appraised them of reality:

> Some people say we should not discuss this matter lest women hear it. Just now as we leave the Council, they shall have known it. Even those that are not in Maseru read newspapers.[133]

Chiefs, much more than any other government official, were the direct recipients of women's grievances.

This sense of fear of provoking women or of helplessness in the face of their blatant disrespect for authority was not confined to the chiefs. The matekatse also frustrated the British. The Assistant Commissioner of Maseru, J.H. Sims, pointedly recalled one of his most embarrassing

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130. Roughly translated: "I'm going to cut your balls off." LNA CR 414/1957

131. This is discussed further in Chapter Nine below.

132. BNC 1945, 151

133. BNC 1936, 128

situations while:

> sentencing these buxom wenches for breaches of prison regulations, as when I looked severe and put them on short rations or some minor punishment they roared with laughter and marched out![134]

Fear of women's unruliness and the tacit acknowledgement that they were slipping beyond the control of men lay behind a number of remarkably revealing debates in the National Council in 1930s. These were sparked by the dramatic rise in the number of homocide cases--from 25 in 1931 to 156 in 1934.[135] While today we might ascribe this to the tensions arising from economic stress, the British and the chiefs of Basutoland at the time seemed to agree that the root cause was female misbehaviour. "These women who have no husbands are responsible for many cases of bloodshed," explained Chief Moloko Bereng at the start of the 1932 session on the issue of how to stop violence which was presumed to stem from adulterous behaviour.[136] Thabo Lechesa rued that "This matter of women is getting very bad,"[137] while Bolokoe Potsane demanded of the Resident Commissioner: "There should be a law on this subject to protect us in connection with our wives."[138]

Not only were women accused of inciting men to the exchange of blows by taking advantage of their husbands' absence to have affairs, but there were fears that neglected women could take matters into their own hands. Hence, British proposals to stem an outbreak of bubonic plague sparked this exchange:

> MAKHOBOALO THEKO: With regard to poison for rats, we request that it should not be issued to Basotho women... We say that women have weak hearts and can finish off the whole nation if they be given the poison.

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134. Sims, "The Story of My Life" (unpublished autobiography, vol. 4) Rhodes House, 47

135. CAR 1934, 22

136. BNC 1932, 63

137. BNC 1932, 62

138. BNC 1932, 173

> LETLASA THEBE: Though we live with women, they have strange manners... you may have occasion to rebuke her and if she knows she has poison she may use it.
>
> RC: An order can be given that poison is not to be issued to women. (LELOKA: What about widows?) It could be ordered that no women except widows should be given poison.[139]

The Resident Commissioner's amenability to the paranoia of a few senior chiefs is almost as telling as the chiefs' paranoia itself. Only after the idea of restricting women's access to the poison had been discredited as impractical and unfair to women by the majority of Basotho councillors, did the Resident Commissioner agree to drop the matter. In the event, the poison was distributed and no outbreak of viricide occured.[140]

Finally, it must be added that there were Basotho chiefs who supported the rights of women to adopt non-traditional behaviour. Contrary to the view propagated by the British at this time that the chiefs were almost uniformly retrogressive and corrupt, some of them in fact argued a remarkably "liberal" line in the BNC. They did so sometimes on the principle of tolerance and without cynical ulterior motives. Thus, as early as 1916, when the Resident Commissioner was pressing the chiefs to take a firmer stand against "bad women" and "loafers" flocking to the camps, Chief Josiel rebuked him:

> Although I do not drink, yet I think people should be allowed to sell their beer so that they may live. When the country is full, people will do worse things than the sale of beer.[141]

Chief Qhobela Joel went even further in requesting tolerance of women's rights to live by whatever means they could, gently pointing out the hypocrisy of the British enthusiasm for restricting the sale of beer:

> Sale of beer is not a custom of the Basuto, the practice has been borrowed from Europeans who sell liquor in their bars. The

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139. BNC 1936, 125-126

140. In fact, with the return of the rains in 1934 the murder rate declined again--in 1943 there were but seven cases in the whole territory. CAR 1948, 88

141. BNC 1916, 6

> people continue selling beer because this helps those who cannot earn a living otherwise, such as widows. Although fights result, some protection should be given to the poor and the weak who can no longer work for themselves.[142]

Some Christians, such as Chief Mokhethi in 1914, warned both his fellow councillors and the British, "Do not look upon girls as animals, they are also responsible human beings."[143] These chiefs later joined with the BPA to protest against the harassment of their wives by the police. Although chiefs vocally demanded stricter crackdowns on matekatse by both the Basutoland authorities and South Africa in the 1930s,[144] when such a crackdown appeared to be actually imminent, they voted overwhelmingly against it.[145]

Other Basotho men, surprisingly, advocated women's freedom on traditional grounds. For example, to restrict widows' freedom, even to travel to Johannesburg, was seen to be an offence against their traditional right to make decisions as "honorary adults." Chief Malebanye, one of the hoariest of the traditionalists in the BNC, was eloquent on this. In 1937 he argued successfully against a motion in the council which sought to prevent widows from running away by denying them the cash compensation due to them on account of husbands who had died in the mines:

> I do not see why the widows should not receive the estate of her husband as compensation... The woman who leaves her house and goes to Johannesburg is still under her first husband's people even if she bears an Indian child in Johannesburg. According to the law, the woman should use the estate of her late husband with her husband's relatives. It should not appear as if something other than the usual procedure should be adopted in the case of money. Though the motion is not quite pointed it would seem to me that the suggestion is that these monies should be paid to the parents of the deceased. But this

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142. BNC 1928, 41

143. BNC 1914, 2

144. For example, requesting that the Resident Commissioner get Union officials to help in "driving these women out of their country," a request the Commissioner expressed frustration that he could not carry out! BNC 1937, 5

145. BNC 1952, 462. That is, the chiefs almost unanimously voted down the proposal that women be required to obtain passes to travel to South Africa.

> cannot be because even the livestock do not belong to the parents but to her husband. She had every right to the money to use in consultation with her husband's people.[146]

Chiefs who outspokenly defended women's rights, whether as Christians or traditionalists, were admittedly rare prior to the 1930s.[147] The majority of the chiefs in this period, like most people, appeared to want their cake and eat it too, that is, to profit from women's non-traditional activities while bemoaning the resultant loss of their authority and social harmony. Their inability to act consistently or decisively against runaway women led to increasing frustration on the part of the British. The administration was placed in the degrading position of attempting to control Basotho women's movement when neither the traditional patriarchs behind nor the South African government ahead, cooperated. The women themselves were increasingly brazen in flaunting the laws of the Empire, giggling before the august presence of the magistrates and ingeniously, mendaciously evading the police.

The need to deal more effectively with the embarrassing and dangerous matter of Basotho women's uncontrollable behaviour, spurred the government to rethink its relationship with the chiefs. Beginning in the early 1930s, the administration abandoned its social conservatism in order "modernize" colonial rule by, ironically, adopting once again an interventionist social policy in some ways similar to what the Cape government had attempted fifty years earlier.

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146. BNC 1937, 3. My emphasis

147. By the 1950s, however, they began to do so to an extent which disturbed the administration. See below Chapters Six and Seven.

Chapter Six: Gender and the Modernization of the Colonial State, 1935-65

Before examining the specific colonial attempts to restructure Basotho gender relations under the rubric of "development," it is important to establish the political context in which those attempts were made. This chapter begins with the multi-faceted crisis which Basutoland underwent during the 1930s and '40s, seeking to understand differences between the way the crisis was dealt with in Basutoland compared to elsewhere in colonial Africa. It will outline the broad scope of administrative reforms, first of all in the period when Britain tried to bring Basutoland in line with the policy of "true" Indirect Rule as it was practiced in its other African colonies and, secondly, in the period when Britain moved hastily to prepare the territory for self-government and independence. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of administrative reforms upon gender and class relations.

Crisis and Reform: Colonial Perspectives

The British were aware by the mid-1920s that "parallel rule" as it had been constituted in Lesotho since 1884 was not working. It was failing to constrain the "illicit" sexual, social and economic activities of the Basotho that were undermining the stability of the migrant labour system upon which both South Africa and Basutoland depended. It was also failing to control the unbridled destruction of the country's soil and pasture resources.

Much of this failure was blamed on the alleged incompetence and cupidity of the chiefs. Not only were the marena not consistently enforcing the authority invested in them, but they were also accused of abusing their powers in ways that exacerbated social disharmony and economic hardship in the rural areas. This, and the endless, byzantine disputes over succession which increasingly occupied the attentions of the senior chiefs and the administration, had serious repercussions for balancing the budget and maintaining stable government. Indeed, after half a century of effectively abetting the BaKoena to consolidate their

position as the ruling dynasty, the British found they had created a group of men who could block even the most ostensibly benign proposals for reform. In the Pim Report's terms, such parallel rule allowed the senior chiefs to exercise their authority "in a state of detachment unknown in tropical Africa."[1]

The stubborn opposition of the chiefs to agricultural improvement was a case in point which became increasingly worrisome to the British as the Malutis were opened up to settlement. Some of the best pasture land in the world was rapidly degraded by the plough and the poisonous weeds which followed. The chiefs either did virtually nothing to protect it or exacerbated the problem by trying to maximum tax receipts and personal wealth through the exploitation of hitherto sacrosanct maboella lands.[2] Erosion, noted as early as the 1870s in the form of deep gulleys called dongas, was wearing away the long-term capacity of the colony to support its population.

Similar problems had been created by colonial policies elsewhere in Africa and, by the late 1920s, the first experimental efforts were beginning to be made to address them in a number of colonies.[3] For a number of reasons, the Basutoland colonial authorities were constrained from adopting similar policies. Above all, they believed that male migrant labour was "unavoidable."[4] That is, for all its admittedly "undesirable" and "unquestionably bad" effects upon Basotho society, colonial officials

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1. The Pim Report, 49

2. Kimble, "Clinging to the Chiefs," 59

3. These included the stabilization of a limited number of African workers, investment to upgrade peasant production, compulsory deferred pay, and the encouragement of the growth of an African petty bourgeoisie by, for example, building new schools and offering credit facilities and export incentives. Such initial, and tentative reforms took place while Indirect Rule was still in its heydey as the guiding philosophy of British colonialism in Africa. They began to be enacted as a consistent policy in the mid to late 193Cs in reaction to the crisis of the Depression. Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa; Cooper, "from free labour"

4. J.H. Sims' submission to the Pim Commission, 3, PRO DO 119/1053

regarded the smooth flow of the cream of Basotho manhood out of the territory as "economic salvation."[5] Consequently, no policy was ever seriously discussed, let alone implemented, which might have interrupted this flow. Given the well-known sentimental attachment of the Basotho to their chiefs, and the proven ability of the latter to cause havoc if they decided to oppose colonial authority, officials in Basutoland believed that any incautious attempt to tamper with the chiefs' powers would threaten the migrant labour system. The Gun War was fresh in British minds not simply because of the huge expense and humiliation it had caused, but also because it had disrupted production in the diamond mines of Kimberly when over 4,000 Basotho miners deserted returned home to fight.[6]

To their dependency on migrant labour was added the pronounced social conservatism of the colonial authorities. As we have seen, these men regarded Basotho women's unruly behaviour as a major cause, not a symptom, of instability. This put them fundamentally in sympathy with the chiefs who argued that women were legally children regardless of age or marital status.[7] Moreover, the peculiar bureaucratic position of Basutoland within the Dominions Office served to shelter it from some of the radical notions coming out of the Colonial Office, especially after 1938.

Nonetheless, the Basutoland officials were aware the parallel rule was no longer adequate to meet their needs, not least of all becausing of increasing criticism from South Africa. Constrained by the attitudes described above, as well by fear of offending South Africa, the Treasury or the local merchant elite, the colonial administration in Basutoland focused its efforts to deal with the building economic and social crisis

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5. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, page 7 (1934), PRO DO 119/1051

6. Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland c. 1870-1884," in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation, 123

7. They also referred to their own wives as "girls." See, for example, J.H. Sims, "The Story of My Life," Rhodes House.

on attempting to "modernize" the chiefs as a class. These efforts were exceedingly slow in fruition, beginning in 1927 but not finally abandoned until 1956. Thus, well after Indirect Rule had been abandoned as official policy elsewhere, the Basutoland authorities persisted in their belief that "traditional" African chiefs could be made to "evolve on lines which are not open to such easy attack and just criticism" as they then were.[8] By bringing the system of government in Basutoland in line with Indirect Rule as it had supposedly functioned in Northern Nigeria and Tanganyika, it was hoped that the chiefs could be "harnessed as an instrument of progress."[9] The Resident Commissioner's reassurances to the senior chiefs in that regard were therefore a sincere reflection of British policy:

> We want to strengthen the Chieftainship and do away with the causes of complaint against it. We consider the Chieftainship as the cement binding the Nation together. We want to work with and through the Chieftainship and to strengthen it; not destroy it nor substitute something else in its place.[10]

The strategy to achieve a strengthened chieftainship centered on destroying the traditional base of the borena as a class in favour of the bureaucratization of its senior members. As first proposed by Resident Commissioner J.C.R. Sturrock in 1927, this involved, principally, abolishing the practice of placing and reducing the proliferating chiefs to a limited, government-approved number. In addition, Sturrock proposed to formulate a clear definition (and implicit limitation) of the judicial powers of the chiefs, replace the chiefs' customary right to retain court fines by their payment directly to the government, abolish the payment of fines in kind in favour of cash payments, and pay the chiefs a salary.[11]

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8. Lord Harlech to Resident Commissioner, 7 May, 1943. PRO DO 35/1176

9. Despatches from Lord Harlech, Report on the Basutoland tour, Jan. 7, 1942. PRO DO 116/8

10. Resident Commissioner to Regent's advisors, 7 June, 1944, PRO DO 35/1176

11. Sturrock's proposals, although rejected in 1929, were published six years later, possibly in preparation for the arrival of the Pim Commission. Basutoland. New Native Court Regulations (Morija, 1935)

This would have brought Native Administration in line with "all nations as they progress."[12]

Sturrock's proposals to reform the chieftainship were decisively routed by the chiefs with, it seems likely, massive popular support expressed through lipitso and the LLB.[13] The issue lay dormant until the Depression gave urgency to the need for some kind of action. Export earnings dropped by nearly two-thirds while government revenues fell by a quarter between 1929 and 1931.[14] During the famine of 1933, an estimated 35-40,000 Basotho died of starvation, typhus and a host of other new, poverty-related diseases.[15] Tens of thousands of others, including growing numbers of women, fled the territory as it became, in Sir Alan Pim's words, "a desert."[16] At this moment of crisis the assertively nationalist regime of General Hertzog came to power in South Africa to add considerable, often crude forms of political and economic pressure to Basutoland. Even more than his predecessors, Hertzog perceived his major mandate to be solving the problem of "poor whites" and, over the 1930s, sought to do so primarily at the expense of Africans. For example, state subsidies to commerical agriculture in South Africa increased by 400% over the 1930s, virtually eliminating the already slim opportunities for Basotho progressive farmers to export their grain surplus.[17] A whole host of new laws were enacted to restrict the movement of blacks, many of

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12. Ibid.

13. Kimble, "Clinging to the Chiefs." Sturrock retired from the scene soon after, while the status quo was further upheld in 1929 when the colonial courts threw their weight behind the Paramount Chief by confirming his choice to succeed as Ward Chief of Leribe. In so doing, the British also confirmed the principle of placing and the concentration of power in the Paramount Chief's hands. LNA S3/5/15/6

14. CAR 1931,

15. Report of Bishop Bonhomme, MMO 1936, 432

16. The Pim Report, 32

17. Stanley Greenberg, Race and State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives, (New Haven, 1980), 88

which were specially targetted against African women. For example, the 1923 Urban Areas Act was amended in 1930 to make it virtually legally impossible for an unmarried African woman to move to the cities.[18] In addition, Hertzog began to make blustering noises about deporting all Basotho labourers unless the British took concrete steps towards incorporating the territory to the Union.[19] The very survival of the colony seemed to many to be in question.

As well as a sense of urgency, the economic crisis also provided an opportunity to impose reforms by undermining the power of the chiefs to resist. Many chiefs and headmen suffered from the drought as literally millions of their cattle, sheep and horses died and they struggled to fulfill their traditional mandate to give relief to the destitute. Since the power to distribute productive resources (mafisa cattle, productive fields, and, through bohali, women) remained fundamental to the chiefs' ability to ensure the loyalty of their male subjects, the dimunition of these resources undermined the power base of the chieftainship and laid it open to renewed assault by the British.

This assault began with the Sir Alan Pim's commission to investigate the root causes of the territory's malaise and make recommendations for solutions. Pim toured the country in 1934 (although his final report relied very heavily upon the views garnered in Maseru).[20] The following year, Pim presented his recommendations which were, basically, the Sturrock proposals rehashed. To coat this bitter pill, however, Pim also recommended massive government investment to restore the vitality of agriculture in the country and halt, eventually to reverse, the spread of erosion. He also called for restrictions on European traders and the cultivation of a Basotho middle class, large increases in health and

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18. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women?"

19. Discussions with the Union of South Africa, 41-48

20. Pim quotes the Resident Commissioner's submission verbatim in much of his report. See PRO DO 119/1051

social welfare expenditures, and salary hikes "to attract suitable entrants" to the colonial service and improve its quality.[21]

Despite these promises, it was three years before the government felt confident enough to proceed with administrative reforms.[22] The Native Administration and Native Courts Proclamations of 1938 were enacted to define and limit the powers of the chiefs and their courts, including reducing their number from 1,331 to 107, and abolishing the practice of placing. Subsequent proclamations continued the process of reform by "democratizing" the credentials of the chiefs through the introduction of popularly elected "advisory and consultative" District Councils (1943), and instituting payment by salary through a Native Treasury (1946). In 1950 the chiefs' power to call matsema, compulsory labour, was abolished, while in 1954 the number of gazetted and salaried chiefs was further reduced to 63.

In colonial eyes, the select elite of reconstituted chiefs which would arise from such reforms would be fair judges, beyond the temptation of limpho ("gifts"). As such, they would inspire confidence in the administration of justice. They would also be "almost without exception keen and progressive farmers themselves and keen stock improvers."[23] Thus, the mass of the people would be inspired to responsible and

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21. The Pim Report, summarized in CAR 1938, 53-59

22. In his 1953 report, Hailey wondered whether this "cautious" approach was excessive (Hailey, Native Administration, 136). In his view, it stemmed from fear of sparking the opposition of the chiefs, and indeed, it was not until the Paramount Chief had been brought on side that the proposals were tabled before the BNC, that is, fully three years after Pim's recommendations had been published. How Griffiths was convinced to support basically the same proposals he had opposed in 1929, and to cajole or convince the other chiefs to accept them as well, is uncertain. Hailey alludes to a secret, informal understanding between the authorities and Griffith which basically offered him carte blanche to expand his own power in return for his support, a view shared by former BPA member Mosebi Damane (Interview, Ntate Damane). This interpretation is certainly plausible given that the concentration of power in the Paramountcy was precisely what happened over the next decade.

23. Despatches from Lord Harlech, Report on the Basutoland tour, 7 Jan., 1942. PRO DO 116/8

productive behaviour by the example of their traditional leaders.[24]

The new-style chief would also be capable of the ruthlessness required by the British to enforce the agricultural improvement and anti-erosion components of their development policy. Or, in the government's understated words, his role was "to prepare the way and to educate the anti-erosion scheme which would involve the disturbance of agricultural routine."[25] As the former High Commissioner later explained it, the "local headman" was "the real lynchpin in the soil conservation effort" as only he could ever be sufficiently alert to "small agricultural offences" like ploughing too close to a donga or stream.[26] Baring saw this man as crucial: "if he cannot or will not perform his function, then Basutoland is doomed."[27]

Equally important, although less openly acknowledged, was the role envisioned for the new-style chief in clamping down on the disruptive activities of Basotho women where the old-style patriarch had failed so miserably. To ensure social stability as these improvements took place, the new-style chief would ensure that "real customs" be enforced. Acting Resident Commissioner J.H. Sims informed the High Commissioner how the proposed administrative reforms in 1935 promised an effective means to accomplish this desired objective:

> In the past efforts have been made to get rid of the menace of women of ill-repute by having them removed to the villages not far from the boundaries of the Reserves where they have been

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24. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, PRO DO 119/1051

25. In this, "a strong lead was given by the Paramount Chief," (CAR 1938, 69) although to some his pedagogical method seemed rather unsophisticated: "'Nka u bulula," he is reported to have told his fellow councillors while making a gesture of firing a machine gun at them: "I'm going to shoot you down." (Interview, Ntate Damane). As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, the British were not above such tactics themselves, and used bribery, verbal abuse and the threat of execution to break the will of the leading opponents of the reforms.

26. Evelyn Baring, "Economic Development under the High Commission in South Africa," African Affairs 1952, 230

27. Ibid.

> able to continue their practices with little or no interference by the Headmen of the villages. Once the proposed system of indirect rule is introduced, it should be possible to exercise more control over persons of this type.[28]

Finally, it was hoped that the new-style chief would greatly improve the efficiency of tax collection, an essential component of Pim's report in that the proposed welfare and development expenditures could not otherwise be afforded. In all, these reforms:

> are regarded as essential preliminaries to undertaking any comprehensive scheme of development, if plans are to be carried out efficiently and economically with the good will and co-operation of the Native Authorities and the people, and if the social and economic advance made is to be of lasting value to the life of the community.[29]

If they could do this, the new-style chiefs would soon show themselves to be a model to the world (particularly South Africa) of "what modern British policy can make of a proud and progressive African people."[30]

The ambiguity of modernization as conceived and implemented by the British in this period is revealed by an underlying discourse of profound social conservatism. Beneath all the talk of fostering the "progressive" elements within the borena was an almost desperate hope that the chiefs could stem the rise of "unbalanced" sections of the community, that is, the aspirant elites. These men and women, most of whom were Protestants, tended to reject "real custom" and the laws to enforce it (like Proclamation #3 of 1915 on Native Women's Restriction). They were also regarded by the British with distrust for their political sentiments and opposition to the migrant labour system, and, consequently, were not at this time deemed suitable leadership material. On the contrary, as shown in the previous chapter, women were often regarded as a positive danger to the colony.

The administration's willingness to block the ambitions of these men

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28. Sims to High Commissioner, 27 April, 1935. PRO DO 119/1053, 3-4

29. CAR 1948, 102

30. Report of Lord Harlech's visit to Basutoland, 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/y701/1/1

and women was clearly evidenced by its continued incarceration and harassment of LLB leaders, and its consistent veto of the BPA's proposals for a partially elected council.[31] It also steadfastly refused to increase the numbers of educated Basotho in the administration. With regard to the police for instance, the Government Secretary specifically warned of the danger that too much education might cause the Mosotho constable "to become a member of the intelligentsia, withdrawn from the common herd."[32] Indeed, the High Commissioner pointedly stated his desire to keep "over-educated" elements out of more than a token position of influence by defending and even praising the chiefs: "With their inevitable human shortcomings, I would rather save the existing political and social order than trust to the problematic emergence of a Cleon."[33]

The danger of such a Cleon, as the British were discovering with Josiel Lefela of the LLB, was that he could so easily expose the self-serving hypocrisy and racism of the colonial officials. The British were conscious of the need to keep quiet about the deal they had struck with the senior chiefs from the moment they made it in 1915.[34] They were, therefore, particularly disturbed at the widespread and vocal support which Lefela drew from among women. Similarly the BPA, by advocating liberal reforms was also advocating greater legal rights for Christian women. While neither the LLB nor the BPA had consistent stances on women's emancipation, their overall effect in British eyes was to contribute to that end, undermining one of the pillars of the migrant labour system.

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31. The first such proposal was made in 1919. It was rejected then and in 1922, 1945 and no less than three times in 1952. Andrew Cohen, Report on Consititutional Reform and Chieftainship Affairs (Maseru, 1958)

32. Round Table Conference on Liretlo, Feb. 10, 1954. Liretlo file LEC archives, 35

33. That is, a demagogue with a commoner background. Lord Harlech, Report on Basutoland tour, 7 Jan. 1942. PRO DO 116/8, 112

34. See the Resident Commissioner's assessment that the only problem about the introduction of Proclamation 3 of 1915 was that "Mrs. Pankhurst... may break the truce." Despatch 982, 2 Dec. 1914, PRO DO 417/375

The desire to control women and youths runs throughout the administration's submissions to the Pim Commission. The Resident Commissioner, for example, praised the Tembus (a non-Sotho clan in the southeast of the country famous for their oppressively patriarchal social system) as more "moral" than the Sotho clans.[35] He also waxed reactionary in his analysis of the modern Mosotho man:

> One cannot help but be struck by the lawless state of mind so strongly in evidence these days among the young Basuto, showing itself in lack of respect to and intolerance of spirit towards their elders, culminating in an irresponsible and callous contempt for human life... [O]ne of the main causes is the fact that the Basuto youth of today goes to the circumcision school at a far earlier age than his father and grandfather did, and as a contributary cause, that the chiefs do not exercise the same supervision and vigilance over the schools as formerly.
>
> The old hardening processes of the school which formed their chief merit are not continued. Discipline is no longer knocked into the pupils, and the Mosotho emerges having learned a lot of filth but no restraint, full of himself and the idea that he is a man and can take his place in his tribe as such. In reality, he is a callow youth, with no sense of responsibility and ignorant of what his new status implies.[36]

It was, of course, impossible for the British publicly to advocate bringing back lapsed pagan rituals. What could be done, however, was to limit the damage supposedly being wrought by Christian "demagogues" and ineffective chiefs. This tack was then pursued, in line with similar support for patriarchal authority that had characterized Indirect Rule in Nyasaland, the Rhodesias and elsewhere in Africa in the 1920s, by support for the most hardline interpretation of "traditional" gender relations in the colonial courts.[37] In many cases, the British found themselves in the

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35. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, 11. PRO DO119/1051

36. Ibid., 4. The Resident Commissioner went on to blame the lack of character development among Basotho boys, with all its disastrous social and economic consequences, to the fact that women now "monopolize" their upbringing and the affection of the father is consequently reduced (page 14). Nostalgia for the superior, "quasi-military" discipline of lebollo schools continued to be voiced by colonial officials as late as the 1950s, for example, during the Round Table Conference on Liretlo, Liretlo file, LEC archives

37. Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order; K. Mann and R. Roberts, eds., Law in Colonial Africa (London, 1991)

position of having to remind the chiefs not to be too indulgent of women's non-traditional behaviour, and chastising those chiefs who erred against "tradition" by giving in to women's demands.

To begin with, Basotho women were increasingly opting for the Christian route to emancipation (that is, using their conversion to appeal decisions made in customary law on the grounds that, as "civilized" people, they should properly be judged in Roman Dutch law). The Resident Commissioner in 1938 explicitly stated that thenceforward, in ambiguous cases, custom took precedence over Roman Dutch.[38] Thus, even if a woman was married in church and lived in a demonstrably Christian manner, if any cattle had been exchanged, she was barred from pursuing her case in Roman Dutch law. In other words, she remained a minor, subject to the will of her male guardian.

'Me Mamosala was one of the first victims of this limitation. She argued her case in 1942 on the grounds that not only was she a Christian and therefore (she felt) not subject to customary law, but also that she was an independent woman: "Mosala cannot state anything which he did for me all his life, even a stick of matches to scratch my ear." The court rejected both arguments and ordered her to obey her son's wishes.[39]

Even in cases of simple interpretation of customary law, the colonial administration took an interventionist stance to ensure that "tradition" be adhered to. In 1943, Mofumahali Mamohlalefi Bereng had allowed the daughter of a widow to inherit half of the latter's property in recognition of the daughter's years of sacrifice to support her mother. The other half was given to a male relative who had totally neglected his customary responsibilities to the widow and her family for years. The

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38. In the same session, the BNC approved an amendment which actually made it illegal for widows to remarry unless they had originally been married by Christian rites. The Resident Commissioner expressed his satisfaction: "I am sure that no Church or District Officer would wish to perform a marriage which is against native custom, and, therefore, this amendment should be welcomed by everybody." BNC 1938, 186

39. LNA HC 27/1942

daughter appealed, seeking the full inheritance on the grounds that she had worked to deserve it. The High Court disappointed her, to say the least, not only by rejecting her non-traditional argument but by overruling Mamchlalefi's compromise decision. The High Court ruled that a daughter could never, by customary law, inherit anything and the full inheritance was given to the man.[40]

Over the years, there were many other cases where women were chastised by the courts for "using unnecessary force" to defend themselves from abusive husbands,[41] ploughing without first getting their guardian's permission,[42] or causing their murderous or child-stealing husbands "extreme provocation."[43] 'Manako, a widow who accused her son of disposing of the family sheep without consulting her (as was his moral obligation under customary law) was upbraided by the judge: "It is not in order for you to speak in that manner."[44] At other times, the colonial courts supported the right of the husband to use violence against his wife. After being ordered to go back to her husband, despite scars and witnesses to the severity of the beatings he had given her, Emma Teiso scoffed at British justice:

> [These] assaults prove that a person should live like a slave if at all she were married... The court says it is not an uncommon thing among the Basotho women to have quarrels with their husbands. Is this the protection which the court exercises to us the women of Basutoland?[45]

The colonial magistrates also questioned the severity of punishments sometimes meted out by Native Courts to men who abused or exploited women.

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40. LNA HC 22/1943

41. See, for example, LNA HC 61/1950; LNA HC 92/1940

42. LNA HC 14/1942

43. As was reported in a murder trial where the judge saved the accused from his own testimony. Basutoland News 27 May, 1958

44. LNA HC 22/1941. She lost her case as her son was declared head of the family.

45. LNA HC 3/1933

In one notable case, a man was found guilty of illegally seizing cattle from his cousin's wife and three successive Native Courts rejected his appeals. Finally, as punishment for his harassment of the woman, the Paramount Chief increased the fine. The man appealed this decision to the High Court where he found a more sympathetic audience. The Resident Commissioner concluded that the man "was acting in good faith" and reduced the fine to a token amount.[46]

Nor were the British shy about informing the Basotho what their "real customs" were. In one case, a widow had been declared by her chief to be legal heir to her deceased husband's estate. Her son's appeal was rejected in three successive Native Courts, including the highest one, at Matsieng. The son then appealed to the Judicial Commissioner where he at last got satisfaction. There, the younger Patrick Duncan rejected the Paramount's earlier decision as "not only contradictory and unintelligible but vague" and an erroneous interpretation of Sesotho custom.[47]

The High Court sometimes even rejected the advice of its own "Native Assessors" if it deemed them to be too liberal-minded. The Native Assessor was normally relied upon to interpret from Sesotho to English and to render trustworthy accounts of legal or customary precedents among the Basotho to the judge. In a 1939 case of a woman suing a man for seduction, the Assessor advised that "a widow in this position has a right to claim damages. She takes her husband's place and is in the same position as a man." The judge rejected this, and the woman's appeal, on the grounds that she was not living at her late husband's kraal. That is, because she was breaking tradition, she was implicitly culpable![48] As the judge concluded in yet another High Court case, after having ruled in favour of

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46. LNA HC 12/1938

47. LNA JC 158/51. The mother appealed this however and the High Court eventually supported her (LNA HC 22/52).

48. LNA HC 222/1939, cited in "Documents and Letters exhibited in Chief Bereng vs Chieftainess 'Manstebo" LNA HC 27/1942

a son who was trying to prevent his mother from using the estate of her deceased husband:

> The Courts should be careful not to interfere too much with the rights of the head of the family, otherwise it may jeopardize his authority and cause needless disputes, for it would encourage the mother or a younger brother to dispute with the heir.[49]

As is clear by now, however, the British in this period did interfere by tending to favour the strictest possible interpretation of "tradition," particularly in regard to women. This did not escape the attention of either Basotho women or men. By making women's grievances public, Basotho men helped curb the administration's tendency to restrict Basotho women's emancipation. Frequently, therefore, when the British did introduce legal changes which favoured greater rights or mobility for Basotho women, they were responding to Basotho requests rather than initiating changes on their own purported principles.

For example, Chief Samuel Matete told the BNC that women were "crying for justice" to be allowed to inspect the property of an heir (often their sons).[50] He urged that the government amend the law so that mothers be legally recognized as an "other relative" and the British responded positively. The British also responded positively to the requests of the BPA in 1953 to allow widows both to inherit by virtue of a will and to make wills themselves. Another key case was Monyake vs Monyake 1953, which established the principle of a mature but unmarried woman's right to own land or make business decisions independently of her legal guardian.[51]

Three proclamations also established the principle that the government would intervene to protect women from sexual violence or exploitation and neglect. In 1939, the Employment of Women and Children

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49. LNA HC 22/1941

50. BNC 1950, 115

51. Seeiso et al, "The Legal Situation of Women in Lesotho," 57

Proclamation limited the conditions under which women and children could be employed, including setting a minimum wage. In 1949, the Basuto Women and Girls Protection Proclamation made it a criminal offence for any man to have "unlawful carnal connection" with a woman, theoretically punishable by up to a draconian £500 or six years in prison. In 1955, the Deserted Wives and Children Proclamation made it an offence, punishable by up to £100, for a man to show "wilful neglect" in his responsibilities to support his family. This included assault and habitual drunkenness as well as outright desertion. Again, however, this was not a British initiative but a response to an existing demand by Basotho women. The Judicial Commissioner, granting separated women the right to take their cases to the colonial courts, commented that "native Courts are full of cases of a wife suing her husband for maintenance."[52]

These formal legal protections were of little use to the great majority of women. Precisely as had been the case when the Cape introduced its emancipatory laws in the 1870s, most Basotho women remained ignorant of colonial law, and too afraid or too poor to challenge men and their families in the colonial courts. Moreover, while it also entirely suited the administration that it publicly appear to favour women's rights, in practice it did whatever it could to keep most women from taking advantage of them. These women tended to be the poor and the most frequently victimized. Thus the proclamations to protect Basotho women against defilement, assault, and neglect were effectively undermined by the exclusion of women "of known immoral character" or those who could be "proved to have committed adultery." Since, almost by definition, any woman in the camps was a prostitute, the state thus extended to abusive and negligent men an extraordinarily effective defence--the victim's lack of moral standing. Given the prudishness of the judicial commissioners, it is not surprising that few convictions were ever made.

The courts also favoured the abandonment of "exotic" forms of

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52. LNA HC 3/1951

customary marriage which were seen to exploit women (and complicate succession disputes), again responding to trends that were already evident among the Basotho. The first such case was over the crucial issue of succession to the Paramountcy in 1942. Chief Bereng claimed that it was his right to succeed to the position on the basis of his right to kenela his brother's widow, 'Mantsebo. She refused. Chief Justice C.W.H. Lansdowne was summoned to investigate whether her refusal could be countenanced by law. He concluded that 1) kenela was a "dying and decadent custom" and 2) women were not sui juris and could consequently hold administrative office, act as guardians of children and control and administer property.[53] Similar decisions followed soon after, on the principle of trying to rationalize succession, that "woman-woman" marriage had "insufficient evidence of custom,"[54] and that a woman had the right to refuse "marriage to the grave" and seantlo, that is, replacing a deceased sister as her husband's wife.[55]

In one area, the British were more reluctant to re-interpret "tradition" in the manner proposed by the chiefs. That is, should they condone the practice, in growing evidence since the 1920s, of women becoming chiefs? In this regard, as much as anywhere else, the marena held a remarkably fluid concept of custom which offered women opportunities denied by British expectation of custom.[56] This fluidity allowed the chiefs in the BNC to argue custom both for and against allowing women to be chiefs. Chief Goliath Mohale, for example, to the evident disbelief of the Resident Commissioner, held in 1943 that it was "usual for a woman to

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53. LNA HC 27/42

54. In 1950. Hammett, "Some Notes on the Concept of Custom in Lesotho," Journal of African Law 15 (1971), 270-71

55. Ibid

56. That is, that a custom was only a custom when it could be shown to have "continued without interruption since its immemorial origin." Ian Hammett, "Some Notes," 267

reign" according to tradition.[57] Nqhaei Selebalo described the succession of widows, and even of junior widows from senior widows, as "an old and customary practice."[58]

Many other chiefs were amenable to the advance of women into the chieftainship, not only because they saw this as having a long historical precedent, but also because they saw that women chiefs made good administrators. The practicality of these men clearly overcame their otherwise deeply sexist prejudices:

> I know the views of many Councillors who will say that women have not sufficient intelligence. I agree, but does that danger not happen because of the Basuto themselves? Are there not also men who have not sufficient intelligence?[59]

At other times, the chiefs were pressured by the threats of the BPA or the LLB. MacDonald Phasumane of the former warned the chiefs that should they block the motion to allow women to become chiefs in their own right, rather than as regents, he would "preach the entire length and breadth of the District that some men seek oppression and slavery of women."[60] Perhaps this was in their minds when they voted by a narrow margin to support the motion. The flustered response of the Resident Commissioner is most telling:

> You will forgive me for saying this but I think this is a very bad decision. It certainly does not accord with practice in Europe, as some speakers tried to make out, and experience in Basutoland since I have been here shows that while some Chieftainesses might be all right, a woman is a woman, and she has not the strength of character nor the force to enforce a good discipline nor is hers the sex mentally endowed with these necessary characteristics... [61]

This was a rare public demonstration of the private aversion by the colonial authorities to the advance of women into the chieftainship.

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57. LNA HC 6/1943

58. BNC 1950, 87

59. BNC 1949, 196

60. BNC 1950, 93

61. BNC 1950, 95-6

Since, however, they could not intervene directly against the expressed choice of the majority of Basotho chiefs, the British simply ignored the Council's decision and it was not implemented until after independence, seventeen years later.[62]

The British also ignored the Council's recommendation that women chiefs be paid equal salaries to men.[63] The British, in their obsession with good local government, simply could not believe that women were capable of the tasks demanded of a modern, bureaucratic chief. The Moore Report on Constitutional Reform in 1954 elucidated the reasons for the administration's distrust of women chiefs:

> From the point of view of practical adminstration it is undeniable that under present conditions in Basutoland, a woman, whether regent or Chieftainess in her own right, is severely handicapped by reason of her sex in carrying out the strenuous duties of her office.[64]

Although Moore did not go so far as to recommend banning women from the chieftainship (his obvious preference), he did propose that a woman chief be compelled to have an officially gazetted male advisor. This man would be paid one third of the woman chief's salary which, in turn, would be "reduced accordingly."[65]

In addition to anxieties about the professionalism or ability of women chiefs, Basutoland officials tended to suspect that women were behind what became internationally a deeply embarrassing development. In the period from 1940-55, over 120 Basotho were mutilated and then murdered

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62. Chieftainship Act 22/1968, cited by Poulter, Family Law. It was, in fact, very unusual for the government simply to ignore a vote in the BNC, for it generally acted quickly upon the recommendations of the Council in this period. This underscores the aversion of women chiefs by colonial officials and the relative indifference of Basotho men (who did not pursue the matter).

63. BNC 1947, 648

64. Sir Henry added that "women were ordinarily weaker vessels, and liable to be unduly influenced by a favourite or advisor." Henry Moor [sic], Report of the Administrative Reforms Committee (Maseru, 1954), 8 [henceforth, The Moore Report].

65. The Moore Report, 12

to obtain body parts for liretlo, or "ritual murder." This, so it was claimed, magically promoted the interests of the murderer. From the beginning, the government suspected that the chiefs were behind the "epidemic" of murders since, in the climate of insecurity created by the administrative reforms, many feared that they would be disenfranchised.[66] Liretlo was therefore alleged to be a magical means ensure that a chief obtain official recognition.[67]

Dozens of executions were carried out in the government's attempt to suppress the practice. Included among those hung were two of the most senior Sons of Moshesh (Chiefs Bereng and Gabashane in 1949), as well as several women (chiefs like 'Mathabo Tautona and 'Mamakhabane Boshoane or "witches" like 'Matsile Tsilo).[68] The murders continued, however, adding urgency to the government's efforts to whip the chieftainship into shape. As the Resident Commissioner saw it, "The Chieftainship can and should be saved. The people still want it but they want it cleansed, reformed and strong."[69]

In their private ruminations about the cause of this "epidemic," British officials wondered whether women, not least of all the Regent 'Mantsebo, had "worn away...the patriarchal character of the chieftainship" and so given rise to the jealousies, uncertainty and unrest which led to liretlo.[70] There was speculation that liretlo was "a clear

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66. Commissioner of Police report of 30 May, 1947 cited by Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, report on ritual murder, 9 Mar. 1949, PRO DO 119/1376. As early as 1946, that is, prior to either the police or the official investigation, the Dominions Office already assumed that it was "a Chief (or Chiefs) at the back of the trouble." Memo on ritual murder, 17 Dec. 1946. PRO DO 35/1177/y835/1

67. This conclusion was also reached by the official enquiry into liretlo by the anthropologist G.I. Jones, Medicine Murder, 65

68. Jingoes, A Chief; Basutoland News, 28 Jan. 1958

69. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 9 Mar. 1949, PRO DO 119/1376

70. Draft Report of the Liretlo Committee 10 Feb. 1954, 5. Liretlo file, LEC archives.

and safe way to revolt," "a disguised revolution" against "corrupt, fantastic, deficient, inefficient chiefs."[71] Although the government did not find any evidence to suggest that women chiefs were guilty of liretlo in disproportionate numbers, or for that matter that women chiefs actually were regarded by the Basotho as less competent than men, the internal report on the persistence of the murders nonetheless concluded that: "There can be little doubt, however, that in most cases the fact of a woman being chief is bound to encourage intrigue."[72]

The desire to modernize Indirect Rule lay behind the government's attempt to ban women from the chieftainship altogether. Although the motion to do so was opposed by the majority of chiefs in the BNC in 1953, the Moore Report was commissioned in part to find more subtle means to achieve the same objective. This belief that women chiefs were undermining the efficiency of Indirect Rule was in sharp contrast to the views of many Basotho men who felt that women's purported spirituality was a powerful positive influence against liretlo. The anti-liretlo activities of women chiefs were also almost universally respected and led to calls in the BNC by disillusioned Basotho men for an increase in the number of female chiefs.[73] There were also calls by Basotho men for women to take a leading role in "vigilance committees" because, as Z. Mangeola put it, "we have more confidence in them than the male in matters of this nature."[74]

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Although the British failed to block the advance of women into the chieftainship, the class alignments which resulted from, or were facilitated by the administrative reforms and the subsequent anti-liretlo

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71. Ibid, page 1

72. Ibid. 23.

73. See for example, BNC 1953, 90. Interestingly, one of the most reactionary voices speaking against women was the member for the Progressive Association, B.K. Taoana. BNC 1953. 90-91

74. BNC 1952, 443

campaign had great long-term significance to gender relations Lesotho. This final section will elaborate how British efforts to exploit liretlo for their own ends fuelled the early nationalist movement and the divisive scramble by Basotho men to win the political loyalties of the majority of the population, women. It will examine also how the anti-liretlo campaign hastened the process of decolonization by discrediting modernized Indirect Rule while serving to bring women into the public political sphere as never before.

Liretlo involved unusually gruesome violence which victimized both men and women.[75] It had especially demoralizing effects in some districts, such as TY, where people became afraid to go out at night, and where a summons from the chief could strike terror into the bravest souls.[76] Yet while embarrassed by the publicity attending to such atrocities and therefore eager to stamp them out, the British also sought to profit from the murders by justifying an even faster pace of reforms. In the words of the High Commissioner, "the practice of ritual murder must be broken, but efforts must also be made to avoid breaking the chieftainship in the process."[77] Not surprisingly, the official report upon the murders laid primary blame upon the very "anachronistic chiefs" and "subsidized" peasants which the government was seeking to eliminate.[78]

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[75]. Of 93 suspected victims listed in the official report upon liretlo, 40 were females. G.I. Jones. Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of 'Diretlo' Murders in Basutoland (London, 1951)

[76]. See Jingoes, A Chief; Baerlocher, Hardegger, 38, and the Codex of almost any Catholic mission during these years. A number of Sesotho novels touch on this topic as well.

[77]. Baring to Resident Commissioner, n.d. 1949. PRO DO 35/4025

[78]. Jones, Medicine Murder, 11. Despite Jones' worthy academic reputation, it is hard not to escape the feeling that he was used by colonial authorities to prove what they already suspected and hence justify what they already wanted to do. Certainly, many of his prior assumptions accorded with those of the administration officials. For example, by "subsidised peasants" Jones was not referring simply to their reliance upon migrant labour remittances (thus bringing the migrant labour system into question) but to the fact that the Basotho were protected from free market forces by traditional land tenure. Also, as Jones admits, he did not consult the chiefs for their views in his investigation, relying

With such a double agenda, British attempts to suppress liretlo were neither effective nor reassuring. On the contrary, they served to exacerbate many of the underlying class tensions which were most likely the root cause of liretlo. The police allegedly used physical torture to extract confessions,[79] and were empowered to impose collective punishment on entire villages when they suspected a chief.[80] More insidiously, they accepted the evidence of accomplices to convict and hang chiefs. This effectively allowed anyone with a grievance against a chief to come forward with a story of how he had carried out a murder on the chief's command. The self-confessed murderer was not only granted immunity from prosecution but given high credibility and monetary reward. No corpse need ever be produced for charges of murder to be laid and upheld. The accused was considered guilty until he or she could prove otherwise. As the judge responsible for prosecution reportedly remarked, there was consequently "an amount of perjury which is positively alarming."[81]

Many Basotho today believe that the whole anti-liretlo campaign was a cynical, if not diabolical plot by the British to destroy those elements of the chieftaincy which were resisting British plans for modernization or

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instead on the "common people and the 'intelligentsia'" (and, informally and unacknowledged, the police and government officials--see, for example, his apologia for the government on page 64 of his report).

79. BNC 1949, 31; Mohlabani 3/7&8 (Aug. 1957), 11-13

80. Proclamation 5 of 1948 stated that "all adult men shall be deemed to have committed an offence" unless they had a watertight alibi or turned crown witness (Proclamations and Notices 1948). Jones's report emphasized the need for even more, unspecified "punitive measures to suppress the murder." Jones, Medicine Murders, v

81. Justice DeBeer (4 Dec. 1946) quoted in Mohlabani 4/10-12 (Dec. 1958), 10. He added that crown witness were "apparently eager to lie about any point where they think such a lie would prejudice the accused." Nevertheless, executions were carried out. Even Jones admitted (but then dismissed) that the chiefs regarded the British to be using "underhand and immoral" methods in their anti-liretlo campaign. Jones, Medicine Murders, 64

incorporation with South Africa.[82] If so, it had mixed results. Some recalcitrant chiefs were indeed removed while the threat of execution based on circumstantial evidence and perjured testimony terrorized others into "moderation."[83] On the whole, however, the anti-liretlo campaign made the chiefs more determined than ever to fight for the defence of their independence. The most threatened, the minor chiefs, became politicized by it in a way which quickly began to unravel the careful weave of modernized Indirect Rule.

The End of Indirect Rule

The minor chiefs turned at first to the LLB whose leader, Josiel Lefela, was outspoken and direct in his attacks upon the British. After 1952, the country's first mass nationalist party, the Basutoland African Congress (BAC) took up the same cause and attracted an increasing number of chiefs. Indeed, the BAC leader, Ntsu Mokhehle, exactly took the old LLB line that the anti-liretlo campaign was a plot by the British to prepare the territory for incorporation to South Africa. The first political cause of the BAC/BCP thus helped to lay the foundation for a political alliance between the chiefs and elements of the aspirant elite which was to shake the ability of the British to impose their social, political or economic plans upon Basutoland.

At the same time as the anti-liretlo campaign was under way, other members of the disgruntled aspirant elite began to articulate their grievances in much more radical language than hitherto. Most noteworthy among them was the teacher Bennett Khaketla, whose periodical Mohlabani ("The Warrior") began its forthright exposure and mockery of British rule

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82. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle, Matete Majara, Patrick Lehloenya. See also Makatolle and Mohlabani for contemporary views.

83. Of the latter, a noteworthy failure was to cow 'Mantsebo, the Regent (see below, Chapter Ten). Officials also expressed dissappointment that they were unable to make liretlo charges stick against Josiel Lefela (a political dissident) and several chiefs who were renowned as stock thieves. It could be, however, that the very nearness which these men came to execution had the desired effect.

in 1954. In addition, nascent trade unions were adopting more militant stances. Teachers, and members of the LLB and BAC, were accused of instigating student protests and political acts of arson.

Such rising militancy, and the threats by the LLB and the BAC/BCP to take their protests against the anti-liretlo campaign to London or even the United Nations, was a direct challenge to the viability of Indirect Rule in Basutoland. The government was also sensitive to the renewed bluster of the Nationalist regime in South Africa which, in the early 1950s, imperiously began to demand incorporation once again. At the same time, the mass nationalist organization taking place in South Africa in reaction to the imposition of apartheid laws gave the administration cause to fear that Basotho men would be "infected" by "communism" and spread the virus to Basutoland.

Caught off guard by the rapidity of these changes, and the virulence of Basotho attacks upon them, the colonial authorities had to scramble to devise ways to devolve power to reliable, or "moderate" Africans who would calm the political waters. Their preferred strategy was to attempt to take the wind out of the radical sails of Mokhehle and Khaketla et al, by proposing their own, "democratic" reforms following the example of decolonization which had already begun in West Africa. To that end Henry Moore, the former governor of Kenya, was commissioned in 1954 to conduct an inquiry into constitutional proposals and make recommendations for change. He was specifically instructed to discuss everything but the creation of a Legislative Council.[84]

Even before Moore began his investigation, it was obvious to almost every one except the Basutoland authorities that there were not many "moderate" Basotho left who would accept the exclusion of a Legco from the commission's inquiry. After decades of insult and frustration, the

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[84]. According to the Resident Commissioner, the Moore Commission was "expressly instructed that they must allow no discussion on the subject of a LegCo. This wrecked the Moore Commission from the start." n.d. 1955, Arrowsmith to Scrivener, Arrowsmith papers, box 3/2, Rhodes House

aspirant elite was largely radicalized and the BPA had declined to a "negligible minority of toadies."[85] By the mid-50s, Protestant teachers and civil servants were nearly all BAC members or supporters. The Protestant teacher's association (BANTA), for example, was entirely dominated by the BAC, its leaders simultaneously sitting on the executive of the party. Despite its own suspicions that the "overwhelming majority" of Basotho desired an elected Legco and would not accept anything less,[86] the government went ahead with its proposals for a limited devolution of power. Colonial officials still believed that "good government" consistent with a stable migrant labour system could best be achieved though democratized and progressive chiefs.

One of the reasons the Basutoland officials were so reluctant to give up on the chiefs was that, despite liretlo and many other frustrations, they remained basically satisfied with their version of modernized Indirect Rule. First, it is clear that they never fully believed their own propaganda about the ineffectiveness or criminality of the traditional elites. Indeed, their confidential reports upon the senior marena indicated that they considered only a minority to be bad chiefs.[87] Second, modernized Indirect Rule as instituted in 1938 had been remarkably successful in raising tax revenue, nearly doubling the collection of Native tax in its first year of operation.[88] The chiefs on the whole were also regarded as doing an acceptable, if not positively admirable job

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85. Mohlabani 2/2 (1956), 12. An indication of the mass appeal of the BPA can be gauged by the fact that in 1960 it won precisely 231 votes out of over 35,000 cast. Leeman, Azania, 142

86. Resident Commissioner to High Commission, 10 Feb. 1954. Hector papers, box 2, Rhodes House.

87. For example, in the 1940 report on 28 of the most important chiefs, the Resident Commissioner considered that only six had an alcohol problem (which, as shown by the case of Paramount Chief Griffith, was not necessarily a problem from the British point of view). Only nine chiefs were described in clearly negative terms. "Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland." PRO DO 119/1135

88. CAR 1938, 54

of enforcing soil conservation.[89]

Although their efficacy in controlling the efflux of women was less praiseworthy in colonial eyes, the government still regarded the chiefs as an essential and potentially effective means to do so. As late as 1958, the Resident Commissioner was still urging the chiefs "to do everything possible to stop Basuto, particularly Basuto women, from leaving the Territory."[90]

When the Moore Report finally came out, it proved to be the last gasp by the "old school" of colonial officials intending to keep Basutoland out of "the hands of the Fenner Brockways and the BAC."[91] Moore opted in his report to heed the advice of the remnants of the BPA, that is, members of the "moderate" educated elite. These men, through the periodical Letsatsi, argued for "direct rule" and closer British tutelage rather than any further devolution of power.[92] Moore did not go quite so far. He merely recommended a very cautious and limited expansion of local government.[93]

To the surprise of the colonial administration, Moore's report was greeted with emphatic scorn by the BNC when it was presented for approval in 1955. To avoid the humiliation of what would have been an almost

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89. "This work has only been possible through the co-operation of the chiefs. If we lost that co-operation, we are likely to see the loss of much, if not all that we have done. We would see the maintenance of conservation neglected and we might well see existing works broken down. That indeed would give the Union a real reason to take over Basutoland." Resident Commissioner to High Commission, n.d. 1955, Arrowsmith papers, box 3/2, Rhodes House.

90. BNC 1958, 76

91. E.P.Arrowsmith memo on Conference of District Officers, page 5, 10 Feb. 1954. Hector papers, box 2, Rhodes House. Brockway was the main Labour Party critic of colonialism, renowned for his radical pro-Africanist statements and activities.

92. Letsatsi, reprinting the BPA's submission to the Pim Commission in 1934, August 1955. The popularity of these ideas can be judged by the Progressive Party's dismal performance in its first and only electoral contest. See footnote 85.

93. The Moore Report

unanimous vote against the proposals, the outraged Resident Commissioner, G.M. Hector, illegally closed off debate and stormed out of the council chamber, denouncing the counsellors as "naughty boys,"[94] Shortly afterwords, Hector was retired from his post by the Dominions Office and a new commission was promised which would be open to all the proposals the Basotho wished, including that for a Legislative Council and self-government.

The rejection of the Moore Report was a major defeat for the British authorities in Basutoland that "modernized" Indirect Rule was thoroughly and finally discredited. Faced with the political alliance of radical elements of the aspirant elite and the chieftaincy, the British were compelled to concede what only three years earlier they had considered "could only lead to disaster"[95] Preparation for self-government demanded a major policy shift centering on rapid constitutional and economic movement which could co-opt or otherwise foster "moderation" among the petty bourgeois nationalist leaders who seemed most likely to gain power from any form of democratic transition.

The difficulty, from the British point of view, was how to ensure that these new men collaborated with the very system which had until then largely frozen them out of power and frequently subjected them to humiliating and racist treatment? In Basutoland after 1956, much the same strategy was followed as had been considered successful in the Gold Coast.[96] This model of fostering "good government" began with the democratic involvement of Basotho of all classes in discussions of constitutional change. Andrew Cowen, a respected lawyer from South Africa, was appointed to tour the country and oversee the formation of a number of

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94. As reported in Mohlabani 1/5 (June 1955), 10

95. Notes of the Chief Secretary's visit to Basutoland, Mar. 1952, page 5, Arrowsmith Papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House.

96. John Flint, "Planned Decolonization and its Failure in British Africa," African Affairs 82/328 (1983), 389-411

sub-committees on what the Basotho desired in terms of government. Cowen eventually heard testimony from over 300 men and his report in 1958 honestly and faithfully reflected their consensus.[97] It was overwhelmingly approved by the BNC leading to the election by secret ballot of District Councils governments in 1960. These were given greatly expanded powers over previous District Councils, the objective being to train Africans in the exercise of fiscal responsibility and the parliamentary process. The District Councils were also given the power to elect 40 members, or half of the new Legislative Council which itself was allowed to elect three of four members of an advisory Executive Council.

At the same time, the Africanization of the administration was speeded up and Africans were given greater opportunities to have input in the decision-making process at the national level, mainly through "select committees" to investigate and make recommendations on a number of specific reform questions (1961-62). A commission of enquiry was launched to consult the widest number of Basotho possible about their views of constitutional development (1962-3) which, after negotiations with the political parties (1963-4), led to the promulgation of a constitution which proposed an elected parliament exercising full self-government leading to independence at its own discretion (1964).

In conjunction with these political changes, new, albeit still limited, economic opportunities were created for suitably capitalist-oriented and otherwise "moderate" men. These came through state sponsorship of co-operatives, "development" schemes, and the liberalization of trade license laws. The European trading community, particularly the Frasers, joined in this effort (at the appeal of the government) to cultivate an African petty bourgeoisie by encouraging

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97. Andrew Cowen, Report on Constitutional Reform and Chieftainship Affairs, [hereafter, The Cowen Report] (Maseru, 1958), 81. Cowen also sought the opinions of two women, both chiefs.

African managers and "independents."[98] By 1960 there were an estimated 3,000 Basotho with trading licences.[99]

Even as Cowen began his work in Basutoland, the sense that real political transition was underway sparked the creation of a number of new political parties. As already mentioned, party politics in Lesotho had actually begun with the formation of the BAC by Ntsu Mokhehle in 1952. Mokhehle, a member of the Youth League of African National Congress (ANC) during his years at Fort Hare University in the 1940s, had also been a member of the LLB. In 1957, that association's aging leader, Josiel Lefela, symbolically "handed the torch" over to the BAC which became, shortly after, the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP).[100] In 1957, Chief Samual Matete with other senior chiefs founded the Marematlou Party, whose main issue was the removal of the Regent in favour of her ward and his constitution as an executive monarch. In 1958, "Christian Democractic" elements in the BCP split from it to form the Basutoland National Party (BNP). Its Basotho founders were devoted Catholics, pre-eminently Leabua Jonathon, a minor chief and advisor to the Regent, and Gabriel Manyeli, a Catholic teacher.

The BCP handily won the first national elections in 1960, taking control of most of the District Councils and winning a large majority of the elected seats in the Legco. It immediately demanded independence. As movement in that direction speeded up, however, the party suffered a number of schisms. Most important of these arose from the expulsion or desertion of some of the most educated and, from the British point of view, most "reasonable" radicals, including Ellen 'Maposholi Molapo,

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98. Danziger, A Trader's Century, 3

99. Basutoland, Basutoland (Morija, 1960), 7

100. See Leeman, Azania, for a detailed, if partisan account of the BCP's development, and Edgar, Prophets with Honour, for an account of the relationship between the LLB and the BAC.

Bennett Khaketla, Seth Makotoko and Robert Matji.[101] A new and bruising era of partisan politics had begun. Before examining how Basotho women demanded, and won, a prominent role in the public, political sphere in these years, it is important to understand the changes in economic "development" policies which closely related to Britain's efforts to modernize and "moderate" Lesotho's political elite.

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[101]. These dissidents joined with Matete's royalist party in 1962 to form the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) in a short-lived marriage of convenience. The MFP's radical wing called for a democratic socialist program along the lines of the Freedom Charter of the ANC, while its conservative wing called for a return to BaKoena stewardship. What united them briefly was loyalty to the notion of monarchy as the symbol of Basotho nationhood. See Khaketla, Lesotho 1970, for an insider's account of the rise and fall of the MFP.

Chapter Seven: Of Donkeys, Dongas and Domesticity: Gender and Colonial "Development" Initiatives, 1930-65

Intimately connected with administrative reform to modernize Indirect Rule in Lesotho was the notion of economic and social development. Indeed, as we have seen colonial officials from the late 1920s identified soil erosion control as essential to the survival of the nation and effective chiefs as essential to erosion control. The Pim Report also quite explicitly called for hugely increased government expenditures on "development and welfare," warning that attempts to enhance the effectiveness of the chiefs would certainly fail unless accompanied by concrete and sincere demonstrations of Britain's good intentions. Later, when colonial policy towards the chiefs finally shifted and the British accepted the need to foster a "moderate" petty bourgeoisie, "development" necessarily had to be adapted to the change. This chapter will examine the gendered, contradictory and changing nature of "development" initiatives as practiced by the colonial state in the periods of modernized Indirect Rule and preparation for self-government.[1]

Colonial "Development": Basotho Perspectives

Colonial "development," such as it was, scarcely existed between 1884 and the 1920s. The first efforts were made to redress the destruction being wreaked by the general colonial policy of "laissez-faire" only began in the mid-1920s. These were largely token, however, particularly in the face of unchecked settlement of the Malutis. For example, in 1924 the government sent four young men to South Africa to qualify as agricultural demonstrators who, upon graduation, gave lectures and demonstrations of modern agricultural practices on 25 to 30 fields per year.[2] The Paramount

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[1]. "Development" is used here in the colonial sense of tsoelopele or progress, with its intimations of technical advance and "civilization" (that is, Westernization) and ntlafatso or "betterment" (that is more scientifically rational, technical and sophisticated). For an excellent analysis of the assumptions behind the discourse of "development" (and "aid") in the contemporary period, see Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine

[2]. CAR 1930, 10. Lesotho had a population at that time of approximately 350,000 "peasants." Census 1921. 18

Chief, meanwhile, sent a few men at the government's request "to keep an eye on this...grave evil."[3]

As for infrastructure, the government maintained a few bridges and a few hundred kilometres of roads of "disappointingly low standard."[4] These were not only deteriorating in the early 1930s as a result of poor construction and declining expenditure upon them, but they were also known to be a major cause of erosion. Most of the bridle paths and feeder roads in the mountains were built and maintained by private enterprise (the traders), just as the education of the Basotho was almost entirely left in the hands of the missionaries.

The Pim Report sparked a major transformation in the government's attitude towards its own role in fostering economic development. Above all, the government determined to lead the battle to control erosion and, on the strength of Pim's recommendations, it obtained a loan in 1936 of over £160,000 to begin the job. A massive construction program was launched which, over the next decade, saw 238 dams built, thousands of miles of terraces constructed, and over half a million yards of diversion furrows dug.[5] In addition, hundreds of thousands of trees were planted. The government's glowing propaganda (and its diatribes against the "delinquent" enemies of scientific "progress") seemed to announce a major turn-around in British policy which would bring prosperity to the poor Mosotho peasant.

In fact, however, the British were less sure about the results of this type of development than they publicly admitted. Only six years into the program, the Resident Commissioner estimated that spending would have to be doubled from the minimal requirements called for by Pim just to halt

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3. CAR 1932, 10

4. CAR 1932, 18. There were no asphalt or tarred roads in the territory at all. Funds for maintenance of the gravel and dirt roads dropped from £21,000 to £13,500 from 1930-32. CAR 1932, 19.

5. CAR 1948, 41

the rate of soil destruction--to £30,000 a year.[6] At that time, less than a sixth of the projects identified as minimally essential were being carried out. Worse, they were being effectively sabotaged by the government itself, by, for example, ignoring its own recommendations (and the traditional practice) of crop rotation:

> Let us frankly admit [Harlech wrote to his minister] that because of the immediate urgency of the 'battle of food' for human sustenance we are land mining in Basutoland.[7]

Referring to the dongas which seemed to be sprouting as fast, if not faster than ever, the Resident Commissioner conceded:

> Many of these have in fact been caused by past bad practice of the Public Works Department in the building of roads. The present Director is cooperating whole-heartedly in ensuring that no new damage is done, but it is patently embarassing to seek to convince the Basuto of the necessity to practice soil conservation when the damage done by a Government agency is there for all to see.[8]

Moreover, much of the science employed to control erosion was experimental, inappropriate to local conditions and underfunded to an extent that likely made erosion worse. The loan devoted to an ecological survey in 1936 (£3,070) was directed not at assessing the damage being done in the name of erosion control but to finding ways to exploit the mountain grasslands as pasture.[9] As Kate Showers' has shown, modern science as it was imposed on the Basotho peasant was, with ample justification, identified as a major cause for the destruction of their land.[10]

World War II only exacerbated the underlying contradictions of Britain's technocratic development policy, resulting in the intensification of the economic and social stress under which the poor in

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6. Harlech visit to Basutoland, 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/y701/1/1

7. Harlech, Report on Basutoland, 1943, PRO DO 116/8

8. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House

9. CAR 1936, 15

10. Showers, "Soil Erosion," and "Oral Evidence and Soil Conservation"

general and most Basotho women in particular lived. Obviously, such massive investment as Harlech called for could not be forthcoming in wartime, nor indeed was it. Quite the contrary--Basutoland donated £100,000 to England in 1942 and loaned a further £50,000 in 1943. Expenditures in the territory meanwhile were cut. Also, the territory lost a larger proportion of its male population than ever before. In addition to a significant increase in the number of men employed in South Africa to meet high wartime demands for mineral and industrial production, 26,000 Basotho men left the territory as soldiers.[11]

Of necessity, women took over much of the ploughing and for the first time were widely recognized as capable agriculturalists and farm managers. It did not pass unnoticed by the government that production actually increased with fewer men in the country, and women were praised for their efforts. Indeed, Basotho women had cause to be proud of their achievements and new-found, and seemingly new-respected autonomy. At the same time, however, this entailed an often onerous increase in workloads and responsibilities. Consequently, many thousands of Basotho women left the colony for greener pastures in the booming industrial centres of the Union. By 1946, the population of Basutoland had actually dropped since 1936 by 5,446. Officially the number of women migrants had increased by half to about 30,000.[12]

Basotho women's greater autonomy during wartime also came with another cost. This became clear for many when the war was over and the soldiers, their husbands, returned. For many of the men who went overseas, the military experience appeared to have compounded a sense of their proprietorship over women and their right to use violence to assert it. Thus, following their return, ex-soldiers were widely reported as causing disturbances (fights, thefts, rapes) in the villages. Missionaries

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11. H.W.Dyke, African Pioneer Corps (Basutoland, n.d.)

12. Census 1936; 1946

bemoaned the resurgence of "paganism."[13] The revival of circumcision schools was deemed especially worrisome as now, more than previously, they allegedly taught "scorn of women" (and hatred for whites).[14] The press was full of letters to the editors by ex-soldiers critizing the chiefs and the government for having let women out of control in their absence:

> We left our families with an order from the Government to go to war. We trusted that our Chiefs would take care of our families. Now we are wondering of what is happening, because women go freely to South Africa, and there is no law which governs their movement. ...What happened to the sons of Moshoeshoe? Now it looks like women are not under control and nobody seems to care.[15]

Left alone for sometimes years on end, many wives had grown accustomed to a de facto autonomy which evaporated in hostility when their husbands returned. With custom and an extremely sympathetic justice system behind the men, women had almost no legal recourse and diminishing familial defences against their guardians' brutality. Women's fear of a thrashing could then lead them to extremes of behaviour beyond simply running away. Said one woman, charged with decapitating her illegitimate newborn with a blunt-edged rock, "The thing that caused me to do this was fear--that is all."[16] Even high in the Malutis, a supposed idyll untouched by modern progress, Bertha Hardregger noted the increase in domestic violence as men aggressively re-asserted their power over the often resentful strangers their wives and daughters had become:

> There are so many cases of wife abuse. Wives are often beaten cruelly. A woman has been almost strangled to death by her husband. The same day I treat a woman whose husband broke her

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13. See, for example, JME 1944, 18; JME 1945, 93; Codex of Koro Koro mission, 21 Feb. 1949, DAM 15. The government admitted as much as well, blaming the soldiers for the huge rise in the crime rate in the first three years after their return. CAR 1949, 56

14. Francois Laydevant, The Rites of Initiation in Basutoland (Mazenod, 1971). This was a reprint of the 1951 article of the same title in International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics.

15. Moeletsi 25 Sept. 1945. For similar angst see Leselinyana 14 July 1943 and 10 Feb. 1943; Moeletsi 31 July 1945

16. Of her husband's retribution, that is. LNA CR 20/1934

jaw.[17]

As economic hardship deepened, women also came to be viewed increasingly as a resource to be exploited by avaricious relatives. Widows suffered the indignity and privation of being robbed of their possessions by distant cousins, in-laws and even their own sons. Meanwhile daughters, "the bank of the nation," were increasingly regarded as commodities. However mistaken the missionaries had been about bohali in the 19th century, there is ample evidence that it was becoming, as they had originally asserted, a form of sale to many Basotho by the 1930s. The protection a girl once had from her parents consequently often vanished as the "thirst for cash" intensified. Thus, the courts recorded numerous cases of girls running away to South Africa (and the missionaries of girls who ran to them) when their relatives refused them their traditional right of ho ngala. That is, young wives were sometimes compelled by their relatives to return to brutal husbands rather than pay back the bohali as a divorce would necessitate.[18]

Bohali also sometimes became a straight cash transaction, further eroding the customary social functions which had worked to protect women and becoming, rather, a calculated means of accumulation for the parents or guardians. Cases are also recorded of fathers who cynically encouraged their daughters or wives to take lovers in order to obtain "compensation" for seduction.[19] This is not to blame fathers or male guardians alone, however. Mothers apparently could be just as bad or worse:

> Mothers are in the forefront of this ardent hunt for gain. The greed of such has earned them the nickname of Bo-motho e ea

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17. Baerlocher, Hardregger, 39 (30 Sept. 1949)

18. For example, LNA CR 619/58. See also "Matrimonial Cases," DAM 12.

19. The matter was sufficiently common to spark a contentious debate in the BNC, 1947, 112

koana, khomo tlo koano.[20]

The attitude of the colonial officials toward "development" abetted such tendencies since they had long considered traditional Basotho society as an inherent obstacle to progress. The Colonial Annual Report of 1930 illustrated the frustration which officials felt when encountering the Basotho traditions and sense of community:

> Every effort is made by demonstrators by way of propaganda to check the increase of this evil [erosion], but it is feared that as long as land is held communally, little success will attend their efforts. It is the old case of where it is every one's duty to prevent it, it is no one's duty... [and] until the Native mind can grasp that it is not quantity but quality that counts in live stock as in everything else, it is feared that little progress can be made in this direction. This love of numbers of cattle rather than quality in them is an inherent characteristic of the Basuto mind, and all who have had close contact with them will realize the difficulty encountered and the patience required to dissuade them from their belief.[21]

Agricultural shows were much desired by colonial officials for the reason that they "engender the spirit of competition so necessary for improvement."[22] As late as 1958, Basotho cultivators were termed an "insoluble socio-economic problem" because of their cultural, if not intellectual shortcomings.[23]

If the Basotho as a whole were perceived as an inherent problem, then the Basotho woman was all the more so. Because of the ethnocentric and technocratic assumptions behind colonial "development" strategies, Basotho women were normally seen as an obstacle to rather than a human resource. In the frank words of the District Officer of Maseru, the Basotho women who had fled abusive relationships or poverty in the rural areas to eke out a living in the camps were "a nuisance and a danger to

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20. "Daughter go away! Cattle come and fill her place." Basutoland Witness 8/2, 1954, 27. The "excessive pre-occupation with bohali...especially by mothers" was also noted by the RCM and blamed as one cause of the rising incidence of chobeliso (abduction). Vinculum 4/9 (Oct. 1948)

21. CAR 1930, 9

22. Ibid

23. CAR 1958, 56

the community."[24] As such, they were the target of whole range of policies which, sometimes deliberately but often unthinkingly, sought to restrict or to eliminate women's autonomous economic activities. At other times, ignorance or disregard for the importance of women's autonomous economic activities led to their being "rationalized" out of existence.

A classic example of this was admitted to, without apologies or apparent awareness that women were affected, in 1947. This was three years after a bureaucratic attempt had been made to control the theft of pigs. In 1944, each pig-owner was required to obtain a "bewys" or certificate of registration. No one seems to have considered at the time that pigs were "women's cattle" and that women were unlikely, for a number of reasons, to accept this bureaucratization easily. In fact, they were selling their animals to a soap factory in Ficksburg which was sending trucks across the border to collect them. Women were thus profitting from the sale of their pigs, even measly ones which were unfit for human consumption. The Director of Agriculture later conceded that the issue of bewyses had "brought to a standstill" this "very large export trade" from the Leribe and TY districts.[25]

A similar strand of conservativism towards Basotho women lingered in the administration's agricultural extention work. Thus, despite the fact that already in 1943 "the bulk of the ploughing" was being done by women and children, the first recorded efforts by the administration to meet with Basotho women in the villages were in 1944.[26] All the Basotho who were trained as agricultural officers or demonstrators were men.[27]

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24. Assistant Commissioner to Govt. Secretary, 23 March 1928 LNA S3/5/1/22

25. BNC 1947, 579

26. Harlech, Report on Basutoland 1943, 110. PRO DO 116/8; The Basuto at War (Morija, 1944) shows a photograph of Theko Bereng in uniform addressing a pitso of women only.

27. This training had begun in 1924 by sending four men to Native Agricultural School in South Africa. By 1938, there were 26 demonstrators. CAR 1938, 21

Consistent with this, the effort to encourage vegetable gardening which began in 1930 was directed almost entirely at men and schoolboys, despite the fact that such work was traditionally done by women, and that the men "show no natural skill."[28] Similarly, although Colonial Reports as early as 1935 mention "a great future" for "Native Women's Associations," it was not until a decade later that the government actually began to address them to proffer agricultural advice.[29]

The Agricultural census published in 1952, however, shows that the old attitudes died hard. The census takers referred with apparent amusement in their report to how Basotho women sometimes ran away when approached in order to avoid giving information. This was, supposedly, because they feared that their husbands' might disapprove of them speaking in public. Luckily, "male relatives or their Headmen then came to the rescue" to talk sense to the women.[30]

Basotho women's favourable attitudes toward their chiefs take on a deeper meaning than simple "traditionalism" when the detrimental effects upon women of the government's failure to take their economic activities seriously into account are considered. The salient point is that old-style patriarchs were relatively lenient in the enforcement of "improvement," and often vocally protested against it. For example, the chiefs had protested against the British requirements that they call matsema to eliminate Bitter Karoo, a poisonous weed which reduced the commercial value of sheep and horses. To the British, this was a clear sign of their intransigence and self-destructive conservatism. For Basotho women, however, Bitter Karoo was often the only source of firewood, the collection of which was one of their most time-consuming responsibilities. Thus, while it may have been a poisonous weed to rich farmers, it provided

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28. CAR 1948, 4.

29. CAR 1935, 10; Medical and Public Health Report 1945

30. A.J.A. Douglas and R.K. Tennant, Basutoland Agricultural Survey, 1949-50 (Maseru, 1952), 36

an accessible and cheap source of energy to Basotho peasant women.[31] The "suspicion and obstruction" of the chiefs which were so abhorred by the British in such cases reflected a responsiveness to women's needs.

Chiefly protests against the requirement that they enforce sheep dosing also won them respect in the eyes of many poor women. Compulsory sheep dosing, introduced in the 1930s, was another aspect of agricultural improvement which fell disproportionately heavily upon, and was therefore deeply unpopular among, Basotho women. Not only did it sometimes result in the death of the sheep but it was time-consuming and difficult. Khosimotse Ntaote saw it this way:

> It is always a pitiable sight to see a poor woman going up the hill and down the slopes trying to look into the question of dosing her small stock because if she fails doing so on the appointed day she will be prosecuted and punished. This poor woman is no longer able to do any work at home because at one time she has to be at the cattle post and the next time at another and yet she is expected to be at home to cook for her children and feed them. Further, she has to look after the ploughing of her lands as well as hoeing them.[32]

As in South Africa, sheep and cattle dips were occasionally the target of Basotho women's vandalism.[33]

On yet another "development" issue, women's interests were primarily defended by the chiefs. The British insisted on limiting the number of donkeys allowed into the territory with the intention of eliminating an animal whose destructive grazing habits were blamed for increasing erosion. The chiefs, however, argued that donkeys were the only means of transport available to the poor, above all, to women. Many chiefs were consequently reluctant to enforce the 1937 law which made it a criminal offence to import the beasts without a special permit. Over the next

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[31]. As, indeed, Pim noted but then dismissed as unimportant. The Pim Report, 6

[32]. BNC 1942, 76

[33]. A District Commissioner's report in 1914 records women "who collect at [the dip] tank and throw stones at and drive away cattle." PRO DO 119/900. See Beinart, "Women's Protests" for a discussion of this phenomenon in rural South Africa.

decade, they continuously appealed to the government to rescind the law or relax its provisions to allow widows to import the beasts. The British stood firm with, significantly, the vocal support of the BPA.[34]

Similarly, many chiefs were proving reluctant to enforce the setting aside of grass strips between fields which were intended to stop erosion. Here again, women suffered disproportionately from the loss of land (without compensation) to buffer strips since many of them had but a single field with which to support themselves and their children. There is also evidence that the way the strips and their connected diversion furrows were laid out exacerbated erosion on the field which remained.[35]

Along with the loss of protection against colonial improvement schemes which women suffered as the old-style chiefs were eliminated, there were more subtle but equally dangerous changes for women inherent in Indirect Rule. First, almost everyone seems to have agreed that an existing problem related to the "thirst for cash" was exacerbated by the Native Treasury, that is, the neglect and impoverishment of the widows of chiefs. In the first place, the Native Treasury removed the right of 90% of the chiefs to collect income through their courts. Their ability to support sometimes numerous "mothers" was thus seriously impeded (although not eliminated entirely since many chiefs continued to accept court fees and fines unofficially).[36] Secondly, even for those chiefs who were gazetted there was often a sharp decrease in their income in salary from what they had previously made from fines and lira lands. The four female ward chiefs in 1944 were awarded between £15 and £71 a month, that is, the market value of the amount of cattle they might normally take in as fines in a few days.[37] Even the Regent, whose salary was deliberately inflated

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34. See BNC 1936; BNC 1938, 97; BNC 1946, 424; BNC 1947, 570.

35. Showers, "Oral Evidence and Soil Conservation" and personal communication

36. Poulter, Family Law, 39

37. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 6 Apr. 1944, PRO DO 35/1176

in order to "buy off" her opposition to the Native Treasury, took a cut in her revenues from over £11,000 per annum to £9,500.[38]

Moreover, the use of cash was widely observed to undermine the customary obligation to support dependent widows. Since the establishment of the National Treasury, Chief Theko Bereng complained, "the position of widows has become a disgrace."[39] Chiefs were unwilling to share cash with the same generosity as they had shared the produce of their lira lands and other resources. In Jingoes assessment, the cash itself was the cause of mental derangement.[40]

In addition to outright miserliness, chiefs were also discontinuing the former practice of allowing widows of chiefs to support themselves as "headmen." Under the old system:

> The villages near the mother's village were also left entirely under her control. All the surrounding villages used to take their cases to [the widow's] court. [She] even had her own land which was worked by the people. [But nowadays] the chieftainess is no longer regarded as a chieftainess, but is left alone to fight for herself. People do not even call to visit them.[41]

Attention was drawn in both the BNC and the government's own investigations into liretlo about the "hardness of the lot of many chiefs' widows."[42] Faced with starvation, these women were allegedly driven to acts of desperation or "scandal." While there may be some truth in that assertion, the real scandal from the point of view of these women was not their own efforts to survive or to resist immiseration. As one councillor related to the BNC after having been openly mocked by the women of his village, the women felt that the government's representatives just "sell

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38. Ibid. By another estimate, the Regent's income was £15,000 (BNC 1945, 151)

39. BNC 1949, 347

40. Jingoes, A Chief, passim but especially 152-59

41. BNC 1949, 344

42. Liretlo file, LEC archives

our interests because we know that you do not even know our views."[43]

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To conclude this section, Basotho women did not see themselves as a "nuisance and a danger" when they acted to preserve their dignity or their own and their family's survival. On the contrary, often supported by their chiefs, women appear to have held a critical view of the government. Its almost casual disregard for their needs or, in many of the cases described above, seemingly perverse desire to prevent them from exercising new options, gave women ample cause to fear and suspect government "development." Regulations to control erosion, for example, must have indeed seemed cruel to someone like 'Me Jeminina of Maseru:

> I bought the donkeys as I have nothing to convey grain for my children. I did not know that I had to have a permit. I did not know that I had to go through a recognized Port of Entry. I did not know that donkeys are not to be brought into Basutoland.[44]

For her ignorance, the three donkeys she had bought were destroyed. Similarly, 'Me Mamohale was sentenced to six weeks of hard labour in 1931 for trying to live by the only marketable skill tradition had taught her (brewing):

> I do this," she pleaded, "from poverty. I have no land. I am starving. My husband dropped me long ago. I have only a small boy. I am asking for a house even today.[45]

"Developing" Basotho Women: The Historical Antecedents of 'WID'

In addition to administrative reforms and large-scale erosion works designed to "modernize" Indirect Rule, the colonial state in Basutoland took initiatives to "develop" African women in order to enhance their ability to underpin the male migrant labour system. This section will examine the historical antecedents of "WID" (Women in Development) in Lesotho, particularly state efforts in education, health and "home industries." It will also detail Basotho women's

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43. BNC 1951, 535

44. LNA CR 30/1938

45. LNA CR 187/1931

perceptions of and responses to being "developed."

Before proceeding, however, it is important to emphasize that sustained development initiatives that were sensitive to and directed specifically at women were begun by Basotho women themselves.[46] Women pressed their husbands to adopt new technology, crops and farming methods which increased the wealth of the household. Women purchased their own means of transport, donkeys, and made arrangements for the export of a wide variety of commodities. Women, in the absence of their husbands, were primarily responsible for the education of their children and frequently also the day-to-day management of the farm. This meant doing work that was increasingly non-traditional, including handling oxen and ploughing the fields themselves.

Basotho women also demanded better education, often by simply taking action rather than by making formal requests. The first sewing class for girls at the government's new Intermediate School in Mafeteng, for example, was initiated by the headmistress at her own expense.[47] More significantly, the Basutoland Federation of Women's Associations, known as the Homemakers' Association after 1945, was formed and propagated throughout the country by Basotho women with minimal assistance from the government or churches.[48]

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46. I employ the term development here in the broad sense which Basotho women seemed to me to understand it, that is, the enhancement of the material, cultural and/or social welfare of a people. Basotho women's understanding of the concept therefore goes beyond the narrow, technical sense of "development" which, despite the rhetoric of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, tended to predominate in official circles in Basutoland. As well as ntlafatso ("improvement" or "betterment") and tsoelopele ("progress" or "civilization"), development in this sense includes "community" and bolokolohi ("independence"). Interviews, 'Me 'Mamohlatsi, 'Me Fobo, 'Me Mosala

47. Until, embarrassed by Miss Morolong (later 'Me Mohapeloa), the government stepped in to pay her salary--£50 a year (typically, about a third lower than a male teacher would earn). Education Secretary memo, 3 Sept. 1930. LNA S3/12/3/1-7

48. This will be examined in detail in Chapter Nine.

Basotho women's efforts to develop or emancipate themselves, as we have seen, frequently impinged upon the colonial administration's notions of economic efficiency and good government (not to mention propriety). As described in chapter five, the unsuccessful efforts by the colonial state to confine women to rural domesticity during the period of parallel rule were regarded as increasingly problematic. For example, police harassment of women in the camps often appeared to do little more than occasion women's mockery of the law and discredit the authority of the chiefs. The need to tighten up control over women was then one of the major motivations for the introduction of modernized Indirect Rule after 1935. Yet this in itself was clearly insufficient as the number of women leaving the territory continued to grow. Officially, over 22,000 Basotho women left the country in 1936, rising to 42,000 in 1956 when they accounted for as much as 35% of all migrants in border districts such as Mamathe's (TY).[49] The problem of women going illegally to South Africa led members of the BNC to request that government literally erect a fence across the mountain passes to Natal to keep them in.[50] Meanwhile, the number of arrests for offences against liquor laws (mainly women brewing and selling HIKI) also continued to rise with convictions increasing nearly sevenfold between 1945 and 1958.[51]

Moreover, while Basotho women made fools of the administration, and their activities undermined the migrant labour system, women back home in England began pestering the Colonial Office about its oppression of African women. The administration in Basutoland was sensitive to such criticism, having been aware from the moment of its

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49. Census 1936, 5; Census 1956, 74-75. Again, the number of unofficial migrant, while impossible to establish, was certainly much higher.

50. BNC 1937, 13

51. From 44 convictions to 245. CAR 1948, 88; CAR 1958, 92. Of the latter figure, about 3/4 were women.

enactment that the unconscionable Proclamation 3 of 1915 had to be kept out of public knowledge.[52] This became increasingly difficult to do by the early 1930s as a number of feminist organizations in Britain took an interest in the colonial empire and were able to have their concerns raised in parliament.

A particular irritant to the Colonial Office was Nina Boyle of the feminist periodical The Shield, whose "carping... would not be a matter of concern if it were not that she is threatening an active campaign."[53] Boyle took her grievances about colonial policy towards African women right to Lord Passfield, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, whom she first met in 1930. Citing the Basutoland Native Women's Restriction Proclamation as proof of the Colonial Office's "betrayal" by "colluding with African men to keep women down,"[54] she inspired him to request an explanation from the High Commissioner with which to defend himself.[55] Although in her later audiences at the Colonial Office, Boyle was fobbed off with assurances that the legislation in question was a Dominions Office matter, "onslaughts" such as hers clearly continued to worry senior officials in colonial bureaucracy. When a Catholic women's organization actually took the matter to the League of Nations in

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52. See Kimble, "Runaway Wives," 15

53. Nina Boyle interview with R.V. Vernon, Colonial Office, 1935. PRO CO 323/1320/4

54. Nina Boyle, "What is Slavery? An Appeal to Women," The Shield: A Review of Moral and Social Hygeine 1/3 (Oct. 1932)

55. The High Commission's explanation of the Act is interesting: "It's enactment was proposed in the interests of preventing the weakening of family ties among the natives and at the direct instance of the natives themselves. It was recognized that it imposed serious restrictions on the liberty of native women, but it was considered necessary in order to meet what was undoubtedly a serious evil. It must be added that legislation of this nature must be considered from the point of view of the state of development reached by the native community concerned and that to do so from the point of view of the position of women in civilized countries naturally conveys a wrong impression." E. Machtig to Passfield, 11 April, 1930. PRO DO 35/402/11207

1937, terming the attitude of the Colonial Office "a blot on European civilization,"[56] it quickly adopted a defensive position. A despatch was sent off to all the colonies directing them to produce a deliberately obfuscating memorandum which would silence the critics.[57]

In addition to taking offence with specific legislation or incidents where colonial authorities appeared to be condoning the oppression of African women, British feminists began to draw attention to the unsatisfactory nature of colonial education policy for girls. The Colonial Office had always been rhetorically committed to the education of girls, while officials in the Cape administration of Basutoland had spoken positively of it as early as 1873.[58] "It may be laid down as a general rule that the greater the percentage of girls at school, the more progressive is the district," opined the Report on Education in Basutoland.[59] Such progress, however, was conceived in narrowly utilitarian terms, and the "emancipation" it would bring to girls was limited to enabling them to become fully domesticated, consumer-oriented housewives. That is, as "the centre

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56. Statement from St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance on the Status of the Women of Native Races, XVIII Assembly of the League of Nations, 1937. PRO CO 323/1439/1

57. This circular is a telling document in that it shows that colonial officials were quite conscious of the need to suppress the truth about the policy of social conservatism they had entrenched since the 1910s. "I am afraid these women may prove troublesome," one official mused, particularly over "facts we would rather keep concealed." R.V. Vernon directed that when the general memo was written, it "need not omit any colony deliberately, but we may very well find nothing to say about some." An honest account of the status of women in Basutoland, for example, "would inevitably have to contain statements which would raise about our ears a hornet's nest." "If our critics return to the charge," he advised, "stick to our refusal [to answer specific charges] with as little argument or explanation as possible." Colonial Office circular, June 1937. PRO CO 323/1439/1

58. Cape, Native Laws and Customs, 66

59. E.B. Sargant, Report on Education in Basutoland, 1906-6 (London, 1906), 12

of domestic comfort and happiness,"[60] the educated African woman would stimulate the consumption of British manufactured goods by Africans, an attitude shared by the early Protestant missionaries and widely cited as justification for their mission effort.[61] Educated girls were also "much sought after as wives by Native ministers and teachers and thus are able to raise the standard of civilization among the tribe" (meaning, presumably, their favourable inclination toward colonial rule).[62] Later, the educated African woman was seen to provide "the most promising means" to stimulate the "Native" to greater productivity, her insatiable consumerism the incentive required to get African men to work.[63]

With such attitudes virtually universal in the Colonial Office in the first five decades of colonial rule in Africa, it was very cautious about developing educational opportunities for African women. As late as 1925, the official view of female education was that it was "a curse rather than a blessing if it makes women discontented or incompetent."[64] A PEMS missionary woman worried that her efforts to educate Basotho girls would be counter-productive

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60. Cape, Native Laws and Customs, 66.

61. As the Rev. Brownlee Ross informed the South African Native Races Committee in 1901, "The spread of education and Christianity creates many new wants among the natives. Each native converted and educated adds £10 per annum to the trade of the country. This sends them out to labour." Cited in Gay, "Options," 12. See also Comaroff, "images of empire."

62. Annual Report of the Director of Education, 1929, 15. This reiterates The Sargant Report, 87

63. This particular quotation came from the Native Economic Commission in 1932 (NEC, 140), reflecting liberal opinion in South Africa at that time. Much the same sentiment was also expressed in the ruminations of a colonial official in Kenya in 1958--the African woman "must be educated to want a better home, better furnishings, better food, better water supplies etc... In short, the sustained effort for the male will only come when the female is educated to the stage when her wants are never satisfied." Cited in Staudt, "Women's Politics," 200. There is no reason to assume that government priorities in Basutoland differed in that respect.

64. "Education Policy in British Tropical Africa," Cmd 2374, 1925, PRO CO 879/146

if the girls did not quickly come under the rule of husbands: "We are sometimes anguished at the thought of their future if they don't marry quickly after having left school"--boredom leading to moral depravity and corruption would supposedly soon follow.[65]

The danger of "imparting any kind of education which has not a disintegrating and unsettling effect upon the people" was such that the Colonial Office concluded its 1925 report with these cautious words:

> It is obvious that better education of native girls and women in Tropical Africa is urgently needed, but it is almost impossible to overstate the delicacy and difficulties of the problem.[66]

In view of the delicacy of the matter the government of Basutoland left female education almost entirely to the missions who shared this view.[67] Virtually its only intervention was occasionally to offer the advice to the missions to keep the subject material "practical." The precise nature of this practical work was carefully spelled out by the Director of Education as "all the subjects that pertain to the home, such as sewing, proper methods of cooking and the care of babies."[68] The government left deliberately vague which "home" was being referred to. Thus, while it denied its aim was to train domestic servants for colonial officials, it noted that "a year or two in the employ of a capable European housewife... is an invaluable addition to their training for

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65. JME 1938/2, 515 (my translation)

66. Ibid

67. Those Christian churches which did not share the dominant view of women's subordination suffered state repression, notably the Edward Lion sect. In the 1920s, this Zionist church was allegedly a refuge for runaway wives and hotbed of illicit carnal knowledge. The Paramount Chief was urgently requested to "take immediate steps to prevent this movement from spreading," while Lion himself was deported. Resident Commission to Griffith, 15 Feb., 1929. LNA S3/9/1/1

68. Report of the Director of Education, 1929, 15

homemaking."[69]

This narrow and inappropriate emphasis on European-style homemaking was justified on the grounds that the girls desired it. "The girls themselves have little inclination for bookwork when it is more than purely elemental. They much prefer to learn sewing and domestic subjects."[70]

Moreover, behind the rhetorical commitment to female education, the colonial administration in practice opposed or undermined female advancement and professional qualification: "the daughters of this land who have ventured for better education have always been confronted with discouragement in lower salaries and lower positions."[71] Although the Pim Report blamed this tendency on "the prejudice of the Basuto,"[72] in fact there were women acting as school principals as early as the 1930s.[73] The prejudice, in short, stemmed at least as much from the British side as from the Basotho, and these women arrived at their positions despite official scepticism or opposition to them.

As the price which the Depression was exacting upon African women

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69. That is, regardless of the fact that most Basotho women lived in homes without the electricity, running water, appliances and so on which they would presumably learn so much about in a European home. Annual Report of the Director of Education, 1938, 28

70. Annual Report of the Director of Education 1929, 4

71. Mafeteng School Committee to resident Commissioner, 24 Jan. 1930. LNA S3/12/3/1-7

72. The Pim Report, 107. The desire to pay women less than men in the civil service remained official policy right up to independence, despite protests from the Basotho, particularly through the teacher's union, BANTA. To keep up with the spirit of the times and avoid accusations of sex discrimination, the government narrowed the ration between women's and men's salaries in the same job type from approximately 5/8 to 5/6 over the period of 1946 to 1961. Sir Fred Clarke, Report of the Commission on Education in Basutoland [henceforth, The Clarke Report] (Maseru, 1946), 71; Richard Ramage. Report on the Structure of the Public Services in Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland. (London, 1961), 63

73. Mention is made of Basotho "headmistresses" in Mafeteng (24 Jan. 1930, LNA S3/12/3/1-7) and St. James Anglican school in Maseru (H.V. Meyerowitz, Report on the Possibilities of the Development of Village Crafts in Basutoland [Morija, 1936], 7)

began to be more widely known, inferior education for girls and discrimination against women under Indirect Rule ceased to be a matter of concern merely to "incurable" feminists whom the Colonial Office could suavely patronize.[74] Officials within the service were beginning to come to similar conclusions, couching their tentative criticism of gender "laissez-faire" in utilitarian terms:

> All experience, in India as well as in the Colonial Empire, shows that the potential improvement in social and economic conditions to be obtained from the education of women is always at least as great as from the education of men and often greater, and that schemes of development which neglect this fact are bound to remain largely ineffective.[75]

Then, in 1936, a reputable woman physician, Mary Blacklock, published an article in an academic journal which attacked the "personal prejudice" (read: sexism) of colonial officers for undermining women's health and status in "tribal society."[76] This came to the attention of the Colonial Office and, with its disparaging comments about colonial officials judiciously deleted, her article was subsequently circulated to all the colonies.[77] Dr. Blacklock was also invited to take part in an advisory committee that was set up to investigate the health, education and welfare of women and children in the colonies. This was specifically charged to find "means of accelerating social progress in the Colonial Empire by increased education of women and welfare work."[78]

This advisory committee began producing reports which had the good

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74. See Vernon's amused dismissal of Boyle in his memo of 1935. PRO CO 323/1320/4

75. Memo on Social and Economic Development and Community Education in the Colonial Office (draft, 14 Oct. 1936) PRO CO 323/1354/6

76. Mary Blacklock, "Certain Aspects of the Welfare of Women and Children in the Colonies," Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology 30/4 (1936), 261

77. Lord Hailey. An African Survey (London, 1938), 1231; Memo on the Education of Women and Children in the Colonies, 22 Jan. 1937 PRO CO 323/1418/0

78. Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, 1939. PRO CO 323/1418/10

luck to appear at a time when a new Colonial Secretary was appointed who was amenable to their fairly radical recommendations. Malcolm MacDonald, from 1938 to 1940, established a number of further committees to investigate social conditions in the empire as prelude to establishing a process of planned decolonization.[79] Although the outbreak of war was to curtail their implementation, these reports, along with the larger study by Lord Hailey which supported them, were largely accepted in principle at the highest levels of imperial management. They led directly to the establishment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund in 1940, and the beginnings of socially activist policy which reversed the dominant conservatism of the previous decades.

The final report of the Sub-committee on the Education and Welfare of Women and Girls in Africa emphasized the centrality of women to the project at hand.[80] Noting that African women were primarily responsible for agricultural and household production, were traders, landowners and often had "great political influence," the report observed that:

> Women are the stable, and from certain aspects, the central figures in society... It is thus clear that the education of women and girls may have an even greater effect for good or evil upon society than that of the men and boys.[81]

Furthermore, African women were clearly not satisfied with the enforced traditionalism of Indirect Rule. "[F]acing a revolution in her morals, her attitude towards the other sex and her ways of living," the African woman was "demanding a part to play in fashioning the development of society."[82] The report concluded by recommending that girls be given educational opportunities equal to boys--"Nothing in our intellectual

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79. Flint, "Planned Decolonization"

80. "Report of a Sub-Committee on the Education and Welfare of Women and Girls in Africa," (1943) Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (hereafter "Education and Welfare Report") PRO CO 879/146

81. "Education and Welfare Report, 1943," 11

82. Ibid., 11-12

equipment should be withheld from them."[83] The advisory committee also specifically criticized the domination of "narrowly interpreted" domestic education as tending to "damage" girls generally, and hence to be detrimental to all of society.[84]

These changes of attitude toward social policy and, specifically, the education of girls, trickled slowly down to the colonial government in Basutoland.[85] The attitude of the Basutoland authorities remained cautious, fearful that education made girls prone to "impertinence and disobedience."[86] Education with a less narrowly domestic objective might, as such, both offend the men upon whom modernized Indirect Rule depended and cause a "hardening of old prejudices" in reaction.[87] Colonial authorities also feared that education might cause the girls to lose interest in or knowledge of traditional skills. Under the conditions of Indirect Rule and male migrant labour, those traditional skills were essential to maintain subsistence production. As late as 1947, the Basutoland Education Department was criticizing the missions (especially the PEMS) for giving "unsatisfactory... too book-oriented" education to girls.[88]

This policy was unsatisfactory to a growing number of Basotho, particulary among the more educated, who began voicing their discontent as

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83. Ibid., 14

84. Ibid., 14

85. As a High Commission Territory Basutoland was not, of course, subject to Colonial Office directives. While some of Lord Hailey's African Survey ideas about the "democratization of indirect rule" clearly inspired attempts to modernize the Basotho chiefs in the 1940s, colonial officials in Basutoland did not actually meet to discuss Hailey's specific suggestions until 1954, that is, in preparation for the Moore Report. E.P. Arrowsmith to Scrivener, 10 Feb. 1954, Hector papers, box 2/4, Rhodes House; Flint, "Planned Decolonization," 406

86. As an expert, the Headmistress of the Thaba Morena Girls School, observed in 1938. JME 1938/2, 511 (my translation)

87. "Education Policy in British Tropical Africa," cited in Leselinyana 5 Phato 1931

88. The Teachers' Magazine 23 (April 1947), 21

early as the late 1920s.[89] They made pressing demands for more schools and boarding facilities for girls, more female teachers and an expanded curriculum. The BPA even proposed that girls and boys compete for bursaries, with the implication that deserving girls should be rewarded if their merit were greater than the boys'.[90] The BPA, employing a discourse of modernity and liberalism in its criticism, was adept at putting the government in a position where to fail to respond positively would be to demonstrate either an unacceptable hypocrisy or a patent racism. After all, it argued, "no nation ever rose above the level of its womanhood."[91]

The missions also urged government support or initiatives, to which the administration finally relented in 1930. Following the PEMS' construction of a new girls' school in Morija in 1928, the government instituted domestic science courses at its new intermediate schools in Mafeteng, Matsieng and Maseru in 1931. By 1948, the government was boasting that "female education in Basutoland can be regarded as the most encouraging section of the whole system."[92]

The ambiguity of the government's embrace of female education is shown in its steadfast emphasis upon domesticity. Basutoland authorities continued to believe that Basotho women had to be kept in the rural areas while their husbands laboured for most of the year (or years on end) 500 kilometres away. Indeed, the government's own Commission on Education in 1946 determined, against all evidence, that "there is no reason to think

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89. The first formal protests about colonial neglect of girls came from BPA members who formed the Mafeteng School Committee. "Unless attention is devoted to both male and female education, Basutoland will reach the adult stage at the sunset of her time, because no nation ever rose above the level of its womanhood." (Letter to Resident Commissioner, 24 Jan. 1930, LNA S3/12/3/1-7).

90. Pleading financial constraint, the government vetoed this suggestion and offered instead to give two or three bursaries a year to "worthy boys" only. BNC 1930, 7

91. Ibid

92. Annual Report of the Director of Education 1948, 19

that [migrant labour] has yet had any serious disintegrating effects upon the Basotho society as a whole."[93] Given this happy observation, it followed that education which might upset the status quo was counter-productive. Flying in the face of the Colonial Office and trends elsewhere on the continent, the Basutoland authorities continued to promote education for girls which concentrated almost exclusively on perfecting their "housecraft" skills. Thus, where the Colonial Office report was increasingly critical of "more and more domestic science,"[94] the Director of Education in Basutoland that same year announced a new Standard VI course "in which greater attention was given to domestic science and kindred subjects which it was hoped would interest girls and teach them how to look after their homes properly."[95] "Instead of general science and nature study," the government urged more domestic science subjects on the grounds that "Surely the study of man, his home and his happiness, is nature study of a very important kind."[96]

This emphasis on domesticity persisted despite the evident dissatisfaction of Basotho girls and missionaries. Thus, for example, while recognizing that the "Housecraft" course set by the government to be taught at the mission schools "has not proved popular or very successful," the commission on education in 1946 simply recommended more of the same.[97] This was justified on the grounds that the girls themselves really wanted it and would be bored with school otherwise. The PEMS, for its part, lamented that the government's insistence that all girls must pass exams in cooking, laundry and ironing detracted from more practical

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93. The Clarke Report, 11

94. The Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, 1939. PRO CO 323/1418/0

95. BNC 1939, 6

96. The Teachers' Magazine 23 (April 1947), 21

97. The Clarke Report, 4

peasant skills such as gardening.[98]

In the event, even the minimal and contradictory expansion of female education accepted as desirable by the government did not come to pass until the late 1950s. Disturbed that rivalry of the main Christian churches was contributing to the climate of tension and insecurity which lay behind the liretlo murders, the government froze its grants-in-aid to the missions in 1940. (This had the added benefit of saving resources for "real" development like building dams). For the missions, and particularly for female education, it was a disastrous policy. By 1949, at least 150 teachers had been retrenched, the majority of whom were women.[99] The entire Domestic Science school at Cana was closed for several years because of the inability of the PEMS to pay teachers.[100] At other schools, girls' dormitories were closed. Basotho men, in the BNC, through the churches, and in the press, accused the government of being "unfair" to girls.[101]

More than such criticisms, it was the rejection of the Moore Report by the BNC in 1955 which finally brought about a significant change in the government's attitude toward women's education. Its preferred collaborating class, the chiefs, had failed it, "naughty boys" almost to a man and woman. In 1956, therefore, the British were compelled to concede what only three years earlier the High Commission had considered "could only lead to disaster"--self-government based on a popularly elected Legislative Council.[102] In the subsequent years, the administration had

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98. JME 1945, 93

99. BNC 1949, 546

100. Basutoland Witness 4/3 (May/June 1950), 33

101. See, for example, BNC 1949, 546; BNC 1950, 547;

102. Notes of the Chief Secretary's visit to Basutoland, Mar. 1952, page 5, Arrowsmith Papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House. A number of committees were struck in 1956 to investigate the possibilities of constitutional change. These resulted in The Cowen Report, almost unanimously approved by the BNC in 1958, and subsequent discussions in London leading to the drafting of a new constitution in 1959.

to scramble to ensure that such a body would be dominated by reliable, "moderate" elements and not the radical nationalists who had joined forces with the chiefs to sink the Moore Report. As they had already done in many of their colonies elsewhere in the world, the British recognized that Basutoland's aspirant elite had to be consulted about and satisfied with any new power arrangements.

The difficulty, from the British point of view, was how to ensure that these new men collaborated with the very system which had until then largely frozen them out of power and frequently subjected them to humiliating and racist treatment. The government realized that its long hostility to the aspirant elite had resulted in a dangerously radicalized section of the population, including women. This was not blamed on women directly but the government quickly determined to address the problem by pouring new resources into the development of a cadre of matrons who could tame the radical passions of their men.

The change in policy toward granting self-government affected the education offered to Basotho women in several ways. First, the old recommendations of the Colonial Office were dusted off and began to be implemented. In 1957, the primary school syllabus was revised so that boys and girls would receive exactly the same "wide general basic education" (as opposed the early "streaming" of girls and boys towards domestic and technical subjects respectively).[103] Money was made available to expand boarding and education facilities for girls so that the number of girls at secondary school could be rapidly increased.[104] By 1963 girls for the first time equalled the number of boys at that level.[105] The government gave bursaries to young women to attend university and the first Mosotho

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[103]. CAR 1960, 65

[104]. The education budget was actually doubled in the fiscal year 1961/62. CAR 1962, 31

[105]. CAR 1963, 55

woman to receive a bachelor's degree in science graduated in 1962.[106] Money was also made available for "adult education" for women through support for women's voluntary groups (such as the Homemakers Association, which began receiving a small government grant in 1957, and the Lesotho National Council of Women, an umbrella organization formed in 1964). In that regard, the administration looked admiringly at the efforts being undertaken in Bechuanaland, where government-sponsored courses for "progressive women" included "group discussions to overcome suspicions of government."[107]

The expansion of educational facilities for Basotho women was designed to provide, on the one hand, leadership and career opportunities for educated Basotho women and, on the other, a stabilizing or moderating influence on educated men. The objective, in the words of Sir Fred Clarke, was the cultivation of a reliable new class of Africans upon whom power could be devolved, "true leaders" rather than "plausible self-seeking misleaders."[108] That it came so belatedly in Lesotho reflected both the androcentrism of the colonial authorities as well as their relative disregard for the class there which was most vocal in demanding educated women, the incipient bourgeoisie. These tendencies, arising from inappropriate assumptions about the needs of Basotho women and the means to restructure Basotho society, also affected the nature of colonial policies to "develop" women through health and "home industries."

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The expansion of health care was closely linked to education for domesticity as a development strategy to modernize Indirect Rule. That is, the provision of modern health services was meant to supplement the focus

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106. CAR 1962, 52

107. G.M. Hector, "Rural Development in Basutoland, 1956," Hector papers Box 3/1, Rhodes House

108. Memo to the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, Dec. 1943. PRO CO 879/148

on good "mothercraft" (hygiene and nutrition) which girls received at all levels of school. By 1922, small hospitals or dispensaries had been established in most of the lowland camps. After the health crisis of 1933, however, it was realized that this effort would have to be expanded, and possibly even made coercive. That is, since the spread of typhus was laid largely at the door of the "carelessness and indifference on the part of the Native," the Director of Medical Services suggested that "compulsion be brought in to maintain cleanliness."[109] A major effort was subsequently launched to expand the government's ability to provide health care services, including the construction of new hospitals in the mountain camps (such as Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek) and a nation-wide penicillin injection campaign.[110] The first class of nurses began their training in Maseru in 1936, along with "trained native workers" (in effect, midwives) who "will live among their people rendering assistance in time of illness, helping women at confinements, instilling into them correct ideas and methods of diet, cooking, mothercraft and the elementary rules of social welfare, hygiene and sanitation."[111]

Good intentions, however, were undermined over the next two decades by the assumption that Basotho mothers were intrinsically incapable and also by a persistent bias against this type of expenditure.[112] Thus, while Basotho women began to be trained as nurses and midwives (and, to the clear surprise of the administration, were competent enough to run the Maseru hospital on their own during World War II),[113] they were

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109. Annual Medical and Sanitary Report 1933, 4

110. CAR 1936, 6

111. Annual Medical and Sanitary Report 1935, 16

112. Plans for social services development made in 1944 had originally estimated needs of £1.13 million over the decade of 1946-56. In the actual budget, however, expenditure on social services and welfare was cut by nearly 80% to £214,375. (CAR 1946, 11). This was explained with the unadorned statement that agriculture and public works "must take preference" in the allocation of scarce resources. (CAR 1947, 13)

113. Medical and Sanitary Report 1941, 2

admittedly nowhere near enough in number to cope with the demand. By 1942, only 15 nurses and midwives had graduated from the course,[114] while over the decade from 1937-47, the incidence of pellagra had increased 700%.[115] The government hospitals were chronically underfunded and insensitive to the specific needs of women, including modesty.[116] In 1944, half the cases in the maternity ward at the Maseru hospital were lying on the floor.[117]

Financial constraint was undoubtedly an important factor in limiting the efforts of the administration to "develop" women or the social services which would benefit them most directly. More fundamental, however, was the British reluctance to admit to the reality of Basotho women's thirst for improved practical development skills and de facto autonomy. To do so would entail a revolutionary restructuring of development and political priorities. In short, it was simply inconceivable to the British that the state's resources be employed to encourage existing tendencies among Basotho women to reject patriarchal dominance. The government therefore went out of its way to reassure the members of the BNC that by training nurses it was not encouraging "girls to be let loose."[118] They were kept under such "very strict supervision" that the Director of Medical Services was later to express regret at how few nurses were graduating: "the number would have been considerably larger had it not been for a considerable number having to be sent away because of insubordination and moral lapses."[119]

Government attempts to "develop" women therefore tended to focus on

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114. BNC 1942, 56

115. Annual Medical and Public Health Report, 1947, 7

116. A frequent complaint about the hospitals which surfaced in the BNC was their "shameful" lack of privacy. See BNC 1950, 652-55

117. Medical and Sanitary Report 1945, 12

118. BNC 1936, 27

119. BNC 1942, 56

ways to change women's attitudes so that they would be more satisfied with the hard and lonely life in the rural areas. A strong moral element lay behind this approach which came through in Resident Commissioner's elucidation of the problem in 1934:

> Sex has always played a large part in native life, and always will until the barrenness of their leisure is relieved. Being deprived by the absence of their husbands of the legitimate satisfaction of their needs, many women are driven to having intercourse with casual acquaintances passing through the village or to making alliances with the men of the village. Much is demanded of them and they willingly respond. The result of this is to prevent such men as are at home from living in peace and unity with their wives, without which family life is impossible.[120]

This connection between sexuality, hygiene and morality led to a quixotic attempt by the state to improve health and social conditions by keeping women gainfully occupied. Building from the analysis that "Idle hands do the devil's work," a commission was struck in 1935 to investigate the possibilities of developing "hygienic" leisure activities for people in the villages. As usual in Basutoland, this led to an attempt to kill two or more birds with the same underfunded stone. The commission, headed by a sculptor, H.V. Meyerowitz, was charged to explore ways of developing Basotho traditional skills at crafts into an "industry." The reasoning was that this could both generate enough profit and job satisfaction to keep people down on the farm and reduce their alleged propensity to while away the hours with extra-marital sex.

Meyerowitz discovered, to his evident surprise, that life in the villages was not quite as sleepy as he had been led to believe. Crafts were thriving. To his frank astonishment, Meyerowitz also found that they were carried out mainly by women. In some cases, women were providing traditional, utilitarian and decorative articles for their whole region. They did this by "fanning throughout the district" carrying their wares on their backs to their customers. Others marketed in the camps where they

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[120]. Resident Commissioner's submission to the Pim Commission, 14, PRO DO 119/1051. He added that "the breaking up of family life" was one of the major impediments to "responsibility" and, implicitly, economic development.

were evidently regarded as a threat to the business of some of the European traders.[121] In other cases, women travelled hundreds of miles to market their wares in the Union. One woman, 'Mamatli of Quthing, was reported to have earned enough to buy cattle for four sons' bohali and school fees for another.[122]

'Mamatli and other Basotho women were able to market their crafts so profitably because, Meyerowitz remarked, "It is generally accepted that the Basotho make the best pots in South Africa."[123] He recommended that the state harness and organize these women's remarkable creativity and resourcefulness in order to raise the territory's standard of living. This would, he somewhat naively concluded, assist to put an end to the "abnormal and unfortunate" practice of migrant labour.[124]

An artist's enthusiasm shines throughout Meyerowitz's report. Not surprisingly, his calls to "nationalize" clay deposits, to legislate protection for women from "chiefs and other egoistic individuals" and to ensure that "workers derive all possible profits," gathered dust for the next five years. Only in 1942, when a special War Levy had produced an unexpected bounty for the colonial administration, was Meyerowitz's basic idea revived. Indeed, with so many men "up north" for the war, the government considered that the time was riper than ever to do something to keep women gainfully employed. The enormous sum of £10,000 was budgetted to create the Gifts and Comforts Organization, the object of which was to employ Basotho women in their villages to knit socks, caps, scarves and so on for the soldiers.

By 1944, Gifts and Comforts was regarded as such a great success that it was determined to carry it over in peacetime transformed into a

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121. Meyerowitz, Village Crafts, 2

122. Ibid., 3

123. Ibid., 9

124. Ibid., 29

profit-making enterprise as Meyerowitz had recommended. This sat well with the general post-war development imperative of making "village life more attractive,"[125] and otherwise demonstrating the superiority of British imperialism. As such, the relatively enormous sum of £50,000 was obtained from the Colonial Development and Welfare fund to be spread over ten years. A Home Industries Organizer was appointed whose terms of reference were to:

> learn what Basotho are doing in such crafts as spinning, pottery or basket weaving, and to advise, in the light of his experience, as to how all this can be developed and improved so as to employ materials grown in Basutoland for the purpose of making articles for sale, and for improving the comfort of their homes.[126]

The Home Industries Organization began its work by establishing centres in nine camps and hiring teachers to train women in spinning, weaving and marketing skills. After the two-year course, the graduates were expected to return to their villages to set up a "Home Unit." By then imparting their skills to their friends and demonstrating the advantages of free enterprise, these women were to become the hub of a local cottage industry. A percentage of the income generated would be returned to the Organization to cover its recurrent costs. An African Deputy Organizer was hired who would, it was intended, eventually assume the responsibilities of Organizer.

Within five years, this grandiose plan was in a shambles. Nearly half the money had been spent without accruing any revenue whatsoever--from 1947 to 1949 alone, it lost over £10,000.[127] Worse, of the 34 graduates of the course, only 13 had gone back to their villages, none of whom set up a "home unit." Despite the recommendation of a BNC commission

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125. Basutoland. Memo of Development Plans (no place of publication indicated, 1946), 8

126. BNC 1949, 92. In other words, repeat exactly what Meyerowitz had done already but, hopefully, come up with less radical recommendations.

127. "Report on the Committee to Investigate the Working of the Home Industries Organization" (Henceforth, "Home Industries Report") BNC 1949, 91

of inquiry that the scheme "must, at all costs, be maintained as the good it will do the Basuto is incalculable,"[128] the Home Industries Organization was quietly cut back in scope and an expert "craftswoman" was invited to come in from Cape Town to assess the mess.[129] The following year, the whole project was declared defunct. The remaining money was invested with the interest going to finance craft courses at the mission schools in Cana, Mazenod and Leribe.[130]

The government appeared to blame the failure of the Home Industries Organization on the "regrettable" attitude of the women who failed to take advantage of the opportunities the government was providing them, and the incompetence of the Basotho teachers.[131] Having confirmed its biases, the colonial government never again attempted development projects specifically targetted at women. The idea was not completely dead, however, and eight years later a Part-time Supervisor of Craft Schools was hired to oversee the activities of the 913 girls or women enrolled in craft courses at the mission schools. In 1958, six of these graduated and were sent to set up their "Home Units," while construction on a place where women could market their crafts for tourists began (the "Home Industries Centre" in Maseru).[132]

The actual causes for the collapse of Home Industries are complex and are only alluded to in the most elliptic language in the official version of its bankruptcy. Much can be surmised, however. For instance, whatever his skill and dedication, it seems unlikely that a white, male "textile expert" brought in from England was truly the best choice as organizer to "revive indigenous handicrafts," that is, pottery in the case

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128. "Home Industries Report," 93

129. Miss G. Rouillard. BNC 1950, 44

130. CAR 1951

131. "Home Industries Report," 92; CAR 1950, 44

132. CAR 1958, 59

of Basotho craftswomen. Rather than adjusting to the fact that weaving was an alien craft to Basotho women (and actually closer to the traditional men's task of sewing than anything Basotho women did), he turned the general training centres into straight "weaving centres."[133] Moreover, his emphasis on producing articles for the "luxury European market" meant that the Home Units made virtually nothing of use to sell to Basotho customers. The "bed spreads, hand bags, chair back covers and other types of fancy work" might appeal to tourists but few, if any, of these ever got far beyond Maseru or the other camps in those days. And, while the scarves and blankets produced by the Home Units were potentially useful, they required imported chemical dyes and cotton and were generally more expensive than store-bought items.[134]

It may also be possible that, in attempting to teach improved techniques to Basotho craftswomen, the zealots in Home Industries ignored Meyerowitz's earlier condemnation of the "distinctly harmful" effect of European interference. Whereas Basotho women had traditionally made crafts with "an extraordinary richness of invention, sense of pattern and balance" which "could rival any object of applied art in the world,"[135] European-coached Basotho women were seen to be producing "abominable," "insulting" and "unmarketable" objects of "the worst European type."[136] He noted also that the crafts teachers "are open to ridicule from village craftsmen and women."[137] The report by the expert from South Africa in 1950 concluded that there was, indeed, "a lack of competent teachers" employed by the Home Industries Organization,[138] and, given their below-

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133. CAR 1950, 44

134. "Home Industries Report," BNC 1949, 94

135. Meyerowitz, Village Crafts, 15

136. Ibid., 7-9

137. Ibid., 5

138. CAR 1950, 44

average salaries, it would not be surprising if morale were low and turnover high.[139]

Finally, the project clearly suffered from confusion as to whom it was directed at and what precisely it was meant to achieve. Thus, for example, until 1950 it was jointly administered by the Education and the Native Administration Departments--two unlikelier allies in the uplifting of women would be harder to imagine. Also, in what was perhaps a Freudian slip, the Colonial Report of 1948 boasted that the Home Industries Organization "offers the Basuto a real opportunity to make money in the comfort of his own home."[140]

Evidently, the government had no intention that its main development project for women should emancipate them from male control. On the contrary, it was intended a facilitate the latter in the context of great social and economic strain.

The end of modernized Indirect Rule brought little change to this attitude. Unlike in the case of female education, the beginnings of constitutional development did not bring about an increase in government attention to women in production. Rather, the cutbacks to the level of resources specifically directed at women producers (and the "privatization" of responsibility for them to the missions) which followed the collapse of the Home Industries Organization continued virtually right up to independence. Ironically though, these cutbacks were made on the exact same principle as more resources were poured into female education. That is, the state, after the rejection of the Moore Report, was obsessed by the need to "develop" a politically reliable class of Basotho men. To that end, and following the lead of the Catholic Church as we shall see in the following chapter, educated women were regarded as useful and deserving of encouragement. Modern production, by contrast, was conceived

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139. "Instructresses" earned £42 a year, less than a well-paid domestic servant could earn. "Home Industries Report," BNC 1949; CAR 1949, 13

140. My emphasis. CAR 1948, 65

of as resting in men's hands. The state therefore channeled the bulk of its limited "development" funds into projects such as co-operatives, marketing societies and consumer clubs where women participated in a subordinate capacity to men. The most grandiose schemes, such as the "Farmech" mechanization project in the Mafeteng district, sought at huge expense to concentrate resources, new technology and decision-making powers in the hands of "progressive" men.

Given this political intent, it is then hardly surprising that such schemes (and local government in general) became highly politicized and open to nepotism or other forms of corruption. The tractors, for instance, besides being expensive and inappropriate for most existing conditions in the territory (as the Department of Local Government admitted), fuelled tensions as they became identified with a specific political party, the BCP. As one peasant farmer remarked, "The tractors have brought trouble and I do not see their good."[141]

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This chapter has shown the need to question government propaganda and Western assumptions about the beneficence of modern technology and liberal "progress." Basotho women's scepticism about government "development" projects and their failure to appreciate government efforts on their behalf as gratefully as the government expected, need to be seen in light of the generally negative impact upon women that these efforts had. Such "development" as did take place under state initiative was often punitive, restrictive, underfunded and inappropriate to Basotho women's needs. As will be shown in the next chapter, an alternative vision of "development" that was more sensitive and appropriate to the needs of the poor women was, ironically, advocated by an institution frequently vilified as excessively conservative and patriarchal.

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141. Sandra Wallman, Take Out Hunger: Two Case Studies of Rural Development in Basutoland, (London, 1969), 140

Chapter Eight: An Alternative Vision: Catholic "Anti-capitalism" from 1930

Thus far I have positted 1935 as a turning point in the history of Lesotho. The acceptance of the Pim Report in that year represented a major policy shift from parallel rule and "laissez-faire" to modernized Indirect Rule and a relatively enormous expenditure on "development and welfare."

By another criterion, however, an even more decisive moment in the history of the country occurred in 1930. In that year, control of the Catholic mission was handed over to the Canadian Oblates. Thereafter, the Canadians, most of whom came from the francophone province of Quebec, began a vast expansion of the RCM and it soon appeared to be "placing itself like the future before what might indeed seem like a thing of the past," the PEMS.[1] Over the next 17 years, 150 priests, 50 Brothers and an equal number of Sisters came from Canada to put their stamp physically and culturally upon Basutoland. By 1957, the 220 Quebecois in the territory comprised a significant minority of the total expatriate community with, as many observers noted and generally condemned, a very vocal political stance.[2] This chapter will examine the concrete achievements of these Canadian men and women in the period from 1930-65, paying special attention to their implications for Basotho women.

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In the early 20th century, the PEMS vision of tsoelopele seemed to hold real promise for the Basotho. Colonial officials also talked glowingly of the potential of the Basotho as an industrious and "sensible" people.[3] Despite growing land shortages and soil destruction in the lowlands, production in the territory was still rising, particularly as pioneers opened the highlands to the production of wool and mohair. By the

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1. Ellenberger, A Century, 360. See also G. Mabille, "The Challenge of the Roman Catholic Church in the Maluti Mountains" Basutoland Witness 1/5 (1947)

2. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 25

3. See, for example, Lagden, The Basutos

late 1920s, exports were booming and prices on the world market for Basotho commodities were exceptionally high. Basotho with an entrepreneurial spirit, of whom there were plenty, stood to make good profits from commercial agriculture, wagon transport and the sale of crafts. On the seamier side of free enterprise, women had "lucrative" opportunities for the sale of sex, domestic comforts and home-brewed liquor in the camps and locations of South Africa. Many of these women hoped that their earnings could be invested in the education of their children with the promise that the next generation would be better placed to enjoy the ripening fruits of tsoelopele.

The crash of 1929 and subsequent years of drought did much to discredit, if not permanently destroy, this optimism among most Basotho. In the context of extreme hardship for the mass of the people, it was evident that the colonial state continued to place the protection and promotion of the interests of capital in the region above those of the people, above all by minimizing expenditures and by abetting the flow of men out of the country to labour in South Africa. In that process, the state not only defended the lower-than-ever wages which Basotho workers were receiving at the mines, but even defended the brutal, sometimes murderous behaviour of the white bosses there. In the worst year of the drought the British did provide famine relief, however, even this was administered in a stingy and mistrustful manner.[4] Starvation victims were made to work for their rations so that, for many, going to the missions or leaving the country altogether were preferred, if desperate, options.

In terms of structural reforms and development, the Depression, as elsewhere in the colonial empire, sparked a period of soul-searching and a change in policy. Yet little real effort was made by the colonial state to redress the disastrous social and economic consequences of its policies for the Basotho until the very end of the 1930s. Even thereafter, the reforms and expenditures which the government embarked upon were half-

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4. CAR 1933

hearted and served to exacerbate existing class and gender tensions. Colonial policies hit Basotho women particularly hard in these years, tending to curtail, among other things, women's access to fields, opportunities in craft production, the informal export of pigs and the use of donkeys for transport. With more men gone and with rising demands by the government for farmers to carry out conservation and crop or livestock improvement, the amount of labour required of women increased sharply as well. Meanwhile, the state acted to buttress Basotho men's increasing exercise of power over women. In such a situation, tens of thousands of Basotho women flaunted authority by leaving the territory, many of them for good. PEMS talk of tsoelopele had acquired a decidedly hollow ring to the majority of women, even those within the church.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Catholic church had different ideals of both development and gender relations than either the PEMS or the colonial state. Essentially, they dreamed of a self-reliant, yeoman peasantry where fertile women raised happy children under the responsible supervision of their husband. Catholic priests and nuns viewed those aspects of Sesotho custom which strengthened the extended family and sense of community (such as bohali, public celebrations with the moderate consumption of joala, and the traditional chieftaincy as an institution) not simply with tolerance but with positive favour. Migrant labour and the commodification of goods and many relationships had been breaking these traditions down long before the actual crisis of capitalism struck in 1929. The RCM actually began practical work intended to address the problems engendered by capitalism and colonial rule in southern Africa in the early 1920s.

The first such work was inspired by the pope's call for "social action" in 1921. In 1923 the Rev. Bernard Huss started the Catholic African Union (CAU) at Mariannhill, Natal. Its objective was the "co-operative self-education of the people" to enable them to resist the "disastrous" laws of South Africa which made Africans "slaves" of the

"great exploiters."[5] The church feared that without concrete action to demonstrate its commitment to the people, they would not only suffer physically and morally but would, eventually, be attracted to communist propaganda. The CAU and other related "social projects" launched by the Catholic church in southern Africa were regarded as "the principal rampart against the bolshevization of the Blacks."[6]

The first convert to this activist approach in Basutoland was the RCM's first Canadian missionary, the "hyperactive" Odilon Chevrier. Soon after his arrival in 1923, Chevrier established a farmer's association at his own mission of Masitise, drawing upon the Catholic co-operative model then being pioneered in Canada. He was later instrumental in bringing the ideas of Huss to Basutoland, helping in 1931 to form a local version of the CAU known as the Catholic Economic Association (CEA). Specifically, it aimed to:

> encourage thrift and economy; to improve the quality of agriculture in Basutoland including under this term afforestation, farming and gardening and also to develop home industries in the territory.[7]

The CAU/CEA comprised three main elements--the organization of co-operative commercial farming (the African National Co-operative Society), the People's Bank, and the Buyers and Sellers Association. The latter operated explicitly to help the African population avoid exploitation by the then almost exclusively European retail traders. It imported in bulk quantities and then sold at cost to its members "farm implements, soft goods, school requisites, groceries, hardware and any other commodity," ordered by its members.[8] Until the mid-1940s, business was frequently

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5. Molisana, July 1931, 5; MMO 1939, 332.

6. MMO 1933, 38

7. Molisana vol.7, July 1931, 21

8. Ibid. Interestingly, one of the hottest selling items was purportedly malt, used by women in the brewing of beer to "undercut legal trade." BNC 1954, 378

conducted in the church buildings themselves.[9] Not surprisingly, the PEMS complained that the CEA was a devious attempt to attract converts to the RCM. This did indeed happen. Many Basotho were attracted to the RCM co-ops and, even if they did not necessarily convert, they helped spread the church's image of working in the interests of the poor. Leading Basotho members of the PEMS could not comprehend why their own church stubbornly refused to follow the Catholic example.[10]

The ultimate aim of Catholic co-operation was "to make MEN,"[11] that is, to provide an organizational framework for African men to learn, to encourage each other and to acquire the material means to honour their obligations to their family, community and church. Even the most progressive thinkers in the church still believed that men were naturally more "efficient [and] business-like" farmers than women.[12] They therefore preferred to teach men the techniques of co-operation and modern farming. Even the most reactionary priests were forced, however, to accept the reality that men were unlikely to remain on the land in prevailing conditions. In the short-run, therefore, the church recognized that, however regrettable in theory, in practice it was in the interest of the Basotho poor to enhance women's autonomous ability to make economic or managerial decisions. Put simply, female self-reliance would enable them to withstand the poverty (and immorality) arising from the migrant labour system. Thus, despite the Oblates' preference for a "woman's place to be in the home,"[13] from the beginning Basotho women were encouraged to take part in the CEA. Technically-minded Brothers and Sisters did much to

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9. Rev. A. Blais, instructions to priests on Catholic Action, 30 June, 1943, DAM 7; Rev. Michael Ferragne, instructions on co-operative business, 7 Sept. 1948, DAM 7

10. Interview, Rev. Brutsch

11. Molisana 31 Oct. 1931, 5

12. Brossard, "The Food Problem," 131

13. Ibid., 131

impart new skills to women as farmers and horticulturalists in the CEA in the 1930s and 40s, while even women's pious associations like the Ladies of Ste Anne were also nudged beyond simple prayer meetings into encouraging their members to learn gardening skills, poultry and egg production and the production of other marketable housecrafts along the lines of the secular Homemakers Association. As Miss L.P. Vilikazi informed the CAU Annual General Meeting in April, 1931:

> We agree that the first place for women is in the home. But we women also claim a place for ourselves in the social and public life. The married woman should not be forced either by poverty or by other circumstances to leave her home and look for work in order to find the means of living for herself and her children. In this respect we hope very much that the CAU will help us, by encouraging our menfolk to be saving and thrifty, and by helping us to establish profitable home industries.[14]

The first Canadian Bishop, Gérard Martin, also opened a printing press at Mazenod and launched Moeletsi oa Basotho, a weekly paper dedicated "to the native point of view."[15] Throughout the next two decades, Moeletsi was filled with letters and editorials denouncing the practices of capitalism and their effects upon the Basotho. This history of often bitter criticism of "monopoly capital," including the practices of European traders and labour agents within the territory, has tended to be forgotten in accounts of the Catholic church in Lesotho, which tend instead to focus on the church's anti-Communist campaign in the 1960s. Looking back to the crucial, formative years before this, however, reveals that the dominant view expressed in the Catholic media was concern for abuses of the capitalist, racist status quo such as "robbery...monopoly...unjust credit manipulation."[16] A few examples illustrate the tone:

> Capitalism is an open perpetration of injustice. It is a gross violation of the natural right of man to live. It is one of the

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[14]. Molisana April 1931, 4-5

[15]. Codex of Mazenod, 24 May, 1934, DAM 9. Moeletsi oa Basotho means the The Advisor of the Basotho.

[16]. Moeletsi 27 March, 1945

> foulest ways of living. [It is] the cursed wheel of the sweating system... We owe our present economical embarrassments to a large extent, to capitalism. To arms, therefore, countrymen.[17]
>
> In the struggle to shake off the intolerable joke [sic] of Capitalism...none will succeed so well and as simply as trade Unionisms. This is the weapon that saved Europe from the oppression and grinding poverty inflicted by Capitalism.[18]
>
> ...monster corporations and the growing evil of the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, a few who are bleeding both the farmer and the labourer.[19]

Molisana, a monthly, was also launched as the organ of the CAU. Its motto, "Delay begets perdition," reflects the sense of urgency of the new breed of Catholic priest.[20] In 1930 alone, 80 new schools were opened and by 1934 their number had tripled (to 368).[21] The RCM opened the first three hospitals in the rural mountain districts between 1936 and 1938--at Roma, Paray and Ntoate's--as well as dozens of dispensaries where medicine was sold at cost.[22] Much of this expansion was in the virgin territory of the highlands which required the construction of roads, also undertaken by the RCM with predominantly female labour.[23] In contrast to the generally derelict state of the PEMS churches and schools, the RCM missions turned from bustling construction sites in the 1930s to often towering stone edifices in the 40s. In cases like Roma and Mazenod, the

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17. Simon Lefunyane, Moeletsi 18 Sept. 1945, 3

18. Moeletsi 18 Nov. 1945

19. Moeletsi 17 April, 1945

20. "Tieho e tsoala tahleho," Molisana Oct. 1931. Molisana means The Little Shepherd.

21. Lapointe, An Experience, 88

22. Baerlocher, Hardegger, 34. Dr. Hardegger compares the price of medicine at her clinic (one shilling) to the same at the establishment of a private South African doctor (20 shillings). It was also noted in the National Council that whereas the government doctors charged 5 shillings per visit, the RCM hospitals charged as low as 6 pence (Majara Mopeli, BNC 1935)

23. The road to Ha Sekake, for example, was built by Father Rousseau in 1946 (Mairot, A Guide, 116). In Sebetia the priest observed 100 women for 12 men working on his road (10 Nov. 1964, Codex of Sebetia, DAM 16)

missions were surrounded by sprawling complexes of well-constructed schools, convents, scholasticates (schools for priests), hospitals, farm buildings, dams, grain mills, and power generating units.

Much of the expansion described above was carried out by Bishop Martin's successor in 1933, the even more ambitious Joseph Bonhomme. Bonhomme was born in Ste Camille, an impoverished village in the eastern townships of Quebec. Before entering the OMI seminary in Ottawa, he worked as a lumberjack. His first job as a priest was in a working-class district of Hull, at that time a pulp and paper town. He brought to Africa a passion for workers' rights, a sense of injustice at the paternalism of colonial rule and "a specialization in the formation and direction of workers' syndicates."[24]

Bishop Bonhomme stepped up the effort to establish co-operatives and to inundate the highlands with Catholic schools. It was in response to his invitation that five new orders of Sisters arrived from Canada who, by 1940, had helped to pepper the country with a further hundred Catholic schools. Bishop Bonhomme also relentlessly pressed the RCM to speed up the indigenization of the church, taking the European missionaries and nuns to task at every occasion when he suspected racism or procrastination in their efforts.[25] Towards that end, he first proposed a Catholic college for the territory in 1934,[26] and founded a new order of Basotho Brothers in 1940.[27] In 1939, he launched Catholic Action, an umbrella organization of lay Catholic groups among whose functions were to challenge the "unjust legislation" of the colonial government.[28] Priests

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24. MMO 1933, 38

25. See his lecture to the Sisters of all the order in 1935, DAM 47

26. G.W. Ochs to Fr. E. Thomas, 11 May, 1944, Bonhomme Correspondence, DAM 48

27. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 100

28. Rev. L. Sormany, "A Short Catechism on Catholic Action" 8 July, 1934, DAM 7

were expressly forbidden to assume duties or monopolize leadership of these groups.[29]

Bonhomme returned to Canada in 1939 to organize a massive fund-raising campaign to pay for all this expansion. In this he was extremely successful, and, by the end of his sojourn in his home province, pulpits throughout Quebec rang with the suffering of "notre négrillons" in Basutoland.[30] In 1939 alone, over $75,000 was raised for the RCM, an amount nearly equivalent to the Basutoland government's entire revenue that year from income tax.[31]

When war broke out, Bonhomme chose not to return to Africa until 1945. During his absence, however, he was in constant touch with his main "lieutenant" in the territory, the Rev. A. Blais, urging redoubled efforts to develop both an African clergy and a lay Catholic elite. This culminated in 1945 in the establishment of the University College of Pope Pius XII, the High Commission Territory's first institution of higher learning. Bonhomme wanted to create a lay Catholic elite which could match the intellectual and political skills of the Protestants, to whose liberal or Marxist tendencies "the field was left free" by the RCM's earlier lack of commitment to secondary education.[32] While the college accepted students from other missions and the other African territories, it was a major propaganda boost for the RCM, a "Little Canada" which came to be

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29. Viniculum Aug. 1950

30. This patronizing term ("our little negroes") appears with some frequency in RCM correspondence and fund-raising appeals, for example, Sebetia Codex, 20 July, 1941, DAM 16. Bonhomme's fund-raising activities later became a matter of serious concern for the Catholic church in Quebec, which introduced reforms in the 1950s to limit the perceived abuses of the Basutoland appeals. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 143; See also the warning issued to the OMI by the Vicar of Missions, Rev. Albert McComber, to "stay within the limits of prudence" in these matters. 8 Feb. 1960, DAM 7

31. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 133; CAR 1939,

32. Vinculum Apr.-June 1955, 56. See also Vinculum 1948, 58; Vinculum 1957, 81. The LNA and DAM contain, respectively, a number of boxes of files and reels of microfilms which deal with the RCM's internal discussions about and early administration of the university.

hailed in the liberal South African press as "the answer to academic apartheid" and "an important experiment in internationalism."[33]

To ensure self-sufficiency for all these grand projects, the RCM purchased a 1400 acre farm across the border in the Orange Free State which, by 1952, was shipping seven tons of food daily to supply the scattered missions.[34] By that time, the RCM claimed over 150,000 adherents (that is, 42% of the total Christian population)[35] and employed over 4000 Basotho in its various enterprises.[36] From a minority church with a reputation for inferior schools, the Canadian OMI had succeeded in less than two decades in making the Catholic mission:

> visible, felt, manifest. It was visible in the public place; it gave the impression of a conquering force which enveloped the Basotho nation.[37]

The PEMS responded to the Catholic threat by adopting similar strategies, including starting its first mission in the mountains (at Sehonghong, 1932) and inaugurating its own hospital (Scott Hospital in Morija, 1940). It simply could not begin to match the RCM in financial resources, however, and an air of gloom settled over the mission which pervaded even their propaganda:

> When a visitor was spending a few days with us, he told us he got a dark impression about our church... As an answer, I took him to an outstation from which we had a wide view of the surrounding country. From where we were, we could see four of our main churches and a great many outstations and schools. We also saw some shining new iron roofs, viz., the new Roman

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33. Contact 18 Oct. 1958, 6. The opening of Pope Pius XII, which granted its degrees in conjunction with the UNISA in Pretoria, anticipated by three years the Colonial Office's own establishment of university colleges in West Africa.

34. Mairot, Centenary Guide, 237

35. Census 1946, 22; Ten years later, these numbers had risen to over 200,000 and nearly 50% respectively. Census 1956, 100

36. Centenary: The Catholic Church in Basutoland, 1862-1962 (Mazenod, 1962)

37. Lapointe, An Experience, 94. Francois Mairot. A Centenary Guide (Mazenod, 1962) offers a detailed if laudatory account of the church's expansion under Bonhomme.

Catholic schools. He understood the situation at once.[38]

Many Protestants in Lesotho believe that the colonial administration was biased towards the RCM, even to the point of suggesting conspiracies against the PEMS.[39] Such a bias would be consistent with the general preference of the British for the chiefs, who were by then mostly Catholic, over "uppity" blacks such as those whom PEMS was producing. There is, however, no evidence to support a conspiracy theory. On the contrary, the government cast a very sceptical eye upon the activities of the Canadian Oblates and, on a number of occasions, intervened decisively to force changes in church policy and personnel.

Government ambiguity towards the RCM was reflected in several ways. On the one hand it appreciated the efforts of the church to build hospitals and generally to "civilize the Natives" in a cost-effective manner. The government especially praised the RCM for its attention to women and its emphasis on "industrial" education as opposed to the "bookish learning" of the PEMS.[40] Like the PEMS, however, many officials believed that the relatively shallow grasp of theological concepts which the Catholics demanded of their converts, when placed in the context of such bitter rivalry between the churches, was destabilizing the African mind and contributing to the outbreak of liretlo.[41] In the case of Pope Pius XII College, the government's attitude was nonchalant. As long as it was not called upon to provide money (which it was not for the college's first two decades of existence), the idea seemed fine. After all, until it took over the administration of the renamed University of Basutoland, Botswana and Swaziland in 1964, the government could boast about its

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38. Basutoland Witness 1/6 (1947), 2

39. For example, suggesting that the British made a secret pact with Chief Griffith to facilitate Catholic expansion in return for his co-operation in getting the Pim Report implemented. Interviews, Nt. Damane, Rev. Brutsch

40. CAR 1950, 42

41. Liretlo file, LEC Archives; Jones, Medicine Murder, 27

commitment to high standards of education with only a token contribution towards it.

On the other hand, the colonial administration took a very dim view of the RCM's "commercial" activities. In response to vociferous complaints from the European traders, it threatened legal action against the church.[42] Most of the traders' animosity was focused on the Buyers and Sellers Association, which, they felt, competed unfairly by not having to purchase a general trading license. They also pointed out to the government the dangers of Catholic clinics dispensing cheap medicine. The RCM was also instructed to desist in this, again upon pain of legal action by the government.[43] The result of this "unfortunate and bitter opposition from the Government" was that the co-operative movement in which Martin and Bonhomme had placed so much faith in the early 1930s was effectively shut down or forced to act covertly by the end of the decade.[44]

The administration also came to suspect the loyalty of the OMI. During World War II, the French Canadian priests were accused of not only harbouring deserters but also of "indulg[ing] in some highly undesirable anti-war propaganda designed to dissuade the natives from joining the forces."[45] For this they were "called severely to order,"[46] Relations were also strained by the mission "weighing in against" the government's

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42. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 25 Sept 1946, PRO DO 35/1177/Y 837/17

43. Baerlocher, Hardegger, 34

44. Later, when the government attempted to get its own co-operatives started, it found itself facing the same "tacit conspiracy" and "determined counter-attack against co-operation by the traders." Fifth Annual Report of the Registrar of Co-operative Societies (30 Sept. 1953) PRO DO 119/1468

45. Secretary of State to High Commissioner, 11 Dec. 1946, PRO DO 35/1177/Y 837/17

46. Ibid

plan to introduce a Native Treasury.[47] What most enraged Bonhomme, however, was the government's policy of restricting the expansion of schools by freezing government grants to education in 1940. Although this affected all the missions, the over-extended RCM was hit hardest. Within a year, Bonhomme estimated that this policy had forced the RCM to close up to 200 new schools. To many Catholics, it was tantamount to a secular assault on the right of the church to educate its congregation. In his determination to resist the "persecution against British subjects in favour of French Calvinists," Bonhomme enraged the ever-sensitive administration by invoking questions about it in the Canadian parliament.[48] Largely as a result of such "subversive activities," the administration informed the High Commission that RCM missionaries "have been a constant source of trouble to the Government."[49]

The "struggle for the schools" broke into almost open combat upon Bonhomme's return to the colony in 1945. In his first address to the Catholic community, Bonhomme reminded them that:

> From the beginning, the Basotho have been exploited in the most crying fashion by the merchants of the country and now, missionaries, we know it more than ever [...that] they are held in poverty, even in misery, the better to be dominated.[50]

Bonhomme also accused the government of holding, as "its principal goal," the compulsion of men to the mines, and, by its corruption of the chiefs through the National Treasury reforms, "having forgotten the most elementary laws of democracy."[51] He urged his missionaries to redouble their efforts to resuscitate the co-operative movement as the most

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47. Lord Harlech, "Report on Basutoland Tour, 7 Jan, 1942," PRO DO116/8

48. Bonhomme to his Quebec MP in 1940, cited in Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 198; see also his letter of 3 June, 1941, Bonhomme correspondence, DAM 48

49. Memo on Bonhomme's "Report on Basutoland," 9 June, 1946, PRO DO 35/1177/y837/17

50. Vinculum June 1945, 23 (my translation)

51. Ibid. 24

powerful means to "work intimately for a people in slavery."[52] Cognizant of a what had happened before, however, he also urged the greatest prudence and discretion if the "traps" of the government and traders were to be avoided. It was with obvious pride that he described the surprise and discomfiture of the Resident Commissioner upon learning that the Catholic co-operative movement had 1700 mostly new members within months of Bonhomme's return to the territory.[53]

Bonhomme spent the next year alternating polite declarations of loyalty with "vituperative" outbursts in government offices attempting to lobby for policy changes.[54] Driven to distraction by administration stonewalling, he finally exploded and in June, 1946, went over the head of the Resident Commissioner with a direct appeal to the Dominions Office. His six-page "Report on Basutoland" is a classic document of anti-colonial rage which began with an attack on the apparent collusion between the administration and the merchants:

> Traders are exploiting the people, selling their goods to the Basutho [sic] at a price three times more than to any European. Nothing has been done by the Government to check this. It is therefore commonly said that Government works hand in hand with the Traders against the Nation.

Bonhomme next attacked government policy on migrant labour:

> ...The Mines! A calamity for the Basutho people. Sent there by the Government, they inherit all the lowness of the outcast. The [South Africans] admit themselves that the compounds have become dens of sodomy, scandal and immorality. Venerian diseases [sic] are caught and brought back to the country... In short, all these disorders have arisen among the Basutho because the Government has failed to respect the moral laws of nature to help the Basutho financially, and to respect the authority of the chiefs.

Next came the administrative reforms:

> ...The Native Parliament is a comedy... People say that they are labouring under a fierce dictatorship. ... It seems that while the Missionaries are doing their utmost to inculcate

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52. Ibid., 23

53. Vinculum 2/5, 1946, 60

54. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 25 Sept. 1946, PRO DO 35/1177/y837/17

> respect of authority and ease the financial position of the people, the Goverment is carrying out a policy of oppression.

Bonhomme even attacked the merits of the authorities themselves:

> The present Resident Commissioner and the Officials--many of whom have showed themselves very incompetent--are not personae gratie [sic] in the eyes of the Nation.[55]

The Dominions Office's response was unprecedentedly swift and decisive. First it requested the Canadian government to use its influence to have its "immoral" and "unbalanced" citizen removed back to Canada.[56] When the Canadian government proved reluctant, the Vatican was approached directly and, within two weeks, Bonhomme was forced to resign.[57]

Bonhomme's successor as Bishop of Basutoland was the cultured and intellectual Joseph DesRosiers. His diplomatic approach towards the administration won almost immediate benefits for the mission, above all, an end to the freeze on school expansion. Moreover, DesRosiers' emphasis on the struggle against communist influence led to a dramatic shift in both the editorial tone of Moeletsi and the public discourse of the clergy. This was much more endearing to colonial officials than Bonhomme's earlier anti-capitalist rantings. Moeletsi's naive support for such "anti-communist" struggles as the French war in Algeria or foreign intervention in the Congo then made it an easy target for ridicule.[58]

Behind the discourse of "war on communism," however, the new bishop carried on or expanded many of the very same policies which Bonhomme had initiated, including the indigenization of the clergy and "social action."

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55. PRO DO 35/1177/Y 837/17; continued in DO 35/4160

56. Memo on Bonhomme's "Report on Basutoland" 9 June, 1946, PRO DO 35/1177/y837/17; Resident Commissioner to Sir Walter Huggard, 13 Mar. 1947, PRO DO 35/4160/y3535/1

57. High Commissioner Baring to Apostolic Delegate of South Africa, 13 Mar. 1947, PRO DO 4160/y3535/1 Even so, the ex-Bishop continued, from Canada, to interfere in the new administration. He was finally compelled to cease all communication with Basutoland and enter a monastery in 1950. Blanchet-Cohen, "Corporate Structure," 137

58. The RCM's political position in the period of preparation for self-government and independence will be explored in detail in the final chapter.

Under DesRosiers, direct ties were established with the Coady Institute in Canada which specialized in the formation of co-operatives and adult education. Special attention was given to the development of a lay Catholic elite by, for example, offering courses for chiefs in Public Administration and sending Basotho on scholarship to study co-operation in Canada.[59] "Social Studies Clubs" (Lithuto ea Bosechaba) were set up in villages throughout the country in 1959 as a means to stimulate discussion of social and political issues, such as the Catholic "duty" to vote. Sundry other local organizations, such as the Medico-Social Work Department of St. Joseph's Hospital (1961), the Association of Mutual Help (1964) and the Mater et Magistra Organization (1963) all sought to develop local handicrafts, co-operative agriculture, gardens, dam and road-building, and working groups for "the dissemination of knowledge."[60] Caritas Lesotho, the umbrella organization which brought all these together in 1965, also oversaw the functioning of four hospitals, eight out-stations, 13 maternity clinics, 47 dispensaries and Homecraft centres in "several villages" and hostels for Catholic girls in Maseru and Johannesburg.[61] Moeletsi expanded to become the largest circulation newspaper in the country, and the RCM set up the country's only radio station. So vast were the RCM's social and economic development enterprises that one of the first British technicians to arrive in the country after independence termed their co-ordinator, Father Gareau, "one of the most powerful men in the country."[62]

In view of all this activity, it is difficult to conceive that the

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59. By 1962, the RCM had sponsored 18 students to attend at St. Francis Xavier University. Centenary: The Catholic Church in Basutoland, 1862-1962 (Mazenod, 1962)

60. Lesotho Catholic Information Bureau. The Catholic Church at the Hour of Independence (Mazenod, 1962), 26

61. Ibid., 15

62. Report of the Director of Statistics, 86. Frank Russell file, Rhodes House

poor of Lesotho, in particular Basotho women, were as disturbed by the "hysterical anti-communism" of the RCM as were visiting academics. Rather, the church's struggle against "the slavery of the trusts and ambitions of the dictatorship"[63] was closer to the reality of most Basotho even outside its actual congregation. Bishop Bonhomme continued to be remembered by many Basotho as a progressive force, even, ironically, by the real Communists.[64] In the words of a Catholic peasant woman challenging a self-serving attack by a BCP leader upon her church:

> I'm hereby telling you that whitemen have been very good to us. They gave us education, good health, schools etc. without us paying even a cent. Don't forget how the whites helped us during the famine in 1933 after the long drought. Children were given food at Catholic missions. Even today the Catholic missions still help the Basotho a lot.[65]

Some of the church's enemies within Lesotho recognized this themselves. W.M. Mokete of the BCP, for example, asked rhetorically in 1965, "Who is more communistic in Basutoland than the Canadian Party?"[66] To the extent that the OMI argued in favour of "a more equitable distribution of wealth,"[67] he concluded that the Canadian missionaries were indeed "communists at heart."[68]

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The RCM's anti-monopoly capitalist propaganda and co-operative activity, and its promotion of the family, community, and economic self-reliance were of significant benefit to women in mitigating some of the oppressive features of the migrant labour system and the colonial regime.

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63. Bonhomme to RC, 14 Feb. 1946, reprinted in Vinculum 2/2 (1946), 22

64. J.M. Kena, one of the founders of the first trade union in Basutoland and later a member of the Lesotho Communist Party, asserted the widely-held belief that Bonhomme "was deported because of his progressive stand in the workers' struggle." Cited in Mohlakola F. Mohlakola "Early Trade Unions in Lesotho" (B.A. honours thesis, NUL, 1986), 20

65. Moeletsi 3 Feb. 1962

66. BNC 1965, 122

67. Annual Theological Conference, 1946 (DAM 12)

68. Mokete, BNC 1965, 122

While Bonhomme and many of his fellow French-Canadian missionaries held intensely patriarchal ideals about the subordinate place of women to men, their social and economic development projects brought direct benefit to the predominantly female rural population as well as generating new opportunities for women to assert meaningful autonomy from traditional and colonial structures which sought to inhibit them. The loyalty and activism of some Catholic Basotho women on behalf of their church and the pro-Catholic political party which was decisively demonstrated in the watershed elections of 1965, cannot be properly understood outside this apparent paradox.

Basotho women did not, however, simply react conservatively or passively to the economic and social changes taking place under the rubric of "development" in the middle and late periods of colonial rule. The next chapter will examine some of Basotho women's own autonomous efforts to improve their living conditions and rebuild the sense of community which offered them the greatest security in a generally disintegrating socio-economic situation.

Chapter Nine: Women and Development: Basotho Women's Independent Initiatives

As we have seen, Europeans, both officials in the government and most missionaries, justified a type of domestic education for Basotho girls and women which served their own interests on the grounds that this was what the girls and women themselves most desired. Needlework, laundry, childcare, knitting, cooking, and so on, were alone held to satisfy women's "natural instincts." Thus, good mothercraft, and how to find and keep a good husband, were almost universally asserted by European men and women in the period of the early to middle colonial rule to be the only skills which women really wanted or needed. Implicitly, many commentators held that these were also the only skills women were capable of mastering.[1]

Much of the historiography of Lesotho uncritically accepts the assumptions about Basotho women's domestic and religious "nature" which were propagated by colonialists and missionaries throughout the region since the mid-19th century, despite ample evidence that Basotho women, like women elsewhere in colonial Africa, rejected, or at least challenged in fundamental ways, both the customary and the colonial ideals of domesticity. That rejection was demonstrated by women in the courts through their legal challenges to traditional patriarchy, by the desultory embrace by girls of government "Housecraft" courses, and, most glaringly, by women opting for the life of "debauchery" in Johannesburg and the labour recruitment camps. Undeterred by "tradition," government harassment or the threats of the Nationalist regime in South Africa to crack down on their illegal presence in the urban areas, over 42,000 women left to work in the Union in 1956.[2]

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1. Jean and John Comaroff, "Home-made Hegemony: modernity, domesticity, and colonialism in South Africa, " in K.T. Hansen ed., African Encounters with Domesticity (New Brunswick, forthcoming)

2. Census 1956, 74. This is the official figure, based on the number of women who received passes to travel and therefore had permission from their male guardians or chiefs. Unofficially, an unknown but much larger

This chapter will present the voices of some of the Basotho women who participated in Christian pious organizations (or manyanos) and who founded the secular "homemaking movement" in Lesotho during the middle colonial period. These were the principal means by which Basotho women organized themselves to cope with migrant labour and related economic and social disruption. Partly because of their emphasis on piety and domesticity, most historians concerned with economic or political transformations have not considered women's voluntary associations to be of interest. Recent literature from the region suggests, however, that the manyanos and homemaking associations had much greater social, economic, and even, at times, political implications than hitherto considered.[3] Rather than simply dismissing them as a manifestation of women's purported "natural" religiosity or domesticity, this chapter will allow Basotho women to provide their own perspective upon the phenomenon from which a more critical interpretation can be drawn.

The Manyanos

Most Basotho women today belong to at least one and sometimes as many as three or four voluntary associations. These include church groups, the Blue Cross (a temperance association), kopaneng societies ("let's pull together"--to give mutual assistance for burials, ploughing, and emergency cash or labour requirements), and setokofele ("stock fair"). Setokofele operate as informal banks making credit available to members on a rotating basis. Maholisana operated in a similar manner but focused on

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number would have left, simply crossing the Calendon River on foot or slipping out of the territory through the mountain passes.

[3]. Debbie Gaitskill, "Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women's Christianity in South Africa," in Walker, Women and Gender, 251-72; idem, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-1939" Journal of African History 24/2 (1983): 241-56, and "'Wailing for Purity': Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters, 1912-40" in Shula Marks and R. Rathbone ed., Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa (London, 1982); Karen T. Hansen, "Introduction," in Hansen, ed. African Encounters with Domesticity (1992); Belinda Bozzoli, Women of Phokeng; Nancy Hunt, "Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's Foyer Social, 1946-1960" Signs 15 (1990): 447-474

entertainment.[4]

Women's societies stemmed from a long tradition of Basotho women assisting each other, on their own initiative, with child care, domestic and agricultural chores. Mutual support was necessary for women who, in a virilocal society, commonly left their home villages upon marriage. Not only did women's traditional tasks demand co-operative labour at key points in the production process but, once migrant labour became fully entrenched by the late 19th century, new brides often found themselves "grass widows" after a few weeks or less as their husbands went off to work in South Africa.

This tradition of women helping each other cope with life in a strange new village was also observed among women brewers of illicit liquor in the camps. Much to the chagrin of the police, these women helped each other, among other things, to avoid detection and arrest.[5]

Basotho women's voluntary associations frequently functioned without bureaucracy and often without "constitutions." Although there were generally clear leaders and hierarchies, Basotho women tended to retain the consensual style of meetings which was characteristic of Basotho men's traditional politics but which, by the late 1930s, had been largely corrupted or replaced by the more formal and adversarial style favoured by the colonial government. The women involved often still possess a consciousness of a distinctive "approach" by women to interpersonal relations. They stress modesty, humility, consensus and tolerance as opposed to the opposite attributes frequently shown by the colonialists and members of the Basotho aspirant elite. For example, where male Basotho preachers had historically attempted to repress certain aspects of Sesotho culture, one of the first women ministers attributes her present extraordinary success to her "traditional" creed:

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4. Coplan, "Emergence," 364

5. Phil Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women?"; Coplan, "Emergence"

> Be gentle, love people, don't admonish. As soon as you admonish people they become stubborn... So, I won't be harsh on other people's way of life. For example, it's not my business if women brew beer... We are all sinners.[6]

This consciousness of a distinctively female "approach" extends to awareness of different priorities and organizing differently from men. Thus, while the men of the government-sponsored co-operative movement demanded and received money for buildings, tractors and office equipment (eventually going bankrupt), women simply met at each other's homes and used or adapted the tools and resources they already possessed. Likewise, while men busied themselves with politics ("like little boys"): "Women like work, they don't like to be talking. They don't want silly things."[7]

'Masechele Khaketla, one of the co-founders of Maseru's Iketsetsing Primary School in the early 1960s, explained the reasons for her own success in gender terms:

> When we started here, we were women only. In our first meeting we banned committees because we'd seen how committees had destroyed so many co-ops. Now, many men cannot understand how twenty women have stayed together for so long without any problems. They can't believe women can be intelligent enough to run a school.[8]

This lack of formal bureaucratic structures or written testaments of purpose and function, partly explains why women's voluntary associations remained largely invisible to the British until very late in colonial rule. Such women's groups as did exist were assumed by the government to be primarily social in function and therefore of scant economic or political importance. Thus, as late as 1948, the Colonial Annual Report flatly asserted that there were "no women's societies" in the territory.[9]

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6. Interview, 'Me Pholo

7. Interview, Priscilla Fobo

8. Interview, 'Me Khaketla. "Bearded creatures" are widely distrusted by the women of such organizations and any efforts by men to intrude are firmly resisted. As the president of the Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW) put it diplomatically, "That is not to say that we exclude men--if you invite the women you must invite the men. But I don't think we can allow them in because it might cause problems." Interview, E. M. Mosala

9. CAR 1948, 59

Nonetheless, the government did recognize that Basotho women had the ability to initiate and sustain social groups which could to be turned toward what was, by official standards, meaningful activity. Notwithstanding their general backwardness and unruliness in colonial eyes, the government was impressed enough by women's voluntary associations to state that "the Mosuto woman gives promise of providing sound material for Cooperation."[10]

By far the largest, most widespread and most visible of women's groups in Lesotho were the women's pious associations or prayer unions of the Christian churches. These also have the longest continuous history, having been established in each of the three major churches over a century ago. The Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) was the first in this, as Father Joseph Gérard made the conversion of women a priority of his mission in Roma valley. Of his first seven converts in 1865, six were women.[11] These he formed into a pious association called Women of the Holy Family, "the scope of which is to contribute to the upkeep and decorum of the altar."[12] It is important to emphasize this practical aspect to piety, and that prayer, as it was understood by the Basotho, involved both meditation and voluntary labour for the church. Father Gérard, for example, stressed "a cult of obedience and manual work."[13] As the mission expanded, so did the latter element, from upkeep of the altar to helping to keep up new buildings and grounds, including the home and garden of the priest.[14]

Women of the Holy Family also acted as "apostles" to draw converts

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10. Ibid

11. J.P. Martin, "Educating the Sotho, 1833-1884," (PhD diss., Columbia U. 1983), 164

12. Tableau of Missions of the Apostolic Vicariate of Natal, 25 July, 1865, DAM 44, 164

13. Martin, "Educating the Sotho, 1833-1884," 166-67

14. Ahbers, "Father Joseph Gérard," 241

to the RCM, most often from among women at the margin of society such as widows or neglected junior wives of polygynists.[15] Each Catholic mission established its own women's association, generally under the guidance of the Sisters of the Holy Family and other nuns. While the RCM made only modest progress in winning converts prior to the 1910s, such success as it did enjoy in the late 19th century was largely attributable to these women.[16] This was despite the fact that, originally, there was little or no connection between the pious associations of each parish, while the practical side of their work rarely extended beyond meeting parochial needs. Indeed, Father Gérard was criticized for showing a proprietary attitude towards "his" women whom he attempted to keep in isolation not only from the community as a whole but even from the other Catholic missionaries.[17] Only in the 1920s did this begin to change, when a single, territory-wide structure of lay Catholic associations was formed under the rubric of "Catholic Action." Within this, by far the most active and prominent association was that for mature women, the Ladies of Sainte Anne (LSA).

Among the Protestants, the first women's organization was established by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) in 1889. As with the women of the Catholic church, there was a "step by step progression for girls from the children's organization to the Youth League to the Bo-'Ma-bana," (literally, "The Mothers of the Children").[18] In contrast to the first Catholic women's groups, however, the Bo-'Ma-bana began as a Bible study group of educated, married women under the direction of Alina Dyke, the wife of the pastor at Morija. This pattern was maintained as the Bo-'Ma-bana spread from the centre of the mission

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15. Francois Mairot, Voix du Basutoland: Centenary Guide (Mazenod, 1962)

16. Martin, "Educating the Sotho," 206

17. Martin, "Educating the Sotho," 166-67

18. Interview, 'Me Khaketla

throughout the colony. PEMS prayer groups were set up by the wives of missionaries and Basotho evangelists who hoped that a nucleus of literate Basotho women could act as a conduit of "modern" ideas into the mass of the female PEMS population. This assumed critical importance after the large-scale apostasy of Basotho men converts in the late 19th century. As a result, "we are obliged, due to the shortage of men, to replace them with women, both for public prayer and for evangelization."[19] This literate bent led to the foundation of Lesotho's first women's periodical, Leeba ("The Dove") in 1924.

The women's association of the Anglican church, which was established soon after the foundation of the first Anglican mission in the country (1878), followed much the same pattern. Because of this church's association with the colonial regime, the Anglican Mothers' Union may have laid even greater emphasis than the PEMS on the formation of a women's elite which could inspire loyalty to the Queen and British values among the mass of the female congregation.[20]

Despite these differences in origin and theology, the manyanos of the three major Christian churches in Basutoland actually functioned in strikingly similar ways. To begin with, until the late 1950s, they were all oriented in a virtually identical manner towards charitable work and the cultivation of improved mothercraft or domesticity. Both aspects involved a combination of "pious and practical Christianity." Thus, charity included volunteer work such as cleaning the church, fund-raising, working in the priest's or ministers garden, and distributing clothes to the poor, as well as long hours, or even days of prayer. Such devotion was understood to be a form of labour for the church and community since it was believed it would bring divine intervention to achieve the same results as more mundane labour:

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19. JME 1890, 291

20. Personal communication, John Gay. See Chapter Four, footnote 4 for a brief discussion of the role of the Anglican church in Lesotho.

> When you talk to the elder women, many of them say we are getting worse, for in the past there were some really great worshippers. Women then knew how to sacrifice which they say we no longer are doing. For example, it used to be that only four women would come together to pray endlessly, fervently, all day and all night saying the novena for nine days in order to get a priest. And they succeeded. Now these women query why we don't pray like that any more.[21]

In a similar way, cultivating Christian domestic virtues involved the combination of either group prayer or private meditation with learning practical mothercraft skills. Thus Leeba published articles which focused on "religious matters, hygeine, care of babies, education problems, and anti-alcoholism," balancing quizzes on Bible knowledge with advice on raising children.[22] The LSA drew their domestic inspiration directly from a Biblical role model:

> The sodality is named after the grandmother of Jesus, Santa Anna. Our women pray to her and have taken after her as the one who raised Mary to be such a good mother herself. We pray to her to help to keep our families up to date and protect them.[23]

This constant reference to prayer and the emphasis which the manyanos placed on public demonstrations of piety led many secular observers to conclude that they did not achieve the balance of the pious and the practical which they purported to seek. They often appeared, on the contrary, to hamstring real development efforts by causing women to devote so much energy to other-worldly concerns. As such, they were often the butt of criticism from development-minded missionaries. The priest at Auray, for example, while praising his LSA members as "the most active, most universal, most numerous" of his congregation, complained that "the only thing they know how to do is to hold meetings."[24] The President of the Bo-'Ma-bana in the 1950s also publicly criticized her own association

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21. Interview, 'Me Cecilia Makuta, Secretary of LSA, Roma

22. Basutoland Witness 3/2 (March/April 1949), 17

23. Interview, Cecilia Makuta

24. Catholic Action report, 1953, DAM 61 (my translation)

for "sermonizing and hymn-singing to the neglect of practical issues."[25]

The women of the manyanos did not, however, see themselves this way. On the contrary, the dominant discourse of prayer among these women conveyed a broad meaning to Basotho women which commonly escaped Western, or Westernized observers. "Prayer" was understood by the women to involve both communication with a diety as well as the provision of mutual support and concrete advice on matters which could enable mothers to enhance the stability and health of their families. Thus, where a Western academic concludes that "this whole strange manifestation" of African women's religiosity is "singularly lacking in utilitarian purpose,"[26] the President of the Mother's Union understands her manyano this way:

> SH: The Mothers' Union helps the church and it helps to make good families. By that I mean it tries to teach the proper ways to bring up the children and to help the husband to be a good father. We don't talk to him usually but we have a special prayer for him. We can talk to the wife to advise her what to do to win back his favour. We always win by prayer and discipline. I think we are so successful that we fight to get Mothers' Unions everywhere in the country. In that way, Lesotho will improve.
>
> ME: What do you mean when you say 'discipline'?
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> SH: When I say discipline, I mean by that that a mother must set a good example to other women by her dignified behaviour. It is the responsibility of the woman to see that the family is well-organized, for example, by sending the children to school. The man's responsibility is to send money but since they don't always do that, we teach women ways to earn on their own. There are some great businesswomen in this country who started with absolutely nothing but now they own shops, fields, restauraunts etc.[27]

The women of manyanos also believed that the "little" tasks they performed demonstrated:

> the right worship of doing things [sic]. In my opinion we work hand in hand with the Bible. We teach women the practical way of living the Bible. For example, you help your neighbours, visit the hospital, you approach the needy to do jobs for them like fetching water, washing, cooking, smearing huts, taking sick people to the clinics, distributing old clothes etc. We

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25. Alina Brutsch cited in Basutoland Witness 15/2 (Apr.-Aug. 1961), 13

26. Mia Brandel-Syrier, Black Women in Search of God (London, 1962), 231

27. Interview, Sister Hilda

> go to people who are so poor that they need help in the fields. This way people who are better off can share with those who are not, and that includes men as well.[28]

This ideal of combining prayer and praxis harkened back to traditional religion as well as to Christian ideals. Indeed, frequently implicit in the self-image of manyano women is a critique of Christian hypocrisy (and Christian men) in that the ideals of the church, such as love for one's neighbour, were often noticeably absent from the behaviour of the missionaries and catechists. Moreover, Christianity as it was practiced by many missionaries and Basotho converts was perceived by many Basotho women as subverting the traditional sense of community which had previously given women succour and sustenance in a patriarchal society:

> We used to have our own Sesotho religion you know. It was a practical one. People looked after each other because if not, they feared the ancestors were watching. Christianity now says you just don the uniform and go to church on Sunday and the rest of the week doesn't matter. But what is your religion worth if you can't put it into action? Even just a little bit, like cleaning up or smearing mud.[29]

In other cases, it was not so much the perception that hypocrisy and strife were inherent to Christianity, but that this was the result of the spread of commodity values which accompanied Christianity, particularly the PEMS. A former member of the Bo-'Ma-bana and one of Lesotho's first educated, professional women, pinpoints cash as the source of corruption in society whose most pernicious effects coincide precisely with the centre of the PEMS mission:

> Morija is such a difficult place to live, you see. It's not poverty but perhaps it is the losing of our customs. In the past, I would take something cooked to a funeral but now we give money--even 5¢. What can you buy? And does a sick person have time to cook? This idea of money... The outside villages seem to be better organized. At least they seem to be keeping their culture better.[30]

Working to rebuild a sense of community which cash, colonialism and

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28. Interview, Cecilia Makuta

29. Interview, 'Me Khaketla

30. Interview, 'Me Masholungu

Christianty tended to break down, the manyanos offered women much more than "other-worldly" escapism. Leeba states explicitly that one of the main tasks of the Bo-'Ma-bana is "to fight loneliness.[31] In the words of a former member:

> Women tend to need something reliable in their lives which the church provides. Men tend to be very unreliable and the church therefore offers consolation to women for the inability of men to provide the love they need. That is why there are many women's organizations in the all of the churches.[32]

One way which the manyanos attempted to build a sense of community among themselves was to attempt to erase some of the class lines which were being drawn in the early part of the century. One of the most important "levellers" in this regard was the uniform. The Bo-'Ma-bana wore a sombre, Rembrandtesque black outfit with a fringe of white at the collar, the Mother's Union a black dress with a brilliant blue robe and the LSA a black dress with an imperial purple robe. Their loyalty to these uniforms was notorious, even to the point of allegedly denying their children school fees or clothes in order to buy them.[33] They were also a common cause for the sharp rebuke of "pride" from disapproving ministers.[34] Efforts were made, without success, to repress the "abuses" associated with the uniforms,[35] while both European and African male commentators often interpreted this stubborn obsession with appearances as proof of African women's (quaint or infuriating, depending on the observer) lack of reason.[36]

Undoubtedly some of this criticism was warranted, however, a

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31. Leeba 1965/4, 4

32. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

33. L'Apostolat Laic Oct-Dec. 1958, 4

34. See, for example, Emille Schloesing in JME 1937/1, 27

35. Interview, Alina Brutsch

36. See, for some examples, Sister Saint-André Corsini, Trente Jours en Mer, Trois Cents sur Terre, Trente Heures dans l'Air: Relation d'un Voyage au Basutoland et au Nyasaland (Ottawa, 1947), 234; Brandel-Syrier, Black Women in Search of God, 30 and passim

profound rationality lay beneath the uniform issue which invalidates assertions of women's lack of reason. Although the uniforms frequently indicated subtle but "complicated gradations of status," the hierarchy so denoted depended upon the women's contribitions to the church and meritorious behaviour in the community.[37] Even the poorest women could thus rise to positions of status and respect which were otherwise unattainable. The churches, for all their aversion to the outward display of "holiness" or "pride," therefore cautioned prudence in attempting to suppress manyano uniforms because, as a Catholic priest explained: "These women can, without shame, hide their poverty in their official dress."[38]

A similar "irrationality" among manyano members was their frequently dogmatic insistence on propriety and rules. The latter included determining who, of the brides in the village, was entitled to wear white at a wedding (certified virgins only), who could speak at a meeting and when, and who sat where in church. Attendance at church and meetings was a must, and certain prayers or hymns were dictated for certain specific occasions. Adherence to these rules gave women a sense of perfectability which, like the uniforms, could erase class or other social differences between them.

The sense of almost legalistic piety and propriety among manyanos could be taken to lengths which sometimes astonished European observers. For example, when the shoulder of a woman became exposed during an athletic farewell dance for a visiting nun, the president of the LSA stopped the dance to ensure that dignity was maintained. This led the nun to observe:

> What strikes me most, is that these women tolerate absolutely nothing unseemly. They act exactly the same way in their own villages.[39]

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37. Gaitskill, "Devout Domesticity," 260

38. L'Apostolat Laic Jan.-Mar. 1959, 44

39. Corsini, Thirty Days, 234 (My translation)

This rigorous formalism and seemingly excessive propriety was interpreted by many observers as being oppressive to women. It is clear, however, that the women themselves desired it and were attracted to the manyanos in very large numbers. By 1961, there were over 10,000 members in Bo-'Ma-bana alone.[40] Far from feeling oppressed by the rules, women in the manyanos steadfastly resisted attempts by their priests and pastors to do away with them. The fact was that the rules provided a framework which supported an extraordinary range of uninhibited and non-traditional behaviours. The prayer meetings themselves were often the apparent antithesis of order:

> The general atmosphere of a Manyano is one of weeping and sighing. The air is heavily charged with intense emotion. Women stand up and speak out their troubles, sometimes wailing or screaming, sometimes in frenzied whisperings. Their bodies tremble. Their eyes are tightly closed or fixed heavenward. There is talk of miracles, of the sick and the dead.[41]

An important aspect of the meetings, which normally took place on a set day each week, was to allow women to experience catharsis from the stress of the poverty, alienation and/or abuse which they commonly experienced. This could occur through "self-induced frenzy" such as described above.[42] It could also (and probably was more frequently) be attained in less sensational ways. These included consultation with respected elder women, group therapy and enforced meditation:

> PL: Before I joined the Sodality, I couldn't get time to meditate or just reflect on the problems of my life. Now I have an excuse to make the time and I find that work and prayer sort of complement each other. In fact, it is stipulated that I make the time, which helps a lot.
>
> ME: What do you pray about?
>
> PL: In our meetings we learn prayer To Be, reflect, meditate

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40. Basutoland Witness 15/2 (1961), 13

41. Brandel-Syrier, Black Women in Search of God, 34

42. Brandel-Syrier, Black Women in Search of God, 35. One manyano in Johannesburg in the 1910s even called itself "Wailing" and resisted the church hierarchy's attempt to make it adopt a more "respectable" name. Gaitskill, "Devout Domesticity," 259; idem, "Wailing for Purity," in Marks and Rathbone, Industrialisation, 338-57

> and even to seek advice on material things. What issues we talk about depends on the size of the group. That can be in the hundreds but women are not afraid to speak out. I don't know what happens but the Sodality makes you feel so much at home, so full of love that women will not be afraid to speak up, either to solicit or give advice. Then they find that they are not alone in their problems but these are shared by many.[43]

Quite often the problems discussed in manyano meetings centred around negligent or abusive husbands:

> In these meetings we ask for prayers in our different problems. Mothers always have problems either with fathers or husbands or children. We come together to open our hearts about these things and then we gain strength by prayer. By open our hearts, I mean we would talk about the things that are worrying us. That is why some young men don't like it--they feel the criticism.[44]

In addition to providing a catharsis, the women at manyano meetings could also offer practical advice to an aggrieved woman, mainly "on developing self-sufficiency and how a woman can generate income."[45] On occasions when neither catharsis nor advice were sufficient, the manyanos also made provision for action:

> PL: With serious family problems, a woman will usually go to one of the older women, perhaps to 2 or 3 of them, and discuss it privately. Those women may then volunteer to approach a man if he is causing troubles. That is why the LSA is the most disliked organization (by men). It has a bad reputation because it is believed to interfere too much in family affairs. The men complain and sometimes have even threatened to beat them but all the same that doesn't stop them.
>
> ME: Can you give me an example.
>
> PL: Yes, because I recall one incident of a woman where her husband burnt her uniform to stop her going to meetings. He was a cruel man so we advised her to stay home. She was really miserable and most of the time was in tears. She cried for two or three years. Then he relented and bought her a new uniform. Well, I don't know if it was our prayers or what. We didn't have any direct confrontation with him because we knew he was a violent man, but we used to sneak around to keep her informed and pray with her. You see, men they are usually quite resistant and refuse to change their habits. With time however, they soften and yield.[46]

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43. Interview, Philomena Lesema

44. Interview, 'Me Khaketla

45. Interview, 'Me Lesema

46. Interview, 'Me Lesema

The gentle, but relentless approach, was clearly the strategy of preference of the manyanos when dealing with wayward or violent men. Given the structural limitations upon women created by traditional patriarchy, colonial rule and migrant labour, this was unquestionably the most viable strategy available to women who wished to remain within the standards acceptable to the community. The traditional authority of men, after all, had been significantly buttressed by the colonial state and men's often exclusive access to cash and fields. Their customary "strong moral obligations" towards women were under attack by cash and colonial ideologies alike, while the customary protections accorded to women by the chiefs were being undermined by the latter's progressive bureaucratization. Thus men by the 1930s could in practice exercise almost unlimited power over women. Aside from running away, which many Basotho women did despite the strong legal, social and church sanctions against it, there was little else a woman could do to resist men's power except to call upon the quiet solidarity of the manyano.

Yet the gentle approach of the manyanos was not only the only viable one. It was also considered to be effective, despite the normal intransigence of men:

> If a man is being a neglectful husband we may try to talk to him but we won't be rough on him. We keep talking in a pleasant way that will make him ashamed after some time. We always win out through perseverance.[47]

From a man's point of view:

> In fact, the women rule the world. They are very, very strong here, although they have a funny way. You can't trust which way they will go... The Bo-'Ma-bana, although they were never disobedient before, yet they were quite stubborn. There were always murmuring about something.[48]

Such persistence contributed to an aura of power around the manyanos which far exceeded their modest and conservative public demeanour. Indeed, a man would think twice about incurring a second visit from a group of

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47. Interview, 'Me Fobo

48. Interview, Ntate Sekhesa

senior women, who, dressed in their austere uniforms and murmuring about damnation, might imply that they had the power to make his life hell on earth. There were even stories, very possibly apocryphal, which gave a mythic substance to female vengeance:

> Heh, yes! There was a time when the women in the village at Roma got together and they castrated a man who was sexually harassing them.[49]

Or, in the matter-of-fact words of an Anglican nun:

> Not all Basotho men are useless. Some come home to help plough if their contract allows. In bad cases though, the wife can come to the weekly Mothers' Union meeting to complain or ask advices [sic]. The Mothers' Unions do a lot of visiting. All the women who are available at the time go there, wearing their uniforms of course, to give their prayers. And I think the men respect our visits because there's a lot of talk of poison these days. Sometimes it's not blame--it's true--women kill their husbands. There was one woman who complained to us that her husband was thrashing her and that she wanted to leave him. Well, that very week he died.[50]

Closer to the realm of historical fact, the manyanos did police the behaviour of their own members. At the weekly meetings, women who transgressed social convention could be "disciplined or reprimanded."[51] Indeed, the LSA meetings were observed to be acting precisely as women's courts had done in pre-Christian days:

> It sometimes happens that they hold their judicial courts where public misdeeds are discussed and where one or the other is determined to be guilty.[52]

In most cases, public reprimands (such as losing the right to wear the uniform) was punishment enough. Manyanos were also capable of more dramatic action if the woman did not mend her ways:

> If we had problems with our members, as women we would first go to discuss them with the minister's wife. We would pray together and only after, if necessary, go to the minister. That was not often. Usually, we did such things within the Bo-'Ma-

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49. Interview, Father Anthony Hall, OMI

50. Interview, Sister Hilda

51. Interview, 'Me Lesema

52. Corsini, Thirty Days, 153. See also DAM 61, where the priest of Auray in 1953 praised the LSA both for converting new members and for "regulating marriage cases."

> bana. To show you how it worked, I can tell of one time when there was a woman and a man here who were committing adultery. We all went to her place and beat her up. The man ran away and returned to his wife.[53]

This ability to organize and discipline themselves was frequently disturbing to the church hierarchy. The priest at Auray, noting that the LSA were "everywhere" and that they went on with their business regardless of whether a priest was there to direct them or not, was concerned that "they rarely report on their activities."[54] The former president of the Bo-'Ma-bana described an even more disturbing independence:

> [Those women] could be very exclusive... The wives of missionaries for the most part did not attend their meetings for they could be ostracized. They were also disturbed by the women's "mysteries" which were a bit dangerous from the point of view of church doctrine. Their secretive attitude extended even to such affairs as how to make soap or cakes. Attempts by the European women to have some professional Basotho women accepted into the organization were just rejected.[55]

Brandel-Syrier also quotes a white missionary in South Africa who rued the <u>manyanos</u> in a similar vein:

> They are independent and want to be independent. They do not allow a European. My wife is probably titular head of the <u>Manyanos</u> here, but in fact, they resent her presence.[56]

By asserting such autonomy from the official church leadership, Basotho women were able to use their church organizations to assert new forms of behaviour in the community in general. For example, they might insist on carrying a coffin and speaking publicly at funerals or even reading the epistle in service.[57] They might take the most prestigious front seats in church, ahead of senior men, and stay up all night or even

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53. Interview, 'Me Mohlaboli

54. Catholic Action report, 1953, DAM 61 (my translation)

55. Interview, Alina Brutsch

56. Brandel-Syrier, <u>Black Women in Search of God</u>, 32

57. The latter was first commented upon by PEMS missionaries as a necessity ("because of the paucity of men" in the church) as early as 1880s (<u>JME</u> 1880, 291, my translation). See also Limakatso Charakupa, "The Roman Catholic Mission of Our Lady of Laghetto, Leribe District, Lesotho," B.A. National University of Lesotho, (Roma, 1978), 20; and interviews with 'Me Khaketla, 'Me 'Mohloboli, Sister Hilda, 'Me Phohlo

for several nights, singing, dancing and preparing for special occasions such as saints' days among the Catholics and Anglicans.[58] Women left their villages and husbands to travel long distances to meetings or ceremonies on their own, sleeping in the church.[59] The procession of Fatima, initiated by the RCM in 1946, annually brought as many as 10,000 women from all around the country to Ha Ramabanta in the central Malutis for several days of celebration and mass prayer.[60] Women in the manyanos also approached women and men alike to discuss theology and win converts.[61] They built churches and school.[62] They even organized and staged large public demonstrations such as the one recorded in 1972 where hundreds of women marched to chase a "sorcerer of evil reputation" out of the village.[63]

Missionary misgivings about the independent or assertive behaviour of women in the manyanos tended to be assauged by the "amazing" ability of these women to raise money for the churches.[64] The first catholic manyano in Roma raised £20 in it first year, an enormous sum in a peasant community in 1865.[65] More recently, the Bo-'Ma-bana were termed the

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58. Interviews, 'Me Khaketla, 'Me Phohlo

59. Corsini, Thirty Days, 142; Gaitskill also records instances of manyano women as early as the 1920s travelling hundreds of miles across South Africa to attend their meetings. "Devout Domesticity," 265

60. Mairot, Centenary Guide, 290; See also any early October issue of Moeletsi for reportage on the event.

61. Again, lay women evangelists were observed in the PEMS as early as the 1880s (JME 1890, 241). One of the most impressive such occasions in recent years was "The Hunt" organized by the PEMS in 1963. Hundreds of women (and a few dozen men) fanned out from their villages on a designated day to win converts to the church. See Leselinyana for coverage of the event.

62. Charakupa, "Laghetto," 15; Mairot, Centenary Guide; Codex of Butha Butha 1945, page 31, DAM 15

63. Bernadette 'Manyeoe Pelea, "La femme Mosotho: élément dynamique de la nation," Vivant Univers (1973), 34 (my translation)

64. Interview, Alina Brutsch

65. Tableau of Missions of the Apostolic Vicariate of Natal, 25 July, 1865, DAM 44, 164

"backbone of the church"[66] and "our Church's chief support"[67] on account of their prodigious fund-raising abilities for the PEMS. It was, for example, money raised by the Bo-'Ma-bana in 1963 which led to the re-opening of the Cana and Thabana Morena secondary schools for girls after over a decade of closure.[68] With the LSA, their seemingly tireless devotion to the church led the priest at St. Michael's mission to describe its members as "forming here, as throughout Lesotho, the most disciplined, the most active and the most apostolic association" in his parish.[69] In this devotion, they did not fear to "flaunt" their beliefs, "rallying thus thousands of other people of good will" to the cause of the church.[70]

Church leaders did not, however, tolerate the independent attitude of the manyanos simply because of their good works. On the contrary, they often had no choice for the manyanos were capable of resisting even direct orders from the church leadership with "formidable" tenacity. This was most noticeable in the case of the RCM which, because it had greater access to external funds than the other churches, was less dependent upon its manyanos for fund-raising than its Protestant rivals. As a result, while PEMS ministers often fulminated against their manyano, fear of occasioning a "strike" made them generally leave the women alone. By contrast, Catholic priests commonly attempted to direct intervention. They were defeated in every recorded case, "driving certain Fathers towards the suppression, pure and simple, of the Ladies of Ste. Anne."[71] For example, an attempt to ban uniforms led to "many" women simply leaving the

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66. Interviews Rev. Albert Brutsch, 'Me Sibolla

67. Basutoland Witness 7/1 (Jan.-March, 1953), 8

68. The schools had been closed because the mission could not afford to pay teachers. Jubile ea Lilemo tse Lekholo ea Mokhalto oa Bo-'Ma-bana (Morija, 1989)

69. Marcel Ferragne, Au pays des Basotho: les 100 ans de la mission St.Michel, 1868-1968, (Mazenod, 1968), 97 (my translation)

70. Ibid. (my translation)

71. L'Apostolat Laic Jan/Mar 1959/1, 23 (my translation)

church in protest.[72] On frequent other occasions:

> The priest would disband [the LSA] only to find that these women would have none of it. In three weeks they were back together, the very same group![73]

A missionary in South Africa described another favoured, and highly successful, tactic of manyanos:

> This 'sitting down' is the most exasperating reaction of African women when they do not like a thing. I know all about it. It means that they do not come to meetings, they do not resign, and they do not give any explanations. They just wait. What are the waiting for? They wait for the next priest or the next bishop to come. After all, this one will not stay forever.[74]

The most common explanation offered for the manyanos' stubborn resistance to the suggestions or orders of their spiritual advisors is that the manyanos were dominated by senior women. The often unwritten rules of membership tended, for instance, to reinforce a hierarchy based on age in that elder women could better afford the time and were therefore likelier to achieve the "perfection" the rules demanded. Another criticism of this aspect of the manyanos is that elderly women "seemed to like being the boss,"[75] and to exercise a domination over people which was not possible for them anywhere else in Basotho society. "The old girls" also had a vested interest in keeping the young and the people with new ideas in positions of subordination or even silence within their organization since change would inevitably undermine their power. Like gerontocracies anywhere, the manyanos were inclined to cling to the "tried and true." This was not only frustrating for the missionaries who hoped to make their manyanos a force for progressive change and community development. It also alienated many younger Basotho women:

> Bo-'Ma-bana were a great attraction to me as a young girl in the foothills because of their monthly magazine, Leeba. I

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72. Ibid., 44

73. Interview, Father Desmond Fahy

74. Cited in Brandel-Syrier, Black Women in Search of God, 96

75. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

> especially liked their recipes and hints on sewing... After marriage and having my children, I decided to join them although I was soon very disappointed. I had hoped to introduce these new ideas of sharing and helping the poor but the old women who dominated did not want to change. They accused me of 'splitting.' Normally, you find the leader is a very old woman who does not want to hear new ideas.[76]

This domination of the manyanos by older women was consistent with Sesotho tradition as well as much Christian doctrine. In the early period of colonial rule it was also quite compatible with the needs of the state since it was perceived to add a further dimension to the effort to keep women, particularly young widows, disciplined and firmly rooted in the rural areas. After the crisis of 1933 exposed the need for urgent development efforts, however, the alienation of young and educated women from positions of influence within the manyanos began to attract attention from the missionaries as a serious problem. The different churches adopted different strategies to address this issue which were to have, by the 1960s, completely unexpected but highly significant political ramifications.

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In the case of the PEMS and Anglican Church, educated women were often driven out of their manyanos by their frustration in not being able to implement, or sometimes even to express, their ideas about rural development and social change. The PEMS did enforce the restructing of the Bo-'Ma-bana in 1954 along the democratic lines in place by then in the mission as a whole, however, this new constitution did not noticeably change the status quo since elder women were then simply elected rather than acclaimed as leaders. Educated women tended as a result to channel their "practical Christianity" into such secular organizations as the Homemakers Association. This was often done with the full encouragement of their ministers who were likewise fed up with the conservatism of the "old girls" in the Bo-'Ma-bana and Mothers' Union. The PEMS weekly newspaper, Leselinyana, is full of glowing references to the Homemakers' Association

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76. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

and its activities in the 1950s, in marked contrast to the patronizing language used of the Bo-'Ma-bana.

In the case of the RCM, however, frustration with the LSA led to a different development. The roots of this change go back to the 1920s when the church adopted a worldwide strategy to combat the intense criticism or outright attacks which it was under in the aftermath of the world war and the Bolshevik revolution. In 1922, Pope Pius XI directed that "mass lay pious associations" be formed and co-ordinated under the umbrella of what he termed "Catholic Action." These associations, or "sodalities," were intended to demonstrate that the church could help the mass of the people to meet their spiritual and material needs better than any liberal or socialist political parties. It was believed that Catholic Action could do this by organizing lay members of the congregation both to proselytize the teachings of the church and to work towards social justice. The work of Father Joseph Cardijn among the working classes of Belgium was taken as a model of how the church could help people to "discover for themselves" the social, spiritual and economic advantages of Catholic co-operation.[77]

Catholic Action came to Basutoland indirectly when, after 1930, the administration of the vicariat was transferred to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) of the Eastern Province of Canada (that is, Quebec and the Atlantic region). By that time, Canadian Catholics had already applied this radical approach with some impressive results. The most noteworthy of these was the establishment of an extension department at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. In the 1920s, this became renowned for organizing successful co-operatives among the impoverished fishers and workers on the northeastern shore of the province. By the 1930s, these were widely held to have been the key to the electoral demise of the hitherto popular socialist and communist political parties. Experience with similar efforts in Quebec, particularly the development of

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77. Andrew Prior, ed., Catholics in Aparthied Society (Cape Town, 1982), 28

Catholic trade unions (or syndicates), were part of the background of the majority of Catholic priests and nuns in Basutoland by the mid-1930s. They launched Catholic Action in the territory with the specific objective of enhancing the appeal of the church by expanding the "social action" component of prayer. Catholic Action at first involved one men's association (Men of the Sacred Heart) and three for women and children--the Children of Mary, the Lebotho of Mary and the LSA.[78]

It was not long, however, before the leaders of the church were judging the LSA deficient in much the same ways as their Protestant counterparts. Overcoming a history of extreme sectarianism, the RCM was at first favourable to its women members joining the Homemakers' Association.[79] Although this association was secular, and therefore inherently suspect in Catholic eyes, its activism and uncontroversial domesticity appealed to the dynamic new leadership of the mission in the late 1930s. They perceived in the Homemakers a creative outlet for their educated women in much the same way as did the PEMS.

After World War II, however, the political climate had changed dramatically and the RCM felt compelled to re-assess its position on women's voluntary associations. In particular, some priests were disturbed that the Homemakers' Association had become dominated by Protestant women, many of whom were known to sympathize with the cause of radical nationalism. This added to the suspicions of many Catholic priests that the association was either "communist" or, at the minimum, liable to use its activities to conduct political propaganda or to suggest social arrangments which were inimical to the church.[80] The need to reform

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78. Vinculum Aug. 1950. Lebotho means "companions" or "a band of people of the same age." In effect, it was the Catholic alternative to "initiation school" for teenage girls.

79. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

80. The internal mission newsletter states flatly that the Basutoland Women's Federation [sic, meaning the Homemakers] is "a satellite organization of the Basutoland Communist Party." Vinculum 18/4 (Oct.-Dec. 1962), 127 (my translation)

Catholic Action thus gained an urgency which related to a worldwide campaign by the church against what it considered to be a dire, multi-headed threat to its existence. Not only had Communist Parties seized power in several predominantly Catholic countries in Eastern Europe after 1945 (and threatened to be elected in Italy), but in China the Communist Party swept to power after a bitter civil war in 1949 and many Catholics were subjected to torture and humiliation as the long-standing Catholic mission was uprooted.

While these events created a kind of anti-Communist hysteria in the church throughout the world, in Basutoland the Nationalist Party's triumph in South Africa in 1948 added a distinct twist to the perceived threat. First, to the RCM the Nationalist Party represented "Modern Caeserism" at its worst.[81] As fascism had demonstrated in Europe, such regimes not only trampled on people's right of religious freedom but also corrupted their spirituality by fostering "the pagan worship of the State."[82] Second, the Nationalist Party introduced apartheid and greatly intensified racial conflict in southern Africa. For years, the Catholic church in South Africa had criticized the colour bar as "camoflaged slavery" which threatened to drive Africans into the hands of the Communists (who, it must be recalled, were the first among the political parties in South Africa to take a principled stand against race and class exploitation).[83] Although the Catholic church had accomodated with the previous segregationist governments in South Africa, apartheid was too much to be reconciled with church doctrine. As one Catholic priest among the Basotho on the Rand reportedly declared after the Nationalist triumph, "if he were a black he would himself become a communist on account of the crying

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81. So declared Bishop Bonhomme even prior to the Nationalist Party assuming full power. He denounced the pre-war regime, where the Nationalists were a partner in a coalition government, as a "dictatorship," alluding to fascist Italy. Moeletsi 18 Oct. 1937, 5

82. Ibid

83. A. Blais, Les Bulletins des Missions vol. XVIII/1, 1939

injustices committed here against blacks."[84]

Compared to the RCM's relentless, often bitter and ultimately victorious foes in the South African government, the colonial state in Basutoland seemed almost benign. Basutoland therefore offered a promising field to accomplish the constructive prong of the Catholic church's regional strategy against apartheid. That is, the territory was seen as a place where the church could continue to expand and to show Africans that it offered concrete social and economic advantages which diminished the allure of both Communism and "ultra-nationalism." In this, experience elsewhere had shown that the women's branches of Catholic Action could be especially effective if they were suitably modernized. Since the LSA were so notoriously gerontocratic and resistant to change, a new manyano was launched specifically for this task.

The Legion of Mary, as this "elite" formation was called, was to be comprised of educated, young women. They would, first, carry out the type of practical development work which the church hierarchy considered to be most effective in alleviating rural poverty and despair. In this they would offer educated, young women who were frustrated with the LSA an alternative to secular women's organizations like the Homemakers. They would also, by example, prod the LSA in a similar direction. By obviously enjoying the blessings of the hierarchy, they would also teach the LSA "a spirit of humility."[85]

In the home, "good Marian mothers" would demonstrate a combination of traditional domestic virtues and progressive mothercraft. The latter involved not only modern housekeeping methods but also demanded that the "Marian mother" adopt new and more rigorous standards of discipline of herself and of her children. The piety of the LSA, which many missionaries

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84. "Communism in Basutoland" Vinculum 4/9 (Oct.1949), Supplement 14, 5 (my translation)

85. L'Apostolat Laic Oct.-Dec. 1958, 4 (my translation). See also Francois Mairot, "La Legion de Marie ches les Basotho," Pôles et Tropiques, (nov. 1961), 198-200

considered to be a form of female self-indulgence, was no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the nation. Specifically, since so many fathers were absent at the mines, the church considered that it was incumbent upon women to instill in their boys the manly virtues which it deemed essential for its own development and for the political development of the colony. Since the LSA as an organization was "already dead or at least in agony," enormous hope was placed in the "vigorous" Legion of Mary to accomplish the task.[86] Indeed, in launching the new manyano, the RCM quoted approvingly the alleged words of a Chinese Communist leader: "the Legion of Mary is more dangerous to our country than an army of wild bandits."[87]

In the first instance, the RCM saw the Legion of Mary as essential to the development of a Basotho clergy. Without the qualities of humility, discipline and selflessness becoming "natural" to Basotho mothers, the character faults which the RCM deemed inherent to Sesotho culture and which were exacerbated by the absence of men through migrant labour, could not be overcome. In other words, it was believed that Basotho boys simply could not develop sufficient moral fibre and strength of character to become priests under existing conditions. Above all, this required dedication to life-long chastity, something quite alien to the culture of Basotho men and women. Only by the "Marian and apostolic formation" of girls and young women could such discipline and self-denial be inculcated in boys.[88]

The Legion of Mary, in addition to its other benefits, therefore promised eventually to lead to the production of a new, dynamic breed of Basotho men who could become priests and Catholic politicians. With

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86. Ibid., 3

87. "The Formation of Catholic Mothers," Catholic Action report, 1953, "Concerning Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life in Lesotho: Practical Conclusions," DAM 61

88. Ibid.

apartheid under construction across the border, and with many Basotho men who went to work there of the opinion that Christianity had betrayed them, the localization of the church was considered essential if the church was to prove, in Basotho eyes, its non-racist credentials:

> Since the indigenous clergy is the principal hope for the establishment of the Church in this country, MOTHERS have a very important, if not fundamental part to play in the establishment of the Church in Basutoland.[89]

On the political front, this new generation of men could (with church guidance) launch themselves into the "hard, Christian battle" against the perceived tide of communism and ultra-nationalism.[90] Such men could also redress the "calvinist advantage" in positions of influence or command in the administration.[91] Thus, upon their suitably motivated mothers and wives depended "the future welfare of the whole Church in Basutoland, and indeed in many parts of the Union."[92]

The first Legion of Mary in the region was set up in Port Elizabeth in 1951. In 1957, the RCM in Basutoland determined that one be established at every mission in the territory. The organizer of this effort, Francois Mairot, began by requesting priests and nuns to identify "quality" candidates to comprise the core of this elite force. Once established, and possessing the enthusiastic backing of the church hierarchy, these women began to transform the catholic <u>manyanos</u> into increasingly effective organizations. While it is difficult to know whether "Marian" mothercraft had the desired effect upon Basotho boys, it is clear that in some cases the new climate prodded the LSA into action almost immediately:

> Our sodality has improved a lot since the 1960s, although we did begin development work in the 50s, about 1955, I think. The brothers and sisters helped us the most then, teaching us new

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89. <u>Ibid</u>.

90. <u>Vinculum</u> (April/June 1956), 57 (my translation)

91. <u>Vinculum</u> 13/3 (Juillet-Sept. 1957), 81 (my translation)

92. "Formation of Catholic Mothers" DAM 61

things.[93]

At other times, the young women, backed by their priests, staged what amounted to a virtual coup in the local LSA:

> There were about 40 of us who joined all at the same time so that it seemed pre-arranged but it wasn't at all. We were nurses (like myself), teachers, younger working women with some mature women, although not old. It was quite exciting. We moved in like that on to the committees and in this way the older women who like to dominate are now having to change their ways. We are getting to be balanced between the old and the young.[94]

An important result of the reforms to Catholic Action which began in the 1950s was that the LSA increasingly stressed the practical as opposed to the purely pious side of its mandate. Although a similar transformation occured to some degree in the other church manyanos, it took place first and most decisively in the Catholic church. Already by the mid-60s at some of the RCM missions, the LSA had become what it is today:

> PF: Each village has a leader, chosen by themselves. They work systematically with a chairman, treasurer and secretary. The village groups meet once a week to learn something of gardening or sewing or nutrition--it's different each time. The rest of the week we practice on our own. Once a month the parish group meets, which can be several hundred people. We can identify a problem, like a donga, which we want to solve, then we can discuss ways to do that and perhaps go to the authorities to seek help. We plan. Once a quarter, the executive meets to check on how the different village groups are progressing.
>
> ME: That sounds like the Homemakers Association.
>
> PF: We are very little different from the Homemakers--in fact we do the same things.[95]

The Homemakers Association

The first official mention of a secular women's organization which was specifically economic in function was made by the Pim Commission which received, in 1934, a submission from the Morija Native Women's Farmers' Club.[96] By 1935, there were four such clubs in Lesotho and the colonial

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93. Interview, 'Me Fobo

94. Interview, 'Me Lesema. This particular incident took place in 1980.

95. Interview, 'Me Fobo

96. The Pim Report, list of submissions. This submission unfortunately is not included among the records of the Pim Commission in the PRO.

administration considered that they had "a great future" on account of their "great keenness for agriculture, especially gardening."[97] Indeed, these clubs grew in number rapidly to 24 in 1937 and 37 in 1938.[98] By 1946, women farmer's clubs had surpassed men's in number (99 to 65).[99] Moreover, in contrast to the men's associations ("often very disappointing")[100] the women's clubs were singled out for praise by the Administration. Not only were the women farmers considered to be excellent listeners who put into practice and then propagated the Department of Agriculture's advice about terracing, irrigating and fertilizing fields, but they were also, compared to the men, excellent managers and co-operators. "Many of these Associations have substantial cash balances deposited in the Post Office Savings Bank and their finances are now well-managed," affirmed the Director of Agriculture in 1938.[101] By the mid-1950s, the "spontaneous" organization of women as farmers and conservationists was recognized as one of "the few signs of latent energy and enthusiasm waiting to be tapped" in a rural population which was otherwise frustratingly resistant to the exhortations of the government.[102]

This recognition, however, did not translate into significant direct government support. This was not simply government stinginess since it had, by the late 1930s, tens of thousands of new Colonial Development Fund to spend on erosion control.[103] Rather, it stemmed in large part from the

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97. CAR 1935, 10

98. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture 1938, 40

99. Ibid. 1946, 10

100. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1938, 40

101. Ibid.

102. Annual Report of Department of Agriculture, 1953, 25

103. £26,910 in 1938 alone (CAR 1938, 46). By 1948, the little territory of Basutoland had accumulated a budgetary surplus of £541,605. CAR 1948, 28

traditional British ambiguity towards the progressive farmer class. Thus, while whole-heartedly approving progressive farmers' adoption of modern farming techniques, colonial officials were often embarrassed or irritated by the progressive farmers' other modernizing principles as expressed primarily through the Progressive Association, Leselinyana and the judicial system. For example, the BPA demanded land reform, more democratic government, and freedom to market their agricultural products in South Africa (which was, by the 1930s, actively protecting its white farmers from black competition). The mission-educated men and women of the progressive farmer class were therefore, in these instances, fundamentally at odds with administration policies. They were therefore discouraged, in practice, by a government keen on maintaining the migrant labour system and Indirect Rule through the chiefs. This ambiguity was all the more evident in the government's view of women progressive farmers, who, as early as the 1930s, were demanding property and inheritance rights through the courts, directly challenging customary male privileges.

Faced with the hostility or apathy of the governments in both Basutoland and South Africa towards them, progressive-minded Basotho women took their own initiative to deal with the economic and social crises of the early 1930s. In addition to the farmers' clubs, but often with overlapping membership, a movement spread throughout the colony which, by the 1960s, touched the lives of tens of thousands of Basotho women. This "homemaking" movement drew its original inspiration from an American missionary (Mrs. Yergan) at Fort Hare College in what is now the Ciskei region of the eastern Cape Province. Then, as now, this was one of the most ecologically and economically ravaged districts in the region, worse even than Basutoland. The Unity Club had been established there at the start of the Depression to bring together the educated women at the mission with "the express purpose of going out to the villages to teach their less fortunate womenfolk the art of house-keeping, including

gardening, sewing, family and community hygeine etc."[104] To these women, "house-keeping" meant basic and practical survival skills for the most impoverished sections of the community.

The founder of what became known as the Basutoland Home Improvement Association (and, after 1945, simply the Homemakers Association) was Bernice Mohapeloa. Born in 1898, 'Me Mohapeloa was "just a housewife" at Fort Hare when the Depression began--that is, while she possessed a high school diploma, she was married to an administrator at the college and was restricted to household maintenance. She had joined the Unity Club in the belief that her domestic skills could be more productively employed by imparting them to the women in the surrounding villages. The objective there was to avert starvation. As 'Me Mohapeloa explains, however, her motivation and intentions in bringing the same type of organization to her home town of Mafeteng in 1935 were somewhat different:

> BM: The idea of the Homemakers came from the Basotho girl students at Fort Hare. What they wanted was for me to start something like what I was doing there in the villages around Lovedale because they noticed the problem that many of the Basotho boys were not going home during the holidays. They preferred to spend time wandering in different places in the Republic rather than to go home to the poor villages in Lesotho. Even some girls, they also did not return, especially in the short holiday in June, but would visit friends or what-not in the Republic.
>
> ME: So it was not necessarily a question of starvation or poverty.
>
> BM: Yes, not quite. But poverty can also be in the appearance of the house and not having anything to do. So they were poor in that sense.[105]

In fact, the Basotho youths at Fort Hare came from families which mostly belonged to the PEMS, a "sister church" of the London Missionary Society which ran the college. While they were not necessarily part of the petit bourgeoisie, their attendance at an elite boarding school so far from home suggests that few, if any of them, came from the poorest sectors

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[104]. Basutoland Witness 7/1 (1953), 5

[105]. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

of the population. This is particularly true of the girls since higher education for females was still considered an extravagance for most Basotho. The mothers whom 'Me Mohapeloa addressed when they came to Lovedale to pick up their children at the end of the first term in 1935 were not, therefore, suffering in the same way as the women being served by the Unity Club. Rather, 'Me Mohapeloa's pragmatic message to them addressed primarily these women's sense of helplessness at seeing their children, particularly their sons, get lost to the life of corruption and debauchery in South Africa:

> So, I agreed to talk to the students and some of their mothers who came and I explained to them that you had to try to make your home a place where your sons would look forward to coming home. Food was the main thing. They had to give at least one good meal a day... But I also emphasized that you needed to make the house look beautiful. You could make nice cloths to cover the furniture.[106]

In response to requests upon her, 'Me Mohapeloa began to write lessons in gardening, nutrition and "housecraft" to send to interested individual mothers back in Basutoland. Finally, she accepted an invitation to visit the territory to assist in setting up a club which would disseminate the information she was providing. The women of Mafeteng then obtained some waste land at the edge of the camp and started a communal garden. At the end of the season, they entered some of their products in the annual agricultural fair, much to the "amazement" of Basotho men and the British alike.[107] "Soon after that, I started getting letters from all over the country requesting clubs and by now, the Homemakers are everywhere."[108] So rapidly did the clubs spread that in 1945, when 'Me Mohapeloa returned to live in the territory, the links with the Cape were severed and an independent Basutoland Homemakers Association was formed. 'Me Mohapeloa acted as President for the next two decades.

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106. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

107. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

108. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

The Homemakers' Association operated as a federation of autonomous groups of 20-120 members each. For most of the year, each club developed its own activities at weekly meetings and invited "experts" to come to the village to address its members. These experts included agricultural extension officers, domestic science teachers, nurses, and the wives of government officials and missionaries, as well as the founding members of the Homemakers. Clubs also shared information on the successes and failures they encountered, most importantly at an annual national meeting. This three-day affair, attended by 80-200 women from all over the territory, culminated in a display of their produce and crafts designed to pique interest and win recruits to the movement. Beginning in Mokhotlong in 1958, the Homemakers also offered occasional "regional courses" at missions or camps which brought together women from different clubs.

Not only was there no central direction to the organization but, prior to 1964, there was not even a full-time organizer. The Homemakers who travelled around the country addressing groups and forming new clubs did so on a purely voluntary basis, their expenses being met by a combination of a membership fee (25d per member and 7/6 per club) and hospitality.[109]

Each club started by the Homemakers adopted its own policies and organization. The gardens that were established were thus run in a variety of ways reflecting the inclinations of each local group. Some garden plots were worked on an individual basis, others co-operatively, and still others communally. Many were worked on a combination of these. For example, the Mafeteng garden provided each woman with an individual plot for subsistence while several larger plots were worked co-operatively for market production. Profits were distributed according to the number of hours each woman worked on the co-operative section.

The emphasis of the Homemakers was always on the practical:

With us when we were visiting people, the main thing was not to

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109. Interviews, 'Me Mokokoane, 'Me Mohapeloa

> tell them but to show them. That's why we always did demonstrations. We encouraged the use of wild vegetables, even now, but the main thing was to keep a garden.[110]

Or, as another venerable homemaker expressed it:

> We live on these things so we have to practice. You see, we don't have to sit at a desk. Our method is to look and do which is how we get our members. They see the results we get and spread the word. Like, someone will come and see this crochet I'm doing and say it's nice, and then I tell them that I can sell it for 10 rands. One day's work will earn 10 rands which women understand very well. So we teach by demonstration. We don't cram, which is a waste of time. The ladies come to see, then they try and by so doing, they learn very quickly. That is why the government representatives always ask us, how could you be so successful when they themselves fail to bring development?[111]

The most visible effect of Homemaker propaganda was reflected in an almost immediate, huge jump in the number of terraced gardens in the territory.[112] From 339 in 1935, the number of gardens grew to 809 in 1936, while in the following year alone, nearly a thousand more were laid out.[113] Even during the war, when so many men were out of the country and women's labour was devoted primarily to the cultivation of grain, the spread of gardens continued apace. In 1942 there were 7,665 of them,[114] but by 1948 this had nearly doubled 13,280.[115] By 1953, the Homemakers contributed a third of all displays at the annual agricultural show and, over the next decade, began to win prizes ahead of male progressive

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110. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

111. Interview, 'Me Fobo

112. Official reports do not specify how many of these were worked by women, however, it can be reasonaly assumed that the majority were. Vegetables were traditionally the woman's responsibility and colonial discourse suggests this continued to be the case in the 1930s. When referring to men, colonial reports generally employ such terms as "farmer" or "agriculturalist." By contrast, when referring to gardening, the same reports employ the term "Basuto families." See, for example, CAR 1948, 48 and CAR 1950, 33. Debates in the BNC also mention Basotho women's special interest and competence in gardening. See, for example, BNC 1950, 349

113. CAR 1937, 19

114. BNC 1942, 75

115. CAR 1948, 48

farmers.[116] The 21,000 gardens reported by the Director of Agriculture in 1961 included 281 communal women's gardens which were worked by groups of ten to thirty women.[117]

The government first officially recognized the "promising" activities of the Home Improvement Association in its colonial report of 1948,[118] although free seeds, tree seedlings and agricultural demonstrations had been given directly to the Homemakers from as early as 1945.[119] The hope was that not only would this help to "rationalize" the diet of the Basotho, but that the methods learned by the Homemakers would be emulated by other (male) farmers, spreading improved farming and conservation practices throughout the country. The Homemakers' other work, such as afforestation, also received praise from the government as "impressive."[120]

In addition to horticulture and food preparation, the Homemakers also taught women to learn non-traditional crafts such as making rugs, linoleum, soap and candles. All of these were ostensibly to "make the house look beautiful" as a way to improve morale in the rural family. In that same vein, nursery schools, drama clubs, singing and other activities were organized for children and youths. Again, much of this was motivated by the desire to provide a countervailing influence to the poverty and barrenness of social life in the villages which otherwise led children to delinquency or exodus. The government approved wholeheartedly, praising the Homemakers' "technique of bringing people together and making them happy by singing and dancing with them, because people in the villages

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116. Basutoland, Report on the Basutoland Central Agricultural Show, 1954; Basutoland Times 18 Dec. 1964

117. Annual Report of the Dept. of Agriculture, 1961, pages 50 and 18

118. CAR 1948, 62

119. Basutoland Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1945

120. Annual Report of the Director of Education 1948, 19

need this."[121] In the Homemakers' own eyes:

> Women are responsible for the good upbringing of children so if they set a poor example by drinking or what-what, it will weaken the nation. If women can make a good home, there will be more and more educated people and the country will be developed.[122]

The Homemakers were not content, however, to improve nutrition and rural morale only. They also advised members on how to make money, for example, on ways to market their garden products and how to obtain capital for expansion into new areas of production or to protect existing assets (especially by the construction of fencing and sheds):

> All these projects we organized needed some capital to get started. In the beginning that was very difficult. But the women themselves saw it as something new and were willing to put in their own money. They had concerts and raffles to help each other. With other means, like setokofele, they could raise enough to buy a sewing machine or chickens and four months of feed, that is, enough to last until the chickens started to lay and you can repay.[123]

The Homemakers' Association also encouraged housecrafts and other income-generating projects based on the domestic science skills which were then being taught to girls in school.

> And definitely I put my schooling in home economics to use. I still profit. I do a lot of dressmaking. I get orders to cater for moketes [traditional feasts], you know, cakes, scones etc. I think I'm cheaper than the bakeries. Of course I'm better, but it varies. Some people prefer to buy from the shops.[124]

The Homemakers' popularity rested in part upon this fact that "we based most of our activities on profit-making."[125] Even the nursery schools ultimately had this objective in mind for, behind the discourse of providing healthy food and stimulating play for the children, lay the goal

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121. CAR 1962, 65

122. Interview, 'Me Mohloboli

123. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

124. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

125. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

"to provide mothers more time for their housework or employment."[126] Attuned to the market at a highly localized level, and able to shift production in a flexible and co-operative manner, Homemakers were then able to extract a livelihood from their homes and gardens which could be "very profitable."[127] Or, as 'Me Mosala explained:

> Women are by nature very compromising, hence they are able to market their products where men could easily fail; with a smile, customers flow to a particular business.[128]

While it was rarely as lucrative as brewing and selling beer, "homemaking" was a respectable alternative means for earning cash to which many women were attracted. Indeed, the Homemakers succeeded in their objectives to a much greater degree than similar attempts by the government or the churches, whose technical and/or moral exhoratations clearly held less interest to women than the prospects of earning their own income. By 1950 there were over 3000 members in 110 clubs, including 15 on the Rand and in the OFS.[129] Less than a decade later, while the government still rued the "insoluble socio-economic problem of Basuto cultivators,"[130] the number of clubs had increased to 160. By the time of independence, this had risen to over 200 clubs and nearly 13,000 members.[131] As it became so big, a number of offshoot organizations were formed, principally Boiteko and The Women's Institute. These did essentially the same work in much the same ways.[132] At the same time,

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126. 'Mathabiso Mosala, "Activities of the Lesotho National Council of Women," unpublished paper, (Maseru, no date), 12

127. 'Me Mohloboli

128. 'Mathabiso Mosala, "Women and Trade," 5th International Community Education Association World Conference, Nairobi, July 1987

129. Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1950, 39

130. CAR 1958, 56

131. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

132. Perhaps the only discernible difference between Boiteko (founded in 1961) and the Homemakers' was that the former offered courses to the inmates of prisons and hospitals. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

the manyanos, especially the LSA, began to emulate its development activities. Thus, by the early 1960s, few villages in the lowlands were without some type of homemaking organization.

In order to co-ordinate the activities of all these groups and facilitate fund-raising, the main secular women's associations were brought together under one umbrella organization beginning in 1964. The Lesotho Federation of Women's Voluntary Organizations (which later became the Lesotho National Council of Women or LNCW) obtained two fulltime organizers employed by the Department of Local Government. Its principal stated aim was to to promote "the concept of integrated rural development and self reliance,"[133] and, reflective of this, reference to its activities are found dispersed in documents on adult education, health, agriculture and social welfare.

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The women who founded and propagated the Homemakers' movement tended to be of petty bourgeois background. 'Me Mohapeloa herself was one of the territory's first female high school graduates, married to an administrator at Fort Hare College and, once back in Basutoland, a teacher. Like the majority of the members, she belonged to the PEMS, and many of the first clubs were located at or near PEMS missions. As such, there was often a subtle form of proselytization for Christian, particularly Protestant values:

> We didn't push our beliefs but perhaps they [non-Christians] were indirectly influenced towards Christianity because when they saw something successful, they wanted to copy it.[134]

Moreover, while the Homemakers did not necessarily promote Christian ideals of gender relations and sexual division of labour, these had a defining influence on the direction of the movement and the type of activities it undertook. 'Me Lesenyeho, for example, was one of the first

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133. Mosala, "LNCW," 11

134. Interview, 'Me Lethunya

Basotho women to graduate from the primary teacher's course at Morija. Her career, however, was deemed unsuitable by her husband, an administrative officer, and was summarily terminated at his behest. The enforced idleness of the petty bourgeois housewife then provided her with the motivation to become a Homemaker:

> At first I was a teacher but when our children arrived, my husband didn't allow that to continue. He said I should stay home to raise his children. Then I had a lot of time on my hands so I had to find a sideline. That's when I started making things to sell.[135]

The terms "home improvement," "homemaking" and "housekeeping" tended to convey something small and non-threatening to men. That indeed, is how the government first perceived the movement as it noted with approval the "steady raising of the standard of homes" that seemed to it to be the major result of women's homemaking efforts.[136] The Homemakers' own discourse did much to support that view. They deliberately, and unself-consciously, cultivated a modest image pleasing to almost any male ear. For example, although they were normally invited to give a demonstration or to help establish a new club by the women of a village, the Homemakers always approached the chief for permission before they came. They would then humbly request a plot of land, often the most ravaged, eroded field which nobody else wanted, to start their garden.[137] They also always invited the (usually disinterested) men to their shows.

To the government, the Homemakers stressed a goal long dear to the hearts of colonial officials, that of correcting the "too bookish" learning of girls which, it was asserted, tended to spoil them of any useful economic role in the rural areas and entice them to leave for South Africa. The Homemakers therefore sought to "form a connecting link between the education which girls receive in the schools and the practical

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135. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

136. CAR 1936, 25

137. "Impossible sites," according to the Annual Report of the Dept. of Agriculture, 1938, 41

application in the home of the learning thus obtained."[138] Small wonder that the government was pleased to hear that:

> It was one of our major topics to discuss how women could maintain themselves where they are in the villages. We did not like to see women forced to go to South Africa or to lead lives based on prostitution and such but they did that because of starvation.[139]

A similar message was conveyed to the Native Administration:

> Our relationship was very, very good with the chiefs. They liked it that we promised to give women something to do, we kept them in their homes so they didn't have to run away or turn to selling beer.[140]

In other words, the Homemakers were telling the government and the chiefs precisely what they most wanted to hear. Likewise with the missionaries, to whom, consciously or not, the Homemakers stressed their Christian credentials. It is a testimony to the chameleon-like nature of the Homemakers that their list of development priorities appear in almost precisely inverse order in church periodicals when compared to the Colonial Annual Reports. Where in the former the Homemakers asserted that their principal objective (as a "family association") was to "strive to encourage a Christian conception of family life,"[141] the government lists this aspect last behind the "day to day work" of diet, hygeine, sewing and "keep[ing] alive old Basotho crafts."[142] Even the Catholic church, which normally did not like its members to join secular organizations, at first gave the Homemakers its "full support" and encouraged Catholic women to join.[143] As the founder of the Morija branch states with some nostalgia:

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138. "The Homemakers Association" in E. Chapman ed., Basutoland Yearbook (Maseru, 1958), 151

139. Interview 'Me Mokokoane

140. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

141. JME 1959, 39 (my translation)

142. CAR 1960, 82

143. Chapman, Yearbook, 151; Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

> I was the first to set up a Homemakers club here in 1939. Then I travelled all over the country and to Kimberly and Johannesburg to set up new clubs. Oh! Everybody liked me so much.[144]

Husbands seemed to have appreciated the Homemakers as well. In some cases this was because the woman's principal motivation was to win the loyalty of her man by offering superior food and accomodation. As Martha Mueller has argued, in the context of their extreme dependency upon men, pleasing a wayward husband often appeared to women to be the most efficacious way to ensure some access to his cash remittances, if not his affection.[145] 'Me Mohloboli expressed it thus:

> Our main idea was to concentrate on making the home happy. The home is a holy city to everyone and if the wife can succeed in feeding her family well and keeping her house beautiful, then the men will never desert.[146]

Many missionaries, including nuns, also stressed the housewife aspect of homemaking.[147] For most Basotho women, however, the focus was very much more upon their children than upon pandering to the desires of their husbands. This reflected a more phlegmatic attitude towards men and marriage than missionaries would have liked:

> We did not really think that homemaking would keep our husbands happy since if a man wants to run away, there are plenty of other reasons he will find.[148]

Rather than passively accepting dependence on men, women tended instead to use homemaking actively to advance their interests vis-a-vis their husbands and the state. Income acquired through self-help projects, knowledge to provide healthier and more varied meals and clothes, and

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144. Interview, 'Me Mohlaboli

145. Mueller, "Women and Men"

146. Interview, 'Me Mohlaboli

147. See, for example Sister Mary Lucy's priorities in her discussion of the importance of handwork in Roma College Review 1/1, Oct. 1939, and Sister Odilia on "Industrial Training in the School," Roma College Review, 1/2 (1939), 33. The PEMS and Administration likewise tended to place enhanced service to the husband at the top of their lists of benefits of homemaking.

148. Interview 'Me Lethunya

ability to add to a man's prestige by making his home "look civilized," all gave Homemakers an enhanced bargaining power within the household. This they used consistently to press subtly upon men sometimes radical changes to the traditional sexual division of labour and gender relations.

> Those who are interested, who care about their wives, we always try to encourage them to help more at home, especially when their wives are pregnant or nursing. Some even do cooking and baking bread and we like that very much. There are many men who are stubborn about this, however, so we only try to coax them.[149]

Of greater relevance to most women was the high mortality rate of childbirth and, as the economy became increasingly monetized, the expense of having many children:

> Another touchy question was birth control. We introduced it in our discussions as far back as the 60s although we were divided. Some women were in favour and some were against it, especially the Catholics who refused to consider it. They said, why would God have made women so that she can have many children if that was not what she was required to do? Yet many women die. So we encouraged child-spacing. I wasn't worried about the husbands and we used to talk about it openly. It's true some women must keep it a secret but many men co-operate.[150]

Homemakers also sometimes ventured into discussions about the injustices of society and law.

> We did try to talk about equal rights for women and men. Nowadays we can talk boldly but even in the 1960s, in our annual meetings we were not prevented from speaking. We discussed such things as why should a woman with qualifications not receive equal pay. Another very solid question was why shouldn't a woman be able to get a loan without getting her husband's signature? We disagreed that a woman, even a businesswoman, should be a junior.[151]

Despite holding such critical perspectives on male domination in the law and society, it was central to the Homemaker's self-image that they were not political. Not only were "politics" considered to be a male pasttime, but they were, like religion, regarded as potentially divisive. Discussions about "politics" were therefore prohibited:

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149. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

150. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

151. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

> BT: Most of our women are just ordinary homemaking women who want to know how to make the best of life. So like me, they are not interested in political questions. They didn't ask me such things. We just think of the work we are doing and how to improve it. I didn't find the time to go into improving the rights of people.
>
> ME: But in your meetings, didn't people ever wonder about political ways to work against the situation they faced?
>
> BT: That was one of the things we were always very strong about, that is, no politics in our meetings. If we overheard some women talking that way, we would ask them to stop. It could be, though, there were many who were following politics...[152]

Considering that the prohibition against politics rested upon a very narrow definition of what was political, 'Me Mohalepoa's suspicions were in fact well-founded. In the sense that so many of the Homemakers' social or economic activities were rife with implications about the re-distribution of power in society, they were in fact, if not in discourse, political. The contradiction is captured by one Homemaker's adamant assertion that "No, we never talked about politics... Socially though, we were very active."[153] In retrospect, some of the leaders of the Homemakers now admit that this social activism was political:

> I would say now that we did a lot to instill political consciousness in women. Politically we were organizing women, I mean, in consumer awareness or to demand their rights. Women in Lesotho are tough, sincere, generous, useful--even the poorest and least educated deserves to be treated like a human being, you know. We owe them dignity, respect. I give you the example of domestic workers. They have been treated very poorly in this country. We want them to at least earn a living wage. Why must they be paid 50 rands a month? They are our people. It's a disgrace. And we also try to get women to elect women to represent them because in the past women have always elected the very men who exploited them.[154]

Even more explicitly:

> MS: The Homemakers and such organizations included more educated women who were all BCP. They were much more interested in raising up the ignorant women which was necessary in those days before most people could read. They normally concentrated on cooking, sewing, and canning meat but they also could give

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152. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

153. Interview, 'Me Mosala

154. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

a subtle or disguised political message.

ME: Can you give me an example?

MS: Yes. I once invited some Boiteko women up to my village. They demonstrated their wares and showed how to can a chicken. "But what is the use of that?" some women asked, "since it is easy to kill a fresh chicken every day?" The Boiteko women then introduced the idea that their husbands may one day be forced into exile because of government repression and so the women would have to be able to support their families on their own. This was a clever way of making women aware that the people in authority could become their enemies. They therefore encouraged women to be able to stand on their own two feet.[155]

The Homemakers' concept of "home" was also often quite different from the government's, the missionaries' and even many of the Basotho men who nodded appreciatively at their work. As has been shown already, the Homemakers' broad concept of housework included commodity production in the fields as well as crafts to prettify the house and ways to keep the children healthy. "Home" thus included the poultry shed and pig-sty as well as the garden, the kitchen and the bedroom. By the 1960s, Homemakers had even begun to move boldly into the male domains of cattle and building.

Of course many men were not happy with women having cows but the women, they were determined. They wanted to show the men they could do it.[156]

The Homemakers also had a distinctly different analysis from the government's of the source of the socio-economic crisis which they faced. They did not, for instance, accept the government contention that Basotho women were careless mothers. Although they shared the government's emphasis on encouraging good hygeine and nutrition, they saw the problem as a recent development associated with colonial policies and not the fault of simple ignorance:

Of course women traditionally knew how to raise their children but because of the economy getting worse, something had to be done. Before there used to be abundant milk--everyone had a cow or a few of them. Only later people began feeding the children

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155. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

156. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

papa only...[157]

Traditional taboos (for example, against pubescent girls eating eggs) and taste preferences (for papa) had not been detrimental to health in the days when other sources of protein were readily available. Nutrition had also declined as colonial and merchant propaganda favoured "civilized" over "primitive" foods (such as highly refined meal, or store-bought instead of gathered vegetables). To the Homemakers, therefore, women were not so much nutritionally ignorant as vulnerable to the very economic and cultural trends which had hitherto been abetted by the government itself. They did not, therefore, condescend to women or moralize at them, but simply tried to point out ways to escape the poverty to which so many Basotho women had been reduced:

> I tried to explain how you didn't need to go spend money at the shops to make good food and that you could do it with your own garden. In fact, some women who grew wheat were exchanging that for mealies only because they were used to papa only. So we just explained that with wheat you can make wholesome bread.[158]

The Homemakers also accepted as a given the fact that men, whether in the state, in the churches or in their marriages, were responsible for the straights which women found themselves in. Consequently, men were unlikely to do much to mitigate it and the Homemakers' attitude was accordingly pragmatic:

> Our main aim was to help women to be self-reliant by all different means. We saw that things were getting worse in the country... and we saw that they [women] have to be self-employed since otherwise they would get nothing.[159]

The Homemakers' concept of home also differed from European concepts in that it did not necessarily include a man. Although many of them held the Christian model as an ideal, they were realistic enough to recognize

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157. Interview 'Me Lethunya. Papa is the porridge-like staple of the Basotho diet made from ground maize. It is largely devoid of nutrients, especially when the husk of the grain is completely removed by machine milling.

158. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

159. Interview, 'Me Mosala

that under the prevailing conditions in Lesotho, faithful and reliable husbands could rarely be counted upon. Indeed, like many of the women in the church organizations which struggled against the social consequences of migrant labour, they often incorporated a critical, if not bitter, analysis of men's behaviour in their views on domesticity:

> The men here are no good. Our men are useless, well and truly. They drink, they go off with other women. If a woman is wise, she should manage the house well and make good meals. Then, even if her husband is a drunkard, he will come back. Many families break up because the woman doesn't know handiwork.[160]

"Self-reliance" was therefore an elemental objective of homemaking, that is, to provide women with some concrete guarantee against men's unreliability. "We love our dear men but, you know, some of them are becoming too clever."[161]

This pragmatism led to a decidedly catholic approach to membership which contrasted with the Homemakers' professions of a Christian orientation.

> Yes, I suppose the kind of home we talked about was of a Christian type, but we were open to all women, even those non-Christians... Now, with those women who brewed beer, we understood them. They did it from economic need, so we didn't preach to them.[162]

Tolerance, however, did have its limits. "With the women who brewed beer, that also was a touchy question. We really did not want to interfere and some of them were members. But it was difficult."[163] In Morija, a member opened a shebeen right on the premises of the Homemakers' new clubhouse. The local president recalled the event without rancour:

> The Homemakers built that house as a place for the women to come and work on their projects but that certain woman started brewing beer right there. Well, it led to noise and the men were bothering us so we closed her down. Well, she is still a

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160. Interview Sister Hilda

161. Interview, 'Me Mohloboli

162. Interview, 'Me Lethunya

163. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

Homemaker but she set up her shop across the street.[164]

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Despite its rapid spread throughout the country, the Homemaking movement faced a number of problems which restricted its success. First, while most men viewed homemaking in a positive light, there were those who reacted violently against it. This was especially true when it was learned that some Homemakers were discussing birth control, for many Basotho men a female tactic to enable their wives to engage in adultery.[165] Other men, however, simply resented the autonomy and financial success which homemakers were demonstrating:

> What is really useful about men is, for example, when we have fires in our tree plantations. I really don't know why but it is a common thing for people, evil-spirited people, to destroy our agricultural projects. I think there are certain men who do not want to see women develop. One time we were despondent because of this. We had planted 2000 trees and they were very promising, when they all burned down. This is unfortunately a common thing which you can even hear on the radio. But if they do grow up, the women still sell the trees for a profit.[166]

There was also the problem of overcoming poor women's suspicions about the women who led the movement. Even before the the different women's organizations acquired specific political connotations in the 1960s and 70s, the fact that the leaders were petty bourgeois by class and frequently PEMS by church meant that they carried with them an image of superiority or sectarianism to the majority of Basotho women:

> Some of the poorest of the poor visualized the other women's organizations, like Homemakers, as to serve the elite. Those who don't know our objectives say that the literate women were organizing the poor to work for them but in fact that is not the case. Yes, sometimes illiterate women would act that way, as if they were our servants, but we did not want that. We wanted development. K'ore, I love development.[167]

In order to assuage suspicions and conflict arising from class or

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164. Interview, 'Me Mohlaboli

165. Interview, 'Me Mosala

166. Interview, 'Me Lesenyeho

167. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

religious differences, the Homemakers made a conscious and strenuous effort to foster a sense that the development they sought was egalitarian and non-sectarian. The President of the LNCW expressed it this way:

> Of course people are human. They did sometimes bring in discussions about politics and religion but we told them to stop it. We have always been non-denominational. A woman has to leave all that baggage behind when she comes to us. We are non-political. We are non-, non-, non-.[168]

When specifically challenged with the accusation that the women who led development efforts were propagating their own elitist or political biases, 'Me Fobo denied it in these terms:

> The main point of this development work is love of one another. We start first of all to develop ourselves and then we plan and then we do. We go to the chief to get a garden. This could be worked communally or by women themselves, but those with smaller gardens get the priviledge of marketing their produce first. We help the poor families send their children to school.[169]

Finally, perhaps the greatest difficulty faced by the Homemakers was their lack of financial resources. Especially disappointing was the lack of support from the government which, despite its enthusiastic approval of the work of the Homemakers, never made a serious commitment to women's voluntary associations. Its investment in the Homemakers' Association amounted to a mere £100 per year in 1958.[170] There were also occasional monies made available to transport the President to regional courses and, beginning in 1960, to international conferences. Not until after the personal intervention of the Paramount Chief on the eve of independence did the government see fit to assign two of its junior African employees to assist the LNCW.[171]

Frustrated that there was so "little tangible help except promises from the powers that be which seem to take a long time to materialize,"

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168. Interview, 'Me Mosala

169. Interview, 'Me Fobo

170. E. Chapman ed. Basutoland Year Book (Maseru, 1958), 151

171. Interviews, 'Me Mosala, 'Me Lesenyeho

the Homemakers began increasingly to look internationally for assistance.[172] In 1961, they joined the Associated Countrywomen of the World, a London-based organization, which put them in contact with a wide variety of other non-government aid agencies, including UNICEF and Oxfam. 'Me Mohapeloa and others began to travel extensively and to win significant recognition and donations for their efforts from abroad. The first major such donation was a Landrover in 1962, which the Homemakers used to get up into the mountains to hold courses at the most remote villages.[173] In 1963, the Homemakers re-established its old links with similar organizations in South Africa. In that year also, another important connection was established with women's groups in Israel. Aside from facilitating expansion within the territory, such foreign connections sometimes opened up new opportunities for income generation. One of the most promising in that regard was provided by the acquisition of large numbers of sewing machines which greatly enhanced the potential of household commodity production for homemaking women.

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Soliciting foreign aid, a now well-entrenched government strategy in Lesotho pioneered by the Homemakers, is obviously a contentious form of "self-reliance." Similarly, homemaking, even in the broad sense that it was understood by Basotho women, was rife with contradictions. Thus, for example, Homemakers' radical critique of migrant labour was undermined by their adamant refusal to engage in politics. While this may have preserved the organization from splintering into political factions, the apolitical stance meant that Homemakers were effectively buttressing the migrant labour status quo, their "very useful work in social welfare, nutrition and hygeine" simply carrying on what the government itself had been trying, but largely failing, to do since the 1930s. In the words of 'Me

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172. B.T. Mohapeloa, "Basutoland Homemakers Association," Basutoland Witness 7/1 (1953), 6

173. Interview, 'Me Mohapeloa

Mohloboli, "K'ore, we just wanted to support the government."[174]

So too was there a contradiction between the Homemakers' often radical critique of men's behaviour and their failure to demand fundamental changes in gender roles. Rather, like the manyanos, the Homemakers largely accepted women's subordinate status in society and often sought to appease instead of challenge men, to adapt to instead of change men's undesirable or irresponsible behaviour. As a result, little real progress was made on such issues as birth control.

Such contradictions as these should not lead us to minimize the importance of either the Homemakers or the manyanos to the history of Lesotho. Through their modest but untiring efforts, both types of association played an essential role in maintaining a sense of community. In later years, their activities also helped to revitalize the moribund rural economy. And, while generally accepting a gender ideology based on women's subordination to men, women's voluntary associations gave women crucial support to enhance their de facto autonomy from men. In these ways they helped to provide a sense of direction, accomplishment and pride for Basotho women in what was an otherwise demoralizing and deteriorating socio-economic setting.

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[174]. Interview, 'Me Mohloboli

Chapter Ten: Women in Politics

The struggles which ensued from British attempts to modernize Indirect Rule and, once that had manifestly failed, to ensure the devolution of power to "moderate" Basotho men, resulted in the increasing politicization of Basotho women. By the mid-1960s this led to their full, and some say decisive, involvement in the political life of the nation. Before examining the particulars of the 1965 election campaign which paved the way to independence the following year, it is important to establish the historical background to Basotho women's political consciousness at that time. This chapter will therefore focus on the development of Basotho women's political views and their activism from the 1930s to the early '60s, paying special attention to questioning the prevailing stereotypes of "conservative" and "radical" politics.

"Conservative" Women

The term "conservative" has been applied to those Basotho who supported the chiefs, the Catholic Church and the BNP.[1] As I have shown, however, the Catholic Church and the chiefs offered concrete social, economic and political opportunities for many women and men which were otherwise not available in the context of colonial rule. The church and the chiefs, despite patriarchal ideologies and well-publicized abuses of power, on the whole offered protection from the ravages the market and the migrant labour system had upon the communities and institutions in which women lived and depended on. The period of modernized Indirect Rule saw these institutions placed under increasing pressure, if not outright attack, as well as generally increasing impoverishment or marginalization of women under the rubric of "development" or tsoelopele. In view of this, is it not possible that Basotho women's political support for the Church and the chieftainship, such as it was, was a conscious strategy to promote their material, social and, in the case of the growing number of women

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[1]. See Chapter One for a review of the historiography of the 1965 election and the prevailing characterization of women's politics.

chiefs, political interests?

The issue of women as chiefs is illustrative of women's political consciousness. In 1911 three women regents were acting as chiefs until their sons reached the age of majority--approximately 2% of total number of chiefs and headmen.[2] In the 1920s and 30s, more and more women began to appear in this capacity. In 1942, Judge Lansdowne interviewed ten of them, all of "acute intelligence" and "in no way...in a subject position."[3] He ruled that there was no legal basis to exclude the widow of a chief from acting as a regent, even if, as happened in 1941, the regency in question was the most powerful position in the country. This ruling confirmed 'Mantsebo as "Paramount Chieftainess" and established a precedent which soon saw women acceding to power at the highest level throughout the country. By 1955, four of the 22 most senior chiefs, the "Sons of Moshesh," were women who ruled over nearly 30,000 subjects while women comprised approximately 12.5% of the total number of chiefs and headmen on the official gazette that year, that is 100 of 800.[4] The trend towards feminization of the chieftaincy continued thereafter so that by 1977 over a quarter of all chiefs and headmen were women.[5]

It has frequently been asserted that these women were simply advanced to their positions by unscrupulous male relatives who saw them as a means to exercise behind-the-scenes control.[6] No doubt this was the case in some instances--the allegedly "deaf and slightly mental"

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[2]. Census, 1911. According to Goliath Mohale, the census may have minimized the actual number of women acting as chiefs since they often registered their male relatives rather than themselves. LNA HC 6/1943

[3]. LNA HC 27/42

[4]. Basutoland, List of Gazetted Principal and Ward Chiefs, Chiefs and Headmen as at 1st January, 1955 (Morija, 1955)

[5]. Gay, "Basotho Women's Options," 41

[6]. Ashton, The Basuto, 191; Jingoes, A Chief, 153; The Moore Report, 8; Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland, 1938 PRO DO 119/1073

'Malibotetso for example.[7] It may in part explain why the gruff, boozing yet "shrewd and able" Paramount Chief Griffith favoured women regents in a number of contentious successions during his reign from 1912-39. By no means, however, was this a strategy confined to women, for, indeed, the placing of male "imbeciles" and "incompetents" in the chieftainship had a long history of expedience to the BaKoena (and through them, the British). Partly through this strategy, the Sons of Moshesh had come to rule the majority of wards in the country.[8]

Nor does this Machiavellian interpretation seem to describe the majority of cases of women chiefs. Rather, as was discussed in Chapter Six above, many Basotho men recognized and defended the abilities of women as chiefs and administrators. There is also ample historical evidence that the ambition of the women themselves was a major factor in the feminization of the chieftaincy. As Jingoes phrased it, "power seems to be a terrible thing and in Lesotho today you often find mothers who fight desperately to cling to power."[9] Most often such ambition was satisfied in nebulous cases of succession when the women had reason to believe that male power-brokers would rather allow a woman to assume a regency (or "caretaking") than enter into a potentially nasty dispute. Typical of such cases were those between the mothers and widows of a deceased chief. Chief Theko Makhaola explained the growing number of women regents in the following way:

> Nowadays what I see happen is this. There are many young women who claim caretakings. This is because they have a right to rule. It is here where the difficulty is. Whether the mother-in-law should rule or the daughter-in-law. I know of several troubles between mothers and daughters-in-law.[10]

Mahali Letsie, senior wife of the Paramount Chief from 1905-12, is

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7. Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland, 1935, PRO DO 119/1055

8. Hailey, Native Administration; Kimble, "Clinging to the Chiefs"

9. Jingoes, A Chief, 153

10. BNC 1938, 270

the earliest recorded example of a woman seeking to invoke new powers. First she approached the High Commissioner to request his intervention to stop her husband from consorting with a young woman and neglecting her.[11] Soon after, Letsie II died and Mahali claimed the right to act as regent for her young son. It was widely believed that she "wanted to rule herself" and was allegedly only prevented from becoming the new Paramount by the disapproval of the Resident Commissioner.[12]

Mahali was not apparently discouraged by this setback as thereafter she exercised de facto rule over the sprawling Likhoele district of the southwest. After Griffith's death in 1939, she tried again to succeed to the Paramountcy, even to the extent of "joining forces" with the radical LLB.[13] She was punished for this by the successful claimant, Seeiso, who, by appointing his own representative over her, "usurped" the powers she had been exercising for nearly three decades. In 1943, however, she took the matter to the High Court in the belief that the Lansdowne decision meant that the British would support her bid to recapture her lost rights:

> I wish to have the power of ruling over my area like other widows. I do not say I did not have this right. I am the senior of all widows. The widows have now been given the power to reign. They did not have this power then. I claim the area of Likhoele and its rights because the law has been changed and I want to be treated like other widows.[14]

In the event, the colonial courts did not support her, finding no convincing evidence in Sesotho custom that a widow could enjoy de jure the powers which Mahali had for so long practiced de facto. Mahali was ruled to be the ward of her "husband," the Regent 'Mantsebo, who was enjoined to

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11. The High Commissioner demured. Machobane, Government, 106

12. Evidence cited in LNA HC 27/1942. A letter from the LLB to 'Mantsebo in 1941 also alludes to the British role in vetoing Mahali's claim. Cited in Edgar, Prophets with Honour, 141

13. LNA HC 6/1943

14. LNA HC 6/1943

take care of her ward with the generosity which customary obligations demanded.[15]

While this decision was a setback for women's claims to rights as chiefs, it must be seen in the light of simultaneous gains for women chiefs in the courts. During the reign of Paramount Chief Griffith, six women chiefs brought and won their cases for assuming power as regents to the royal court: 'Mathabo Tautona of Qacha's Nek, 'Mamatheleha of Thaba Bosiu, Malibe Motsoane, Toaba Sekonyela and 'Mankata Rafolatsane of Mafeteng district.[16] Griffith also supported women chiefs and headmen against court challenges or demonstrations of disrepect by men. For example, he praised the female chief of Morija for her "courageous fight against alcoholism" and empowered her, over the protests of her male subjects, to disrupt "beer drinks," even to the extent of entering peoples' huts to do so.[17]

Griffith, it was asserted, also regarded as "cruelty" the custom which prevented women from inheriting either property or power and he therefore turned a blind eye to women chief's insistence upon both.[18] Thus, when asked to clarify the matter in 1949, the BNC was faced with a fait accompli. Women, rued Kelebone Nkuebe, had been acting "contrary to custom" "for at least fifteen years" and "have acquired rights which they did not have before."[19] Given this fact, "How can we remove the rights of the woman who lived with her husband as one person?"[20] The council decided it could not.

Lesser chiefs also used the colonial courts to assert new rights. The case of 'Ma-Dorothia v. Leshoboro Majara shows that this was not done

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15. Ibid

16. BNC 1949, 208

17. JME 1935/2, 419

18. BNC 1949, 208

19. BNC 1949, 196

20. Ibid

simply at the behest of men who were exploiting their supposed weakness. 'Ma-Dorothia, headman of Khubetsoana, evidently fell out with the man with whom she had been living for 25 years and decided to banish him from her village. Her chief refused to allow this and she subsequently sued him for illegally curtailing her power. 'Ma-Dorothia lost her case but won a reprimand from the Judicial Commissioner who chastised her litigation as "nothing more than a Declaration of Rights as to her position of Headman inferior to the Respondent."[21]

The case of 'Mathabo Tautona in 1942 illustrates a similar caution on the part of the Administration. She sued her superordinate, Chief Sekake, for failing to deliver the cattle which she claimed he rightfully owed her. The High Court determined that she did in fact have legal claim upon the cattle, and any incomes from court fines and lira lands. In her victory, however, the court cautioned her to consult with her chief and other male relatives before she used her property.[22]

Women as chiefs were also known to resort to violence or threats of violence to advance their interests. As early as 1926, Mofumahali Maletapata of Quthing district was found guilty in the High Court of having "maliciously incited public violence"--she had ordered huts burnt in a neighbouring village as part of a campaign to seize new lands for herself.[23] In 1929 the widow of Chief Jonathon of Leribe threatened the Resident Commissioner that she would "create disturbances" and "bloodshed" to resist his and the Paramount Chief's choice of succession over her son.[24] In 1935, Mofumahali 'Makuini of Qalo was reprimanded by the High Court for "her wild way of talking." "She is a widow but unless checked

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21. LNA Civ/P/22/1953

22. Cited in LNA HCC 27/1942

23. LNA HC 685/1926

24. LNA S3/5/15/3

she will cause trouble here."[25] In this case, the colonial state imposed new counsellors on her who were sharged with ensuring that she "respect [her] father the Paramount Chief."[26]

As for the competence of female chiefs, the evidence shows that they were at least as well regarded as men. Individual women chiefs were singled out for praise by the British, missionaries and Basotho alike. Chieftainess 'Ma-Lerotholi of Mafeteng district, for example, was cited in the government's confidential reports on Native chiefs in 1935 for her "exceptionally good work,"[27] 'Ma-Thumane as "a progressive and enlightened woman,"[28] and 'Makopoi Api for "perform[ing] her many duties with success, esteem and distinction."[29] Of 'Makopela, her fellow chief Jeremiah Moshoeshoe had this to say:

> There is not one man in the Mafeteng district who can say he conducts matters better than that woman. She can be pointed out in the forefront of men.[30]

One reason for women becoming widely accepted and respected as chiefs was that they had proved less likely than men to succumb to the temptations which were discrediting the chieftainship as a whole from the 1930s through the 1950s. A commoner politician recalls:

> As chiefs, that is true that women were more responsible than men. Men are too extravagant, for example, they drink.[31]

Morena Leshoboro Majara reiterated this view before his peers in 1953:

> As I have been looking around to see how the administration stands in Basutoland, men are much weaker than women. The Chair

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25. LNA HC 9/1935

26. Ibid

27. "Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland, 1935," PRO DO 119/1053

28. "Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland, 1938," PRO DO 119/1073, 12

29. Harlech, report on Basutoland tour, 7 Jan., 1942, PRO DO 116/8, 102

30. LNA HC 27/1942, 27

31. Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

> will agree with me and the Paramount Chief will also do likewise that they have found more difficulty with the men than they have with the women.[32]

Yet another chief and senior member of the BNP went so far as to interpret women chiefs as a contributing factor in his party's election victory in 1965:

> As you know, we had women as chiefs for a long time and they were very good. I would say the people respected them even more than their husbands. There was 'Mamamohlahlefi Bereng who was paramount chief in Maseru back in the 20s or 30s. There was 'Mantse 'Mota in Berea, 'Matholoane Masupha, 'Mathatheo was there in Mokhotlong and another in Peka--I can name many of them. 'Mamathe there in TY was outstanding. She always spoke strongly for women... So you see, women who believed in liberation would vote for us, not the BCP.[33]

Women chiefs could also be active innovators. Paul Devitt's study of a village in the Roma valley shows that the widow of an extremely popular and long-lived chief attempted to overcome suspicion at her succession in the 1960s by introducing radical new ideas about development and agricultural practices. She also sought to consolidate her power base, unsuccessfully as it turned out, by expanding the role and influence of women's organizations. The resentment which quickly accrued against her in the village was therefore not due to her conservatism at all, but quite the opposite. It was fanned by the hostility of the local BCP leaders who, after 1965, portrayed any innovation which might give credence to government policies as treachery.[34]

Nor did women chiefs shy away from that men's game, politics. The first woman other than the Regent to sit in the BNC was 'Makopoi Api of Ha Ramabanta. She did so beginning in 1941, and by 1947 had "acquired a

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32. BNC 1953, 90

33. Interview, Matete Majara

34. Paul Devitt, "The Politics of Headmanship in the Mokhokhong Valley," (M.A, diss. U. of Witwatersand, 1969), 50

reputation which earns her close and respectful attention."[35] Women chiefs' distinctive political style in the BNC was later noted by a journalist:

> Aloof from the hurly-burly sit the only women in the Legislative Assembly--three chieftainesses who are, in their own way, equally impressive. Although they leave the debating to the opposite sex, the chieftainesses wield considerable power behind the scenes. And the course of legislation can be shaped to a great degree by what they say in the political lobby.[36]

By all accounts, their fellow councillors treated these women chiefs with the respect due to men of the same status. Their sex was not a factor in diminishing that respect since they were, in essence, "honorary men" whose rights and dignity stemmed from the office and the relationships inherent in the traditional chieftainship.[37] 'Mantsebo, for one, even insisted that she be addressed as Ntate, that is, Sir.[38] When her authority was questioned by the senior BaKoena widow, Mahali, she explained:

> I call myself a man because I am the Paramount Chief... You are my wife because I was married to you by my father. I say you are married to me because I have taken the name of my husband your father and therefore all the upkeeping should be in my hands.[39]

The political record of these women chiefs in the BNC warrants the term of "conservative" in the sense that they sought to preserve the chieftainship and they generally seemed to urge caution in adopting new policies. 'Mamathe G. Masupha, for instance, used her first speech to announce that "I am not quite satisfied with what has been done in the

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35. Basutoland. Basutoland, Lesotho (Maseru, 1947). After her retirement, she was remembered by the Government Secretary as "a notable councillor." Marwick to Resident Commissioner, 23 Aug. 1954. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3, Rhodes House

36. "The 'Big Talk' is on in the Basuto Council," Basutoland News 17 Dec. 1963

37. Interviews, Robert Matji, C. Khaketla

38. Interview, 'Me Khaketla

39. LNA HC 6/1943

Council" due to the "sloppy motions" and "unforseen implications" which resulted, in her view, from her fellow men proceeding too fast.[40] Women chiefs also often employed strongly "anti-Communist" rhetoric, a catch-all term which basically meant opposition to those who threatened the Christian churches.[41]

Beneath this rhetorical conservatism, however, the women chiefs frequently and forthrightly rejected "tradition," particularly on specific issues of women's rights. Thus, all of the female chiefs who addressed the Constitutional Commission in 1962 spoke in favour of women's right to vote. 'Mamathe G. Masupha conducted a vociferous campaign to win the franchise for women. At a pitso in TY she spoke directly to the women and mocked the assertion made by male Congress Party supporters that women were financially irresponsible. On the contrary, she argued, they had primary responsibility for the family:

> For this reason, women, mothers of the nation, should not be made slaves. They should be given the right in the country to vote and also to stand for election. [The laws] will be made for everybody, men and women, in the country. These laws will oppress the women more than anybody else, because the men will go to the mines and be away for ten years... I would like you women to take note of this, and to note that if you are not careful, politics will make you slaves.[42]

Chieftainess L. Bereng also spoke to the Commission:

> We women of the age of 21 and more should be allowed to vote or to stand for election... We do not like to be slaves as we are now. If we have to pay a fee for the franchise we would then rather pay for it in order to free ourselves from slavery. Many women are widows who have great responsibility.[43]

A woman trader explained to the same commission:

> In Basutoland women work very hard. Men have disappeared and we

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40. BNC 1954, 466

41. After independence, 'Mamathe founded her own United Party which criticized all the other parties, including even the BNP, for their "communist" tendencies. The precise meaning of this term is explored in the next chapter.

42. Basutoland, Basutoland Constitutional Commission Verbatim Record of Evidence Heard [henceforth BCC] (Maseru, 1963), 660

43. Ibid., 775

> don't know where they are. Women are left to look after the children to work for them. That is why they ask that they should be allowed to vote, so that they may be able to protect these women who have been deserted by their husbands... Women work like slaves in order to educate their children. If they had representatives this slavery would be decreased. You find them ploughing the land while the men have deserted them, but the men are the only people who are regarded.[44]

On other issues too, women chiefs were frequently sympathetic, if not partisan to women's non-traditional behaviour. One of 'Mantsebo's first acts as Regent was to overturn one of the laws the Administration had introduced in its efforts to harass women brewers. She argued that by restricting the amount of beer which could legally be brewed to four gallons, the government was simply trying "to cause a great deal of trouble" for women.[45] She also adamantly opposed Administration efforts to impose a "town rate" of taxation which would boost the strength of the police in their efforts to keep "vagrants" and such out of the camps.[46] Although she did this on the general principle that no Basotho should be discriminated against by virtue of site of residence, the specific result of her opposition was to the benefit of Basotho women.

As discussed above in Chapter Five, women as chiefs were also in the forefront of women's efforts to gain increased custody, inheritance and property rights in the Native courts throughout the 1930s to 50s. In 1962, 'Mantsebo and 'Makopoi also testified on the need to revise the inheritance laws in women's favour, to allow women independent access to credit and freedom to use their absent husbands' property "without taking into consideration the usual Sesuto customs."[47] 'Mantsebo's proposal to the Committee that "the mother must have the final word where there is a disagreement" with the legal heir represented a complete revolution in

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44. Ibid., 988

45. BNC 1941, 19

46. Hailey, Native Administration, 100

47. BNC, Report of the Select Committee on Wills, Estates and Marriages (Maseru, 1962), 17

customary powers over an inherited estate. She even went so far as to demand (implicitly) the legal emancipation of unmarried daughters as the most appropriate means of protection for them against their legal guardians:

> Nowadays even the girls work hard to maintain their parents... The uncles no longer provide for the old-time maintenance. I have reached the conclusion that the cattle paid as dowry for a girl constitute her contribution to the family wealth.[48]

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For all the talk of women's "natural" conservatism then, there is ample evidence to suggest that the British feared that women's adoption of non-traditional roles would lead to greater instability. Their views of the Regent from 1941-1960 speak volumes about their assumptions concerning the capabilities and dangers of women in positions of authority, as well as their inability to understand Sesotho gender relations. The relationship between the British and the Regent, 'Mantsebo, is worth particular attention not only because she has been ignored by most historians, but also because it reveals many of the false premises upon which "modernization" in Basutoland was built.[49]

In 1939, Paramount Chief Griffith died. He was succeeded by his son Seeiso Griffith, a man who exemplified the characteristics of the new-style chief the British sought for modernized Indirect Rule: progressive, intelligent, strong, courageous, tactful, and "outspoken but amenable to reason."[50] He was keen on the fight against Hitler. A true aristocrat, he even liked horse breeding. To the great disappointment of the British,

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48. And, therefore, daughters should be allowed to inherit and dispose of property in their own right. Ibid., 616

49. This study is based on the incomplete Dominions Office files in the PRO, private correspondence of Administration officials at Rhodes House and limited interviews with some of the political figures who knew 'Mantsebo. I urge historians, particularly those conversant in Sesotho, to investigate the archives of the royal family at Matsieng and to conduct fuller oral research in order to round out my tentative reappraisal of a fascinating, but hitherto largely ignored, historical figure.

50. "Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs in Basutoland, 1940," PRO DO 119/1135

however, he died after only a year in office.

Amplifying this disappointment, the Sons of Moshesh chose a woman, his widow, to succeed him as Regent until his son (her stepson) reached the age of majority. The British strongly advised against Amelia 'Mantsebo's appointment to the Paramountcy, but, with 19 of the 22 senior chiefs supporting her, there was nothing they could do. In Lord Hailey's words, "The wisdom of the appointment of the Regent Paramount Chieftainess is open to question," but "she was pressed upon us."[51] Or, as the Acting Resident Commissioner complained, "There are evidently disadvantages to having a woman as Regent in Basutoland, but this cannot be helped."[52] Instead, the British simply watched as the man they originally favoured for the job, Seeiso's brother Bereng, challenged the legitimacy of a woman ruling in the High Court. There he was decisively defeated, only to pursue his ambitions by other means. Bereng became, in 1949, the highest ranking Mosotho to ever be convicted and executed for liretlo.

The main reason for British scepticism of 'Mantsebo was given by Lord Hailey. "[A]ll experience shows the great difficulty experienced by a Chieftainess in surmounting the obstacles which African society can place in her way." This vagueness echoed the High Commissioner's concern for the (unspecified) "problem of women regents."[53] Yet the British quickly adjusted to the fait accompli of a female Regency. First of all, Lord Harlech was compelled to admire how 'Mantsebo had "behaved with tact and dignity" through the bitter and sometimes personal challenges against her.[54] More importantly, however, the British hoped that a "weak" Paramount would enable them to push through their proposals for a modernized (that is, bureaucratized) chieftainship. They believed that

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51. Hailey, Native Administration, 90

52. Acting Resident Commisioner to High Commissioner, 20 Aug., 1943, PRO DO 35/1176

53. Harlech to Resident Commissioner, 7 May, 1943, PRO DO 35/1176

54. Harlech, Report on Basutoland tour, 7 Jan. 1942, PRO DO 116/8, 102

'Mantsebo's youth, inexperience and femaleness could be exploited to ease the introduction of their vision of progressive Indirect Rule.

The British were soon disabused of this notion, and their original anxieties about a woman as Paramount returned with a vengeance. The essential problem was twofold. First, 'Mantsebo did not go along with the administrative reform proposals. On the contrary, she persistently "obstructed," "sabotaged" and "evaded" British plans to an extent which, as will be shown below, drove experienced British officials to apoplexies of frustration and anger. Moreover, she kept demanding increased powers, including the right to veto all proclamations affecting the territory (including the taxation of Europeans, customs duties and the maintenance of law and order in the Government Reserves).[55] She also raised the issue of self-government, to the evident ire of the Resident Commissioner, by writing directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies inquiring how the Atlantic Charter would be applied to Basutoland.[56]

In her stubborn refusal to cooperate in what she considered to be the destruction of the chieftainship, she had the audacity to question publicly the sincerity and integrity of the British. By doing this, she betrayed the "old boy" rules of informal chats to decide the future of the colony which had worked so well to bring her predecessors onto the British side. Her insistence, for example, on airing the reform proposals for public consideration, on seeking outside advice or mediation (including from the United Nations, the Fabian Africa Bureau, and even the King himself), and on keeping written records of the communication between the Resident Commissioner and herself, infuriated the former. "It seems as if the Chieftainess definitely mistrusts me," whined the man entrusted with pushing the reforms through, Colonel Arden-Clarke. "I may say I have spent

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55. Paramount Chieftainess to Resident Commissioner, 16 Dec. 1943, PRO DO 35/1176/y832/3; C.G.L.Syers to W.A.W. Clark (Commonwealth Relations Office), 4 Oct., 1949, Hector Papers Box 2/4, Rhodes House

56. Resident Commissioner, Interview with Paramount Chieftainess, Sept. 1944, PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

25 years in African administration and never before have I been treated in this way."[57]

In the crucial years of 1942-45, when the British first encountered this type of opposition to their plans, they accused 'Mantsebo of a number of crimes. Because they could not believe she was acting out of her own political convictions, she was accused of being "moulded far too much by flatterers and intriguers," and exploited by "low people."[58] "Immorality" was said to be rampant at her court to an extent which disgusted and demoralized the Nation.[59] She was accused of venality in placing her own financial interests above the needs of the people,[60] "evasion" for deliberately misrepresenting facts,[61] and "stupidity" for failing to understand the purported benefits of a Native Treasury.[62]

In actual fact, it is clear that 'Mantsebo opposed the administration's Native Treasury proposal both because she feared it would undermine the traditional power base of the chieftaincy (as the British intended it to do) and because of the haste and secrecy with which the British sought to enact it. She urged Arden-Clarke to go slower and allow her to consult the population before agreeing to any changes:

> I desire that my people should carefully study these proposals and give their views fully and openly without fear as to their true opinions on the matter. After the Nation has thus expressed its views and I shall know what these views are I

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57. Resident Commissioner interview with Paramount Chief, 25 Sept. 1944. PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5. Perhaps this experience helped qualify the man who went on to "tame" Kwame Nkrumah as Governor of the Gold Coast.

58. Resident Commissioner's comments on Lord Harlech's visit to Basutoland, 1942, PRO DO 35/1172/y701/1/1

59. The alleged immorality stemmed from "the late Paramount Chief's wives consorting with the present self-seeking counsellors" who were "mainly commoners." Arden-Clarke to the District Commissioners' Conference, Maseru 21-22 Dec. 1942; T.B. Kennan to Arden-Clarke, Report on meeting with the Paramount Chieftainess, June 1943. PRO DO 35/1176

60. Correspondence on the Native Treasury, 10 Dec., 1943. PRO DO 35/1176

61. H.B. Lawrence report on meeting between Paramount Chieftainess and Resident Commissioner, 14 Nov., 1944. PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

62. Ibid.

> shall express my final views on the whole matter when it comes before Council.[63]

Moreover she urged the Resident Commissioner that, in view of the fact that "some people distrust the government," he should "prove goodwill" by advancing more Basotho in the Administration.[64] An outraged Arden-Clarke accused her of obstruction and "speaking against custom."[65]

Government strategy to deal with 'Mantsebo's opposition centred around compelling her to accept an Advisory Council of three "responsible" men, into whose selection the government would have decisive input. The Council would replace the traditional method of informal advisors, the quality of whom, the British judged, was "deteriorating" with the result that 'Mantsebo's natural disabilities as a woman were being exacerbated. With such a Council, "there would always be a strong, influential man in charge at Matsieng and the matter would tend to right itself."[66]

'Mantsebo, however, was not at first amenable to this proposal. The Administration approach then quickly evolved from giving her a "heart to heart talk"[67] to attempting to "dress her down" by directly confronting her with accusations against her. She was informed, in no uncertain terms, of the full weight of British disapproval of her morals and motives:

> This will probably shake her to the core, but I have no idea what her reaction will be. I hope she will crumble up but, of course, she may not do so. If she sticks to her guns then there can be only one line of action and that is to have a 'show down.'[68]

The first step towards the latter was to re-establish in protocol who was

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63. Paramount Chief letter to Resident Commissioner, 23 June, 1944 PRO DO 35/1176

64. Paramount Chief to Resident Commissioner, 20 June, 1944, PRO DO 35/1176

65. Resident Commissioner interview with Paramount Chief, 27 June, 1944, PRO DO 35/1176

66. Arden-Clarke, District Commissioners' Conference, 21-22 Dec. 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/y708/1

67. Arden-Clarke, District Commissioners' Conference, 21-22 Dec., 1942. PRO DO 35/1172/y708/1

68. T.B. Kennan to Arden-Clarke, 15 June, 1943. PRO DO 35/1176

the boss, abandoning the polite diplomacy (or chivalry) which had led Administration officials to go to her court at Matsieng rather than simply summoning her to Maseru.

> She must come to me. Judging by my previous experience of the Basuto, she will come to it--but, as she is a woman, and pig-headed into the bargain, she may not.[69]

As it happened, she did not, "definite instructions being absolutely ignored."[70] By 1944 the Resident Commissioner was driven to "put the fear of God into her" in a ranting, insulting face-to-face confrontation which one of his own officials described as "deplorable tactlessness."[71] Even then, she appeared to remain both resolute and "gracefully" inscrutable:

> She may in fact have parted from him [Arden-Clarke] feeling that the victory was hers: she had kept her temper throughout and managed not to show her hand, even under extremely strong pressure.[72]

If 'Mantsebo remained resolute, the same cannot be said of her fellow chiefs, many of whom were shocked by the intemperate language used by the Resident Commissioner.[73] Although they professed their strong support for her, fearing the consequences of British ire, they saw the need to appease the British and therefore they urged her at least to accept the British demand for the appointment of an Advisory Council.[74] The relentless anxiety and advice of her informal advisors provided the pressure which finally brought her to concede to the Native Treasury in

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69. Ibid

70. Resident Commissioner interview with 'Manstebo, 25 Sept. 1944. PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

71. H.B. Lawrence report on Resident Commissioner interview with Paramount Chieftainess, 14 Nov. 1944. PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

72. Ibid

73. Chief Bolokoe, memo of interview between Pararmount Chieftainess and Resident Commissioner, Sept, 1944. PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

74. This she resisted until 1948 (and even then, to the continued frustration of the government, managed to retain the power to chose her own advisors from among 18 nominees).

1945. In particular, the Administration's favourite progressive chief, Theko Bereng, helped her to see "reason."

The Administration's confidence that it had successfully constrained 'Mantsebo by surrounding her with its own preferred advisors was soon put in question. 'Mantsebo continued to oppose the Administration in embarrassing ways on a number of issues, most crucially on anything which could be construed as advancing South African interests or preparing the territory for incorporation in the Union. For example, in 1949 she wrote directly to the King to request a reprieve for the chiefs convicted of liretlo, and to protest against the number of South Africans being appointed to the Administration.[75] She also publicly questioned the obstructionism of the Administration which "prevented" her from consulting with the "Basuto Nation."[76] When the British rejected her nominations for the BNC, she simply renominated them.[77] When the British accepted a South African proposal to build a satellite tracking station in the Malutis, she "just said no, no, no and the British couldn't argue."[78] Likewise, when the British proposed to grant concessions to South African companies to begin prospecting for diamonds, she resisted with such determination that they abandoned any further attempts to develop the territory's mineral potential.[79] She was also forthright in chiding "the undistinguished action pursued in general by the Government Officers in Basutoland," specifically, their usurpation of powers not granted in the 1884 treaty.[80]

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75. Africa Bureau file, Box 219/5, Rhodes House

76. Ibid.

77. Brian Marwick to E.P. Arrowsmith (RC) 28 July, 1954. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3, Rhodes House

78. Interview, B.M. Khaketla

79. R. Turnbull, Notes of Chief Secretary's Visit to Basutoland, Mar. 1952. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House

80. 'Mantsebo letter to Forsythe-Thompson (1952), cited in Machobane, Government, 251-2

This continuing "growing arrogance" led the British to adopt another means "to put the fear of God" into 'Mantsebo: the death threat.[81] Twice she was accused of liretlo on the most spurious grounds, the first time only months before the execution of Chiefs Bereng and Gabashane in 1949. Many Basotho believe that that the British were trying to destroy the opposition of 'Mantsebo and the chiefs by cynically "framing" and executing her as an object lesson:

> 'Mantsebo understood what was behind the liretlo accusations, no doubt, because it happened to her as well. There was the case of Boranyi, a shepherd from Mokhotlong who came here with 'Mantsebo. He used to steal her sheep to eat at night right in the kraal. Then, when he was caught, 'Mantsebo gave him such a thrashing that he ran away. A few days later a British officer and some Basotho officials came. He said that he had witnesses to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that she had murdered this boy for medicine. They gave her one week to produce him if she wanted to save herself. After that she was crying like a child, day and night. But people were sent out all over the country until, with only 2 days left, they found Boranyi down past Quthing there. He was brought back here as fast as the horses could carry him.[82]

When the police came to arrest her, 'Mantsebo had recovered herself sufficiently to mock their integrity. With handcuffs already on, she produced the alleged murder victim and said, "Look, this is how you kill us." The police "did not apologize but only said well, they had been misled and just left."[83] 'Mantsebo appealed the matter to England, including a passionate letter to the King about the "glaring false accusations" around liretlo in general:

> Your Majesty, this attitude has grievously pained me when I find that His Majesty's servants with whom I am working appear to have no more confidence in me. Further, to ignore a deed of this kind can have no other results but to encourage evil people...[84]

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81. Forsythe-Thompson, cited in Machobane, Government, 252; and H.B. Lawrence, memo on interview between Arden-Clarke and 'Mantsebo, 14 Nov. 1944, PRO DO 35/1177/y832/5

82. Interview, Patrick Lehloenya. Similar accounts and sentiments were almost unanimously expressed to me by Basotho of all political leanings.

83. Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

84. 'Mantsebo to Rev. Michael Scott, including a copy of her letter to King George, 9 Sept. 1949. Africa Bureau papers, Box 219/1, Rhodes House

Until concrete evidence appears to support this extraordinary accusation, the Administration must be presumed innocent of possessing the intent of legal assassination, if not of gross ineptitude and injustice. In fact, it is likely that the British sincerely believed 'Mantsebo to be responsible for liretlo murders. As no less than the Resident Commissioner himself told a visiting American journalist, how else to explain the fact that Basotho men were afraid of a woman?[85]

'Mantsebo's techniques for thwarting British intentions included consulting her informal advisors about every issue which came before her. Despite her inability to speak English and occasional ill health, she also maintained rigorous (and, to the British, disconcerting) scrutiny of British action. Her personal involvement in day-to-day matters of administration then served to constrain the colonial authorities' predilections to work through a select elite and to make changes or terminally procrastinate on BNC decisions which it did not approve of. Thus, for example, the Government Secretary advised the Resident Commissioner not to tamper with 'Mantsebo's recommendations for the BNC because "we heard a rumour that the Paramount Chieftainness was watching very closely to see if we made any changes."[86] To avoid "a major row," her nominations were accepted.[87]

'Mantsebo also employed the license of her gender with considerable effectiveness in her dealings with the British. That is, she used methods of obstructionism which only a Basotho woman could resort to with dignity:

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[85]. Gunther, Inside Africa, 574-75. Hailey, who draws upon official sources, also re-iterates the innuendo against her. By contrast, her guilt was refuted in the official report on liretlo and by 'Mantsebo's own tireless campaign against the practice. (Hailey, Native Administration, 90, 98; Jones, Medicine Murder, 34; Liretlo file, LEC archives). If she were in fact guilty, why would she have pressed the government to invite a United Nations' commission of enquiry and to propose increasing police powers to investigate the crimes? (as described in the Resident Commissioner's Report on Ritual Murder, 9 Mar. 1949, PRO DO 119/1376)

[86]. Marwick to Arrowsmith, 23 August 1954, Arrowsmith Papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House

[87]. Ibid.

"throwing a fit"[88] or falling into hysterics.[89] Part of her "difficulty" lay with her tendency to break into tears at crucial moments of negotiation, something which clearly alarmed the British and contributed to their perception that she was a "very uncertain quantity."[90] In addition, she did not always play by the same rules of logical engagement or dialectic: "She could really stand up to them. She would just refuse something like a woman, you know, not giving a reason but just saying no."[91]

These "feminine" tactics may have contributed to the British tendency to underestimate or even dismiss 'Mantsebo.[92] Nonetheless, they were increasingly aware that behind the tears was a shrewd politician who was successfully enhancing her powers. She did so through the courts and through active intervention in disputes between her subordinates. At times she "placed" her own close relatives and trusted advisors in key positions of authority in the wards of rivals or potential opponents. At other times, she employed the large assets at her disposal to "purchase" loyalty in the traditional manner of Basotho chiefs. In addition to this generosity, she won the respect and loyalty of the senior chiefs by adhering to the tradition, largely abandoned by her predecessors, of consulting them on political decisions. This "conservatism" had radical implications for the political development of the territory. It was 'Manstebo, for instance, who:

> allowed freedom of gathering. It was her regulation that said the political parties had to advise (not ask) the chiefs about holding a pitso. All the chief could say was you hold it there or there or there. They no longer had the right to stop a

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88. Ibid.

89. D.H. Wilson file, Rhodes House

90. Arrowsmith to T.V. Scrivener, 30 May, 1956. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House; Personal communication, G.M. Hector

91. Interview, B.M. Khaketla

92. See Lord Hailey's almost pitying comments about her in Hailey, Native Administration, vol. 5, 90, 98

> meeting which was very radical. She released the parties from the interference of chiefs, which is an example of her rather progressive ideas.[93]

Thus, through the expansion of her own power, she sought to restore the chieftaincy to what it had been prior to colonial rule--a legitimate and democratic ruling body in the eyes of the people.

> 'Mantsebo--she was a leader, she was a leader. Before you take note there, listen--I mean in the Basotho sense of a leader. That is, a person who listens well and judges according to the will and advice of her people. Morena ke morena ka sechaba. The Paramount Chieftainess followed that which is why the British called her weak. In fact, she frustrated them. They had engineered her coming to power, it was a clear plot, because they thought that as a woman they could easily manipulate her and initiate their plans through her. At that time the British were hungry for colonization. They wanted to make Lesotho like Swaziland or Botswana where whites could own farms. But she stubbornly refused. They tried to pressurize her to make Lesotho a colony and they tried to get rid of her advisors, to castrate the chieftainship. Fortunately, they failed lamentably. By keeping to the traditional Basotho way of leadership, 'Mantsebo was able to resist these pressures so she was very much loved.[94]

The Resident Commissioner clearly did not understand this when he held that her apparent control over her male Basotho advisors and the men of the BNC was because "they are frightened of her."[95] Yet it was also becoming clear that the Administration itself was fatally hesitant when it came to risking battle with her. In particular, Aubrey Forsythe-Thompson, Resident Commissioner from 1948-52, drew criticism from the High Commission for failing to stand firm in the face of her histrionics or delay tactics. The "dangerous" result of this was that "the power of Matsieng" had grown to be the territory's most outstanding political problem. In the analysis of the High Commission, Forsythe-Thompson:

> was prone to purchase peace by acceding to all her demands. In the result, the power of Matsieng has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminised. I found that the Paramount Chieftainess persistently intervened in matters that are not her concern, between the District Council and field officer on

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93. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

94. "A chief is a chief by the people." Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

95. Arrowsmith to Scrivener, 30 May, 1956. Arrowsmith papers, Box 3/2, Rhodes House

> the one hand and their local chiefs and councils on the other, that she arbitrarily overrides both the territorial rights of the chiefs and agreements with the Administration, and that appeals by District Councils to Maseru do not meet with the support they should.[96]

As a result of this observation, high priority was given to brief the incoming Resident Commissioner so that "his first responsibility [would be] quietly and firmly to curb the power of the Paramount Chieftainess."[97] Indeed, when the Administration met to consider the reforms proposed by Lord Hailey in 1954, they concluded that:

> the development of a healthy local government in the Territory depended on the elimination of the Paramount Chieftainess's power to interfere in local administration.[98]

This concern with 'Mantsebo's increasing power led directly to the Moore Commission as a way to bring public pressure upon her. Its recommendations for administrative reforms would have undermined her authority almost entirely and paved the way for the elimination of "feudal" elements in the government. The new Resident Commissioner must have felt 'Mantsebo was too stupid to realize this when he confidently asserted that Moore's proposals would pass through the BNC. He also appears to have underestimated her ability to overrule her advisors, who, in the Resident Commissioner's opinion, "backed me up strongly."[99]

In addition to underestimating 'Mantsebo's acumen and leadership ability, the British also believed that the mass of the people, including the political parties, had lost faith in a discredited chieftaincy and would therefore not tolerate 'Mantsebo's or the senior chiefs' opposition to reform. Finally, after a second <u>liretlo</u> accusation against 'Mantsebo, the British believed in 1955 that 'Mantsebo was "a broken reed" and

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96. Notes of Chief Secretary's Visit to Basutoland, March 1952, page 4. Arrowsmith papers, box 3/2, Rhodes House

97. <u>Ibid</u>.

98. Arrowsmith to Scrivener, 10 Feb. 1954. Hector papers, Box 2/4, Rhodes House

99. Arrowsmith to Scrivener, 30 May, 1956, Arrowsmith papers, box 3/2, Rhodes House

wondered smugly whether her appearance as a "catspaw to force through the Moore proposals" might not damage the Administration's own desired image of respect for democracy.[100]

The confidence of the colonial authorities that they had won the Regent to their side led them to disaster in that, contrary to British expectations, 'Mantsebo rallied the chiefs to oppose the Moore Report. One of the most vocal opponents of Moore gives her the ultimate credit for its defeat. 'Mantsebo:

> was instrumental in the rejection of the Moore Report. When the Resident Commissioner told the Council that she had agreed with him to accept Moore, she used sign language to tell the members that he was lying. She sat behind him so he could not see her but in Sesotho, that is what this means [demonstrates, fingers twiddling lips, laughter]. In others words, she got the chiefs to come along with her to reject that report.[101]

'Mantsebo's role in aligning the majority of the Council against it was not only crucial but the decision to do so was based on her own, rational political calculation. Another contemporary politician recalls:

> In my opinion the Paramount Chieftainess was shrewd. She was a simple woman with Standard IV only but she had natural political judgement and the ability to consult with others. She was strong! For example, at the time [of the Moore Report] none of her 5 councillors was willing to give her advice. She finally gave her own view when she spoke to the nation: she said, sechaba se phoro--the nation is a bull. When you analyze this politically, you will see it is a very deep thought. She was saying that we the chiefs must be ruled by the people and not the other way around.[102]

In the rapid constitutional developments which followed, 'Mantsebo took a back seat to professional, often commoner politicians. She did not testify before the Cowen commission nor participate in the negotiations which followed. In part this stemmed from failing health. It also stemmed, however, from her belief that the democratized and accountable chieftaincy she had always favoured was at last being put in place. Her interventions in the political process in the late 1950s, such as they were, were

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100. Resident Commissioner to High Commission, n.d. 1955, PRO DO 35/4110

101. Interview, B.M.Khaketla

102. Interview, Anthony Manyeli

limited to keeping a watchful eye on the British and ensuring that the chiefs co-operated in allowing free political debate.[103]

It was only at this point, after nearly 19 years of her rule, that many of 'Mantsebo's advisors abandoned her, sensing in her solicitous attitude towards commoners the death knell of their own class position. In 1960 the majority of senior chiefs together with elected members of the BNC compelled her to resign.[104] Against her will and the wishes of her closest advisors (including a minor chief, Leabua Jonathon), her ward Constantine Bereng was hastily married and brought home from his studies at Oxford to assume the Paramountcy in her place. 'Mantsebo died four years afterwords, allegedly bitter at her betrayal and disappointed with the manner which the new Paramount, Moshoeshoe II, involved himself in partisan politics to advance his own ambitions as an executive monarch.[105]

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To conclude this reappraisal of 'Mantsebo, it is fitting to draw upon the comments of two influential Basotho who observed first hand the achievements of her rule. Both categorically refute the image which predominates in the historiography which describes 'Mantsebo as a weak, missionary-oriented woman irrationally longing for an idealized past. Ntsu Mokhehle, who is otherwise famous for his antagonism towards the chiefs and his radical political ideas, considered that:

> of all the paramount chiefs I have known, which is four, she was the strongest. She was more progressive. She was very liberal. She was the only one of the chiefs who agreed with our democratic ideas because she based her attitude on what the people say, what the people want. That is not stubborn. She was very liberal and progressive because she was of the opinion

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103. For example, by allowing political parties to hold lipitso without first having to get the local chief's permission. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle.

104. Basutoland News, 26 Jan. 1960. In this "coup," the Progressive Association joined with 14 of the Sons of Moshesh in an alliance which prefigured the formation of the MFP.

105. Machobane, Government, 274; Leeman, Azania, 121-22

> that the people must be allowed to say their views. Neither the British nor the Catholics liked her very much. She was a Catholic but she was too independent... When the present king took office, he tried to undo some of her rather progressive ideas.[106]

A Mosotho woman also placed "progressive" among 'Mantsebo's attributes, recalling the specific effects of her gender in breaking down traditional barriers to women:

> From our cultural background women are always looked down upon. Women have never been in the forefront of anything so it was something out of the unusual in this country that the Paramount Chief became a woman. Women felt a little stronger after that, they could express themselves more boldly and, after 'Mantsebo, it became almost expected that the mother would rule. She was indeed respected. The country was much better ruled in those days. You see [laughter], women have a way of doing things. If she didn't like the British, she would say so.[107]

"Radical" Women

In the same way that the term conservative has tended to misrepresent women's real political interests and social radicalism, so too the word "radical" obscures the contradictions of the strongly masculinist politics of the nationalist movement in Lesotho. Although many women were attracted by the anti-colonial message of radical parties from as far back as the 1920s, the gender politics of the men of these parties, above all the BCP, tended to be highly conservative if not reactionary. Josiel Lefela, for example, in 1920 denounced as "Christian whores" the Basotho women who left for Johannesburg and stayed in the hostels established there by the missions. He urged:

> Wake up black man, open your eyes, rise from your sleep. Lay down the law for your women and girls. Men take your women and girls out of these [Christian] associations, it is a danger to give these people the right to plan schemes in places where men are not present.[108]

Given the often assertive machismo of radical men and the class

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106. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

107. Interview, 'Me Khaketla

108. LNA S3/22/2/4. Lefela was expelled from the BNC as a result of this inflammatory letter, published in the paper Naledi in Sept. 1920. See Edgar, Prophets with Honour, 67-70

ambitions of the aspirant elite leadership of radical parties, it is worth considering whether the positions they took and the rhetoric they used could have been seen as threatening to the welfare and hard-won gains of the mass of the population, particularly women. This section will examine the contributions of the women who fought politically for the radical parties in light of such contradictions.

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Basotho women have a long history of opposition to colonial rule and exploitation. While much of this was disorganized or personal rebellion, Basotho women also demonstrated some of the earliest organized protest, enthusiastically joining, for example, anti-colonial organizations in the 1920s such as Zionist church of Edward Lion, the LLB and the BPA. The President of the latter was greeted with cheers in 1922 by women who called him their "Moses" for seeking to deliver them from oppression.[109] Police reports of the LLB mention women actually participating in its political meetings, publicly denouncing the government.[110] In 1936, "the most terrible scandal in our church [the RCM]" occurred at Nazareth when "some women and young girls maliciously attacked and injured the priest in church, hurled abuse at him and profaned the altar."[111]

Professional Basotho women were the first Basotho to organize as workers. Lesotho's first "strike" was conducted by women, the 14 nurses at Maseru hospital in 1943, who first protested the racist policies of the

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109. Machobane, Government, 164, citing a report by the Resident Commissioner. Interestingly, the women "sat at the approaches of the village" to greet Simon Phamotse as he made his way to a pitso to explain BPA objectives. Women were not then allowed to attend lipitso.

110. Police report of the March 1930 LLB meeting, LNA S3/22/2/4. Women also praised Lefela as their "Moses" according to the police report of the 1929, LNA S3/22/1/1. See also Edgar, Prophets with Honour, 125-6

111. Codex of Hermitage, n.d. 1936, DAM 47

administration and then, when patronized and reprimanded, quit en masse.[112] The nurses' association offered some of the most radical critiques of the government's policies of racial and sexual discrimination of any of the civil service associations who testified to the BNC in 1961. It rejected the government rationalizations for a wage differential between the sexes: "Basotho have passed the stage where they should still be told that the man is the head of the family... we are advanced."[113]

Despite such assertive political behaviour, a fairly strong taboo continued to exist against Basotho women addressing public gatherings. When party politics began in Lesotho, therefore, the most prominent women leaders came from South Africa where the mobilization of women into mass-based politics had begun as early as the 1940s.[114] By the late 1950s, repression there forced many South African blacks into exile. One was Elizabeth Mafeking. Upon arrival in Basutoland in 1959 she immediately launched herself into founding the Basutoland Congress of Trade Unions and in 1961 became one of the founding members of the Lesotho Communist Party.[115]

Ellen 'Maposholi Molapo was another South African woman who became renowned as one of Lesotho's most outspoken and radical political figures. Connected at first with the Pan-African Congress in South Africa, she was at the inaugural conference of the BAC. Her first task for the party

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112. The government's official report on the incident ("a severe setback") does not discuss the "trivial" concerns of the strikers. Basutoland, Medical and Public Health Report (Maseru, 1943). Nearly twenty years later, however, E.T. Tlebere, representing the Basutoland Nursing Association, provided explicit detail on the racist and sexist policies of the health service which may have sparked the earlier protest. BNC, Report of the Select Committee on Salary Scales and Conditions of Service of the Basutoland Civil Service (Maseru, 1961), 161-175

113. BNC, Salary Scales and Conditions, 175. Among their demands were equal pay for equal work (between men and women and between the races), six months' paid maternity leave, pensions, housing and better training.

114. Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa

115. Interview, Robert Matji; Basutoland News 17 Nov. 1959; Leeman, Azania, 104

involved exploiting her ties in the Transvaal to lead BAC efforts to organize support among the miners there ("courageously" in the assessment of colonial authorities).[116] She left the BCP in 1960 after a dispute with its leader, but continued thereafter to "address pitsos and was very influential" for the MFP.[117] She also spoke out forcefully in the fight to win the franchise for women.[118]

The first Basotho women to become activists in the BAC/BCP in the 1950s were generally of the aspirant elite. Gertrude 'Makali Masiloane, for example, who became the long-standing president of the BCP Women's League, was a clerk at Fraser's trading station in Morija. In 1965, she demanded to be made and became the country's first female manager.[119] Many others were teachers for whom the BCP accusation of British racism struck a resonant chord: the teachers' union (BANTA, to which several hundred Basotho women belonged) was dominated by the BCP until it split along religious and political lines in 1964.[120] Still others came from

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116. Report on BAC 1st Annual Conference, Africa Bureau papers, box 219, file 5, Rhodes House.

117. Interview, B.M. Khaketla

118. BCC, 580

119. 'Me Masiloane's recollection of that event is revealing both of her own chutzpah and of the attitudes of men: "I approached the management of Fraser's and said that since I'd been working there for 17 years, I wanted a raise in salary. They said that was impossible since I was a lady. The only way to give me a raise was to make me a manager which was also impossible because how could a lady control the men employees? After a long argument, I convinced Lord Fraser to give me a try, though he said that if I failed, there would never be any women managers again. Obviously, I was a great success. The men under me thought it was a bit strange since it was a new thing but I was so strict that after two or maybe three months at the most, there was no problem at all. In fact, maybe they were used to women in authority since there were some women chiefs by then who were no different from men." (my emphasis) Interview, 'Me Masiloane

120. The association president, G.P. Ramoreboli, was a member of the BCP executive and many BANTA graduates ran as BCP candidates in 1965. In the first edition of the BANTA newsletter, Ramoreboli denied any association with politics--BANTA was merely "our dynamic weapon" of "intellectual leaders" who could take the country to independence. BANTA Echoes 1/1958, 11 and 30. In 1964, most Protestants left BANTA to form the even more radical LANTA which, immediately after independence in 1966, launched a brief national strike.

progressive farmer, trader or prominent PEMS families who regarded the British policy of Indirect Rule through the chiefs as detrimental to their own class interests. A daughter of a PEMS church elder explained:

> I first became interested in politics when I was too young to understand but we could feel something was wrong with the way the country was run. Of course I couldn't tell you how, but I felt inside that we were being denied our rights, especially by the whites. For example, at a pitso the whites would always get shelter while we stood in the sun and the rain. They were always placed above the Basotho in jobs, it doesn't matter how untrained they were or how educated the Basotho were, they automatically became the boss because their skin colour was their passport. I felt this was unfair since I felt people should be treated equally. A human being is a human being.
>
> The second thing was that chiefs were just as bad as whites. I remember my father being summoned to the chief in the middle of the night. You would get a knock on the door, for no good reason at all, and exposed to all the dangers of the night. And they had huge fields, when others had nothing, although they were supposed to take care of the people. Men would be called from all corners of the country to work on the king's fields.
>
> I realized that this was what I hated when I first heard the politicians of the BCP speak. The fire within me became excited also when I read articles explaining the oppression we were under.[121]

Among the mass of the population, women were also attracted to the BAC/BCP because it re-iterated many of the same "conservative" critiques of colonial rule as had the LLB. Mokhehle had originally defended the chieftancy in general against the anti-liretlo campaign of the administration. He criticized those specific chiefs, however, who deprived widows of their rightful fields in order to maximize tax receipts. The BCP also attacked government "development" works such as the compulsory setting aside of grass strips and the construction of terraces which impeded on both women's labour time and amount of land at their disposal.

The functions of the BCP's Women's League were fund-raising and proselytization along much the same lines as other women's voluntary organizations (for example, by organizing setokofele to raise money to bring in new members).[122] They also provided an important, if not key,

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121. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

122. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

element at public meetings by whipping the crowd into a state of excitement with their singing and fiery speeches or praise poems. Frequently, they adopted provocative behaviour such as brandishing a knobkerry (koto), a traditional male weapon and the symbol of the party. In an incident in 1961, BCP women repeatedly disobeyed the authority of their church minister, their chief and the police, closing down the mission school of St. Agnes outside of TY. Their protest against cutbacks in education involved "chasing the children away." Eight of them were eventually convicted of public mischief.[123]

In most such cases of radical activism, police, media and official attention were focused on the male politicians. A hint of women's radicalizing influence on the atmosphere of political meetings comes through, however, in occasional reports such as the following description of the reaction of party members to the discovery of a Communist poster at their conference in 1959. The enemy propaganda:

> aroused indignation... Delegates demanded that it should be removed from the platform. It was torn down by Mr. O.P. Phoofolo, Transvaal president of the BAC. A woman took it from him and burned it in the hall amidst the cheers of the audience.[124]

By the 1950s, a South African Mosotho wrote that, "The first thing that strikes a visitor's eye in Basutoland is the predominance of women over men at any public meeting place."[125]

Similarly, while the majority of the people who were arrested after the 1961 riot to prevent the deportation of the Pan-Africanist Mohau Mokitimi were men, police testimony during the subsequent trial showed that the Maseru mob was at least half female. "I did not notice any men out there, only a lot of women screaming and throwing stones at the policemen," testified one witness, while a Mosotho police officer

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123. Basutoland News, 28 Feb. 1961

124. Basutoland News 6 Jan. 1959

125. Mohlabani 1/8 (Sept. 1955), 19

described what he faced thus: "Some of the women were armed with bottles, big bottles... They got up and attacked us with stones and bottles."[126] Women were also described by the prosecution as "prime mover[s] and intimidator[s]" in both instigating the violence, much of which was directed at whites or their property, and silencing potential witnesses for the crown.[127] As the headman of Maseru explained to the judge:

> The ululating started as we came out of Court and they saw Mokitimi struggling with the police. The women who were ululating were outside on the road. Among them were two of the accused. As soon as women ululate, you should know that Basotho are going to kill each other. Whenever a fight breaks out the women ululate. They urge on the warriors to fight. That is why it is done, as an encouragement.[128]

Despite the adoption of such radical behaviour, BCP women did not champion the cause of women's emancipation. On the contrary, they did not challenge traditions which were oppressive to women nor did they publicly raise questions or directly address women about men's prerogatives. Their energy was directed instead to "improving the life of the nation" as a whole, primarily by getting rid of the British. Their assumption was that "improving the life of women" would flow naturally from BCP policies <u>after</u> it took power.[129] Such work as they did which touched women's specific interests focused on encouraging self-reliance or urging the government to improve social services, particularly by building maternity wards and schools, and by pressing the mining companies in South Africa to provide full benefits to widows.[130] Many Congresswomen were also Homemakers, an association with which "of course there was no conflict."[131] The constitution of the Women's League also explicitly accepted the domestic

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126. LNA CR 1/A/1-15/1962

127. LNA CR 1/A/1-15/1962

128. <u>Ibid</u>

129. Interview, 'Me Masiloane

130. Resolutions of BCP Women's Conference, Maseru, <u>Leselinyana</u> 22 April, 1961

131. Interview, 'Me 'Masiloane

nature of women's contribution to the anti-colonial revolution when it stated "to protect and raise children as good citizens of the country" and "to give proper care to all the guests of the Party" among its objectives.[132]

Given that so many BCP women belonged to the PEMS, it is not surprising that their views upon women's role in society reflected many of the same assumptions and contradictions of that church's ideology. Above all, they believed in a meritocratic society where women would win social and economic equality to men through the gradual achievement of educational equality. The party encouraged this view in its rhetoric and by sending almost as many young women as men abroad on scholarships. BCP leaders were then proud to point out the high levels of achievement of "their" women as opposed to the BNP's.[133] The other parties were also conscious of "the very strong" qualities and leadership abilities of Congresswomen.[134]

Nonetheless, just as the PEMS vision of tsoelopele held little promise for the mass of Basotho women, the gradualist and elitist approach to women's emancipation by the BCP Women's League did little to address their concerns, very few of whom got any, let alone equal pay. The irrelevance of their rhetoric of gender equality explains why it was ignored by most Basotho women, tolerated by most BCP men and contradicted even in the words and deeds of BCP women themselves. As 'Me Masiloane explained, the Women's League essentially accepted that "tradition" (that is, subservience to men on key social and political issues) took precedence over equal rights:

> Long ago, Basotho women didn't do anything but cook and such, but we didn't see why now they couldn't do the very same jobs as men. When I addressed the public on this, I found that the men agreed very much with equal rights. Our customs though, we

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132. Constitution of BCPWL cited in Leeman, Azania, vol. 3, 117

133. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

134. Interviews, Patrick Lehloenya (MFP), Matete Majara (BNP)

like them. We can't ignore them so we never attacked bohali or other customs like that.[135]

These contradictions between long-term emancipation and short-term acceptance of the sexual status quo did not become major issues until 1962. As pre-independence political manoeuvering began, however, the contradictions within the BCP over gender became a glaring weakness over two specific issues: leadership and the franchise.

First of all, many radical Basotho men strongly resisted the very idea of women doing politics. In Ben Masilo's opinion, this would lead children to be deliquent since women would have to neglect their household chores to attend meetings where, incidentally, they would learn bad language. Moreover, they were needed at home to "feed the husband so he can fight."[136] Masilo, a highly educated man and editor of the PEMS newspaper, also denounced women who worked outside the home as they "destroy the peace of the family"--such work "teaches her disrespect for men."[137] Such views were also deeply entrenched among migrant workers.[138]

Secondly, there was the issue of the sexual exploits and associated scandal around Ntsu Mokhehle and other leaders of the BCP. These have been touched upon by Leeman, whose accusations of male chauvinism on the part of the BCP leadership range from their treating scholarship candidates as

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135. Interview, 'Me Masiloane. 'Makhosi 'Mapeete adds, "With things like bohali or polygamy, we didn't talk about changing it because those are the peoples' traditions so if we wanted to change them, it needed the people to say."

136. Leselinyana 22 April, 1961, 4 (translation from Sesotho). Almost precisely the same view was expressed in the BCP-dominated teachers' union several years after the colonial government had officially abandoned its narrow emphasis on girls' education for domesticity: "We need girls who know better methods of cooking, who are able to wash and iron our clothes, who can do efficient mothercraft." LANTA Echoes 27 June, 1964, 4

137. Ibid

138. Interview, Rakali Khitsane. This theme will be explored in the final chapter.

"a personal harem" to squandering party funds on mistresses.[139] More seriously, Mokhehle's "legendary" appetite for sex purportedly endangered party unity and alienated party supporters by occasioning struggles over the possession of young women's "favours."[140] The extent of truth in these accusations is almost impossible to ascertain and, in any case, largely irrelevant to this study. What is relevant is that the rumours were current and widely believed:

> The leader of the Congress Party wasn't a bad man, not at all. But we did hear rumours about his private affairs, that he was womanizing. We heard from the people and even on the radio we learned this. It surely did affect us because we thought if a person could be like that he won't be leading us well. This thing discouraged me a lot.[141]

Nor were the accusations confined to the top leadership. The party Youth League:

> was very wild. They used to say no one would have a proper wife--they would be shared. Your mother and father are free, then why shouldn't we be? And the young bachelors would say that daughters will be the property of the party. From that time we Basotho morally went down. Illegitimate children increased. It's true, it's true. The BCP destroyed the family. Mr. Mokhehle used fair and foul means to win the votes of men.[142]

The matter even came up in the National Council, much to the amusement of many members:

> Is it right that these people should be free with girls-[laughter]-that they should go up and down with them, setting very bad examples, teaching them how to swear at people; their laxity of morals is appalling.[143]

Some commentators, like the members of the Council who laughed above, have dismissed such complaints with the implication that they were either the exaggerated grousings of prudes or the cynical exploitation of

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139. Leeman, Azania, passim but especially 116-117

140. Ibid., 67, 116

141. Interview, Sister Victoria 'Mota

142. Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

143. J.P. Khaebane, BNC 1964, 1111. "Go up and down" or "wander about" is a translation of ho teka, from which the word letakatse or prostitute derives.

scandal by the BCP's political enemies.[144] Undoubtedly there is an element of truth in such an interpretation and rumour must be treated with great caution as historical evidence. It is clear, however, that the rumours were of sufficient concern within the party that the president of the Women's League saw fit to urge restraint upon Mokhehle:

> It is true that Mr. Mokhehle was loving these young girls too much. All Basotho, that is their weakness, even the chiefs. It did not make me angry but I tried to talk to him once. He laughed, he took it easy. Well, you can't change people's characters easily. We have a saying in Lesotho that a man has many women. I tried to talk [to caucus] about this. The men just laughed.[145]

When the highest ranking woman in the party found it difficult to be taken seriously about the subject, less senior Congress women were even less likely to risk Mokhehle's notorious ire by criticizing him. Congresswomen therefore kept their peace about the pecadilloes of the party leadership, either out of fear of being patronized or of being expelled from the party.[146] Others, acting from their conviction that private affairs were of no relevance to political ones, defended their leader in such terms as:

> MAPEETE: Mr. Mokhehle's private life was not a party concern. It is untrue that we ever requested the Youth League to punish him for making love to girls. That was his own business. And besides, how can you say that?
>
> ME: I just read it somewhere.
>
> MOSALA: Anyway, what does it matter how many girlfriends a man has? Mr. Mokhehle's personal affairs don't enter into politics. Besides, how do you measure too much? Who says he did that too much? I think some of the things that are written are just false.[147]

To the majority of Basotho women (and men), such a rigorous

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144. This is Mokhehle's own view. Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

145. Interview, 'Me Masiloane

146. Expulsion and bitter retribution were the rewards of the single caucus member who did take a principled, public stand on women's equality (Robert Matji). See the discussion of the franchise below.

147. Joint interview, 'Me Mosala and 'Me 'Mapeete. This was in regard to one of Leeman's specific assertions, also strenuously denied by Mokhehle. Leeman, Azania, vol.3, 69

separation of public and private spheres was an alien concept, just as was this apparent tolerance of a man's unbridled right to exploit women sexually. It is also safe to assume that in Basutoland, as in even some of the most literate societies, party slogans were less impressive to the mass of the population than the concrete personal behaviour of politicians. Basotho women were not shy to challenge Mokhehle publicly about discrepancies between the personal and political, as is shown by the following account of a BCP pitso at Roma in 1964:

> The Leader of the Congress Party appealed to every woman who attended the meeting to join their political party, because they believe it is the right party. One of the women asked him where his wife was, in reply she was told that the wife of the Leader of the Congress Party is in England. Then this woman said, 'How is it possible that you can let your wife to go and study in the country of the blood-suckers?' This woman went on to say, 'If you have failed to control your own wife, how can you control us?' Then the women told him that they were unable to join his party because they were more concerned with the management of their households.[148]

Even Mokhehle's political enemies agreed that he was a dynamic speaker and "a good man." Many of the other BCP leaders also made a positive impression at lipitso with their self-confidence, intellectual ability and image of modernity or career success. Nonetheless, the whiff of scandal which surrounded them fertilized the fields of rumour and made the wilder statements about BCP intentions seem plausible. Fear for the sanctity of the family, and for the loss of cattle which daughters could bring to the family, provided resonance to such rumours as:

> I recall one big pitso where we heard it said that those girls who went to Ghana were sent there just to bear children. We heard other stories like the BCP would put us in rooms with our picture posted on the outside so men could come and choose which one they liked then come inside to take us. The children we would bear would be taken from us.[149]

The failure of BCP women to address such concerns, and their apparent public acceptance of them, undermined much of the appeal which BCP women

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148. BNC 1964, 1114

149. Interview, Philomena Lesema. Innuendo about the girls who went to Ghana on scholarship was published in the Anti-Communist League's paper, 'Mesa-Mohloane, for example, in the Dec. 1961 issue, page two.

might have otherwise held to Basotho women as mothers:

> As for the women in the BCP, we looked down on them. To carry a koto was absolutely strange. I don't know...we thought they were animals.[150]

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The question of who should have the right to vote in the elections of 1965 proved to be another area which exposed the contradictions of radical African nationalism. The fact is that the BCP determinedly and hypocritically opposed the franchise for women. When Mokhehle appeared before the United Nations in 1962, he condemned the British for having restricted the franchise in the 1960 elections to tax-payers only, and thus restricting the number of women who were eligible to vote to precisely 56.[151] Yet later that very year, Congress members who testified to the constitutional commission spoke almost to a man, and woman, against changing this arrangement. At times they used vehemently sexist language to express their opposition to that "terrible misfortune" and "great danger," universal franchise.[152] As BCP District Councillor L. Shoepane brutally put it, "these ladies [who want to vote] are stupid."[153]

None of the leading Congress women made the effort to appear before the BCC (as did, by contrast, women of the MFP and BNP). Among the handful of women who testified in favour of the status quo, the prevailing argument was that "women are children."[154] The view of the Women's League was less blatantly reactionary but amounted in practice to the same public position:

> We opposed the vote for women in 1962 because we believed women were not matured in politics. They knew nothing about

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150. Interview, Philomena Lesema. A koto is a club normally carried by men only.

151. Hennessy, Report on the 1960 Elections, 26

152. BCC, 715, 729

153. BCC, 776

154. So said, for example, L. Fooso, the wife of trader E. Fooso of Mohale's Hoek; BCC, 808

> independence because they didn't understand and we knew they could be used by certain people. Our position was that women could learn after independence, and I agreed fully with that.[155]

Who the "certain people" were was clarified as:

> The BCP knew that women were just subjects of their chiefs. They would go to those men to say, "Morena, hé, I don't know about these politics. Can you advise me how to vote?" Then the chief or priest would tell them which party. This would satisfy them so they never went to the rallies of the other parties. It was not that they were afraid, just that they were fully satisfied with the explanation of their chief or priest. They... did not even listen to their husbands. Almost all men were BCP but there was often a split in families [because] it is 100% true that women were just dominated by their priests.[156]

The election tactic of opposing women's suffrage was opposed on principle by Robert Matji, the BCP District Councillor from Qacha's Nek. Not a single woman in the party came to his support. On the contrary, their acceptance of the continued disenfranchisement of themselves and the majority of the population, and their passivity in the face of the party leadership's "betrayal" of women, facilitated Matji's expulsion from the BCP over this issue.[157] In his view, the BCP leadership had made a decision based on elitist and sexist assumptions which amounted to "the height of hypocrisy and dishonesty."[158] The fact that the BCP Women's League colluded in this was exploited relentlessly by the BCP's rivals over the next eight years as a means to convince the mass of the population, most of whom were women, that the BCP could not be trusted. Of crucial importance to the outcome of the elections in 1965 therefore was the fact that the BNP, the party of "conservatism," was able to portray

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155. Interview, 'Me Masiloane

156. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

157. "In the ANC where I come from, we always had a strong policy to push for women's rights--even in the Freedom Charter. Here it was never like that. I don't think the women in the BAC were as concerned about it as they ought to have been. I think they accepted their position and the rights of men over them. There was never any debate by them. The only time women were useful was at the annual general meeting where they could shout slogans and sing." Interview, Robert Matji

158. Mohlabani 28 Nov. 1962, 7

itself as the party which would both protect and emancipate women.

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This chapter, like the previous ones, has called attention to the problematic assumptions that in Lesotho a) "conservatism" was necessarily backward-looking and short-sighted and, b) "radicalism" was necessarily emancipatory or perceptive of people's needs. In reality there were strong emancipatory elements in the position of "conservative" Basotho politicians, from 'Mantsebo to the BNP. Similarly, while "radical" politicians did indeed possess a vision of society liberated from racial and sexual discrimination, they often demonstrated contradictory behaviour. Since the major parties held virtually identical platforms on other matters such as economic development, the personal behaviour and imputed beliefs of the leaders came to play a significant role in the elections leading up to independence.

Chapter Eleven: Gender and Politics: A Case Study of the 1965 Elections

After 1960, the behaviour of the South African government made it clear to the British that, for domestic political reasons alone, arrangements with that country to avert the "fantasy" of independence for the Basotho were no longer feasible. The Sharpeville massacre and the banning of opposition groups (1960), South Africa's imperious demands upon the British to return political refugees (1961 and onwards), its expulsion from the Commonwealth (1963) and its violation of the United Nations mandate over Namibia (1964), meant that there was no longer any serious question about whether the High Commission Territories should follow the rest of Africa as it moved towards decolonization. The questions were simply how and when.

In Basutoland, Britain had little choice as to whom it could devolve power. It considered that the elections of 1960 had been "a decisive defeat for conservatism" and that the electorate had rejected both the chiefs and the "moderate" progressives (that is, those remnants of the BPA who favoured continued British tutelage).[1] Although only a quarter of the registered voters had actually cast their votes, the BCP and sympathetic independents had been the overwhelming preference of the majority. The British were also well aware that the most educated and articulate elements of the petty bourgeoisie, including the majority of the civil service and teachers upon whom much of the responsibility for making self-government work would rest, were BCP supporters.[2] Although the radical nationalists of the BCP were not their preferred collaborators, therefore, the British had by 1964 resigned themselves to the inevitability of

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[1]. J.P.I. Hennessy, A Report on the First General Elections in Basutoland (Maseru, 1960), 53

[2]. The BCP and sympathetic independent candidates took control of 8 out of 9 District Councils and three quarters of the new Legco seats, while "95%" of the civil service was BCP (BCC, 110). Government and business community hopes that the less strident MFP could win some of this support evaporated after 1964 when members of that party introduced violence into the campaign. Leeman, Azania

working with the urbane, popular and forceful Ntsu Mokhehle.

The BCP thus went into the 1965 general elections widely expected to win. Not only was it the country's first modern political party with a long and honourable history of opposition to British rule and chiefly abuses, but also it had the most educated leaders and the most apparently well-organized campaign. It also had the most visible and vocal Women's League, whose ululations and singing helped create the impression that "everyone was Congress."[3] Many Basotho, including a majority of women in many districts, were attracted by its platform of anti-colonialism, anti-apartheid and the development of economic self-reliance. Yet when the votes were counted, the BCP won only 25 seats, against 31 for the BNP and 4 four the MFP. Leabua Jonathon, not Ntsu Mokhehle, became Lesotho's first prime minister.

Many explanations have been offered to account for the unexpected BNP victory which allowed Leabua Jonathon to become Lesotho's first prime minister.[4] One common view, although generally offered with no empirical evidence to support it, is the supposedly decisive preference of women (who comprised two/thirds of the electorate) for conservatism. In this view, the BNP and its allies cynically exploited the fears and political naivite of women to defeat the "rational" nationalist parties. This chapter will challenge this hypothesis by giving special focus to Basotho women's own views and political behaviour with regard to the two main

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[3]. Codex of Ramabanta, Nov. 1964, DAM 16

[4]. The large historiography of the election is discussed in the introduction. Weisfelder, "Defining," and Machobane, Government offer the most thorough-going analyses, examining and weighing the importance each of the different factors with scholarly discipline and discourse. See also Peter Sanders, "The General Election of 1965," unpublished manuscript #779, Rhodes House. These attribute the BCP's loss to its urban bias and purported neglect of the rural areas, the too intellectual or "high-brow" campaign style of the BCP leaders, South African and British collusion or electoral corruption that favoured the BNP, and the bitter opposition to the BCP from the influential Catholic church. Most of these same views were re-iterated to me in interviews with male Basotho political elites. Khaketla, Leeman and Matji stressed the divisions within the BCP caused by Mokhehle's domineering personality. Khaketla, Lesotho 1970; Leeman, Azania; interviews, Robert Matji, 'Me Khaketla

political parties. The 1965 general elections shall serve as a case study of class and gender in the political process.

Before proceeding, however, a number of erroneous assertions and assumptions which are commonly made in the historiography of Lesotho must be pointed out. Some of these have been corrected in earlier chapters, notably, the assumption that women were naturally conservative or that women were politically more naive than men. Even given the narrowest definition of politics in the so-called public sphere, the existing evidence contradicts this assertion. As the previous chapter made clear, by 1965 women had had a long history of involvement in the chieftainship and nationalist political struggles. It was also made clear in earlier chapters that women were not as a rule blindly beholden to their priests. Indeed, Basotho women in massive numbers disregarded the injunctions of their priests, chiefs, and male guardians alike. They also disobeyed the laws of the colonial state in their efforts to find new ways to survive and even, in some cases, to prosper in the conditions created by capitalism in the region.

This study does not, however, accept that a narrow definition of politics is sufficient to capture the scope of women's political activity or consciousness. As Chapter Nine showed, women's purportedly non-political voluntary associations in practice mobilized and to a significant degree empowered women to cope with the inequitable and repressive social and economic situation. An understanding of Lesotho's politics must therefore include an analysis of what women's church and homemaking organizations thought about and did to address questions of distribution of wealth and power.

Nor does this study accept commonplace assumptions about modernization and "tradition." As we have seen, colonial rule exacerbated many of the most repressive features of the society. The government's actual "development" policies were frequently burdensome to women, if not directly and explicitly targetted against them. In this context the

notions of modernity and progress offered by the colonial state and the main Protestant churches (and, on the whole, accepted uncritically by foreign observers) represented for most women deepening poverty, state harassment, the destruction of communities and increasing family violence. In contrast, traditional social and political structures (and the church which disrupted them the least, the RCM) often allowed women to resist these policies and to maintain their survival and dignity better than conformity to the dismal options provided by "progress." In such a context, "traditionalism" could be a means to advance the de facto rights and autonomy which pre-colonial Basotho women had enjoyed and had expanded in the early years of colonial rule.

It is also important to emphasize that such "traditionalism" was dynamic and selective, constantly infusing ancient customs with neo-traditions invented or adapted by women from foreign institutions. To give one prominent example, women's traditional brewing of joala for hospitality became over time the concoction of much more potent liquors for business. The fact that women were predominant in the Christian churches, which were historically hostile to many Sesotho customs, is also striking. Clearly, Basotho women selected certain church dogmas to advance their rights while rejecting others in favour of those customs which they understood to protect them from the ravages of "progress" (such as bohali). In short, the stereotypical dichotomy of conservative/progressive cannot be sustained by a close examination of Basotho women in history.

The assertion that women mostly voted conservatively not only has no grounding in a meaningful definition of the term conservative, it furthermore cannot even be supported by the empirical evidence. Only two earlier studies of the 1965 and 1970 general elections questioned the co-relation between gender and voting behaviour and both showed that there is no evidence either that most women voted for the BNP or that most men voted for the "radical" parties.[5] On the contrary, the BNP received

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[5]. Weisfelder, "Defining," 341-2; MacCartney, "A Case Study," 478

40,000 fewer votes than the MFP and BCP combined. As is wont to happen in the Westminster system of first-past-the-post, the "radical" parties split their plurality in such a way that the BNP was able to capture seven marginal seats with only a minority of the votes cast. Statistically, therefore, it was almost impossible that most women supported the "conservative" party.[6]

Weisfelder's conclusion that women on the whole favoured the radical parties is also supported by my oral evidence. Many of my informants, including Catholic women, and even nuns, expressed their belief that the Congress Party, with its highly educated and well-travelled leaders, had more potential to lead the country than any of its rivals. None of them believed that the BCP would wilfully endanger Lesotho by provoking a South African reaction that might cut off migrant labour remittances.[7]

The tenacity of the claim of female conservatism is therefore remarkable in the face of all the contradictory evidence. It persists in recent historiography for two main reasons. First, the sexism of the claimants allows them to perpetuate generalizations and stereotypes which are derogatory to women without feeling the need to investigate them. Second, upon investigation, a grain of truth to the claim emerges. Although in ways quite different from those most commonly asserted, a determined minority of "conservative" women did in fact have a decisive impact upon the election outcome. Rather than simply labelling these mainly rural and often illiterate women as conservative or as dupes, it is worth an attempt to understand what motivated them to campaign and vote as

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6. Underscoring this conclusion, a quick glance at the electoral map shows that it was likely men, not women, who provided the bulk of the "conservative" party's support. The BNP seats were almost entirely concentrated in the highlands which had, proportionately, the highest number of men. The lowlands, where up to half of all men were absent and did not vote, and which had, therefore, the largest female population, were overwhelmingly won by the BCP.

7. Interviews, Sister Antoinette, Sister 'Mota, 'Me Khaketla, 'Me Phohlo (Catholic or Anglican women). The idea that women favoured the BNP because it was likelier to preserve better relations with South Africa was unanimously dismissed, often with contempt, by my female informants.

they did and so to upset the electoral expectations of the country's elites and expatriates alike.

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The electoral campaign to decide which party would govern an independent Lesotho really began in 1962 with the Basutoland Constitutional Commission (BCC). Leaders of the three main parties toured the country with the chair of the commission, jostling with each other over their conflicting visions of political and social change before large lipitso. These meetings were normally attended by large numbers of women, often more than men. Thousands of women also signed petitions which were submitted to the BCC, suggesting considerable awareness of and interest in political developments. The print media also published many letters by women discussing politics, above all, the question of women's suffrage. By contrast, campaigning was almost impossible in the mining compounds, locations and farms of South Africa where most of the 150,000 male migrant workers lived. The major parties had all originally agreed that these men should be enabled to vote in abstentia. The difficulties of campaigning, however, particularly for the BCP which was regarded with considerable hostility by the South African regime, meant that:

> Many men were influenced to vote BCP by their wives. That was because women were much more interested in politics since they were the people who were here, listening to the speeches.[8]

There was, indeed, much of interest to women in the speeches before the BCC, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, much of the well-articulated platform of the BCP was attractive to women and to the rural poor in general. The BCP generally, but not always, adopted a "progressive" stance which tended to reflect the liberal ideals of tsoelopele, including self-reliant economic development and women's emancipation through education. Along with its radical anti-colonialism, however, were specific "conservative" positions such as opposition to soil conservation works which impinged on people's fields.

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8. Interview, Ntate Sekhesa

The BCP also adopted a strongly traditionalist stance on one issue which was of particular interest to women, the franchise. Unlike radical nationalist parties elsewhere in Africa, the BCP determinedly opposed women's suffrage, with fully 98% of identiable BCP supporters who appeared before the BCC speaking against universal franchise.[9] It would be wrong to assume that the thousands of women who heard the often contemptuous words spoken about women by many BCP leaders did not take note of this attitude. On the contrary, many of the women who addressed the commission spoke directly to the women in the audience about the "oppression" or "slavery" under which they lived and the fact that "we are deceived by the men."[10] Such comments were greeted with ululations, cheers and applause.[11]

Likewise, it would be wrong to assume that women did not notice the class background of the most virulent opponents of women's suffrage. As an analysis of the occupations of BCC witnesses shows, support for the status quo (that is, tax-payer suffrage only) came overwhelmingly from the "modern" sector of the population. Thus, of the 179 identifiably petty bourgeois or proletarian witnesses,[12] a large majority (137 or 76%) favoured either the status quo or a strictly male franchise. Of those migrant workers who travelled from South Africa to testify, five out of

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9. The sole apparent dissident was the leader of the Youth League, Koenyama Chakela. BCC, 573. The tactical reasons for this betrayal of party prinicipies are discussed in the previous chapter. Although different from elsewhere in Africa, they are remarkably similar to the arguments put forward by the European socialist parties who opposed female suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. See Ellen Carol DuBois, "Women's Suffrage and the Left: An International Socialist-Feminist Perspective," New Left Review 186 (1991)

10. BCC, 764

11. BCC, 1111; Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

12. Those identified in the record as government clerks, advisors, tax or insurance accountants, traders, unionists, labourers, miners or diggers, progressive farmers, labour agents, artisans, journalists or printers, unemployed, and councillors. Teachers and ministers are considered separately because of the partisanship of their employers, the rival missions.

seven were opposed to women's suffrage.

The co-relation between party affiliation, class background and stance on the franchise question is thus quite striking. These figures support the assertion by critics of the BCP that the principal opponents of women's franchise appeared to the mass of the people as "rich, go-ahead types."[13] The fact that the small Indian community, almost all traders, also supported the BCP confirmed in many peoples' eyes that it was the party of petty capitalists and grasping opportunists.[14] In that respect it was indeed the successor to the LLB: "Ces gens-là veulent faire de l'argent: '<u>Motho eo, oa bereka</u>.'"[15]

Conversely, the principal advocates of reform were found among the chiefs and other "traditional" elements of society. Of the 70 chiefs, headmen, herbalists, and court presidents who testified, 59 (or 84%) favoured either a universal franchise or the expansion of the franchise to include widows (approximately a third of all adult women). Identifiable BNP supporters were 77% in favour of universal franchise.[16]

Another interesting trend emerges when the witnesses' religions are considered. Those who were identifiably Catholics unanimously favoured universal franchise while the Protestants were 80% opposed, a divergence

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13. Interview, Sister Margie

14. Lending credence to Basotho suspicions of political opportunism by the Indian community, Gani Surtie, one of the co-founders of the BCP, defected to the BNP as soon as it came to power. Khaketla, <u>Lesotho, 1970</u>, 41

15. "Those men want to make money: they want to take the white man's job." So reported a Catholic priest on what his congregation was saying about the LLB in Butha Buthe. "Communism in Basutoland," <u>Vinculum</u> 4/9 supplement 14 (Oct. 1948)

16. MFP members were split almost evenly on the issue, reflecting the schizoid nature of the party. Aspirant elites of the "progressive" wing tended either to favour universal suffrage or to demur expressing an opinion (as did the party leader, Seth Makotoko), while the senior chiefs opposed it on similar grounds as the BCP, that is, electoral expedience couched in terms of "tradition." Chief M. Sekake, for example, intoned that "An African woman, perhaps unlike other African women, is a housewife. She must cook for her husband the most delicious food and take care of the children... But I fear one other aspect too. There may be some political predominance or dominance of voters in the way that some Churches have too many women." BCC, 297-8

of opinion reflected in the editorial lines of the rival newspapers, Moeletsi and Leselinyana. In addition, most chiefs were Catholic, and hence their predominant support for female suffrage coincided with their church's stance. Ministers, teachers and peasants (of whom there were 79) were almost equally divided on this question, undoubtedly a reflection of the different views of the churches to which they belonged.

Why did the BCP so strongly oppose women's suffrage? BCP members offered a number of reasons for this (other than women's alleged stupidity, backwardness and lack of education). Many argued that granting women the vote would entice the government to impose taxation upon women, carrying this line to the illogical extreme of asking, "Who will look after the children?"[17] Others, including Mokhehle himself, argued that women, because they did not currently pay taxes, "do not know what it means to use money."[18] They would, therefore, make irresponsible demands upon the candidates they elected including the "cruel" taxation of men (meaning excessive either to extract vengeance upon men or to pay for women's welfare).[19] M. Masitha held that the people who proposed such an evil "should be put in prison."[20]

Many BCP members also appealed to "tradition" and family peace to deny women the right to vote. Typically, Legislative Councillor Simon Fokotsane asserted that giving women the vote:

> would be an insult to the people of Basutoland... Here in Basutoland we know that a woman is a child and is the property of

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17. That is, if women were given the vote, were then required to pay taxes, then failed to pay their taxes and were imprisoned in large numbers. BCC, 645

18. BCC, 642. This line of reasoning is expressed or implied by, among others, BCP Legislative Council members A. Makhobalo, BCC, 661; Ntsu Mokhehle, BCC, 305; G. Ramoreboli, BCC, 451 as well as by virtually the whole TY contingent of several dozen witnesses. The "tedious" repetition of such arguments eventually led the Chair of the commission to chastise the BCP witnesses and to limit their input in the hearings. BCC, 633-651

19. BCC, 352

20. BCC, 642

her husband.[21]

Granting "children" the franchise was not only against "tradition" but it would also, argued A. Mphanya, contribute directly to "the breaking up of families"[22]

Given his control over the caucus, it is inconceivable that Mokhehle did not approve of the expression of such sentiments.[23] Moreover, while never publicly on record as opposing women's suffrage, his hostile grilling of supporters of universal franchise during the commission implicitly makes his position quite clear.[24] As late as 1964 he was reportedly still attempting to block the BNC's request to the British to allow women to vote, claiming that the mass of the people opposed it because they wanted to preserve their traditions.[25]

The British were in fact quite amenable to this argument and not noticeably concerned that "tradition" in this case was emphatically rejected by most of the supposed traditionalists. The first draft proposals of the new constitution, which they tabled before the BNC in 1964, provided for "transitional arrangements" only, that is, conceding female suffrage in principle but delaying its introduction until <u>after</u> independence.[26]

When it finally came to a vote in council, almost all of the BCP members abstained. Meanwhile, as in the BCC, almost all of the chiefs spoke in favour of universal franchise and criticized the British for

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21. BCC, 729

22. BCC, 618

23. Robert Matji confirms this. Interview and <u>Mohlabani</u>, Nov. 1962

24. See, for example, his sharp dressing down of a peasant, K.J. Mosaase, who had ventured the opinion that "there are quite a number of women who understand politics even better than certain men." BCC, 121

25. <u>The Basutoland Times</u> 28 Jan. 1964; BNC 1964, 861

26. Section 48, 153 (i) of the constitutional proposals, BNC 1964

equivocating about it.[27] As a last ditch effort to restrict the number of women who could vote, Mokhehle proposed a literacy qualification for women, but this too was rejected by the consensus of the BNC. In late 1964, the British finally accepted the wishes of the majority of the councillors and provided for an unqualified, universal adult franchise.

An indication of the real motive behind the BCP's duplicitous appeal to democracy, responsibility or level of education was given repeatedly in the words of BCP supporters and the BCP newspaper, Makatolle. Basically, the argument ran that women "have enough to do in their homes and lands"[28] and were therefore too preoccupied with domestic matters to understand the long-term benefits of the Pan-African liberation struggle. It was assumed that "those women who are making porridge,"[29] could be easily bribed by the "superficial and artificial bread and butter politics" of the BNP.[30] Moreover, women were regarded as "weak vessels"[31] and assumed to be puppets of unprincipled men. "Many of our women are not educated therefore they simply do as their priest or minister tells them."[32] "Chiefs will frighten them,"[33] while "the

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27. BNC 1964, 747-861, 1139. At this time, the chiefs were still in the majority on the council, either as elected District Councillors or appointees of the Paramount Chief.

28. BCC, 15

29. BCC, 1055

30. Makatolle 15 May, 1965, 6. Interview 'Me Mosala

31. BCC, 15. At least this BCP Legislative Councillor, S. Ntlaloe, acknowledged that women existed, which was more than G.M. Kolisang was apparently prepared to concede. The member of the BCP executive remarked, "I do not agree that [the present arrangement] deprives anybody of the franchise." BCC, 82

32. M. Letete (councillor and trader), BCC, 223. This was, of course, precisely the opposite of reality since the number of literate women at that time was nearly double the number of literate men.

33. C.T. Tsotetsi, BCC, 729

ignorant Christian flesh of this country"[34] would be cowed into voting for the BNP by the "frenzied screamings and lunatic shrieks"[35] of the "French-Canadian tourists and the Boers."[36] BCP members reportedly said that allowing women the vote:

> would be tantamount to allowing the Roman Catholic priests to determine the composition of the new government of Lesotho so that our government should be run from Rome, through Papal representatives in Lesotho.[37]

This assumption that women lacked the ability to resist pressure or bribery or to think critically about political views so pervaded the party that the BCP Women's League accepted it as well. After Robert Matji had been expelled, "simply because he would not be party to the insults that the BCP was hurling at our women," the MFP newspaper asked rhetorically, "Are our women so foolish as to continue to support a party which despises their intelligence as much as the BCP?"[38] It may have appeared to be so, for the Women's League continued its rousing campaign without serious defections or direct challenges from women constituents.[39]

For many women outside the BCP, however, the answer to Mohlabani's rhetorical question was an emphatic no:

> I knew very well that the BCP was very much against women voting. They were sexists. Congress still had an old mentality. They wanted to keep women in the kitchen. Even though they had a Youth League where the majority was young women, they still treated women in that old-fashioned way.[40]

The leader of the BNP clearly held a different attitude toward women and sought to infuse his party with it.

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34. Makatolle 4/21, 19 June, 1965, 2

35. Makatolle April 1965, 2

36. Makatolle April, 1965, 4

37. Mohlabani 9/2, 2 Nov. 1964, 7

38. Ibid., 7

39. Interview, 'Me Masiloane

40. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

> Our leader kept raising this issue in our private, executive meetings. We never thought that he was serious but he kept saying he could not understand why women here were not taken like in other countries where they have equal rights to vote. I don't know if that was because he thought they would vote for him only--he never said such a thing. He just spoke strongly for women and finally he convinced us so we began to publicly talk about it in 1962. The women never came to us to ask for this but they praised us after.[41]

Regardless of whether Jonathon was sincere or simply politically astute, the fact is that he did "openly and repeatedly appeal to the women for support right through his campaign in practically every one of his speeches."[42] Not only did he pray publicly and speak reverently of God, but he addressed women's immediate concerns in a language which was reassuring to them. While BCP candidates spoke disparagingly of women, Jonathon constantly praised their development work, including the work they did under primarily RCM and government auspices to build roads, dams etc.:

> Ache, I don't think I agree that Leabua exploited women. Women got the benefits. They got roads, food and they got appreciation which was the first time for that.[43]

This made a deep impression and had a lasting effect upon many women. A nun recalled that:

> Leabua Jonathon sensitized women, that is, he made them aware of the need to take pride in their work. Then [after he came to power] women worked hard for him building roads but they never felt exploited. They saw that road was something that belonged to them so that even today, without him to encourage them, they continue to keep up their roads. They do an amazing job. I've come to some beautiful roads in the most remote village and if I ask, who did this, the women will tell me very proudly, 'It's

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41. Interview, Matete Majara. Many non-Catholic and non-BNP women support this view of Jonathon as well. For example, speaking of the years after Jonathon's election, the former president of the Women's Bureau asserted that "I personally believe he was very, very, very sincere... Sincerely speaking, he had women at heart. He was very humble and very considerate. In fact I wasn't so close to him but that only proves that he was not befriending me or trying to use me to exploit women. He only sought my advice, even though I was not of his party, because he believed women could lead development in the rural areas." Interview, 'Me Mokokoane.

42. Personal communication, Rev. G. Blanchard

43. Interview, 'Me Mokokoane

ours.'"[44]

During the campaign, Jonathon also continuously reminded women of the BCP stance on the franchise, even having Robert Matji's letter of protest against that stance translated into Sesotho and distributed at his rallies.[45]

This is not to suggest that the men of the BNP were paragons of male virtue. On the contrary, some of them held contemptuous views of women's capabilities, while others were admittedly cynical about the party stance.[46] On the whole, however, it is unlikely that such a purely opportunistic attitude predominated. For one thing, many of the BNP leaders were chiefs who were accustomed to working with women as equals:

> We talked openly of women's equality because we never thought they were inferior. As you know, we had women as chiefs for a long time and they were very good... In parliament, 'Mamathe and the other women never had any problem. They were listened to with respect.[47]

Once it became clear to the BCP leadership that they had lost the fight to keep women from voting, they did not adjust their campaign tactics accordingly. Rather, they redoubled their efforts to capture the male vote. At this point, it is useful to examine the nature of the constituency to which the BCP turned and the means by which it sought to elicit male support.

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44. Interview, Sister Hyacinth. A telling incident in this regard was reported in the post-election period. Eight women belonging to the government's Women-in-Self-Help organization, stoned the car of a BCP MP who allegedly mocked the road they had built. The Basutoland Times 3 May, 1968

45. Interview, Robert Matji

46. This was probably even more true of the MFP, however: "Like every politician we were looking for every loophole in order to win. So strictly speaking, we were not sincere when we talked of women voting. It was not so much that they came asking us for it but we looked around to see what could help us. We were still behind in Lesotho at that time so we looked abroad. Then we saw people like Helen Suzman and we realized we could utilize that in order to gain more votes. I wrote my speech [for the commission] in a way to captivate women psychologically. When we heard them ululating, we knew that we were winning them to our side." Interview, Patrick Lehloenya

47. Interview, Matete Majara

In 1965, migrant labour was at its peak. Apartheid was in place and enforced with vigour. Real wages were lower than they had been in the 1880s.[48] Agricultural potential in the territory had fallen catastrophically, with soil loss through erosion having been amplified by years of misguided and underfunded "erosion control." A drought in 1965 added to this to leave much of the territory facing famine conditions.[49]

Under such conditions, the prospects of earning enough money to pay bohali or avoid a lifetime of debt were slim for many men. After years of a degrading and sometimes criminal life on the Rand, Basotho men often returned home without hope for the employment, fields or family life which had once been their right and, in many ways, the definition of every "real man." Many of these men then became liquata ("squatters") living in the camps, "primitive, stupid, and irresponsible people."[50] Their existence had been noted by the missionaries as early as the 1930s, liquata comprising:

> a different people from the rest of the tribe, with disturbing habits and mysterious language... Oh, in the trains which bring them, one hears terrible words launched against the female travellers, women or young girls, without even bothering themselves to know if they are married or with a father![51]

Such men became much more numerous after World War II and were regarded by many as the prime cause of rising crime and violence. Many of them were graduates of "the Russians," one of the most notorious urban gangs on the Rand. Not only were they infamous for violent crime and extortion, but for the "powerful male chauvinist impulse [which] also

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48. AIM, Migration and Development, 13

49. The BCP downplayed the seriousness of the famine, accusing the BNP of exploiting it to get food aid from South Africa and hence buy people's votes. While there may be an element of truth in this accusation, evidence from the missions in the Malutis shows clearly that starvation was real and widespread. See, for example, Baerlocher, Hardegger, 55-6 and interview, 'Me Mosala. The Codex of Ramabanta refers to a drought "such as not seen in forty or fifty years." (Feb. 1965, DAM 16)

50. So described by a Mosotho migrant who had the attributes of a "real man." AIM, Another Blanket, 7

51. JME 1939/1, 353

seems to have marked their handling of marital and family disputes particularly when triggered by women."[52] It is noteworthy that the rise of this aggressively macho subculture in South Africa coincided with a rise of nearly 1200% in the homicide rate in Basutoland in the two post-war decades.[53]

Even among those who could get wives and a relatively secure retirement, expectations of female docility were often rudely shattered upon their return from South Africa. From humiliating treatment in the Republic, husbands often returned to face the further humiliation of inability to control "their" women, including even their daughters. As one miner expressed it:

> My wife is a stranger I know, my children too. They are so much accustomed to my absence that my presence irritates them. They are uneasy and uncomfortable around me. When I try to talk to them about things relating to the welfare of our family, the miner in me repulses them by orders, shouts, curses and threats. Sometimes I feel neglected because of the children's attachment to their mother.[54]

Fuelling gender tensions in 1963, South Africa finally imposed its long-threatened ban on Basotho women; at least 20,000 of whom were compelled to return to the territory.[55] These women included many who had survived and prospered in the "Babylonian" conditions on the Rand and they were not of the type to accept passively and humbly any man's

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52. Phil Bonner, "The Politics of Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-52," 106. Bonner adds, with understatement, that "this more violent, chauvinist and ethnic orientation which characterized Basotho-dominated squatter camps most likely impaired the quality of squatter life." See also Bonner, "The Russians"

53. That is, from an average of twenty cases per year (1941-45) to 236 in 1965. CAR 1946, 1965

54. Cited in Sebilo, "What do the Miners Say?" 30

55. "Some are chased away from the farms in which they were born. They are carried away in truckloads. Some others are brought by aeroplanes, and are just dumped in Basutoland without any food or clothing." BNC 1963, 763

injunctions to be obedient.[56]

In such conditions, many migrants began to cherish idealized notions of traditional male authority. As a result, far from constituting a progressively-inclined proletariat, the migrant labour population was, on the whole, more conservative than the men who remained behind. This tendency, under the rubric of respecting tribal customs, was actively encouraged by the apartheid regime and the mining companies. As M.S. Mohasi informed the BNC in 1961, the miners "are the ones who love custom more than any others."[57] With respect to their political consciousness, study after study found that it was virtually non-existent. Particular attention was focused on the Russians, possibly because of their name. It was found that communist or even ANC propaganda:

> never had the slightest effect or made the slightest impression on the Basuto. These people, who are mostly peasants, had never, or have never heard of [Russia] or its traditions and its ideologies... For that matter, they have never joined any movement, like the Defiance Campaign in its heydey.[58]

To appeal to these men, the BCP distinguished itself from the other nationalist parties in several ways. First, it addressed the men in the forceful language they were used to at the mines, with facile promises of easy wealth and hints of revenge against the whites:

> During the elections, most miners supported the BCP. The BCP were the first to promise them that they could have the white

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56. For a look at Basotho women migrants' views of South Africa and Basotho men, see Dave Coplan, "Musical Understanding: The Ethno-aesthetics of Migrant Workers' Poetic Song in Lesotho," Ethnomusicology 32/3 (Fall 1988), 361-2. In Gay's analysis, "There is no greater source of resentment among younger women than influx control, which they believe has deprived them of economic alternatives for the personal advancement and independence enjoyed by their mothers." Gay, "Options," 19

57. Committee on Wills, Estates and Marriage, 10

58. Mohlabani 4/6 (Aug. 1958). See also the Mosotho trade unionist, Herbert Taka, in BNC 1956, 63. This view is supported by Lapointe, An Experience, 216; Coplan, "Eloquent Knowledge," 419, and the leader of the BCP himself. "For most of the men who went to work in the mines, I don't think they could be politically conscious in a proletarian way, not even today. Back in the 1960s organizing the workers had not yet begun. There were strikes, yes, but they weren't politically conscious and they were just repressed. I wouldn't be able to say if those miners supported us or not." Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

> man's jobs and cars. Most of them didn't understand such things. In fact, the Basotho were often tricked into politics.[59]

Congress leaders were also prone to indulge in the most extraordinary technocratic and autarkic fantasies, revealing a naive faith in tseolopele from the beginning of their political activism. For example, in urging the British to proceed with the development of a huge hydro-electric scheme in the highlands (even if South Africa, the only conceivable customer, did not buy the electricity), Mohlabani dreamed of the "textile industry, fruit canning, creameries, fish, irrigation" which would automatically follow: "Mountains would be tunnelled and electric trains run from Maseru to Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek."[60]

Given the historical record of "development" schemes in Lesotho, it is hardly surprising that such plans, and avid talk of economic independence from South Africa which the BCP made during the election, evoked considerable scepticism among the common people.

> Really, they didn't know what they were talking about. They said anything.They had these vans with loudspeakers going up and down the street saying things like you won't have to go to South Africa if you elect us--you'll find gold and diamonds right here, under the street. I heard that with my own ears.[61]

To exploit the deep sense of grievance and latent traditionalism among male migrant labourers, the BCP also appealed, implicitly and explicitly, to symbols of lost masculinity. Like the LLB before it, some BCP leaders derided the effects of Christianity upon male privileges, "boasting that a Mosotho man, by tradition, had the right to five or six wives."[62] At a time when the association between the terror of liretlo murders and degraded, "neo-paganist" forms of lebollo was still very fresh in people's minds, Mokhehle himself asserted that the men who went to

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59. Interview, Ntate Sekhesa. Makatolle 4/14 (April 1965) also crudely implied the promise of making love to white women.

60. Mohlabani 3/9 (Sept. 1957), 4

61. Interview, Sister Margie

62. Interview, 'Me Mosala

circumcision school were "more solid morally" than those who went to mission school.[63] He also lambasted the RCM for its "defamatory" attacks upon Sesotho tradition.[64] While many BCP members were Christian, such statements created the sense that the leadership of the party was pandering to the basest instincts of the most "primitive" men:

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[63]. BNC 1963, 1096

[64]. Ibid.

> The BCP wanted to boss it, even in the family. They believed that a man should have that power over women and this caused clashes in the family because, ka'nete, most women supported the National Party. They wouldn't change their vote just because of their husband so there were many clashes, even with children against their mothers.[65]

Reinforcing this image of a renascent or reasserted masculinity was the type of language and the swaggering machismo used by some BCP members. A quick glance at the pages of Makatolle provides ample evidence of such a "bully (macho) attitude":

> The BCP made the stick (koto) their distinctive symbol, with the cry "ea lla koto" (the stick strikes, or flies around). People said, look, they are not even in power and they are giving us orders already.[66]

Accounts from Catholic women confirm that an abusive, if not misogynist, element in the party was allowed by the leadership to exist:

> Che, it was bad when I used to take the girls out for a walk. The BCP men would come up to me shouting "Ea lla koto!" in my face and be very rude indeed. I just told them to get out of my way.[67]

Compounding this further, there was a level of leader-worship in Makatolle which was offensive to traditional sensibilities.[68] "Morena ke morena ka sechaba" applied to politicians as well as chiefs.[69] Thus, while Mokhehle himself did not openly abet a personality cult, the obvious fact that he tolerated it among his followers contributed to the sense that he was power hungry. To the RCM, such leader-worship proved that the

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65. Interview, Sister Victoria 'Mota

66. Personal communication, Rev. G. Blanchard

67. Interview, Sister Raphael Monyako. Similar accounts of "rudeness," with sexual innuendo, were given to me by Sister Margie, Sister 'Mota, Rev. Mairot, Ntate Sekhesa, Philomena Lesema. They also appear in the Codex of Paray (DAM 16), Tsoelike (DAM 37) and many of the other RCM missions from 1959 to the elections.

68. For example, see the paean to Mokhehle ("to the masses an idol") in Makatolle 10 April 1965, 4

69. "A chief is a chief by the people."

BCP was following in the "communist" footsteps of the LLB.[70]

The anger which BCP members expressed during their campaign was only rarely directed against women as a sex. By far their greatest object of vitriol, exceeding the British, the Boers and the chiefs who were deemed responsible for Lesotho's humiliation and poverty, was the Catholic Church. From the point of view of the BCP leaders, there were three main reasons for reviling "the notorious pro-Verwoerd, pro-Hitlerite, pro-Colonialist priests."[71] First, as mentioned above, many of the BCP leaders were aspirant general traders, including prominently, members of the Indian community. Like the Europeans who had sabotaged Bishop Bonhomme's earlier attempts at forming co-ops, these men objected to the co-operative activities of the church which undercut their profits. "Every Roman Catholic mission in the country is a retail shop," complained Mohlabani before demanding a government crackdown on "illicit" activities of the church which "strangle the small Basotho traders."[72] When BCP leaders urged people to boycott such activities as a protest, however, or when they used their dominance of the District Councils to prohibit the church from offering services which competed with their own, Catholic

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70. The term "communist" when employed by the RCM had very little to do with the political or economic platforms of the parties. Rather, it meant almost exclusively "anti-Christian" or "anti-family" in the Catholic sense (interviews, C. Khaketla, P.Lesema, Matete Majara). "Communist" could also mean simply "undesirable" or "bad for the people." Thus did the RCM term the MFP "Russian Communists" to distinguish it from the "Chinese Communists," the BCP. In fact, as was well-known and admitted even in internal RCM documents, neither party was communist at all and, indeed, some of their leaders, including Mokhehle, had special animus against real communists (Vinculum 10/1, jan/mar 1960, 4). What made the MFP undesirable ("communist") to the RCM was that its schizoid platform combined tsoelopele (liberal reforms and indigenous capitalism) with "feudal" tradition. The church's "anti-communism" in this case therefore needs to be understood not in the literal sense, but as an aversion to liberalism and the big chiefs, whose abuses were both inextricably linked to colonial rule.

71. Makatolle April 1965, 2. This is just a sample of the copious and colourful abuse found in virtually every edition of the BCP paper.

72. Mohlabani 4/5 July 1959, 11; Mohlabani 6/11-12, 14. Again, this was an old sticking point of Josiel Lefela, who proposed banning missionaries from "trading" as early as 1946. BNC 1946, 364

women in particular quickly perceived the conflict of interest:

> In this country many BCP members have businesses but they are very expensive yet they advise the people not to buy from whites.[73]
>
> The new political government [the BCP-controlled District Council] is confusing and not progressive. At Mashai, the payment of grinding maize has gone up. Now it is about ten years since the Catholic Mission helped us at Mashai to grind meal free of charge at the Mission... Women are complaining that the government should not involve itself in the price of milling because in the past it has been women's job to take care of it..."[74]

The element of venality on the part of the some BCP members was real but should not be exaggerated. As nationalists, they also disliked the paternalistic attitude of white missionaries and Christian intolerance of Basotho customs, a dislike which extended to all three of the main missions. Their greatest source of resentment, however, undoubtedly stemmed from the RCM's entrance into the political fray against them. Although the church won praise from the nationalist press for its opposition to the Moore Report,[75] by 1959 it is had occasioned the wrath of Mohlabani's editors by assisting in the formation of the BNP. In fact, as early as 1955 the Committee of Social Action was established to co-ordinate the efforts of the priests in Basutoland to identify and prepare lay Catholic leaders who could effectively oppose the more dynamic and educated Protestant politicians, including finding potential candidates for elections.[76] In 1956, the RCM internally declared itself in a state of "combat" against the "menacing danger of exaggerated nationalism."[77]

Initial church efforts which were specifically directed against the BCP involved a concerted campaign to gain control over the Teachers' Union

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73. Moeletsi 12 Nov. 1960

74. Moeletsi 23 July, 1960

75. Mohlabani 1/12 (Jan. 1956), 57

76. Vinculum (Mar. 1955), 56

77. Vinculum Avril/Juin 1956, 57 (my translation)

by removing its BCP-dominated leadership,[78] a widespread propaganda campaign through Moeletsi which sought to insinuate BCP links to international, especially Chinese communism. Priests were enjoined to propagate their own political views "by legitimate arguments," although they were instructed "absolutely not" to do so from the pulpit.[79] They were encouraged to give publicity to the BCP's own more inflammatory statements, for example, by publicly posting copies of anti-chief or anti-white articles culled from Mohlabani.[80]

In the lead-up to the 1960 elections, the RCM made frequent and explicit reference to the successful intervention of Pope Pius XII against the Italian Communist Party in 1948.[81] Drawing lessons from the past, the bishops instructed the clergy that, while they had to avoid open involvement in partisan politics and they were forbidden to excommunicate BCP members, it was their "duty" to "teach their congregation how to make good, Christian political choices."[82] Basotho Catholics were also to be informed that the bad or non-use of the vote was "a social sin."[83] At the annual "retreats" which were held for prayer and reflection, the sisters were lectured on the evils of communism, how to recognize the first signs of it among their congregations, and how to fight it.[84]

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78. Mohlabani 7/1-6 (June 1961); LANTA Echoes 2 (1966), 2; Weisfelder, "Defining," 228

79. Vinculum jan/mar 1960, 5 (my translation)

80. Interview, Rev. Blanchard. Weisfelder also maintained that such articles were sent directly to 'Mantsebo. "Defining," 217

81. This example rested comfortably with the majority of the expatriate priests who came, it will be recalled, from a society where the Catholic church had at least a century of very successful political machination (Quebec).

82. Vinculum july/sept. 1959, 77 (my translation)

83. Vinculum july/sept. 1959, 77 (my translation). The election campaign which stopped the Italian Communist Party from coming to power in 1948 was frequently cited as the ideal.

84. L'Apostolat laic april/june 1959, 41

This "prudent" approach had been a cause of suspicion and irritation among the BCP, however, it was not regarded as a serious threat and, indeed, it totally failed to stem the landslide victory of the Congress in those first elections. The BNP won only two seats out of 32 at stake. Immediately after this huge defeat for the "Christian" party, the priests and bishops met for a "Council of War" and more assertive tactics were adopted by the mission to ensure that the BNP would be better prepared for the next elections. Priests were directed to "abandon all secondary activity to concentrate on the emergency" for:

> If we have lost the first battle, we do not have the right to resign ourselves to lose the war. We do not want to lose it! And we can, if we want, avoid such a catastrophe.[85]

The new means of "attack" which were adopted included a large expansion of Catholic Action and social welfare or co-operative projects, redoubled efforts to politicize a Catholic "elite of men" (primarily teachers and catechists), self-criticism (especially of "Patrician" attitudes or the appearance of "bourgeois comfort") and support for the Anti-Communist League.[86] The latter included direct appeals for money back in Canada to purchase, for example, a truck which would "permit a group of young Catholics... to travel throughout the country in order to organize everywhere the fight against communism."[87]

BCP leaders were enraged by this type of intervention, not only because churches were supposed to stay out of politics but also because many of the most vocal "political priests" were Canadian whose intervention in Basotho affairs smacked of colonialism. In fact, the Canadians were by no means monolithically "anti-communist" in their views and activities and there were intense debates within the mission about the propriety of taking sides in Basotho politics. Some even sided with the

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85. Vinculum april/june 1960, 41 (my translation)

86. Ibid. 145

87. Marcel Ferragne, "Le Danger Communiste au Basutoland," Voix du Basutoland, 1960 (my translation)

BCP, while others urged restraint and "charity" towards those who abused the church.[88] This became evident especially after 1961 when the Canadian archbishop, J.D. desRosiers, was demoted to bishop of the remote mountain district of Qacha's Nek in order that a Mosotho take his place. One of Archbiship 'Mabathoana's first acts was to demand restraint from his white missionaries.[89]

Nonetheless, the RCM did allow some of its hierarchy to overstep the non-partisan line. Sometimes this was by priests making "hysterical" diatribes from the pulpit or by the publication of ill-advised innuendo in the Catholic newspaper.[90] More often, however, it was by fairly subtle but relentless propaganda at the personal level:

> I remember a certain French Canadian priest who was a good friend. He often tried to convert me from the BCP by arguing that the BCP allowed its youth to be immoral. As communists they would supposedly allow boys to share women without marriage. When I asked the Father how he knew such subtle things considering he was not a Mosotho, he replied that his congregation told him.[91]

BCP leaders believed that their own anger at the RCM could be turned into an effective political weapon since, they felt, the mass of the men of the nation also had a pool of resentment against the church which could be exploited to win the party support. Such resentment stemmed primarily from three sources. First, there was a strong sense that Christianity had failed African workers by enjoining men to be loyal to the state and therefore, in practice, condoning apartheid and extreme capitalist

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88. Vinculum 16/1 (jan/mar 1960), 5. Interview, P. Lesema

89. "Keep your religion safe and do not humiliate it, abusing it for political interests, for personal reasons, for fear of rascals. We would like to appeal to everybody in the country, not to play any more with religion and not to compare it to politics. Let religion be above politics." Africa Digest 15 (1963), 4

90. As asserted by, for example, Makatolle. Many Catholics admitted this to me, with regret, although emphatically denying the accusation that priests ever excommunicated Basotho Catholics who supported the BCP. Interviews, P. Lesema, Rev. Mairot, Rev. Fahy, Rev. Lapointe. Excommunication for belonging to the BCP was explicitly forbidden by the Bishop in Vinculum, jan/mar 1960, 4

91. Interview, 'Me Sibolla

exploitation. As a result, only "feeble-minded men" attended church services at the mines.[92] The church's apparent alliance with the chiefs within Basutoland, some of whom were notoriously corrupt or criminal, supported the view that the church was unduly tolerant of the abuse of power.

Second, despite the church injuctions of modesty upon its priests, the church was obviously the wealthiest institution in the country. It was consequently the cause of envy. This was exacerbated by the fact that the manyano's fund-raising efforts seemed to vacuum up so much hard-earned and scarce cash. Not only did it seem unfair that poor men should be giving money to a rich church, but a major source of conflict between husbands and wives often arose over the cost of manyano uniforms.[93]

Finally, it was clear to the leaders of the BCP that Basotho men's suspicions or resentment of the RCM could be exploited for political gain. To many men the church represented a female institution which condoned or facilitated de facto rebellion by women against traditional male authority. Not only were there direct attacks upon Basotho customs like polygyny and kenela in Christian ideology, but also the congregations were overwhelmingly female. Their often assertive manyanos possessed reputations for toughness and self-reliance which many men regarded as unacceptably rebellious. Furthermore, church development efforts often concentrated in social welfare areas which primarily benefited women. This too, contributed to a perception that the church favoured women, leaving men to suffer the indignities and hardships of migrancy. In the context of extreme gender and class tension which existed in the early 1960s, this perception of a gender bias, or even of an emasculating tendency in the church, was a highly sensitive issue. The BCP leadership chose to exploit it by focusing attacks on the institution which most clearly symbolized

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92. AIM, Another Blanket, 9

93. Interview, P. Lesema

lost or imperilled traditional masculinity, the nuns.

Accusations of BCP hostility to the nuns were based on a wide range of alleged BCP statements and tactics, from its leaders' use of subtle innuendo to overt threats against the nuns.[94] Some threatened to drive the nuns out of the country and expropriate their convents and schools. Others allegedly boasted of planning to rape or marry the nuns off to party stalwarts in order to breed soldiers for the liberation of South Africa. Some of these wilder statements had been levelled against the LLB earlier and therefore have a strong air of crude propaganda. There is, however, ample oral evidence to prove that some BCP members made such statements in public. For example:

> That was not rumours about the BCP, it was true. They said they would turn the convent and churches into stables and marry us. We went to the pitsos just to hear what the people were saying and we could also hear them in here because they had loudspeakers. The BCP members were also rude to us. When we were travelling by public transport they would just challenge us and speak ill things...[95]

At the very least, the BCP leadership did not take sufficiently strict discipline against such behaviour. At worst, if not actually guilty of promising an anti-nun policy, the leadership often seemed to be implying this.[96] There was also a strong perception that "'politicians' are favouring those Sesotho customs...[and] promised to rule against Christian marriage."[97] A result of such innuendo, when combined with

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[94]. The accusations are reviewed and judged in Weisfelder, "Defining," 280-84. They continue to be remembered with some passion by many of my informants--see the interviews cited below.

[95]. Interview, Sister Victoria 'Mota. Similar stories were forthcoming in my interviews with Catholics (Rev. Fahy, Rev. Mairot, Rev. Tlaba, Cecilia Makuta, Matete Majara, Sister Margie, Sister Hilda, Priscilla Fobo) as well as Protestants ('Me Masholungu, 'Me Mosala, Alina Brutsch).

[96]. See, for example, Mokhehle's derisive innuendo about the Canadian sisters in the BNC after the elections. BNC 1965, 39. Also, to whom was Makatolle referring when it mentioned that the BNP might restrain the Mosotho man's right to make love to white women? Makatolle 4/14, April 1965. Interview, Gabriel Tlaba

[97]. In the words of a Mosotho priest (Rev. Letsie), reviewing the state of marriage in Lesotho months into independence. Codex of Roma, 8 Jan., 1976, DAM 6

widespread rumours of immorality on the part of the BCP leaders, was that many Basotho Christians, especially Catholics, feared that a BCP government would abolish the institutions (such as the sisterhood) or disrupt the social relations (such as the monogamous family) which had benefitted them most over the previous decades of economic decline and social hardship.

The campaign style adopted by the BCP also heightened fears that a BCP victory would mean that exploitation by black businessmen would replace and be even worse than that done by paternalistic whites or "feudal" chiefs. Much was made by the BNP of the collapse of the BCP-controlled co-operative societies in a morass of corruption, "political interference and bad management."[98] BCP-controlled District Councils were also cited for oppressing "poor widows" by imposing excessive market stall fees (which tended to increase the truck of established shops, often owned by BCP members).[99]

These fears were held by both Christian men and women. However, since women tended to be the poorest and most vulnerable sector of the population, they stood to be the worst affected. Basotho women were therefore the most motivated to mobilize themselves in defence. While some joined the BNP and worked as party canvassers, the main outlet for Catholic women's political activism were the Catholic pious associations, particularly the Ladies of Ste. Anne (LSA). As expressed by the president of the Roma branch of the LSA:

> The Congress did things only for themselves. They were very selfish of themselves. They were like little boys who like fighting and who said things that are not nice in the ears. They scandalized us with minor things when in fact, the LSA do not like this talk that "might is right." We want simplicity. We want to do the job, which is to help and love our neighbour.

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98. In the words of the British official who was called in in the ultimately futile effort to save the organization. BNC, Report on the Enquiry into the Basutoland Co-operative Banking Union Ltd. (Maseru, 1961), 63

99. Mohale's Hoek council, for example, built a market and charged £9 for people who had formerly used the street to sell their wares. BNC 1965, 611

> So women came to their priests and nuns to ask advice. We also talked a lot about politics to discuss past events. The LSA are very strong, in a Christian way. We don't fight but politically, we do.[100]

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The LSA's political work began "accidentally" as early as 1959, when they distributed copies of the "pastoral letter" from the bishops which instructed Catholics on the necessity of voting well.[101] The LSA also travelled to remote villages, "using their influence upon the men of their families as well as the women of their villages in order that all Catholic men or sympathizers do their duty."[102]

As the campaign heated up in 1964, the LSA expanded its activities in the discreet manner to which they were accustomed to operating as a manyano:

> It's true that the Santa Anna became involved in politics but they did it privately. They have ways of spreading a word quickly and they travelled a lot. They used to go from place to place quietly, not making noise, but in each house talk to the people.[103]

In these visits, sermons and political lipitso were explained (or elaborated upon with emphasis on how a BCP win would imperil church and family. To back up their argument, the LSA distributed Moeletsi, whose 15,000 copies per week reached a far larger audience than the other paper, and was read by Protestants as well as Catholics in some of the remotest parts of the country.[104] Both Moeletsi and the even more extreme 'Mesa Mohloane were replete with stories of atrocities committed by communist

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100. Interview, 'Me Fobo

101. L'Apostolat laic 3 (July/Sept. 1959), 59. DAM 61 (my translation). "Accidentally" in this case means that the church hierarchy did not initiate the activity. The fact that the women took matters into their own hands rather than taking direction from the church or the BNP is crucial and is overwhelmingly corroborated by oral evidence. Interviews, Rev. Fahy, Rev. Hall, Rev. Mairot, P. Lesema, C. Makuta, Rev. Tlaba

102. L'Apostolat laic 3 (July/Sept. 1959), 59 (my translation)

103. Interview, Cecelia Makuta

104. L'Apostolat laic 3 (July/Sept 1959), 59; Weisfelder, "Defining"

and "exaggerated nationalist" regimes around the world. There were also letters from Basotho complaining of BCP abuse and hypocrisy. "Mosali oa Mosotho," for example, related an encounter with BCP men who accused the RCM of interfering in Basotho affairs (ironically, by criticizing greedy chiefs):

> My fellow readers, I replied to these questions very well. I only write them here so that you realize how much the BCP hates and fights against the Catholic church. They fight against it regardless of how it helps the nation, yet the BCP has not been able to help the nation in that way... They only like it when the Roman Catholic Church helps them (and their families)... One BCP member was selling his maize to the Catholic mission. It was bought. Yet when the help goes to other families, they find it wrong.[105]

The LSA surreptitiously distributed other BNP propaganda and, allegedly, party membership cards:

> These women, the real Santa Anna, they privately distributed cards. It was very confidential, a very secret thing which I only heard about lately. But they were the ones distributing BNP [membership] cards. After, when the soldiers asked and you didn't have a card, aché, you would get a thrashing.[106]

The "accidental" (that is, secret and independent) nature of LSA activity is also made clear by the fact that even the man in charge of Catholic Action, Francois Mairot, was unaware that it was taking place. Rumours abounded that Catholic women were politically active but these were normally considered to be individual and unco-ordinated. Yet organized they clearly were:

> How can you not organize the people when there is a problem to be faced? The organization of women is very simple and cheap. They hear about some development and ask, could you help us? We learn, we put it into practice. If we see a lovely garden, we ask what happened? In that way women spread new ideas very quickly and the same applied in the elections. Women organize themselves by seeing and doing and then passing it over to other people.[107]

If this organization took place largely outside the ken of the priests and sisters, the LSA did not disregard what their church leaders

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105. Moeletsi 27 Feb. 1965 (translation from Sesotho)

106. Interview, Cecelia Makuta

107. Interview, P. Fobo

were saying and doing. On the contrary:

> We also wanted to calm down our fathers who sometimes got over-excited. We asked them not to use strong language because modesty is the only thing you must have to be able to live with other people.[108]

Politicians of the BCP and MFP tended to dismiss such rumours with the special contempt they often reserved for Basotho women. Some portrayed the LSA as a mindless gaggle of geese being herded by Jonathan or their priests.[109] Others simply saw them as irrelevant:

> I suppose the Ladies of Ste. Anne did some behind the scenes politics where they went from house to house, but they never came out in the open. So there is nothing else to say about women in politics.[110]

In many ways, this dismissive attitude reflected the prejudice of educated elites against the manyanos in general.[111] Thus, just as the social and economic impact of women's pious associations in the rural areas were underestimated by the urban elites, so too was their potential to damage the more urban-leaning parties politically. In the circumstances, this underestimation was to prove fatal to the BCP. While Mokhehle made but a single journey into the central Malutis during the campaign, the LSA were constantly at work, penetrating to the most remote villages, spreading anxiety about the potential dangers of a BCP

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108. Interview, P. Fobo

109. Interview, 'Makhosi 'Mapeete. In the leader's words, "The LSA were not organized by the BNP--they were drilled by the missionaries. We did not have a special strategy to deal with them because we felt all the churches were against us and these women were just kept together by their religion. Still, I agree, it was a known matter that the Ladies of St.Anne were mobilized by the church and they were more successful in the mountains in their work." Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

110. Interview, B.M Khaketla

111. Manyanos and women's issues in general were rarely discussed in Makatolle, although men who appeared to be influenced by women were the object of ridicule (Makatolle mocked Seth Makotoko, for example, for "dancing under the apron strings of his sister"--'Maposholi Molapo. Makatolle 10 April 1965, 3). More generally, the editors let their contempt for people without higher education overwhelm their rhetorical commitment to the masses. Thus, the leaders of the BNP were "typical shepherds," "intellectual dwarfs" and "unlearned semi-illiterates," while their supporters were simply "ignorant." Makatolle 4/19 5 June, 1965, 4/21 19 June, 1965 and passim

government. In retrospect, the president of the BCP Women's League recognized the gravity of this failure to address directly the anxieties of the Catholic, female majority of the country:

> In fact, this was a big mistake of ours since we didn't organize on this issue or instruct our people. We really only relied on men in the campaigns, even in 1970. Meanwhile, the BNP did organize with women and so they were able to win. [...] I would even have to agree that it's possible that some women were frightened of Mr. Mokhehle coming to power. They thought he would not listen to their point of view since they could see that he himself did not treat women in a good way sometimes.[112]

The quiet work of the LSA, rather than injunctions from the church elite, was in the end crucial in winning votes for the BNP. Although the baruti were generally well-respected, they were divided, inconsistent and, despite BCP accusations of politicking from the pulpit, on the whole reticent about offering political guidance. For the most part, and at the reminding of the archbishop, priests and sisters were also conscious of their foreignness and that the Basotho highly resented foreign interference in local politics. In other words, the claim that "the French-Canadian settler priests" led a conspiracy to deprive the BCP of its deserved victory cannot be sustained by the evidence.

The LSA, however, were respected in their communities, united, and forthright in spreading their political message far and wide. While the majority of women did not ultimately accept this political message, and continued to place their faith in the "high-brows" and radicals of the BCP or MFP, the LSA helped ensure that a significant minority voted for the BNP. This proved decisive when, on the eve of the election, the major parties unanimously agreed to cancel arrangements which would have enabled the migrant workers to vote from South Africa. The BCP went along with this out of fear of South African or British corruption,[113] taking the

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112. Interview, 'Me Masiloane

113. "The British and South Africans never intended us to run this country. There was a lot of corruption. Ha ke re, that was annoying." Interview, Ntsu Mokhehle

calculated risk that the party's support was strong enough at home to withstand the loss of some of those voters. As it happened, however, only 4% of the migrants returned to Basutoland on election day. The BCP thus lost the vast bulk of the constituency it had been most determinedly cultivating.

The quiet work of the LSA among the men and women who remained in the rural areas assumed decisive importance in this event as the relative weight of their constituency increased. Keeping in mind that the BNP won five of its seats with pluralities of less than 500 votes and that it had and overall majority in the first parliament of but two seats, the role of the LSA in ensuring that the BNP virtually swept the mountain districts was crucial to Jonathan's victory. A Catholic woman who was educated in South Africa and who, as a member of the aspirant elite, saw much to recommend the BCP in its more radical policies, summed up the party's defeat in the following terms:

> Mr. Mokhehle is a super man and a very powerful speaker. But he made the biggest mistake of his life when he said, if you vote for me these women who are nuns, we'll marry them. I heard him say that with my own ears. He did and if he says no, it's because he's afraid. It was the leader who said that and you know, Christians were shocked and annoyed. Many of them voted for the BNP because of that and he lost the election although he would have won.[114]

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114. Interview, 'Me Makuta

Conclusion

Both women as historical actors and gender relations as a feature of the political economy have been ignored or minimized in the historiography of Leostho. The bias in favour of men's activities in part stems from the male biases in the sources, a narrow understanding of politics and production which privileges men's activities in the so-called public sphere, and a profound and pervasive androcentrism in the research methodology and terminology previously employed by many historians and social scientists. With a few notable exceptions, Lesotho's historians have relied upon archival sources or oral research gathered from male elites. The resultant over-emphasis upon masculine, elite politics has acted to the detriment of our understanding of Basotho women's voluntary associations and economic activities, often in the so-called private sphere.

A second conclusion of this study is that, once efforts are made to overcome these androcentric biases it becomes clear that women were important, autonomous actors in Lesotho's history. They made prominent, if generally unsung contributions to Lesotho's development as workers, as chiefs, as mothers, as migrants, and as Christians. It is also clear that gender was a central organizing principle in the political economy as it changed over time. Gender relations and ideologies were the site of considerable struggle between women and men, between women and women, and between men of different classes as colonialism and capitalism spread their contradictory effects throughout the country.

Third, changes in Lesotho's political economy in the colonial era had effects which were specific to Basotho women and men. Many of these were subtle and passed without attention at the time by the men and (few) women who recorded such things. For example, South Africa's labour policies influenced Basotho ideals of masculinity which, in turn, influenced relations between men and women in a negative way. Women experienced increased stress, alienation and often physical violence by

men who resented the dimunition of their own autonomy and dignity by migrant labour and colonial rule. In this context, the Christian churches offered women solace and a sense of community in a much more consistent and effective way than they did for men.

The prolonged absence of men due to migrant labour also had specific and different effects for women and men, notably that it unintentionally resulted in women's greater de facto autonomy from their husbands and fathers in their personal and political decision-making abilities. However much this was regarded as theoretically undesirable by both men and women, it is clear that women often used their new autonomy to defend or even enhance their gains in the face of male reaction.

It is important to note that changes in gender relations and the degree to which women could exercise their new autonomy varied across class lines. The attention of observers has tended to focus unevenly on the experiences of women and men of the elite or "middling" classes with, for example, many colonial and missionary sources emphasizing the emancipating role which cash, Christianity and colonial law played for such people. In fact, only a small minority of women of petty bourgeois standing were able to escape from customary male controls in the ways provided for and intended by the state and major Protestant churches. An equally small minority, including ambitious commoner women, was able to insinuate itself into positions of authority and relative wealth as chiefs.

At the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, women escaped or challenged traditional gender relations by migration, prostitution, and petty commodity production. For many others, however, changes in the political economy resulted in increased marginalization and dependence on men. Thus, for example, a traditional chieftaincy which had historically been tolerant of a relatively high degree of women's autonomy and economic self-reliance was reformed into a bureaucracy which targetted women for specific new forms of exploitation, the expropriation of widows from their

entitled fields to name but one. By the 1930s, subsistence for most women would have been almost impossible without somehow acquiring a share of the remittances of male migrant labourers.

A fourth conclusion to be drawn then is that the de facto autonomy which women tended to gain in the period under study was compromised by contradictory and frequently hostile reactions from men. For example, the legal emancipation of women originally favoured by missionaries and the colonial state was circumscribed by such laws as the Basutoland Native Women's Restriction Proclamation. Political reforms, for the most part enacted with almost total disregard for women, also tended to alienate women from their customary rights and privileges. Basotho women's attempts to resist these changes or to carve out new economic and social niches on their own initiatives (such as brewing and selling beer, emigrating to South Africa, or forming manyanos) generally met with state repression and/or church disapproval. State "development" initiatives, including the few specifically aimed at women, tended, with their underlying technocratic and elitist assumptions, to be irrelevant or inappropriate to Basotho women's needs.

The hostility of the state to women's autonomy or self-emancipation transcended class lines--"respectable" women suffered harassment along with matekatse when they travelled, women chiefs were treated with contempt or distrust, and women employees such as nurses were subjected to racist and patronizing supervision lest their employment lead them to "loose" behaviour.

Fifth, the Catholic church tended to be the least guilty of such harmful "development" of all the major institutions which accompanied colonial rule. Although it was an intensely patriarchal institution and it often adopted policies which were at least tacitly supportive of colonial rule, the RCM was less disruptive of the pre-colonial traditions and sense of community than either the other major Christian churches or the government. Particularly in the period of the Canadian administration of

the RCM, the Catholic church expanded its efforts to offer an alternative vision of society in which poor women and men had a more secure position.

This study shows, however, that Basotho women were not simply passive recipients of male wisdom or victims of male domination. They made their own efforts to survive in an environment which, for the majority, was increasingly hostile to them on the basis of their gender and class. Together with the assertion of their rights and dignity as women and as human beings, these efforts comprised a powerful force for change. The general trend over this period was that women's assertion of greater de facto autonomy and emancipation to triumph over male reaction and attempts to define and limit women's activities. As such, colonial authorities tended to regard the Basotho women as a definite obstacle to the kind of modernization they desired--"a nuisance and a danger to the community." This fear that Basotho women would assert their distinctive social and political needs was echoed in the words and deeds of elite Basotho men in the 1960s and foreign observers.

Women's resistance to the types of modernization which were imposed upon Lesotho has often been cited by the latter as proof of their conservatism and, implicitly, their irrationality. A sixth point which this study makes is that we need to question commonplace assumptions around the dichotomies of conservative/progressive and modern/traditional. In fact, from a both a materialist and a liberal point of view, little could be more irrational, immoral and unjust than the face of progress in South Africa since the late 19th century. The "uniquely pernicious" structures of capitalism and colonialism in the region, while enriching a small white minority, impoverished the majority of Basotho and led to the near-catastrophic destruction of Lesotho's land. Women, that is those Basotho who were primarily responsible for the survival of the nation by their productive and reproductive labour, often saw through the self-serving statements and policies of male elites who justified such structures. They also regarded critically those Basotho men who placed

themselves at the forefront of the struggle against colonialism yet betrayed women's interests for "tactical" (opportunistic) reasons prior to the first general election in 1965.

Adopting the standpoint of poor Basotho women offers a powerful means to analyze critically the supposed benefits and logic of modernization or "development." Doing so quickly reveals a consistent historical theme in the period covered by this thesis: far from being inherently "conservative," women took initiatives of an often revolutionary kind. From the very beginning of colonial rule, their structural vulnerabilities in pre-colonial society gave them strong incentives to innovate, from urging their husbands' to adopt new crops and ploughs in the late 19th century to escaping patriarchal control by independent market activities, emigration and the selective adoption of Christian beliefs and rituals. In the colonial period, many women opted for the emancipation and individual rights which were theoretically espoused by the regime and Protestant missionaries. However, as these theoretical rights were in practice often betrayed by the men who espoused them, women adopted apparently "conservative" tactics to advance their cause. In many cases this was simply a matter of dressing up a radical act in traditional garb, cloaking self-emancipation behind a discourse of custom.

The same tendency held true as the colonial era came to an end and indigenous men sought to succeed the British. That is, since the modernity espoused by the British and many of the radical politicians of Lesotho frequently, if not predominantly, entailed the repression and intensified exploitation of women, women opted in significant numbers to take advantage of and manipulate the "traditions" which best safeguarded or advanced their interests. First and foremost among these was the preservation or strengthening of family and community, whose staunchest and most consistent advocates in practice were the RCM and the chiefs. In the 1960s, the clearest proponents of family and community were the minor

chiefs (such as Leabua Jonathan) who comprised the backbone of the BNP.

Such a conclusion is not invalidated by subsequent events, notably the dismal failure of the BNP to deliver on its promises to women and the country. On the contrary, further proof of women's ability to think in rational political terms is shown by the fact that in the country's second general election, Catholic women joined in a massive vote against the BNP. This happened despite their Church's continued, albeit less vocal, support for that party. The BNP after 1970 then resorted to an authoritarian and increasingly technocratic style of government which almost completely betrayed the principles upon which it had won support in 1965. By the 1980s, Jonathan's increasingly divided and cynical party had resorted to the crassest manipulation of women's organizations for partisan gain and the imprisonment of key women leaders who spoke out against it.

Finally, this study shows that transitions in colonial policy towards gender and class formation were of more central importance to the lives of the Basotho than constitutional development. It thus confirms the periodization offered by Fred Cooper for Africa as a whole, with adjustments to take into account Lesotho's unique colonial experience, particularly its early rule by the Cape Colony, its position in the colonial bureaucracy, and its unusually high levels of migrant labour. In Cooper's view, colonial rule in Africa began with a period of state intervention intended to rid Africa of the social injustice and economic inefficiency which missionaries and colonialists alike considered intrinsic to African society. Early colonial policy also sought to inculcate in Africans the values and mores associated with middle class Western Europe. This was the period when faith in the "civilizing mission" and the gradual demise of African traditions and traditional elites was predominant.

According to Cooper, this approach to gender and class transformation held sway elsewhere on the continent from the 1860s to 1910s. In Lesotho, however, it lasted only briefly from 1868 to 1881, that

is, the period of Cape rule. Social intervention was abandoned as a policy earlier in Lesotho than elsewhere due, critically, to Basotho men's access to guns from South Africa and their willingness to fight to defend their traditional chiefs.

The second phase of colonial rule when periodized by social policy was characterized by the imposition of a "conservative social agenda" and Indirect Rule. In the rest of Africa, this occured from roughly the 1910s to 30s. In Lesotho, however, this phase actually began earlier, and, through three distinct periods, lasted longer. The first period was one of de facto independence and social reaction from the outbreak of the Gun War to the re-establishment of Colonial Office authority (1881-84). This was followed by an extreme form of rule through the chiefs that Sir Alan Pim termed "parallel" or "dual" rule (1884-1935). During this period, Lesotho was not administered by a "laissez-faire" policy (as later claimed by critics of British rule) but by active intervention by the colonial authorities to support the senior lineage of the traditional chieftaincy and to enforce the most consistent and patriarchal interpretation of custom. Reaction against women's (and junior men's) emancipation by the senior chiefs was therefore codified and policed by the state. The power which was accorded to the senior chiefs was greater than elsewhere in Africa and it contributed to retarding the development of the industrial and petty bourgeois classes.

The first recognition that parallel rule was not working in Lesotho came with an aborted attempt at administrative reforms in 1929. It was not until 1935, however, that colonial policy in Lesotho began to come closer to Indirect Rule as it was practiced in other British African territories, that is, with much more limited powers for the chiefs and with simultaneous efforts to "develop" the colony economically. Basically in line with the principles of colonial policy outlined by the Colonial Office under Malcolm MacDonald in 1938-40 and carried out elsewhere in Africa through the 1940s, such "development" was intended not simply to

avert economic crisis but to foster a new African elite. Due to the retarded nature of Lesotho's proletarian and petty bourgeois classes, however, the new African which the Basutoland administration hoped to foster at this time was drawn primarily from the old collaborating class, the traditional chiefs, in whom the British maintained great confidence. In essence, Indirect Rule was modernized in Lesotho just as it was beginning to be abandoned elsewhere on the continent.

This determination to modernize the chiefs, rather than nurture the aspirant elite, then partly explains why colonial policy in Lesotho was relatively slow to move to the decolonization phase. Despite possessing one of Africa's highest levels of literacy and longest traditions of industrial experience, virtually no consideration was given to the prospect of decolonization for Lesotho until after the defeat of the Moore report in 1956. Only at that time were Indirect Rule and a conservative social agenda finally abandoned as policy.

In the last phase of colonial rule, from the late 1950s to mid-60s, social policies were enacted to enhance the "moderating" influence of petty bourgeois elements in the nationalist movement. That is, the colonial state took steps (in mass education, co-operative development, Africanization of the civil service and so on) to provide the basis for restructuring the local African economy and family life in such a way that would provide "stability" in the transition period. The British sought to develop a "moderate" African elite to whom power could be devolved without disrupting the dominant European interests in the region, much as the Catholic church had been pursuing similar objectives to preserve the achievements of its century-old mission.

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To conclude, this study has attempted to move the historical focus in Lesotho away from male elites by the adoption of methodologies which are more sensitive to the views and experiences of the mass of the people, particularly the least articulate in traditional sources, women. Doing so

has exposed the inadequate or outright misleading nature of many categories and dichotomies which have been commonly advanced to explain Lesotho's historical development. Thus, while communist/anti-communist, conservative/radical, chief/commoner, modern/traditional, and even male/female conveyed definite meanings to the male elites and non-Basotho who most commonly employed them as explanatory concepts, what they represented to poor Basotho was frequently quite different. Indeed, this study has shown that elite usage of these terms often conveyed almost the inverse meaning to that understood by poor Basotho women. As has been shown, from the latter's point of view, radical could mean anti-women, progress could mean impoverishment, and anti-communist could mean anti-capitalist. Sensitivity in future historical research to the contradictions between discourse and experience which are related to or derive from class and gender will greatly enhance our understanding of the historical processes which have brought Lesotho and other African countries to the state they are in today.

APPENDIX A: Biographical sketches of informants

Blanchard, Rev. Gérard (personal correspondence Aug. 19, 1990, and interview Maseru, Sept. 2, 1990): Teacher and former Secretary of Education for the RCM

Brutsch, Rev. Albert (interviews, Morija, August 14 and 28, 1990): PEMS missionary originally at Cana (1940s). Former Secretary of Education and LEC archivist

Brutsch, Alina (interview, Morija, July 10, 1990): PEMS missionary and former president of the Bo-'ma bana

Damane, Mosebi (transcript of interview with Gwen Malahleha courtesy of Kate Showers): Historian, former member of BPA, BNC and editor of Letsatsi

Fahy, Rev. Desmond (interview, Roma, Sept.22, 1990): Professor of theology, NUL

Fobo, Pricilla (interview, Roma, Sept 23, 1990): President of LSA

Gay, John (personal correspondence, May 29, 1991, March 19 and May 23, 1992)

Hall, Rev. Anthony (interview, Ottawa, June 19, 1989 and Nov.3, 1990): chief negotiator for the transfer of Pope Pius XII College from the OMI to secular authorities, 1963-5

Hector, Gordon M. (personal correspondence, May 9 and June 28, 1991): Deputy Resident Commissioner, 1956, Government Secretary 1956-60, Leader of the House 1960-65

Khaketla, Caroline 'Masechele (interviews, Maseru, Sept.8 and 20, 1990): Co-founder and Headmistress of Iketsetsing Primary School, member of (Anglican) Mothers' Union

Khaketla, Bennett M. (interview, Maseru, Sept. 20, 1990): Founding member of BANTA, editor of Mohlabani, member of the BAC/BCP executive 1955-1962; founding member of MFP, author

Khitsane, Rakali (interview, Maseru, March 10, 1990), former BCP member and mine-worker

Lapointe, Rev. Eugene (interview, Ottawa, June 17, 1989): Professor of divinity, St. Augustine Seminary, St. Paul's University, author

Lehloenya, Patrick (interview, Ha Lehloenya, August 17, 1990): Leader of the Catholic teacher's union, MFP Member of Parliament for Thabana-ntsonyana, 1965

Lesema, Philomena (interview, Roma, Sept. 1990): Nurse, member LSA

Lesenyeho, P. 'Mamookho (interview, Teyateyaneng, Aug.24, 1990): Founder of Boiteko, co-founder LNCW, teacher

'Me Lethunya (interview, Masianokeng, Aug.17, 1990): Member Women's Institute, manager of Basotho Canning Corp.

Mairot, Rev. Francois (interview, Roma, Sept.23, 1990): Former editor of Moeletsi, head of Catholic Action, author

Majara, Matete (interview, Ha Majara, Aug.24, 1990): Senior BaKoena chief, member of BNC, BNP executive 1962-91

Makuta, Cecelia (interview, Roma, Sept.24, 1990): LSA treasurer, businesswoman, came to Lesotho in 1965 from South Africa

'Me Mamohlatsi (interview, Morija, July 30, 1990): Domestic worker, LEC

'Me Mamosala (interview, Morija, July 30, 1990): Homemakers Association

Manyeli, Anthony (interview, Roma, Sept.20, 1990): Professor of theology, NUL, son of former BNP executive member

'Mapeete, 'Makhosi (interview, Maseru, Sept.3, 1990): Women's League of BCP, member of Parliament 1973-83

Mapetla, E.M. (discussion, Roma, Sept. 24, 1990): Institute of Southern African Studies

'Me Masholungu (interview, Morija, Aug.28, 1990): A Xhosa woman born in Johannesburg who came to Lesotho with her husband to become one of the first African female high school teachers in the country.

Masiloane, Gertrude 'Makali (interviews, Mohale's Hoek, August 10 and Sept.26, 1990): Lesotho's first female manager, first and long-time President of BCP Women's League

Matji, Robert (interview, Maseru, Sept.11, 1990): Refugee from South Africa (1956), former ANC member and "self-professed Marxist," District Councillor for Qacha's Nek (as BCP, 1960-1962 and independent, 1962-65), unsuccessful MFP candidate (1965), businessman

Mohapeloa, Bernice (interview, Mafeteng, August 21, 1990): born c. 1898, teacher, founder and long-time president of the Homemakers Association

Mohloboli, 'Mathato (interview, Morija, August 7, 1990): Founding member of Homemakers Association and LNCW

Mokhehle, Ntsu (interview, Maseru, Sept.8, 1990): Founder BAC/BCP, leader of the revived Basotho Congress Party

Mokokoane, 'Malikeleli (interview, Upper Thamae, Sept.30, 1990): President Homemakers Association, former president of the Women's Bureau under Leabua Jonathon until her resignation 1983

Mosala, E. 'Mathabiso (interview, Maseru, Sept.3, 1990): Founder and President of the LNCW

Phohlo, 'Maneoana (Interviews Teyateyaneng June 2 and October 4, 1990): Domestic worker, farmer

'Me Pholo (interview, Matsieng, Aug.17, 1990): Lesotho's first woman minister (African Episcopal Methodist Church, 1965), matron of Moshoeshoe II High School

Ntate Sekhesa (interview, Morija, July 29, 1990): PEMS/LEC elder and former member of the Seboka

'Me Sibolla (interviews, Morija, July 21 and August 10, 1990): Headmistress Morija English Medium Primary School, former member of BCP Women's League, LEC member

Sister Antoinette (interview, Leribe, August 25, 1990): nun at St.Monica's mission (RCM)

Sister Hilda (interview, Leribe, August 25, 1990): nun at St.Mary's mission (Anglican), Mothers' Union member

Sister Hyacinth (interview, Roma, Sept.12, 1990): Head nurse, St.Joseph's Hospital (RCM)

Sister Margie (interview, Leribe, August 25, 1990): nun, St.Mary's mission (Anglican), an Englishwoman who arrived in Lesotho in 1965

Sister Raphael Monyako (interview, Leribe, Aug.25, 1990): nun at St. Monica's mission (RCM)

Sister Victoria 'Mota (interview, Roma, Sept.20, 1990): nun and teacher at St.Mary's convent school (RCM)

Tlaba, Rev. Gabriel (interview, Mazenod, Aug. 17, 1990), RCM priest

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Litsoakotleng (Mazenod, Catholic monthly digest)

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Ministry (Morija, monthly ecumenical theological journal)

Missions de Missionaires Oblats (Ottawa, worldwide OMI journal)

Moeletsi oa Basotho (Mazenod, Catholic weekly)

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