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by: Philip Bonner

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'DESIRABLE OR UNDESIRABLE SOTHO WOMEN?'
LIQUOR, PROSTITUTION AND THE MIGRATION OF SOTHO WOMEN TO THE RAND, 1920-1945[1]

P.L. Bonner

On the 19th September 1937 a violent collision rocked Vereeniging's Top Location. It occurred after a detachment of police conducted an afternoon raid for unauthorised visitors and illicit beer. A crowd of 200 who had previously gathered in the square for 'traditional dancing' were soon swelled by 1 000 to 1 800 more when the police converged on the square, driving many location residents ahead of them. As the police swarmed into the square 'women started shouting' and the police were suddenly pounded by stones hurled from the crowd. In the ensuing melee two parties of police were cut off from the main force and were fiercely attacked by the angry mob. By the end of the afternoon two European constables lay dead, and four black and white police had been carried off seriously injured. Dozens of other demonstrators and police nursed less serious wounds, and 70 location residents ended up in gaol.[2]

The Vereeniging riots, as these clashes soon came to be called, gave a sharp jolt to both local and central 'native' administrations, and sent a ripple of unease running across many sectors of white public opinion. Protest meetings were held in dozens of rural areas in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal,[3] liberal and missionary opinion stood aghast,[4] while Prime Minister Hertzog professed to see in them at least a partial confirmation of,

> "the ominous prediction of an approaching clash which began to take root among the European population following on the many instances of robbery and other crimes of violence committed during the last few months by natives on Europeans"[5]

The widespread attention attracted by the episode led to the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the causes of the

clash. In its report which was published in October 1937 the Commission singled out rough handling by the police, and the provocative timing of the raid as contributory causes to the clash, but its main criticisms were reserved for what it saw as the slack control excercised over the location by the Vereeniging municipality. Illegal entry into the location, the commission charged, had been allowed to go largely unchecked because of the abscence of an enclosing fence and because of the serious undermanning of the location police. Still more reprehensible was the failure of the location administration to make use of even what resources it had at its disposal to control the illegal brewing of beer and the massive inflow of its principal manufacturers - Basuto women. The location superintendent, the Commission observed, had been conspicuously slack and inefficient in not using location police to raid for liquor, in not withholding lodgers' permits from the husbands of female brewers, and in not using the appropriate sanctions of the 1923 (Natives) Urban Areas Act to curb the entry of Basuto women.[6] So alarming did it consider the scale of illegal brewing that it re-iterated the recommendations of the 1937 Police Commission of Enquiry, and called for the establishment of municipal monopolies over brewing, or the legalising of domestic brewing of beer.[7]

The Vereeniging riots were only one among many less publicised disturbances in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area which flared up in the late 1930's and early 1940's in response to police raiding for liquor, and in a sense stand at the juncture of two periods of black urbanisation. The mid 1930's marked the beginning of a sustained surge of black immigration to the towns which would carry on for another two decades. A central feature of this process was the vast numbers of black women who streamed out of the black reserves and white farms, many of whom could find no alternative occupation to the brewing of beer. Basotho women were the most conspicuous among this group, and were at the centre of numerous

clashes with the police and between different sections of the black urban population. It is with these that this paper is primarily concerned. It looks first at the extent of the conflict which erupted around the municipal monopolisation of beer brewing in the late 1930's. It goes on to examine the role of single Basotho women in these collisions. It then attempts to explain why so many single Basotho migrated from Basotoland in this period, and concludes by examining why the authorities were unable to halt this exodus, and what this meant for relations between women and men.

Beer Hall Riots in the Late 1930's

From the early 1930's tension had mounted in many of the Reef locations and elsewhere over intensifying police raiding for beer. The problem stemmed, at least in part, from a successful police crack down on the illicit trafficing of various kinds of 'European' spirits and wines on the Rand. After the early 1930's depression, returning prosperity had caused the illicit liquor trade to boom. It reached its peak between 1933 and 1934, after which new legislation (the Liquor Law Amendment Act No. 41 of 1934) and a police clamp down reduced the volume of the traffic to relatively insignificant proportions. Far from disappearing, however, the liquor trade simply re-appeared in new guise. The gap in the market which had been left by the elimination of European liquor was filled by the brewing of various adulterations of indigenous beer such as skokiaan and barberton, which had long been consumed in the slums and locations but on a somewhat lesser scale. As police switched their attentions to this sphere of illicit liquor production points of friction multiplied rapidly, and scuffles and affrays became increasingly common.[8] The discontents fuelled by such raids are suggested by the high levels, both absolutely and proportionately, of liquor related convictions. In 1936, for example, 107

348 convictions were secured against blacks across the country for liquor related offences, out of 344 710 convictions all told, to which Pass Law and location regulation offences contributed a 'mere' 71 052 and 21 584[9] respectively.

While the quickening tempo of police raids generated considerable friction and ill feeling, they did not generally provoke large scale confrontations. The Vereeniging riots were in this sense exceptional. The Police Commission of Enquiry of 1937 gives a clue of why this was so. "As the possession of liquor by a native is an offence," it reported

> "the native brewer adopts the expedient of hiding the maturing liquor by burying it in containers in a yard common to several houses or in adjacent roadways or vacant ground. If discovered, the liquor cannot be proved to be in the possession of any particular person, and when in the course of raids the police do unearth a container they can only destroy the contents while the natives stand by and look on. The position is one of 'stale mate'.[10]

The Vereeniging riots commission reached a basically similar conclusion. Police efforts were 'unremitting ... but, in the Vereeniging location, as in many if not most urban Native townships and locations in the country, the result has been rather to make the liquor trade hazardous than to prevent it or even sensibly to diminish it'.[11]

A new twist to the screw was given in 1938. In the previous year the 1923 Urban Areas Act had been amended to compel local authorities to establish municipal monopolies over beer, or to permit domestic brewing. The measure was part of a wider ranging programme embodied in the Act to slow the pace of black urbanisation which was steadily depleting the platteland of black labour.[12] The liquor clause was aimed not only at stemming the flow of black women to the towns by closing down access to beer brewing incomes, but also at providing the revenues to house and regulate the much expanded black populations in the urban areas. The first objective was quickly frustrated, but the second soon proved to be spectacularly successful. After 1938 the Johannesburg City Council was able to stop

subsidising the Native Revenue Account from ratepayers' pockets because of the massive revenues the municipal beer halls produced, and the same experience was reported all over the Rand.[13] Between 1938 and 1940 all of the Reef municialities established municipal monopolies which in the majority of cases soon yielded rich profits.[14]

The municipal monopolies over beer provided a new incentive to Reef and other municipalities for suppressing the domestic brewing of beer, and created fresh sources of conflict between municipal authorities and the residents of black urban locations. From 1938 to 1940 the tempo of liquor raiding steadily mounted, as the municipalities sought to root out all rivals in the trade. In the first three months of 1938 police destroyed 60 000 gallons of liquor and made hundreds of arrests in Johannesburg locations alone,[15] and as beer halls were constructed elsewhere in the Transvaal the same pattern of aggressive police behaviour was repeated there as well. In August 1938, for example, Benoni's location superintendent announced 'a war' with Benoni's skokiaan queens.[16] Early in 1939, Krugersdorp municipality reported a 50% drop in the production of illicit liquor, and claimed that many 'skokiaan queens' had given up brewing or had left the location.[17] In June 1940 20 separate raids on Marabastad location near Pretoria netted 17 150 gallons of beer and 8 524 gallons of skokiaan.[18] Between 1937 and 1939 numbers of liquor convictions climbed from 46 018 to. 63 728.[19]

The heightened intensity of raiding detonated explosions all over South Africa. In Vereeniging and Johannesburg's Western Townships effective boycotts of municipal beer halls were mounted.[20] Elsewhere ugly confrontations developed between location residents and the police. In February 1938 29 police carrying out 'the most extensive liquor raid ... in years' in Middelberg location were attacked by 'a mob of natives' and one policeman was seriously injured.[21] In April of the same year 100 Vrededorp residents retaliated against a police raiding party by belabouring them with

stones and sticks.[22] The following month several hundred Africans stoned police who were raiding for beer on a vacant plot near Johannesburg's Bantu Sports Ground.[23] Two of the most violent centres of conflict were Benoni and Springs. In May 1938 arrests for permits in Benoni location led to a clash between a crowd of 800 men and women and the police. One person was killed and one other was injured before the incident 'resolved itself' into a factional dispute between Basutho and Zulu.[24] This last detail hints at the real source of the trouble. The Basutho at least were almost certainly visitors from neighbouring mines who had entered the location in search of entertainment and beer provided by the location's Basuto beer brewers. Since one of the principal sources of patronage sought by beer halls all over the Reef were migrant workers from the mines and the hostels, this was a constituency that they were particularly anxious to exclude from the clientele of the 'skokiaan queens'.[25] Permit raids on migrants hence became a major weapon in the arsenal of the municipalities in their quest to monopolise the consumption of beer. The permit raid on Benoni location thus affected mine labourers and women beer brewers alike, provoking them to combine in their assault on the police.

An even more serious clash took place in Payneville location near Springs, two years later. Payneville's municipal beer hall was only completed in the middle of 1938, and soon after it was opened the Springs municipality expressed its intention of emulating the Boksburg municipality which had built a beer hall as part of a major urban complex which included eating facilities and shops.[26] To sustain such a project the illicit brewing of beer had to be ruthlessly stamped out and in the second half of 1938 the police and the location administration mounted a determined assault on beer brewers and illegal visitors to the location. The opening shots in the campaign were fired on 14th August when 100 armed men descended on Springs location at 4 o'clock in the morning, arresting 70 women and 360 men

in a four hour raid, and confiscating 1 000 gallons of illicit beer.[27] This was followed by a 'clean up' campaign inaugurated by the Springs Public Health Committee in September 1938 which netted 110 'unauthorised' persons in its first weekend. Twenty additional constables were drafted in from Natal to spearhead the campaign, and it was soon being reported that Payneville's 'liquor queens' were beginning to leave the location, and that the sale of municipal beer had doubled.[28] Payneville's liquor brewers were nevertheless a more tough and resourceful bunch than the Springs municipality had anticipated, and when the twenty additional constables returned to Natal early in 1939, the trade seems once again to have picked up.[29] For the next eighteen months raiding seems to have slipped back to somewhat lower levels until in August 1940 when it re-engaged higher gear. 'Hundreds of natives' were arrested in Payneville location and the adjacent plantation on beer and permit offences creating a smouldering resentment among miners and brewers alike. This burst out into open conflagration at the beginning of the next month. On Sunday 15th September police were called into the Payneville location to stop a fight between about 100 Basuto and Xhosa miners, but as soon as they arrived the erstwhile combatants united and the police almost immediately found themselves the target of attack. Women shouted 'attack the police' and a general offensive was launched by hundreds of visitors and residents. So fierce was the onslaught that the police felt compelled to shoot their way out, leaving two of the crowd dead and two wounded by bullets. Six white and one African policemen were injured in the disturbance.[30]

Payneville was the scene of an equally fierce confrontation in July 1945, except that this time it was a more carefully orchestrated affair. In July 1945 the Control Board informed the Springs Council that its supply of 'kaffir corn malt' would be reduced by 55%. The quality of municipal beer immediately deteriorated and the women's leader Dinah Maile, together with

local Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) stalwarts decided to seize the opportunity to demand domestic brewing of beer. A boycott of municipal beer was immediately started, leading to arrests and a brief altercation between location women and the police on 9th July. Over the following two weeks daily meetings were held in the location which culminated on Sunday 22nd July in the renewed picketing of the municipal beer hall. Police action to break the pickets resulted in a violently hostile reaction from the residents of the location. The police were stoned by a crowd of 3 000 men and women and were then cut off in the location after a section of the crowd broke through the ten foot high perimeter fence and attacked the police from behind.[31] According to a Rand Daily Mail report 'women fought as fiercely as men' and it was only after rifles were brought from a nearby police station that the bruised and beleaguered policemen were able to shoot their way out.[32] The casualty list resulting from the shootings made grim reading. Six were dead and 20 injured, while 15 men and 62 women (among whom Sotho women figured prominently) were arrested as a result of the affray.[33] In Springs at least the municipal monopoly of beer was taking a heavy toll.

SOTHO WOMEN AND ILLICIT LIQUOR

The common thread running through most of these clashes - certainly those at Vereeniging, Benoni and Springs - is the connection between women, migrants and beer. This association goes back to the earliest days of black urbanisation on the Rand. It is now widely accepted that the brewing of beer was vital to family survival in the first four decades of the twentieth century, and that much of the added income earned through the brewing of beer was drawn from migrant labourers and domestics. Since black urban wages were pegged back to what migrants could be made to accept, it was impossible for urban families to survive on the income provided by a single

male bread-winner. Equally, since virtually all avenues of wage labour - including domestic service in Durban and most of the Rand - were closed off to black women, the brewing of beer was one of the few alternative income generating strategies that they could employ. In Johannesburg, Koch argues, the brewing of beer became 'the kernel of urban culture', while the improvised marriage arrangement of 'vat en sit' became 'the crucial means whereby the informal production of the [slum] yards and the income from formal employment were harnessed together to provide for working class needs'.[34] These conclusions have been echoed in a number of other studies, both across the Rand as well as further afield.[35]

Given this centrality of brewing to black urban life, it would be easy to depict the beer riots of the late 1930's and early 1940's as valiant defences of family life by wives and mothers who had been driven to their wits' ends. The women's anti-beer hall demonstrations at Cato Manor and elsewhere have indeed often been cast in this mould.[36] Yet the part played by women in these confrontations, as well as female roles in the wider process of black urbanisation on the Rand was far more complex and contradictory than this. At the centre of each of these clashes was not an undifferentiated and anonymous group of black urban women, drawn at random from the whole spectrum of black urban households, but clearly defined social and ethnic categories who had become increasingly conspicuous in the business of beer over the previous two decades. These groups were comprised of single women migrants from Lesotho, the Eastern Free State, and Southern Mozambique, who brewed professionally or semi-professionally, and who were frequently involved in the most fleeting and transient relationships with men.[37] Women from these groups all too often were not brewing beer to sustain a settled family life, but were rather refugees from broken marriages that had cracked under the strain of rurual pauperisation and the migrant labour system. Women from Mozambique were initially the most

prominent practitioners of the craft. In mid 1920 H.S. Cooke, the Director of Native Labour, alerted the Secretary for Native Affairs to 'the considerable number of such women residing in mine and other locations or in slum areas [who were] in almost every instance engaged in illicit liquor selling or prostitution' and recommended their forced repatriation.[38] With the support of the Portuguese Curator in Johannesburg this was embarked upon towards the end of that year but the exercise seems quickly to have spluttered to a halt. By April 1921 the Home Native Co-operative Society of East Africa (an organisation of Mozambiquen migrants to the Rand) who had earlier complained about the large scale movement of Mozambiquen women to the Rand were urging the resumption of the programme of repatriation, and complaining of the continued presence of 2 000 Mozambiquen women at Barberton, Breyton, Witbank, the Witwatersrand, Klerksdorp, Viljoens Drift and Bleomhof.[39] The issue seems to have briefly slipped from view until 1926-7, when concern was once again expressed at the presence of 'loose Portuguese East African women' on the Witwatersrand and other industrial and urban areas of the Transvaal. By then their major centre of activity seems to have been Witbank and other mining centres of the Eastern Transvaal, although they apparently still maintained a strong presence in Benoni, and a more vigorously prosecuted programme of deportation soon saw their temporary removal from both Witbank and the Rand.[40] By the late 1920's they in any case being eclipsed if not supplanted on the Rand by other groups of women migrants who were to dominate this sphere of activity until the legalisation of the private consumption of alcohol in 1962. These were single women from another adjacent territory to South Africa - the tiny land-locked British colony of Basutoland. It is on these that this article will concentrate most of its attention.

The flight of Sotho women from Basutoland emerged as an issue as early as the late nineteenth century. A colonial report of 1892 observed that

chiefs of ... district were 'sore' about seeing their wives seduced into the Orange Free State, and in 1898 a full scale rebellion was triggered by the same complaint. On this occasion a son of the senior chief Masupha seized back a 'runaway' wife from the Orange Free State, which in turn provoked a British reprisal and precipitated the Masupha rebellion.[41] A change in the character of migration may have occurred during the Anglo-Boer War. The garrison town that was established in Bloemfontein attracted women in droves, not only as washerwomen, but also for the sexual services they could provide. The 1903-5 South African Native Affairs Commission, perhaps myopically, blames the origins of large scale prostitution on the military presence during the war, and the massive increase in the number of black women in Bloemfontein in this period may at least partly bear them out.[42] To begin with the majority of women attracted to the city were probably refugees from Free State farms whose agricultural production had been severely disrupted by the war, but since close relations existed between Basotho in the Free State and Basutoland, and the border was only a notional barrier to most Basotho, a number of women from Basutoland almost certainly slipped out as well. In the aftermath of the war the growing numbers of absconding women from Basutoland became an increasingly contentious issue, and an arrangement was eventually reached in 1908 whereby Orange River Colony officials agreed to deliver runaway women to the Basutoland border police. This procedure was of highly dubious legality, and in 1913, following Union, the Orange Free State administration refused to persist with it any further. The Basutoland National Council, consisting mainly of chiefs, responded by taking a leaf out of the book of the Natal Native Code. In its 1914 session it proposed a law

> "making it an offence for a girl or woman to leave the country without the permission of her father or husband."

which would then enable men to get a warrant to secure any absconding woman's return. Despite certain reservations by the colonial authorities

about the possible reactions of British public opinion, the measure was passed into law.[43]

None of these measures had any appreciable effect, at least outside of the small Free State border towns. In 1911 nearly 3 000 females were recorded as being absent from Basutoland, and this more than trebled in the following decade when a quarter of the total population recorded as being absent from Basutoland consisted of women.[44] To begin with, the great majority went to the various eastern Free State towns where they greatly aggravated relations between the town councils and their black urban populations. Together with the large number of women displaced or escaping from white farms, they ensured that the Free State's towns and dorps enjoyed the most balanced black sex ratios of any urban centres in the country. In 1904, for example, the black population of the towns of the Orange River Colony was 56% male and 44% female, with the growth of the female component accellerating at a much faster rate than that of men.[45] The female exodus from Basutoland gathered pace in the 1920's. Women 'flock[ed] into [Kroonstad] by the thousands, mostly from the tribal reserves' and helped to double its population between 1923 and 1931.[46] Bloemfontein likewise experienced a massive jump in its female population, which progressively outstripped the number of males after 1925. A great part of the increase was contributed by new arrivals from Basutoland who soon busied themselves in activities for which they would become notorious elsewhere - liquor brewing and other 'immoral' activities.[47]

In the course of the 1920's large numbers of Basuto women also began moving further afield. The late 1920's saw a great surge of immigration into virtually every urban centre in South Africa, with the rate of increase of women rising far more sharply than that of men. In the late 1920's, for example, most Reef towns experienced a phenomenal growth in their female populations. The percentage increase recorded for 5 Reef municipalities in

this period was as follows:

Brakpan	58.6%	1921-31
Germiston	158.9%	1921-31
Krugersdorp	99.0%	1921-31
Roodepoort-Maraisburg	84.7%	1925-31
Springs	67.4%	1924-31[48]

In a number of areas Basuto women were in the forefront of this trend. In September 1930, for example, serious concern was being evinced at the 'very considerable number[s] of undesirable native women from Basutoland [who had] taken up residence in locations on the Witwatersrand, notably Benoni and Nancefield'. According to the Director of Native Labour 250 or more stands out of 818 in Benoni location were by that stage occupied by women, many of whom hailed from Basutoland.[49] By 1932 Brakpan was likewise 'teeming with people, principally from Basutoland', while the greater proportion of the increase of Vereeniging's female population in the 1930's was made up of single Basutho women.[50] These new immigrants to the towns were soon identified as the principal source of a variety of social malaises, centering around the illicit brewing of liquor and widespread prostitution.

In Benoni, Basotho women 'affect[ed] voluminous skirts with numbers of petticoats which ... [were] frequently used for smuggling liquor into the locations'.[51] It was also 'common practice for [these] undesirable native women to travel by cabs and taxis to the neighbouring mine compounds for the collection of their debts and the furtherence of immoral business'.[52] In Springs, Basotho women waited outside the mine compounds on weekends to direct miners where to get liquor, while in Vereeniging several hundred Basotho women sold vast quantities of liquor to compounded workers and miners both inside and outside of the location.[53] These Basotho women brewers also seem to have engaged widely in prostitution. From the late

1920's the phrase 'Sotho women' was almost invariably paired with the opprobrious epithetics 'undesirable', 'unattached', 'immoral' and 'loose'. In 1929, for example, the Native Commissioner of Benoni was already noting their propensity 'to take to immorality and the illicit liquor and beer traffic' adding that 'after a while many of them become so abandoned and unsuitable for anything that they follow a life of vice and die of disease and neglect'.[54] Similar charges were echoed all over the Reef.[55] Native Commissioners and police were not alone in these opinions. Many Basotho men shared them as well. Sotho author Simon Majara addressed this issue in the opening pages of his novel Liakhela. Here Majara remarks quite matter-of-factly that

> "It is common to say that the women of Basotho who are all over the Republic are prostitutes"

before going on to explain why this was so.[56] Majara's view was not uncommon among Sotho men and a whole genre of Sotho literature (as indeed of African literature more generally)[57] grew up around this theme.[58] A number of letters to the Paris Evangelical Mission newspaper Leselinyana la Basotho raised the same complaint,[59] and some of the distaste felt by Sotho traditionalists when confronted by urban Sotho women is powerfully conveyed in a passage from the autobiography of A.S. Moepeli-Paulus - himself the son of a Witsieshoek chief.

> "I saw my Basutho women dressed in print skirts an inch below the knee, their blouses an inch above the navel, bracelets round their legs, running in the streets, swinging their coloured blankets in the air shouting
>
> 'If you are a man, come let me tell you keep away my boy! Go to the Christians! Here is Benoni-Twatwa. We rule ourselves.'
>
> Then throwing their skirts above their knees and crying
>
> 'Take and eat'."[60]

These provocative postures of Sotho women could have more destructive outcomes than drunkenness, debauchery or even disease. Escalating violence and crime were also increasingly associated with illicit liquor and Sotho women. Already by 1930 week-end disturbances at Nancefield were 'almost

invariably due to so called "tea meetings"' given by Basotho women. In the first 9 months of the same year the number of cases tried at the Benoni magistrate's court jumped to 7 265 from 5 900 in the same period of the previous year,[61] prompting the Native Commissioner of Benoni to stigmatise Basuto beer brewers as being the 'root of crime' as well as 'a cause of disease'.[62] The same experiences were reproduced all over the Reef. The sale of liquor and other services to miners in and around Brakpan location produced a situation where by 1935 'fighting and rioting is almost continuous, and lives are frequently lost'.[63] In Springs, a hapless traffic inspector was stoned by Basotho beer brewers when he tried to arrest one for purveying illicit liquor, while Vereeniging was the scene of an attempt by angry Basotho women to ambush and kill the location superintendant in 1933, after he had several Basotho beer brewers deported to Basutoland, and a large scale riot in the Indian quarter in 1936.[64]

A sudden surge of Sotho women to the Rand in the latter part of the decade added further fuel to the flames. From about 1937 Johannesburg experienced an unprecedented influx of Sotho women, many of whom engaged in the brewing of beer.[65] Heidelburg, Nigel, Krugersdorp, Benoni, Germiston and Vereeniging reported similar experiences,[66] along with mounting conflict over the illicit brewing and selling of beer. Conflict intensified after the municipal monopolisation of the brewing of beer, and had reached such a pitch by mid 1938 as to prompt an urgent appeal from the Witwatersrand Compound Managers' Association and Gold Producers' Committee. Conditions prevailing on the Rand, the compound managers complained were now seriously

> 'prejudical to the health and efficiency of the mine Native labourers as well as a menace to the Native population as a whole"

The uncontrolled supply of liquor and prostitution in these locations, the compound managers went on to assert, were the direct cause of 'considerable lawlessness during the weekends resulting in a large number of casualties'. Recent clashes between ethnic groups at Venterspos and Springs, had led to

loss of life and the serious disorganisation of mine production. In the worst collison which took place on 6-7 August, 24 seriously injured miners had to be sent to the nearest government hospital apart from the host of others treated for less serious injuries at mine hospitals, all of which were 'directly attributable' to the uncontrolled supply of 'skokiaan' and 'women'. The Native Commissioner at Krugersdorp shortly afterwards substantiated at least one part of this claim, informing the Director of Native Labour that West Rand Consolidated Mine had recently established that no less than 1 200 of its employees visited outside liquor dens every week-end.[67]

For the Compound Managers unattached women were also having another subversive effect. Many miners were forming liaisons with women 'of dubious character' in the locations, and moving to settle permanently in the towns, thereby 'becoming detribalised and of no further use as mine labourers ... Bastard families [were] becoming a serious menace, forming the class known as "Amalaita" ... [who were] absolutely useless for mining or manual labour of any kind'. Besides suggesting the more effective implementation of the (Natives) Urban Areas Act, the Compound Managers and the Gold Producers Committee only made one specific proposal - the debarring of Basotho women from the Transvaal, and the deportation of all single Basotho women and those living with 'unofficial husbands'.[68] The Native Commissioners of the Witwatersrand, when canvassed for their opinions, largely endorsed the Compound Managers' claims. Although two tried to evade direct responsibility for the situation by suggesting (quite incorrectly) that the problem of uncontrolled brewing was primarily one of the outside brickfields, the free-hold townships and the peri-urban areas, and not of the municipal locations, all acknowledged the central role of Sotho women and heartily endorsed proposals for their forced repatriation.[69]

These qualifications were enough to allow the Director of Native Labour to ignore the main burden of the Compound Managers' representations and slip himself gently off the hook, 'In most of the municipal locations' he

informed the Secretary for Native Affairs, 'there is no problem of control'. Outside of the locations the problem would have to be addressed by excluding women who could not prove they had been married by Christian rites or customary law, and by rigidly restricting the number of tenants who could live on peri-urban farms. Taking note of the Director of Native Labour's caution, D.C. Smit, the Secretary of Native Affairs penned a reply to the General Manager of the Gold Producers' Committee which was a masterly example of evasion and inaction. The position was being 'closely watched' by the Department and 'wherever practicable' steps to repatriate were being taken. Meanwhile the restriction of any further influx of women 'was a matter for the local authorities concerned'.[70]

Unencumbered by the responsibility for actually having to do something about the situation, a number of government commissions who enquired into a range of issues at about the same time took a less complacent view. Both the 1939 Farm Labour Committee and the Committee into Peri-Urban Areas spoke of the towns and their margins being swamped by Basotho beer-brewers, and roundly denounced them as being 'a menace to Bantu social life' and 'the greatest individual vitiating influence in the areas they frequent'.[71] The 1942 Native Affairs Commission of Enquiry into the use and supply of Kaffir Beer likewise reported that

> "The majority of women professionally engaged in this traffic appear to be of Basuto origin and the evidence shows that they have drifted into practically all the larger urban centres (with the possible exception of Southern Natal) where aggregations of male labour are to be found."[72]

In the 1940's and 1950's the situation, if anything, got worse. Numbers of female absentees from Basutoland which stood at 22 669 in 1939, increased to 32 331 in 1946 and 41 992 ten years later.[73] So large was the exodus of women in this period that the drop in the population of Basutoland which drew so much comment after the war was made up almost entirely of Basuto women. Now towns like Vereeniging and Benoni were literally swamped by this tide of Basuto women immigrants, and soon felt themselves sinking in a vast

lake of illicitly brewed beer.

ELOPEMENT, THE LEVIRATE AND RUNAWAY WIVES

Both the scale and the character of Basuto women's emigration was unique. Ony Mozambique and the Ciskei began to compare in either respect. How is it to be explained? Moepeli-Paulus, who was not otherwise the most sympathetic observer of Basuto urban women, offers this suggestive comment: 'Lack of land has driven the women to places like this' he remarks 'for they once followed their husbands to the Reef'.[74] What Moepeli-Paulus alerts us to here is the central role of rural impoverishment and labour migrancy in this massive flight of Basuto women. It is to some of the less visible and more insidious effects of these processes on Basutho family life that this discussion now turns.

M.B. Smith of the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce identified four main categories of Basuto women migrants to South Africa in his evidence to the Fagan Commission of 1947. First were women who had trouble with their husbands. Second were widows who 'very often have a very rough time'. Third were girls who had eloped and had been deserted by their partners, and fourth were women who had been properly married with cattle but had been deserted by their husbands.[75] Other commentators suggest a basically similar breakdown.[76] With the partial exception of the first group, women in each of these categories were the victims of land shortage, and the casualties of migrant labour. However, while each of these categories seem to have been present in the ranks of female migrants from the early days of this movement, their relative importance varied over time, since the ravages of migrant labour exacted its toll in different fashions in different times.

In the 1890's it was 'runaway wives' who captured most attention. Where identified, these came mainly from polygynous households and it is likely that it was their status as co- or junior wives that prompted them to

leave.[77] When the Basutoland National Council proposed in 1914 that women be obliged to carry a pass signed by their husbands or fathers and chiefs before being allowed to cross the border into South Africa, the commoner councillor Josias drew attention to their often unhappy position.

> "Some will blame you, the sons of Moshesh, some of these women will say they have no blankets, they have no homes, or they are denied conjugal rights."

Chief Maama dismissed Josia's intervention with the curt comment 'wives of polygamists will always complain',[78] but the actions of the women themselves could not be so lightly set aside, as the numbers of runaways multiplied in the face of such unyielding attitudes. As rates of polygamy declined, mainly due to increasing land shortage and poverty, the flight of wives from polygynous households made progressively less contribution to the annual exodus of women. In 1931 a Maseru court interpreter could still inform a visiting delegation from the South African Institute of Race Relations that

> "The National Council asked that wives should be compelled to obtain passes before leaving Basutoland ... because most of the members of the National Council are polygamists and some of their wives are deserting"[79]

but for the majority of the population polygyny was a thing of the past. The numbers of men with more than one wife as a percentage of the number of marriages recorded declined steadily from 18.7% in 1911 to 15.8% in 1921 to 11.4% in 1936 to 8.4% in 1946.[80] Here at least was one burden from which Basuto women were gradually freed.

A second type of emigration which was present from the late nineteenth century was made up of women who eloped or were seduced and fled across the border with their lovers. In the 1910's and 1920's significant changes occurred in the practice of elopement, as it grew in scale and won a grudging social acceptance. Young women now commonly eloped to their lover's father's village, the payment of 6 head of cattle being exacted in compensation from the man. These could subsequently constitute the first

instalment of a full bohadi (marriage cattle) payment,[81] but in practice this all too often allowed marriage on the cheap, and reflected the growing poverty of much of Basuto society. In the mid to late nineteenth century bohali payments were raised to exceptionally high levels, as a means of entrenching the Koena chiefly lineage's predominance. While marriage payments varied according to a woman's status, 20-30 cattle were demanded to marry even commoner women.[82] These levels were considerably higher than those prevailing in most other parts of South Africa, and placed severe strains on the resources of many commoner homes.[83] These grew as Basuto prosperity was systematically undercut in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The latter story is sufficiently well known to need only brief recapitulation here. Land losses after the Free State war of 1867-8, population pressure as a result of natural increase and the eviction of share-croppers from the Eastern Free State farms, exclusion from markets for agricultural products, and natural epidemics and blights all served to cripple Basutoland's previously thriving economy. Per capita incomes from agriculture dropped; levels of migrancy climbed. By 1911 approximately 25 000 Basuto nationals were working outside of its borders. Despite this, Basutoland's economy retained a degree of viability until the late 1920's. Then depression and drought combined to break its back. In the 1932-3 drought between 30-50% of cattle holdings were lost, and cultivation of maize was temporarily extinguished.[84] Virtually every bit of ground cover was destroyed, and choking clouds of dust filled the air. Older Sotho still date key events in their lives by reference to the all-enveloping clouds of 'red dust', and many even identify them as a turning point in their ability to win a daily subsistence from agriculture.[85]

For young men, especially those who were born into poorer households, the levels of bohali demanded now became increasingly unrealistic: it required half a lifetime of migrant labour to pay them off. In 1931

witnesses from Rydal Mount told the Native Economic Commissioners in Bloemfontein that abduction and seduction was rife because bohali was too high, and young men preferred to pay chobale (compensation for elopment) instead.[86] Complaints over elopment pepper the Basutoland National Council's minutes, where occasionally the same connection is drawn. In its 1938 session, for example one exasperated councillor argued that 20 head of cattle for bohali was too high. Young men without livestock were eloping with men's daughters, having children and then absconding to the mines. 'People's daughters' were 'turned into dagga' which 'after smoking' was 'simply abandoned'.[87]

Abandoned women were indeed an increasingly common outcome of elopment. Without transferring a large proportion of the bohali payment men enjoyed only limited rights over their children, and a much weaker bond was sustained between husband and wife. Men were encouraged to adopt a more casual and cavalier attitude towards their spouses, and were more inclined to disappear into South Africa and never return. M.F's experience illustrates this pattern. Born in 1917, she eloped to her in-laws' homestead in the early 1930's. After spending two weeks with her husband, he had a violent quarrel with his father and left to find work in the Free State. M.F. spent two years in her father-in-law's homestead waiting for her husband to return. When her father-in-law proposed a more intimate relationship, she finally decided to quit, heading for the Free State in search of her husband, and then, when she failed to track him down, going on to the Reef.[88]

'Chobale' wives were to some extent a marginalised category in Basuto society. Worse off, very often, were widowed women. These were faced with two often equally unpalatable options: to be married to a male kinsman of their husband (the levirate), or to remain perpetually vulnerable to men.[89] Those choosing the latter option often fell prey to chiefly opportunism or

to the greed of their husbands' kin. A combination of land shortage and a proliferation of chiefs in Basutoland had pushed widows into an increasingly exposed position in the 1920's and 1930's. Under the 'placing' system of chiefs which had been started by Moshoeshoe, the number of chiefs had grown steadily in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As one Basutoland National Council member exclaimed in the early 1930's

> "there are now as many Chiefs in Basutoland as there are stars in the heavens"[90]

each of whom exercised authority over a steadily dwindling patrimony. This continually narrowing jurisdiction encouraged them to exploit more intensively their rights over the area that remained. Fines and tribute (lira) labour for the chiefs' fields were extorted ever more remorselessly with much of the burden falling on women. Widows, who lacked the protection of husbands and adult male children, were particularly vulnerable to these demands. Worse still, since widows were exempted from the payment of tax, and the chiefs took a cut of the taxes collected in their territories, widows often found themselves arbitrarily deprived of their lands which were then allocated to young male tax payers.[91] Other pressures, which might include the levelling of witchcraft accusations, could be applied by jealous in-laws, until the hapless widow was ultimately forced to leave. Such women often fled to government camps in Basutoland, where they engaged in the brewing of beer, or alternatively they might proceed to the Free State or the Rand.[92] It is presumably this category of person to whom the superintendent of Bloemfontein location was referring when he spoke of 'the Basuto woman who is ostracised by the tribe and driven out' in his evidence to the Native Economic Commission in 1931.[93]

While these groups of, in one way or another marginalised, women made a significant contribution to the mounting exodus of Basuto women, by far and away the largest component of this movement consisted of women properly married by cattle and living with their children in monogamous homes. It is

here that the callous destructiveness of the migrant labour system is most plain. Commonly husbands returned to South Africa within a couple of months of marriage and were almost always away for considerable lengths of time.[94] Some never came back; others intermittently returned and in the interim neglected to provide adequate support. Many wives were thus condemned to live lives of profound insecurity and intense poverty never knowing when their husbands would come home or where their family would get their next meal. The records of the only surviving district archive for the post 1930 period in Lesotho are littered by pathetic appeals to have absent husbands tracked down. A few excerpts give some sense of the strains under which many Basuto wives lived:

Motsarapane Molapo to District Commissioner (hereafter D.C.), Leribe, 8 May 1954.

> I have been asked by Anna Lesaoana that her husband John who has been away for the last 6 years be repatriated. She says 10 cattle were paid for the marriage.

J.D. Elliot, D.C., Leribe, to Native Commissioner, Pretoria, 26 November 1955.

> I have received a report that Teboho Mpho Linakane of Thaba Phatsoa is not supporting his wife and 6 children. Please persuade him to support them.

Elliot to Native Commissioner, Germiston, 23 December 1955.

> I have a complaint of non-support on the part of Elliot Thoahlara of the South African Repairs Shops, Germiston. He has been away from home for nearly 8 years.

Acting D.C., Leribe, to the British Agent in Johannesburg, 7 June 1956.

> The Chief reports Moleleki Mohale has been lost on the mines. His address is supposed to be the S.A. Railways and Harbours Compound, Germiston, but his wife says she has been there and he is not there. He has been missing for 10 months.

D.C., Leribe, to Manager, Eclipse Engineering, Benoni, 18 October 1958.

> The Bearer of this letter is Tomothea Malao, wife of Paulus Malao who is working in your firm. His wife complains her husband is not supporting her and also his children. Please persuade him to support her.[95]

The problems experienced by the wives of absent husbands were often

compounded by frictions at their new homes. Upon marriage young women were obliged to live at their in-laws' homestead and it was often some time before their husbands established a fully separate home.[96] In the meantime, especially if their husbands were absent, they occupied an invidious position. They were obliged to observe rules of respect and avoidance (hlonepho) in regard to the senior male agnates of her husband, there were tight restrictions on whom they could meet, and they could easily be scorned or frozen out by the women of their new home. In these new and often alien surroundings potential for conflict abounded, particularly over the distribution of the husband's remittances or the allocation of work.[97] 'Me Likeleko, for example, married with cattle in 1932, and went to stay with her in-laws where she worked in their fields. 'Me's father-in-law 'hated her very much', and she was forced to go back to her home. Her husband followed her back to her parents' village but then began 'to beat her every day', until in 1942 she absconded to South Africa without his consent.[98] 'Me Mmatuku Ramatuku experienced similar problems. She was married about 1940, and soon bore 2 children. Her husband was recruited into the Basuto contingent fighting in the Second World War and did not return for 5 years. In the meantime tensions mounted between Mmatuku and her mother-in-law who was 'jealous of her possessions' which she bought with the money remitted by her husband. When her husband returned from the war he found his elder brother dead. Encouraged by his mother, he took over his dead brother's wife and family abandoning his own.[99]

In every way migrant labour profoundly warped marital relations. The protracted absences of men predisposed women to extra-marital affairs. As Mr Maguta observes

> These women were immediately left after marriage by their husbands. These men would remain with their wife for about 2 or 3 months and would join the mines leaving the woman still young and fresh and anxious for their husband.[100]

Extra marital affairs in these circumstances were less the exception than

the rule, and inspired intense jealousy among husbands who often resorted to beatings and abuse.[101] These intense pressures often so embittered relations between husbands and wives, that the one party or the other would desert or abscond. Herein lies the background to Theko Bereng's lament to the Basutoland National Council in 1952.

> At the moment whenever we travel by train we see many women travelling to Johannesburg. Whenever I ask them myself why they are running away from the country, they tell me about the cruelty which is practised on them by their husbands in Basutoland.[102]

What is most striking about the movement of Sotho women to South Africa is the overwhelming preponderance of married women in their ranks. Occasionally unmarried women would leave, usually those who had been 'spoilt in the yard' (i.e. had fallen pregnant) but these were comparatively rare. 'Me M.P. was one such case. She fell pregnant while still at school, and since she was alone with her mother and there were financial problems at home, she decided to look for work on the Rand. Although her initial impulse for leaving was unusual her later experiences find echoes in the histories of countless other women. 'Me M.P's friend had a boyfriend in Germiston, who wrote to tell them that it was possible to find work in South Africa. They left by train in 1944 and on arrival at Park Station, they approached a stranger to ask where the boyfriend's factory could be found. The man took them to the factory, but when the boyfriend was called he refused to come out - evidently because he was living with another woman. 'Me M.P. and her friend were thereafter directed to Masakeng (Mpanza's shanty town) by the same man they had met at the station, where they were able to find accommodation. She eventually found work as a domestic, entered a relationship with a Nyasa lover, and fell pregnant once again.[103]

The part of 'Me M.P's experiences which is so reminiscent of those of the numerous married women who set out for the Rand, is the attitude of the man they came to find. In many cases women who went in search of their husbands would find they had disappeared without trace.[104] In others where

the husband was still present at his last known place of work he would refuse to come out. Where the husband was living in a mine or factory compound this effectively closed off the desperate women from any access to her man. Simon Majara claims that his cautionary tale on the life a migrant Sotho woman (Makotulo) was inspired by observing one such harrowing scene. A stereotypically beautiful young Sotho woman came to the mine where Majara worked in search of her husband, only to be spurned and sent away. Rather than return to Basutoland, she took up the life of a brewer and semi-prostitute, being much fought over by rival Sotho men.[105] This seems to have been the characteristic response of Sotho wives rejected in this way. Overnight, respectable married women thus became transformed into the notorious unattached and undesirable Sotho women, so reviled by white administrators at the time.

Not all Sotho women migrants endured such unhappy experiences. A number interviewed in this study who set out to join their husbands in the Free State or the Rand succeeded in re-establishing fairly harmonious marital relations.[106] Almost as common however was for the marriage, once reconstructed, to collapse. Janisch and Shropshire estimated the period of average cohabitation of black men and women in Johannesburg at the end of the 1930's as two years, and while traditional marriages by cattle were probably more durable than this, the volatility and flux of the urban environment seem to have exacted a heavy toll on these relationships as well. The marriages of two of the women interviewed for this study collapsed while they were living in the towns, and the district archives of Leribe reverberate with complaints from indignant urban dwelling husbands whose wives had vanished from their homes:[107]

Native Commissioner (N.C.), Vereeniging to D.C., Leribe 17 November 1954.

> Ntepe Jackson Mosala complains that his wife Matomasa Mosala deserted him on 8 November 1954 when he was at work taking her 11 month old baby. There was no reason.

Moss Friedman & Co, Attornies, Vereeniging, to D.C. 25 January 1956

> Augustus Semena states his wife and 2 children have left him and are at Peka. She has written to him refusing to go back. He wants you to order her to go to his home at Fobana Leribe and lay any charge she has against him.

Native Commissioner, Pretoria, to District Commissioner, Hlotse, 13 July 1954.

> Piet Malelane lodges complaint that his wife Christina Malelane has maliciously deserted his home and is now staying with her elder brother ... in your district. He asks she be prevailed upon to return home as he has nobody to look after the minor children.[108]

Since these files refer only to women who had gone back to Basutoland, it is clear that desertion by women was taking place on a fairly substantial scale. Urban women were refusing to submit to the demands and caprices of their men. Men were losing control of their women. The same trend is evident in relationship to the state, and indeed men's loss of control was partly premissed on the incapacity of the state to direct the movements and activities of women. It is to this subject that this article now turns.

THE LOSS OF CONTROL

The loss of control over Sotho women can ultimately be traced back to the failure of the South African authorities to install an effective system of pass controls over South African women as a whole. The root of this failure can itself be tracked down to the campaigns against women's passes which burst out in a number of Free State towns between 1913 and 1923. In these campaigns, as Wells shows, a respectable middle-class women's leadership, linked to the equally respectable and middle-class ANC and APO played the most conspicuous role.[109] Less visible, but, if anything, even more important in provoking the conflict however, were poor, uprooted Sotho women from Basutoland and the eastern Free State farms who had been driven by a combination of economic and family pressures to seek refuge in the Free State's towns. As Wells observes 'it was no accident that the conflict [over women's passes] first emerged in the Orange Free State. The political

economy of the region incorporated black women earlier and more extensively than any other in South Africa'.[110] What Wells is referring to here are the women of share-cropping families who were being extruded from the Free State's farms in the 1900's and 1910's. Her comment could equally appropriately be extended to Basuto women on the other side of the border of whom she is largely unaware.

Women arriving in the Free State's towns in the 1900's who were not already members of middle-class families had two basic options: they could work as domestics, or they could engage in informal income-generating activities such as beer-brewing, petty trade or prostitution. Herein lay the source of the women's agitation. From the Anglo-Boer War onwards most Free State towns experienced persistent shortages of female domestic labour. Women either refused to present themselves for such low paying work or were unreliable and undisciplined and flitted between jobs. The reasons for their ability to withhold labour varied with social class. Women from the more prosperous oorlams (deracinated groups that grew up on Boer farms) and Baralong families were freed very often from the economic compulsion to seek work and could devote their attention to their families and their homes. Women from poorer farm labouring stock, or from Basutoland, on the other hand, engaged in a whole range of informal sector activities in order to escape domestic work. The first pass laws were thus framed with the related objectives of suppressing beer brewing and prostitution, and forcing women onto the domestic labour market. As more and more Sotho women flooded into the Free State towns in the 1910's and the domestic labour shortage persisted as acutely as ever, the Pass Laws against women were enforced with renewed vigour. In Bloemfontein, Winburg and Jagersfontein their application was particularly indiscriminate and severe. In contrast to Heilbron and Kroonstad, where married women were exempted from pass controls, the police harassed respectable middle-class matrons as well as

younger unmarried women. A sudden burst of particularly strict enforcement which occurred in May 1913 provoked the first passive resistance to women's passes. Its leaders, as Wells stresses, were women from middle-class Baralong, oorlams and coloured households, and it was their efforts, along with the political and propaganda campaigns of the APO which secured first the relaxation of pass controls over women, and then the exclusion of women from the provisions of the 1923 (Natives) Urban Areas Act.[111] Without this leadership it is highly unlikely that this concession would have occurred, but this should not blind us to the context out of which the anti-pass movement emerged. It was the first large scale proletarianisation of women which provided the context for the first women's anti-pass campaign and it was this in turn which shaped the Pass Laws for the next thirty years.

The accellerated influx of women to the Rand in the latter part of the 1920's led to renewed efforts to give the existing influx control legislation more bite. A 1930 amendment to the (Natives) Urban Areas Act provided for the issuing of special permits to African women conditional upon their joining a husband or father who had two years of continuous employment in the town, while the 1937 revision provided that a woman entering an urban area for the first time should have a certificate from the authorities of her home district granting her permission to leave.[112] The 1930 amendment turned out almost immediately to be a dead letter. Several witnesses told the 1937 Vereeniging Riots Commission how easily this provision was evaded. As Albert Mduli (sic) put it, Basuto women came to Vereeniging, and 'got a man around the compounds' in order to get a lodger's permit.[113] When it came to policeman G.C. van der Merwe's turn to give evidence, his frustrations bubbled over. 'We have made a plan to get them out of the location' he told the Commission

> "but each one of them has a man, and you can do what you like, but they have got a man .... Unless I could show you 2 or 3 previous convictions you could not get them out. If you arrest a girl with the name Maria, tomorrow she is Jane. Consequently, unless you go to court and swear there are previous convictions you cannot get a sentence imposed."[114]

R.W. Norden, the Native Commissioner of Johannesburg, put the matter a little more dispassionately. Since irregular unions could be claimed as customary marriages, women could not be expelled under the 'habitually unemployed' clause of the legislation (17(i)(a)), nor for not having sufficient honest means of livelihood (Section 17(i)(b)). Deportation orders were difficult to secure even if the marital status of women was slightly in doubt, and where attempts to check this were made women frequently presented certificates from chiefs that were forged or simply unintelligible.[115] A further hedge against arrest under Section 17 was for a single woman to get a job as a domestic in a white suburb, then take up residence with a man in the location, and then take up beer brewing while taking the occasional load of washing as a cover.[116] Action under Sections (c), (d) and (e) of Section 17 could only be contemplated if the woman had a criminal conviction or had been convicted more than once for the illicit brewing and selling of liquor. Convictions here were equally hard to obtain. 'Kaffir beer' was exempt from this provision till 1938, and women seldom allowed themselves to be convicted more than once. Aside from routine techniques of evasion, beer brewers became increasingly sophisticated in their manipulation of the law. In Benoni, for example, 'reprehensible' solicitors 'raised innumerable difficulties' to frustrate the efforts of officers of the law. Where all else failed, women facing conviction would simply entreat bail, and slip away to some other location.[117] Once convicted, offenders might still escape deportation. The hard pressed police on the Rand frequently lacked the time 'to search the voluminous records of the Reef courts', in which case convicted women were free to resume their 'undesirable' activities again.[118]

Even once all these hurdles were cleared, other traps lay in wait for the unsuspecting Native Commissioner. Women beer brewers had to have somewhere to be deported to, and those not born on the Reef would simply refuse to disclose from which home district they came.[119]

The frustrations felt by many officials over their inability to deal with 'undesirable' women led a number to contemplate more radical solutions. Major Cooke of the Native Labour Department went so far as to recommend to the Native Economic Commission that

> "There certainly ought to be [a labour colony] for women, because one of the difficulties of dealing with a dissolute woman now is that she will not disclose the place from which she comes - which is the term used in the Act. Unless there is some other means of dealing with her, when it comes to the question of giving her the alternative of going back to the place to which she belongs, or being confined to a farm colony, then she makes no bones about disclosing where she does belong to. Similarly in regard to procedure about the Immigration Act, a woman may obviously be a Basuto ..., but she will allege she comes from Ficksburg or somewhere in the Free State and the Administration has the greatest difficulty in establishing whether she comes from this side of the border or the other side."[120]

Cooke's call was re-iterated a number of times in the course of the decade as the rising tide of women and illicit liquor broke decisively through banks of control.[121] Due to shortages of funds a female section at the Prison Farm Labour Colony at Leeuwkop was not established until July 1937. However, even then similar problems bedevilled its operations. It was just as difficult as ever to get convictions against undesirable women, while the Supreme Court preferred warning to immediate incarceration on the prison farm. As a consequence, over the next 15 years, the section often had as little as 2 inmates, and sometimes none, and never housed more than 14 at the same time. The Prison Department displayed predictable irritation at this low occupancy rate, especially since they had been bombarded with requests for the facility for over a decade, and the section's activities were first suspended between November 1951 and June 1953, and finally closed in mid 1954.[122]

The only alternative means of preventing Basotho women's entry onto the Rand was to control their movement at source. This was attempted both by the Basutoland and the South African authorities, sometimes in unison, sometimes by themselves. One of the earliest efforts came in 1915. In terms of a law proclaimed in that year no Basuto woman was allowed to leave

Basutoland without a letter signed by her husband or father and endorsed by her local chief and an officer of the colonial administration.[123] The system proved to be immediately ineffective. Women wishing to evade pass controls could obtain a document to cross to the border towns of Ladybrand or Ficksburg, purportedly for the purposes of shopping or medical attention, and then simply entrain for the Rand.[124] Attempts to breathe new life into the law were made after complaints by the South African authorities to the Basutoland government in Maseru in the second half of 1930.

> There had been 'a steady migration of unattached Native women from Basutoland to the Witwatersrand where they form[ed] a most undesirable class which ma[de] a living by smuggling liquor into the locations and compounds and by immorality'.

'Crime' and 'disturbances' were the direct outcome of their activity. The Basutoland authorities were requested to stem this flow at source.[125]

Three months later the Government Secretary of the Basutoland administration was able to report that by arrangement with the Paramount Chief all Basuto women would in future be stopped from leaving the territory unless in possession of a certificate from their local chief confirming that they had the permission of their husbands or parents to travel to the Union.[126] This was the 1914 Proclamation revived, and it had just as little effect. Only shortly afterwards the Secretary for Native Affairs was once again complaining to the Basutoland authorities that travelling passes were being issued indiscriminately to Basuto women to visit or find absent husbands on the Reef. The Government Secretary once again assured the Secretary for Native Affairs that he would discourage this practice among officers of the Basutoland administration but only now revealed the limits of his powers. A major problem was presented, he confessed, by the absence of colonial legislation restricting the movement of Basuto women, while the 'extensive nature of the border' made it easy for them to evade any proposed prohibition.[127] A further loophole was identified after a fresh batch of complaints in 1934: there was virtually no control over women visiting the

border towns of the Union, from which they could entrain to the Reef. The only solution to the difficulty proferred by the Basutoland Government was that the South African Railways and Harbours should be instructed to refuse the issue of tickets to those not in possession of permission to proceed.[128]

The South African Railways and Harbours were conspicuously unresponsive to this appeal. Their General Manager replied to the suggestion

> 'Even if practical' they could not justify it in view of the large numbers of women permanently resident in the Free State whose movements were unrestricted by law.[129]

The alternative of closing the border to Basotho visitors to border towns, seems not to have been canvassed at all. An altercation which erupted some twenty years later probably provides the answer why. In September 1955, Secretary for Native Affairs Eiselen instructed the Native Commissioner for Ficksburg to apply the provisions of section 12 of Act 25 of 1945 to Basuto citizens, which required that women wanting to cross the border to South Africa obtain a pass from the Basutoland District Commissioner, who in turn was required to get the permission of the Native Commissioner or Magistrate of the place to which they were intending to go. A howl of protest went up from the Ficksburg Chamber of Commerce who were threatened with a dramatic fall off in custom, and the Minister quickly backed off of the issue claiming that the Native Commissioner's interpretation of his order had been an 'unfortunate misunderstanding' and that 72 hours visitors were always meant to be exempt.[130] The ban would in any case have probably not made much difference. Even a pass to visit Ficksburg was superfluous if the Caledon River was not in flood. As Councillor Lepolesa reminded the 1952 session of the Basutoland National Council "women [could] just cross the river and to to the railway" thus making a mockery of the existing system of pass controls.[131] For those who felt they needed added security they could just go to the nearest farmer over the border. By the mid-1940's, and presumably earlier,

> "some of the smaller farmers [were making] a kind of business of endorsing passes for women"

for which they charged 2/6d.[132]

One last attempt to regulate the movement of Basotho and other women was made just before the Second World War. A 1937 amendment to the (Natives) Urban Areas Act provided that a woman entering an urban area for the first time should have a certificate from the authorities of her home district granting her permission to leave. As in the 1930 amendment, however, there was no proper mechanism of enforcement, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the government was chary of any effort at compulsion following the experiences of the late 1910's.[133] Women migrants were in any case quick to spot loopholes in the law. As the Native Affairs Manager of Benoni ruefully recorded in 1946

> "the average native has now got wise to the date of promulgation and when questioned he readily answers he came here before 1938"

To him, 'to all practical purposes the 1938 amendments were useless and obsolete' because women were not required to carry passes which made prosecution 'extremely difficult and complicated'.[134] Efforts to control the movements and activities of women, if anything, diminished in the course of the war, as the South African authorities relaxed the operation of the pass laws in an effort to assure itself of the loyalty of blacks, and this allowed Basuto women to flood into South Africa on an unprecedented scale. It would not be until the 1950's and early 1960's that effective measures were taken to curb this wholesale emigration, by which time a generation of Basotho women were securely ensconced on the Rand.

BASOTHO WOMEN AND BASOTHO MEN

The abscence of state controls over the movement and activities of Sotho women, seriously weakened the hold that could be exercised by their men, and further strained relations between the sexes. Across the African

communities of the Rand, Sotho women acquired a reputation for being promiscuous and fickle. Questioned by the Vereeniging Riots Commission in 1937, Albert Mduli (sic) remarked

> "they do not stick to the men through whom they get their lodgers' permits. When a woman thinks she has sufficient money, she drives the man away and gets another.[135]

Sotho migrant S. Pelanyane likewise recalls, "women at that time were enticed by money. If you had money you could have as many women as you wanted".[136] The same stereotype recurs in the pages of Sotho vernacular novels. Simon Majar writes in Liakhela "when a man is not bringing money home he is left and she goes to a new man".[137]

Of course, what was promiscuity for Sotho men often represented independence for Sotho women. This independence seems in many instances to have been consciously asserted, and drew its strength from two principal sources. The first was Sotho women's experience of poverty, abandonment and neglect. The second was the independent income that could be earned from brewing and prostitution. Most Sotho women migrants to South Africa had come to South Africa in a last desperate effort to save their marriages and find their men. Once finally rejected, many seem to have resolved never again to become wholly dependent on men. Beer-brewing and other informal income generating activities provided this opportunity. Women made a point of keeping this money for themselves, which in the 1950's could amount to £10-£20 a week, and with this they could support their families independent of men. M.F. saved money because "in the end she knew she would come back to Basutoland". Like most other brewers she also joined a mahodisane group (rotating credit association). In her case three women participated paying £10 a time, which provided the necessary insurance against misfortunes like illness, arrest or deportation.[138] The grasping hands of men were kept well away.

A certain section of Sotho women were, nevertheless, on any reckoning,

promiscuous. The experiences that had brought them to the town seem to have bred in them immensely contradictory attitudes and emotions. Despair and depression about the collapse of their marriages mingled with exhilaration at the new freedom of the towns. Men were alternately solicited and rejected, their company invited, their authority spurned. This behaviour and these attitudes were in a sense distilled in the famo dances that many urban Sotho women attended. Coplan writes:

> "According to numerous eye witnesses, the famo was almost defiantly suggestive. Women made shaking and thrusting movements with their shoulders, hips and bosoms, while lifting their flared skirts. The dancers wore no underwear but instead 'had painted rings around the whole area of their sex, a ring the called "stoplight" ...'. Men dancing alongside or seated against the walls chose the women they wanted and took them into the back for intercourse."[139]

Maliehe Khoeli describes famo in similar terms:

> "when women dance they jump and twist, lift their dresses about their waists and expose their underwear. Then men would come and produce their sexual organs which they called picks"[140]

M.R. a beer brewer in Apex squatter camp near Benoni likewise recalls:

> "Women would dance around men then lift up their dresses so that men would have sight of the panties or even their private parts .... Men would obviously be enticed. There would be hush hush business taking place. Some would vanish as couples. Others would stand in the corners of houses in the dark. It was 'Thagiso'".[141]

P.M. and C. Maguta who lived in Benoni location in the early 1940's remember miners from neighbouring mines outbidding each other to buy dances with these women, a practice which could easily degenerate into fights.[142]

Coplan describes famo as providing 'a cathartic moral comment on social problems' and cites the experience of Adelina who attended famo in Vereeniging and Kroonstad. She explained

> "When I was deeply depressed and worried, in order to express myself and feel contented .... I went to the shebeen to sing these things. I had gone (to town) to visit my husband and I found him but we were separated. I suffered a lot because of that. So I had to go to these places and get some joy out of life and unburden myself. Others came for similar reasons, and to share their feelings with others"[143]

Sotho men did not necessarily submit tamely to this provocative

behaviour by women. Individual reactions would often involve assaults on women by their male partners, but there was also a more collective form of response articulated through the Ma Rashea gangs. This had an almost schitzophrenic character. On the one hand the promiscuity of women seems to have given them some moral or other justification for simply seizing women by force. Simon Majara records in Liakhela

> "If they find a man walking with a beautiful woman they say 'Here is the woman I have been looking for'; then they take her by force and sjambok her until she submits."[144]

Ex-members of the Ma Rashea confirm the practice. Ex-gang leader Maliehe Khoeli recalls that "The Russians used to say 'This is my wife of years that I have been looking for'" adding that he himself prohibited the practice if the couple had been married by cattle.[145] Khoeli's attitude was nevertheless not shared by many MaRashea. When ex-Russian leader Nthodi was asked whether such treatment of women was an expression of moral censure against irregular marriages he gave the purely instrumental reply that it was simply because Sotho women in towns did not enjoy the protection of a chief or male kin.[146]

Women living with Ma-Rashea men were however expected to conform to an entirely different code of conduct. If one absconded with another man she would be recaptured by the gang and mercilessly beaten. Again Majara writes:

> "They seized women, but if your wife had gone with another man because of his wealth or something you could get them to go and get them back. By so doing they stopped prostitution. Many women began to stick to their husbands despite riches and wealth."[147]

'Me M. R provides a somewhat different emphasis but makes a similar point:

> "It wouldn't be defection as such, but I suppose love would be the cause, or at times a woman is not satisfied with the way she is being treated by the man."

Once caught

> "you will be ordered to take your belongings with you, and they will chase you all the way while beating you. At times you reach home dead. These men were terrible."[148]

S. Pelanyane confirms the reprisals in even more chilling detail:

> "She got beaten up by all the members. You see, I would be tightened with a band on my waist so that it tends to have a tail and be ordered to run and she runs after me and I must make it a point that she doesn't catch up with me while running. They would be beating her up so as to catch up with me and I wouldn't stop whatever. If I did I would also be beaten. But I had a whistle with me. If I felt she had had it I would then blow it and that would be an order to stop."[149]

Men went to extreme lengths to establish control over their women, and still all too often failed. The central government efforts likewise aborted until it resorted to draconian legislation in the 1950's and 1960's to impose passes on women, and to deport illegal women migrants. Only then was the rebellion of Sotho women quelled.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to weave together a number of connected themes. It demonstrates that particular areas of Southern Africa contributed disproportionately to the flow of women to the Rand. It suggests that his pattern was the product of the uneven impact of proletarianisation and labour migrancy and the specific constitution of the internal structures of the societies concerned. It also indicates the intimate connection between these groups of women and the illicit brewing of liquor, and focusses on the late 1930's as the time when the municipal and central authorities attempted to gain some control over the process of black urbanisation by controlling the brewing of liquor. The paper suggests that this control over women proved unattainable in this period, mainly because they were not obliged to carry passes, and that this freedom was the direct result of past struggles over passes, and the potential for large scale resistance revealed in other contemporary collisions with women. The paper concludes that lack of Basutoland and South African Government control also weakened the control of Basoto men over Basuto women, and had important repercussions on Basotho migrant culture in the towns.

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