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1991-03
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8569

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm MARCH 1991

Title: Fictions that Save: Migrants' Performance and Basotho National Culture.

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No. 286

FICTIONS THAT SAVE:
MIGRANTS' PERFORMANCE AND BASOTHO NATIONAL CULTURE

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Introduction

...You know, my fathers, my parents,
Why should I steal [reveal secrets] in this way?
I feel I want to shake the nation....
(Majara Majara)

Of all South Africa's neighbors, none has suffered more severely from expropriation and underdevelopment by white colonialism and supremacy than the Kingdom of Lesotho. In reality, Lesotho is not South Africa's neighbor but its backlot: an eroded, mountainous, Belgium-sized (11,716 sq. mi.) remnant of a once expansive semi-feudal African highveld state. The military depredations of the Free State Afrikaners, combined with successive betrayals by its erstwhile "protectors," the imperial British, transformed Basutoland from a largely self-sufficient agricultural exporter to an impoverished, dependent supplier of labor to South Africa (Murray 1980). While independence from Britain in 1966 did nothing to improve its economic position, Lesotho is one African nation whose citizens have never felt the slightest nostalgia for the colonial period. In the mid-19th century, the Basotho (sing.: Mosotho) were lauded by missionaries and resident British officials for their courtliness, ingenuous adaptibility, and eagerness for the "progress" they believed would come from the adoption of European ways. In the event, however, British and white settler colonialism deprived them of both autonomy and resources in virtually every sphere.

In response, the Basotho have retreated to the stubborn protection of their last existential redoubt, Sesotho, their unifying language and culture. Like a cultural correlative of the impassible but sheltering ranges of the Drakensburg up aginst which the Europeans drove them, the secrets (likoma) of Sesotho have become a defensible symbolic landscape, ringed by authoritative knowledge and identity. Connotatively and ideologically, Sesotho refers to anything, ideational, behavioral, or material, that Basotho regard as purely of their own devising, unadulterated by "external" influences. The impossibility of identifying the boundaries or content of Sesotho in this sense historically is not the point. The point is that the concept of Sesotho has long served as a cognitive and behavioral defence against the loss of Basotho national identity and the misappropriation of the resources to which this identity gives title. From varying and sometimes conflicting perspectives, Sesotho is spoken of by all classes of Basotho as vital to both social and "national" survival. With so much of the original Basotho territory irretrievably incorporated into the Orange Free State, and so many Basotho residing in South Africa, the most significant markers of national identity are cultural. Representations of such markers however, are constructed on the basis of geographical origins and political allegiances within what remains of the autonomous monarchial state. As retired migrant Makeka Lihojane, a World War II veteran who spent forty years in the South African mines, sang in his autobiographical sefela song:

I reside at Quthing Sebapala [in southern Lesotho];
I was born there, I pay tax there,

The brother of 'Mamphasa and 'Mamoitheri,
I am the soldier of [Chieftainess] 'Mamokhesuoe's village....

In this sense Lesotho's current borders enclose and anchor a more wide-ranging historical patrimony. But as South Africa enters a period of dramatic political change, Lesotho's independent existence, already a fiction in an economic sense, may cease to be worth the candle except to the small military, professional/bureaucratic, and aristocratic elites who have a vested interest in structures of government and patronage, land allocation, and the political economy of migrant labor. It is members of this class who most pointedly represent cultural and political identity as coterminous, bottling up Sesotho in Lesotho. As a prominent Mosotho professor of African Languages complained to me, "These things you are studying from the migrants and bars and prostitutes, they were never in Lesotho, they have been brought in from South Africa." Not surprizingly, the erstwhile "Sesotho Academy" of Basotho intellectuals locates the performance domain of Sesotho in much honored but seldom performed chiefly "praise poetry" (lithoko; see Kunene 1971), rural dance/song genres (Matsela 1987), and written Sesotho literature.

Yet it is the nature of culture to be suffocated by a too self-conscious and solicitious embrace. The continuing development of Sesotho (no italics) as a living symbolic structure guiding autonomous social action has passed in large degree from aristocratic retainers and "praise singers" (liroki) into the hands of people historically consigned to Lesotho's social margins. These are the disenfranchised, physically mobile and frequently absent, socially ambiguous yet economically indispensible migrant workers. As other Basotho educators have come to realize (Mokitimi 1982; Moletsane 1982, 1983) it is the performing artists and genres among migrants, both male and female, that have expanded and kept open the boundaries of Sesotho, while still reproducing its collective understandings and historical representations for the affective encoding of social experience. Migrant working men and women have created new performance genres that enlarge Basotho cultural boundaries and increase their permeability, challenging idealized or authoritative notions of what constitutes Sesotho.

Among the various categories of Basotho performers and performances, this paper focuses on migrant tavern singers turned recording artists, to whom some of the task of making and remaking Basotho "national culture" has fallen. Their songs, long performed in wayside bars and now widely distributed on radio and audio cassette, reveal the dynamics of genre, gender, and expressive authority in the politics of performance. Their relation to Sesotho as emergent tradition embodies the layered contradictions created by the need for social solidarity in the face of competing positions and interests, and for historical continuity (re)presented in collective metaphors in the face of a radically transformed and fragmented social reality (Marcus and Fischer 1986:184-5). In proposing the universality of the marginal as the defining condition and not merely the by-product of structuration, Babcock-Abrahams argues that marginality is not a structurally residual category, but "That which is socially peripheral or marginal is symbolically central and predominant" (Babcock-Abrahams 1975:155). Recognizing this, performers openly adopt "marginality" as a stance from which to address the tension between the impracticabilities of solidary structural ideals and the conflictual structure of real social practices.

In the larger sense in which Sesotho is a means of confronting, interpreting, and domesticating the external conditions that affect Basotho migrant life, the work of these performers represents what Raymond Williams (1977) called a "structure of feeling": an articulation of experience with broader social forces and expressions of ideology, of authoritative genres and metaphors with what Mikhail Bakhtin called "the common people's

creative culture of laughter" (Holquist 1981:20). As Bakhtin argued, such articulations occur in some form in the cultural representations of every historical context. What Basotho migrant performers in particular are up to is a kind of organic rejection of apartheid-sponsored dualities of culture, in which historical and social identity is opposed to the pursuit of material interests and rationalized modes of social cooperation and agency. In the apartheid conception, colonial categories of African ethnicity are reified as an immemorial heritage indispensible to group autonomy and development, and so it follows that being a Mosotho is opposed to being an active member of the black National Union of Mineworkers. As what the mine companies once called "foreign natives" (!), citizens of Lesotho are not legally entitled to join the South African union, but Basotho from both countries do in fact comprise a large segment of both its members and leaders. One result of this situation was the repatriation of more than 5,000 Basotho mineworkers to Lesotho following their summary dismissal during the massive union mine strike of 1987.

Understandably, union leadership also regards ethnic loyalty as divisive and therefore inconsistent with worker militancy. Harriet Ngubane reports (personal communication 1989) that when Mineworkers Union General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa and President James Motlatsi urged workers at a union rally to put aside their identification as Basotho, Xhosa, or Shangaan in the interests of solidarity and united action, many were indignant. They protested that upholding Sesotho was not an expression of disrespect or hostility towards members of other ethnic groups as workers. Further they pointed out that whereas the leaders who spoke against Sesotho were educated and cosmopolitan professionals, invited to speechify before the mighty in Johannesburg, Europe, and America, mineworkers would still be in the South African mines with their attendant hardships no matter how successful the union's campaigns. Was it not then unfair for citizens of the world like Ramaphosa to ask mineworkers to downgrade the one thing that was inalienably theirs, their sociocultural and thus human identity as Basotho? This identity, morevoer, is maintained as a defence against the continuing reinvention of Basotho "tradition" by the bureaucratic purveyors of apartheid ideology. Adding injury to insult, the culture of black workers is recreated in the image that dominant others make of it and thrown in their faces as either a confirmation of their lack of capacity and entitlement or a reproach to their rational methods towards amelioration.

Attempts like those of the Basotho to create forms that are qualitatively new yet invested with the authority of historically continuous cultural practices, a kind of cultural self-preservation through self-transformation, are widely characteristic of formerly colonized societies both in Africa and elsewhere. In the present instance we will follow both Bakhtin and Williams, showing how the ethnographic interpretation of oral genres in their contexts of construction can reveal the cultural ground of migrants' accommodation and resistance to the existing social order (Marcus and Fischer 1986:133). Carrying their accordions and likhetsi ("medicine bags") full of historical metaphors, popular Basotho musicians cross and recross cogntive boundaries in order "to tap the continued vitality of the mingled continuity and innovation which resides within indigenous cultures as they have continued to develop underneath the rigidities" of invented tradition (Ranger 1984:262).

Symbolic Dualities, Mediating Genres

There is no evidence that songmaking, much less anything comparable to our notion of musician, was ever an authoritative or functionally differentiated role in agrarian Basotho communities. Even the authoritative composers (liroki, sing.:seroki) of royal praise poetry (lithoko) residing at court performed this function irregularly and made a living by other means. Of the lexemes commonly used to refer to specialized abilities in composition and

performance only a few others are of immediate relevance. These include mosue (pl.:basoue, from ho sua: "to make hides supple"), a teacher at boys' or girls' circumcision schools whose duties include instructing the initiates in sacred secret likoma and other songs, dances, and in the case of boys, the composition of their own praises. A more widely extended term is kheleke, "eloquent one," applied to any talented maker of musical texts in any genre, but suggesting extraordinary abilities in lyric/melodic/rhythmic extemporization.[1] In ordinary discourse, kheleke is most often associated with male migrant composer/performers of lengthy first person extemporaneous songs known as lifela tsa litsamaea-naha, "inveterate travellers songs" (see Coplan 1987a, 1987b, 1988).

Operating metaphorically, the title ngaka (pl.:linaka), "spirit diviner and herbal healer" is extended as a recognition of expertize in any domain of cultural knowledge; hence ngaka ea lipina "doctor of songs," for any renowned songsmith. Such expressions gloss the Basotho prescription, taught by basoue at initiation, that adults should use whatever special talents the ancestors may have given them for the benefit of the community. Further, a productive ideal of social harmony or agreement lies at the center of Basotho moral ideology. The ancestor cult which comprises the essence of Basotho pre-Christian religion sanctions this ideology, frequently through the offices of the ngaka, who ritually mediates relations between ancestors and their descendants and among living members of the community. Such mediation can of course, foster the disruption along with the reordering of social relations. Master lingaka are as much feared for their ability to confront and reveal witchcraft as they are needed to restore physical and moral composure to the sick and conflicted.

Praise poets enjoy a parallel license to criticize as well as eulogize their aristocratic subjects, while migrant likheleke disdain the need for any hierarchical or contextual legitimation in celebrating or satirizing chiefs or commoners, kith or kin, including themselves. A renowned singer of lifela (sing.:sefela) migrants' songs who is in demand among his juniors as a teacher of composition is known as a ngaka ea lifela. In bringing the causes of social disaffection to public attention through heightened modes of aesthetic discourse, the seroki turned kheleke shares in the ritual functions and authority of the ngaka, creating the opportunity for cognitive and social reassessment and reintegration through "illocutionary acts" both in and of performance. Bongaka, "traditional divination/healing," is a potentially fulltime occupation in Basotho society and thus one of the few alternatives to labor migrancy open to landless, unschooled rural Basotho. Though traditional healers are still very widely employed in both the medical and ritual exigencies of everyday life, they have largely lost their historical position as seers and councillors to the powerful. Bongaka is a form of institutionalzed liminality discredited by educated resident elites, and today shares in the categorical marginality of migrancy, though in Lesotho migrancy is a marginality that has overgrown the center. Likheleke and lingaka can also be compared as what Gramsci termed "organic intellectuals," purveying the knowledge underlying the historical continuity of Sesotho in respectively aesthetic or ritual performance and discourse. Like singers, traditional healers are classified not by their varied divinatory techniques but by personal reputation (Murray 1975:67). Both bokheleke, eloquence, and bongaka, healing, are repositories of Sesotho, and singer as traditional diviner/herbalist is one of the most popular metapoetic tropes by which a composer lays claim to authoritative knowledge. Beyond the spiritual powers of the ngaka, however, the singers exploit the historical status of aural poetry as a legitimate, contested medium for the expression of power relations in southern African chiefdoms (White 1982). The singers' reflective resonation of historical metaphors with personal experience is a flight of "moral imagination," because "To imagine another kind of world is always a judgement

about this one" (Beidelman 1986:204). "Eloquent ones," like diviners, have the capacity to articulate the social realities and contradictions that lie beneath the surface of institutional and community life, and so to help reestablish the moral basis of productive and satisfying social relations.

From the point of view of male migrant workers and their women, more than a few of whom are migrants themselves, the moral system attributed to history is in dire need of reestablishment, for current Basotho social reality is disoriented and disaffected indeed. First there is the alienation and contradiction of migrancy, a system in which the survival of a patriarchal household depends upon the forced absence of its male head. Second there is Lesotho's dependent position in South Africa's political economy, and the society's resultant loss of patterns of production and exchange based on reciprocity and cooperation. That migrants use Sesotho performance to create an integrated, positive self-concept in the face of displacement, fragmentation, and dehumanization should not surprise us. On the other hand, the uses of Sesotho suggest that the once entrenched "dualist" economic model (Wallmann 1969) now so widely criticized in studies of southern African labor migrancy (Murray 1981;Bardill and Cobbe 1985:28,42n.) is equally misleading when applied to the symbolic structure of the Basotho social universe.

Much writing based on this dualist view has depicted southern African migrants as "men of two worlds" (women migrants have been largely ignored); people who maintain a symbolistic discontinuity between the structure of social relations, patterns of interaction, and cultural norms encountered in South Africa, and those governing social participation in the home communities. Alverson (1978) and more recently John and Jean Comaroff (1987) have based their analysies of migrant consciousness in Botswana on this opposition. The Comaroffs have identified two Setswana verbs for the same apparent activity, "working," as representing this fundamental dichotomy. The first, go dira, refers to working as an autonomous, socially productive activity in the home community; while go bereka, derived, significantly, from Afrikaans werk, refers to working for whites: the proletarianized, unequal exchange of labor for wages on the farms and mines. The Basotho are ancient relatives of the Batswana and their languages were not recognizably distinct until the 19th century. Such a deliberately rigid, unreconcilable opposition would seem ideal for differentiating between Sesotho and Sekhooa, the culture of the whites, or mtheto, the unwritten code that governs life at the mines. Ideally, perhaps this is so. On closer ethnographic examination however, the discontinuity between Lesotho and makhooeng, the "whitemen's place" (the mines) appears as a putative representation, a fiction useful only in the defence of Sesotho and its attached situational entitlements. The term ho lira (for go dira) does not properly exist in Sesotho and is regarded as a South African synonym for ho etsa, "to make, do, create." The verb for working, ho sebetsa, can be used for any kind of work, in South Africa or Lesotho. Ho bereka, though less common, does have the connotation of "working for whites," but again is regarded as a South African loan word and is not categorically opposed to ho sebetsa.

There is evidence to show, moreover, that Basotho migrants no longer regard the environments of the mines and the home villages as two separate social fields. Labor migrancy is more firmly woven into the fabric of Basotho experience and more economically pervasive in Lesotho than in Botswana. The latter, with its Texas-sized territory (275,000 sq. mi.), thriving cattle and mineral production, and its backdoor to central Africa, is a place where significant numbers of rural household heads can "build up the homestead" by other means than labor migration, and thus the ideology of go dira and the opposition between it and go bereka can be maintained. This is not the case in Lesotho, where only six percent of

average disposable household income comes from agriculture despite the employment of ninety-two percent of the resident workforce in farming and animal husbandry. A far greater proportion, two-thirds of Lesotho's Gross Domestic Product, comes from the remittance of migrants' wages.

Sesotho, we might reemphasize, extends beyond the boundaries of Lesotho as a national state, and operates also among Basotho in the Free State, Transvaal, and Transkei. In another passage of the sefela quoted above, Makeka Lihojane, better known by his performance nom de voix "Ngoana Mokhalo," sings about a thokolosi (Ashton 1952:294-6), a witch's demon-familiar and poetic/ritual/medical symbol of social evil, sickness, and disruption. A ngaka can chase a thokolosi out of a village with powerful herbs and magic, but the traveller poet/healer must expell the demon, which physically resembles a monkey, by relentless pursuit over the countryside. Here, the chase brings Ngoana Mokhalo to his wife's natal village:

> ...At Pechela's in the mountains
> I arrived in the morning
> (There) I discovered my wife's parents bewitching.
> I found them down in the river, beating out seakhi,
> The pastor was naked,
> Their monkey (thokolosi) sat by,
> Pointing with a barbed spear in silence.
> I saw them file past, the witches,
> They filed across the river....

The thokolosi has taken refuge among the singer's in-laws, who are busy bewitching people, including our hero, while performing the seakhi dance. This seems peculiar, since the seakhi is a dance performed only by mineworkers in the dead of night in the minecompounds in South Africa. The focus of the seakhi is a competition in which the winning dancer is awarded the right to take a young newcomer, dressed as a girl for the occasion, as his homosexual "wife." Payments to black minecompound overseers (lintona: this office has recently been abolished) who sponsor the dances have been known to influence the outcome of seakhi. Why should a miner's rural in-laws perform it? Both witchcraft and homosexuality are considered inverted forms of social behavior. Miners insist that, with women available, homosexual liasons contracted out of necessity at the mines are never continued at home. Witchcraft, however, can be practiced by and upon anyone, even white people, anywhere. The associated images of demon-familiar and witchcraft here unify the social field, since jealous in-laws are quite capable of sending a thokolosi to bewitch, afflict, injure, or kill a mineworker when he is down in the shaft. Further, witches, like seakhi performers, dance naked. South Africa and Lesotho thus become a single social world, full of evils and dangers that the migrant performer must uncover and overcome at every turning in his endless road. As one kheleke exhorted his comrades:

> Koete ha habo monna ke hohle; u nke molamu u k'u itekile.
> Gentlemen, a man's home is everywhere; take up your stick
> and ramble (Mokitimi 1982:456).

In contrast to Alverson's (1978) suggestions about the Batswana, Basotho migrants' conformity to one code of conduct, mtheto, at the mines and to Sesotho at home does not imply any

reformulation of his identity as a Mosotho oa mankhonthe, a true Mosotho. "Mosotho" is a unfied concept that includes the willingness to face danger in the pursuit of family livelihood wherever the migrant finds himself.

Or herself: despite restrictions, seven percent of registered (and many more unregistered) migrants to South Africa are women. Thousands more have migrated from rural homes to seek employment in the capital, Maseru, and other border towns (Wilkinson 1985). Up until 1962, twenty-five percent of known Basotho migrants were women, but then South African law made female migration from Basutoland illegal. Among the reasons for this bitterly resented restriction was the century-old fame of Basotho females in South Africa as independent suppliers of wine (beer), women, and song to urban and migrant black workingmen (Bonner 1988). It was these barflies and canteen-keepers - single, deserted, deserting, or married - who developed the dance and song genre that forms the basis of contemporary Basotho national popular music.

The ramshackle illegal taverns called shebeens (Gaelic: "little shop," Coplan 1985:92-98) provided women not only with an independent albeit hard-won means of livelihood; they created a female-controlled arena for individuated performance.

Basotho women's rural choral songs, such as those for the famous mokhibo kneeling dance, provided little acknowledged scope for extended solo composition. We must be careful, though, to discriminate between normative and actual potentialities for self-expression in a culture where women's opportunities for social comment are protected by the useful fiction that there aren't any. Eventually the tragedy of women left in Lesotho or forced into migration themselves by absent and unsupportive husbands did find expression in village women's feast or party songs, such as the following recorded by Hugh Tracey in 1959:

> Aunt, stretch out the blanket
> There are two of us.
> Stretch out the blanket,
> I'll be coming; I'm going out to smoke [make love].
> When I leave here, going away,
> Montsala remain here and look after my children.
> Look after Mamotolo and Malerato and Toma.
> Toma, look after these children of mine
> Particularly Mamotolo and Malerato.
> It looks as if I'll be going away.
> I feel I'm going.
> I really feel I'll be crossing the [Caledon] river
> [into South Africa]
> (Music of Africa Series, AMA. TR-103 (B-3).

This potential migrant is perhaps luckier than many of her counterparts, for it appears she may be going to South Africa with her man, rather than in search of him or even to get away from him. The distorted social system that no longer provided social security in return for the continuing subordination of women made migration to South Africa an attractive, sometimes necessary alternative to exploitative local chiefs and in-laws. Local authorities attempted to deal with this problem by collaborating with South African attempts to prevent the flow of women across the Caledon river, but with little effect except to keep female migrants on the move, wherever they were. Women who migrated specifically to enter the liquor trade often

returned along with their migrant menfolk, and established the shebeen as a fixture of both town and country life in Lesotho itself. Such women became known as matekatse, a term universally translated in Lesotho as "prostitutes," derived from ho teka "to roam about helplessly," and ho tekatsa, "to abandon one's husband."

The immediate sources for women's shebeen songs appear not to have been established women's genres, but the relatively new lifela tsa litsamaea-naha songs of their men. Textual evidence and oral testimony suggest that early in the twentieth century, the shebeen setting provided women with the inspiration and compositional models of male lifela, along with acknowledged places to perform their own songs of moral assessment, self-justification, and affliction. Though they lack the cultural prestige and extended semi-narrative elaboration of the typically unaccompanied lifela, shorter solos closely resembling truncated lifela are an integral feature of dance songs performed to the barrel-house Sesotho rhythms of accordion and drum in shebeens. Though men also take their solo turns, often as a retort or appreciation for a female singer's barbs or praises, the recognized virtuosos of this style are women, who will not perform without instrumental accompaniment.

Lifela are most often egocentric, reflecting the male migrant's existential self-concept as a contemporary hero in the traditional Sesotho mould (Kunene 1971:4), an ordinary man confronting extraordinary dangers in an alien place, exiled from the home, family, and community he is (thanklessly) fighting to preserve. Like black American bluesmen they sing of love affairs and faithlessness not marriage, doubt and danger not certainty, wage labor not agriculture, trains and trails not home and family. Once again "Ngoana Mokhalo":

I am the soldier of 'Mamokhesuoe's village.
When I was leaving to go to the place of whites [mines],
I spoke to my heart and we finished.
And my soul we understood each other.
My eyes cried I was not content,
I felt sick from eating nothing...

...The train is a taker and a returner,
Ours, that of the young men,
It came running from Rouxville, the white-faced carriage... ...It galloped like a white-spotted hare,
Like a hare of the uplands.
The train entered Bloomfontein at night,
At five o'clock in the evening.
It has taken men who are workers;
Chaile and 'Makhoana, those who surveyed the west shaft,... ...When it reached Moselekatse [Johannesburg labor depot]
It reached and gave birth to people for Moshoeshoe,
[Moshoeshoe II, reigning monarch and by extension
Moshoeshoe I, dynastic founder, d. 1870]
It delivered of people in hundreds.
It's then I went off to the location [African township]:
Johannesburg, South Africa....

Women's songs proclaim a resolute, individualistic, and adventurous spirit imitative of male

itinerant heroism, and deliberately contrary to the stationary domestic commitment expected of adult women in Lesotho. Their flight from the normative is an enforced one, however, and the accompanying sense of displacement profound. Theirs is in an explicitly shared affliction, mourning the loss of kinship and marital security; friendship found, sundered, and betrayed; the anomic reality starkly outlined against the communal ideal.

Heee! the cruelty to my mother,
To my mother, an unfortunate woman, she cries daily,
Always my heart never forgets.
I am going away.
I am a person living in difficulties:
I live by cheating workers [taking advantage of migrants],
I am not working;
I am a wanderer, a divorced one;
Divorcer [philanderer], a little girl of Lesotho
Give me a ticket, gentlemen, a ticket and my stick
When I leave, I wander about –
I am going home, home to Lesotho.
When I leave, I move fast;
Chabane is a prostitute.
My father is looking for me,
My father or Teboho,
The man who begot me
They pass; my brother is coming.
Hele helele my sister Anna,
The misfortunes I am caught up in! Why am I going?
I am a polygamist [I have many men]...
...These women, they speak about me girl,
About me at the corners of houses.
I look at them; they look away, yonder.
He-e you, my girl child, my father or Nthako,
I abandon my sisters [fellow barmaids];
Here they are at Hlotse camp [town], girls,
In whose trust do I leave them?
I have entrusted them to God eee! [they have no husbands]
I have left, pray for me,
Yes why? Because I am a prostitute.
I know where I live, girls:
They ask where I stay?
At Hlotse, the camp [town],
Helele, helelele, helehelele, helehelele
Father or Molefi helele,
I can leave my sister [friend], Tholinyana
My heart is fighting against my thoughts,
Me, a little girl of Masupha's (district).

Nthabiseng Nthako, the composer/performer of this passage, was twenty-two years old, an

unmarried barmaid afraid that the miner who paid the rent on her tiny ramshakle bedroom might forsake her, but confident of attracting a replacement when he did so. The male dimension of her stance is exemplified by the rhetorical request: "Give me a ticket, gentlemen, a ticket and my stick," referring to the train ticket and heavy wooden fighting stick (molamu) that symbolize the intrepidity of the male migrant. Her friend and fellow shebeen singer Thakane Mahlasi (called Tholinyana in the passage above) performed the following admonition to "little boys" (reluctant migrants), reminding them of their responsibilities, and that women's struggles are equivalent to their own:

He ee oele oelele oele!
Dying at one's home, little boy,
Yes, one dying in his home
Is no meat for his relatives:
A man's home is everywhere.
Helo child of Mathopela;
A man is never overwhelmed by troubles:
Even women do overcome them,
Oh, little girl of (the) Kholokoe (clan)....

Their right to sing out was ensured by the intoxicated (literally) freedom of the "immoral" and illicit but indispensible shebeen, a setting whose social centrality is symbolized by the white or yellow flags (phephesela) that fly on poles outside these libara (Eng.:"bar") in every Lesotho community. Indeed, unlike the family homestead, the pastures and cropfields, or the distant workplace, which tend to segregate the sexes and limit social intercourse between them, the shebeen provides an environment for cross-gender communication, performance, and sociability; a change in relationships fostered by processes of proletarianization all over the world. Like male lifela.... performers, the chanteuses can be called "eloquent ones," but their songs have no commonly accepted generic label. The most convenient way to refer to the song texts themselves is to say seoeleoelele, an ideophone representing the act of singing that serves as the universal introduction to shebeen songs in performance. It may be that, within the politics of performance in Lesotho, a women's genre whose texts are often fiercely critical of the behavior of men and governments is being denied a public identity:

I wish my voice would ring like a bell,
To let the miners know that I live in hardships
here in Lesotho.
I deeply fear the government in power!...
...Go away from here,
You with porridge between your teeth.
Go away from here,
You with your stinking body,
Return to your cattle posts!...
...Here in Hlotse town in bed I outstretch myself,
But I do pay dearly for the rent....
(Thakane "Tholi" Mahlasi, from the film, Songs of the Adventurers, Costant Springs Productions 1986)

Outside the shebeen, however, Basotho women characteristically express explicit disapproval in the presence of authority by affecting a stony, sullen silence that speaks more powerfully (and more safely) than angry words. Women have perhaps sought to preserve this new medium for expressing their social grievances and by collaborating in its anonymity. This genre that dare not speak its name achieves its purposes by travelling incognito – pointed commentary, emotional community, high art and low comedy – acceptable only if kept categorically outside the secret precincts of Sesotho. In this context, the contradiction of women usurping the expressive privileges of men is resolved not only by the ambiguous, "independent" social position of shebeen women, but also by the Sesotho metonymical principle whereby individuals performing unaccustomed roles can be reclassified with the category of persons who ordinarily perform them. Thus a singer may urge a prospective lover to come and "play the husband," or, urged on by shouts of "Hela, ntate! ("Hey now father/sir!") belt out the following:

> ...What do you say, you men of Lesotho?
> When I leave I clear out,
> I am the donkey stallion, girl!
> The donkey stallion, neck-bridle breaker:
> When I leave I travel....
> (Nthabiseng Nthako)

Pursuing the male metaphor from sung rhetoric into dance, it is only in shebeens, singing and moving to the music of accordion and drum, that I have seen women snatch up and wave (quite aggressively) the massive and beautifully decorated melamu fighting sticks carried by the men.

The provision of the shebeen or sepoto (Eng.:"spot") as a space for non-normative behavior, self-expression, and gender crossing on the part of women helps to reduce the stress caused by the need to maintain the more general operation of social norms, molao ("the law"), as useful fictions. This principle allows for the reproduction of social structure as both a moral and historical
template for cultural identity and integrative behavior, while reducing the socially disruptive consequences of what people actually wish or have to do. The Basotho have a proverb (maele): Leshano le pholosang le molemo, "The lie that rescues is good," widely cited to sanction the white lies and inadmissions that smooth the surface of social interaction or prevent public injury to the feelings or pride of people "caught out." It is also much quoted by non-Basotho as proof that unapologetic prevarication is a normative quality of Basotho social character. The deeper meaning of this proverb, however, is that neither competing personal interests and loyalties, nor intractible social and material realities, nor even plain human frailty ought to be allowed to fracture the general acceptance of and attempts to approximate stabalizing structural ideals. Cynicism, an attitude bespeaking a lack of faith in social values in both motivation and conduct, is therefore an inappropriate alternative to social naivete.

Moreover, their social practice reveals that Basotho are aware of and exploit the transformational potential embedded in structural contradictions. For example, the ideology of "cousin marriage" in this partilineal society gives preference to unions with the mother's brother's daughter, based on values of cooperation and equality among affines. In practice, however, the preference is for marriage with a father's brother's daughter, which infuses these affinal behavioral norms and expectations into the hierarchical and competitive relations that

inevitably undermine the solidarity expected among agnates. As Kuper explains (1975:74):

> This is not stressed in the ideology, and it does not appear in the ideal order of close-kin marriages, since a preference for this sort of marriage [FBD] implies that relationships with close agnates are fraught with difficulty and need to be translated into something else. The Sotho prefer to see their endemic fraternal conflicts as occasional and lamentable deviations from the ideal amity.

The concept of molao, the law, is further used to bring normative and actual patterns of behavior into greater harmony or agreement (tumelano). Among the most striking examples is bonyatsi, a non-normative but virtually institutionalized form of adultery in which married men or women contract extended extramarital relationships in the frequent and lengthy absense of a spouse (Spiegel 1990a). Bonyatsi for a man is condoned on the basis of the once-normative institution of polygyny, forbidden by the Christian denominations to which the vast majority of Basotho nominally belong. Bonyatsi among women is probably no less common, but may be overlooked rather than condoned since Basotho seek to prevent human weakness, however understandable or prevalent, from threatening the overall maintenance of social harmony and customary law. Women point to accepted notions of the universal human need for emotional and sexual satisfaction, and to beliefs about the harmful physiological and mental effects ("stagnant blood") of celibacy in justifying bonyatsi for themselves. There are however, clear socioeconomic motivations for female bonyatsi, since the cattle paid as bridewealth for a woman by her husband go to her father and other consanguineal relatives, while the secret but mandatory gifts from a nyatsi ("lover") are hers alone, free even from the restrictions that a husband may place on the disposition of other family income (Spiegel 1990a:5-6).

Among the likoma (sing.:koma) secret lore taught to girls during the bale rites of initiation are instructions in how to conceal adultery from their future husbands and, in the event her transgressions are discovered but tolerated by an understanding or equally guilty spouse, how to keep her affairs from causing him intolerable public embarrassment. It is for such reasons, and not only because of their deep historical and cultural embeddedness and authority, that the Basotho say koma ke nnete, "a koma is truth" (Guma 1967:117). For most Basotho, marriage is an indispensible social and economic partnership, preserving the male migrant's investment and entitlements in his home community and providing distributive and reproductive security for women and children, more than an emotional and sexual union. Hence bonyatsi is virtually never discussed in public (why spoil things?) and the lie that rescues social structure is a higher truth than the truth that fosters stress and discord. Initiates are strictly enjoined from singing Likoma outside the bushlodge (mophato). To tell these sacred secrets to non-initiates or to mention their specific content in public is sanctioned by beating and inspires the proverb ho bolella koma hae, "to tell a koma at home," which condemns inappropriate or socially hurtful revelations in everyday contexts. As the koma admonishes:

> The first koma,
> It is not sung at home,
> It is sung in the wilderness....(Guma 1967:125, my revision)

The parties, music, and dancing that accompany shebeen singing go beyond bonyatsi into botekatse ("prostitution"), a publicly recognized (and rather less concealable) arena for

"deviance" in which the very harshness and social fragmentation of migrant life becomes a basis for commiseration, commensality, and collective self-expression. The goings on are grouped under the terms famo, from ho re famo, "to throw up one's skirts," or focho, "wild, bawdy, or intoxicated dancing," from fecha, the pelvic movements of a woman during sexual intercourse. In the Basotho areas of South African towns, the original instrument for famo dancing was the pedal organ (okono), which might even be loaded into a horsecart or taxi and moved when occasion demanded. In the smaller depots and country junctions, the portable German concertina (korosetina), adopted from Afrikaner farmers, was the ubiquitous accompaniment. The term famo apparently originated as a term for the bawdy dance parties organized by the infamous Basotho "russian" gangsters around Johannesburg. Divided into regional factions of "Matsieng" from southern Lesotho, and "Ha-Molapo," from northern Lesotho, these gangs fought each other, the police, citified criminal predators called tsotsis (Eng.:"zoot suit"), and members of other ethnic groups in pitched battles in the ghetto streets (Motlatsi and Guy, 1983). The name "russians" (marashea) apparently began in the early Cold War days of the late 1940s as an antonym to that of their major tsotsi foes, Johannesburg's feared "Americans" gang, and in identification with the Soviet Union, "the only nation feared by the whiteman in South Africa," as one retired russian explained. "Russianism" (borashea) was a sort of urban proletarian recrudescense of the tradition of fierce stickfighting between young herdboys of neighboring rural villages, and of the historical antagonism between the royalitsts of south Lesotho and the restive collateral nobility of north Lesotho, their activity a blend of vigilantism, social banditry, and blood sport.

The night before a pre-arranged battle, faction members would gather for a famo party at their favorite shebeen, where their women, matekatse, would brew, cook, sing and dance for them in encouragement. The word famo refers to the rhythmic artfullness with which a woman would fecha her hips backward and throw up her skirt to reveal her naked derriere in a single fetching movement. At dawn the men would take up their formation outside the bar, performing a male traditional mohobelo dance and song. One such anthem of the Matsieng faction in Johannesburg praised the role of women in supporting the embattled men:

> My boy [lover] when I get out of here, I will depart,
> Leave carrying you on my back [like a baby],
> Boy, when I get out of here, I will depart,
> Fearful for you of the thief-men [tsotsis and rival russians].

It should be noted than rather than the mokorotlo, the dance songs of war in which each soldier prepared himself to meet death (not
victory) through individualized, self-revealing, extemporaneous movements, the russians chose mohobelo, the highly stylized and synchronized dance of male fellowship, unity of purpose, and team display – a dance of social agreement – as entertainment in the bar and as preparation for the fray. Possibly of equal importance, however, is the sense of national unity symbolized by mokorotlo, "a song by which Basotho distinguish/differentiate themselves from other peoples" (Adams 1974:172-3). Mohobelo, on the other hand, is performed in two distinct southern and northern Lesotho regional styles, "Leribe" and "Mohale," which originate in the civil conflicts between Moshoeshoe's sons in the 1890s, and which correspond to and express the opposition between Matsieng and Ha-Molapo russians (Adams 1974:170). Along with courage, loyalty is the preeminent value of borashea, guarenteed by the swearing of secret oaths by both male and female faction members.

As the enemy approached, a whistle was blown, and a brutal clash would commence, resulting on occasion in numerous deaths. A great many of the most stirring women's shebeen songs focus on the russians and provide harrowing and piteous evocations of famous faction fights. Perhaps the most renowned of all the shebeen singers is 'Malitaba, now retired in Lesotho, who attended her husband, a Matsieng faction leader, at numerous battles in the Johannesburg area during the 1950s and '60s. Asked what role she played during the actual fighting she replied, "Why, to carry on singing, to give them courage to win the fight!" Russians themselves insist that the gangs' operations were originally defensive, and have always been confined to the lawless and uncivilized South African environment, outside Lesotho. Perhaps, but today in tough Lesotho border towns like Hlotse, a major migrant labor recruitment center, it's easy to pick out the russians in any backstreet shebeen. Thus have the organizing values and historical oppositions of Sesotho, under a foreign name, been extended by embattled Basotho men to "humanize" (enculturate) an uncivilized environment. Identification with the russians and the marginal position to which they are both socially consigned leads female singers to express admiration for these stout-hearted men and to the appropriation of images of battle to express women's existential struggles:

Hae oele oele! You, child of 'MaKhalemang [a male russian,
friend and fellow bar singer],
Blow the whistle so the russians may fight oe!
When it's fought it is fearsome,
When it's fought it is fearsome:
I can fling off my blankets [in anguish, aggression,
sympathy, excitement, desire?],
He! I, the child 'Ma'tsepe oe!
The loafers' [russians] whistle blower, Khalemang,
Whistler of loafers, Khalemang, you, man of Mokotane's,
Makotane's at Mantsonyane,
Lead them into the way (of battle); they know it (well).
Hee! (so) I seize the black (heavy) fighting stick;
I'm fighting,
I cannot be stopped; I am fighting.
(Alinah Tsekoa, "Malitsepe")

Nevertheless a favorite verse of many women singers is overtly critical of the russian likoata ("uncultured ruffians")
who frequent the shebeens. In the version sung by "Malitsepe" (Mother of "Springboks," a russian gang):

What kind of people are you russians?
Each time you meet one another, you fight.
After greeting one another, you fight.
Hello! You, my little young fellow,
My sweet young Bonang....

Interestingly, male shebeen singers and lifela.... performers rarely give borashea more than a mention, and almost never sing about russian battles, particularly if they themselves are

russians. The women, who would never actually join such a fight, sing about them in detail, praising the valorous and handsome, mourning the fallen, projecting themselves into the fray. So these denizens of the labor depots on the Lesotho/South Africa border identify with each other. Just as the term for barmaids derives from the verb "to wander about," male migrant performers commonly refer to themselves as lipapatlele, "vagabonds," likhutsana, "orphans," likeleme (Afrikaans: "skelm"), "rogues," melotsana, "deceivers," likempolara, "gamblers," makholoa, "absconders," and most professionally as litsamaea-naha le liparola-thota, "inveterate travellers of the wilderness." In wildness is their salvation, and moreover, the salvation of Sesotho (see Taussig 1987:209-220). I do not use the term "salvation" randomly. As one older woman singer explained:

> ...At that time I was associated with people whose manners were rough, wild. When I was deeply depressed and worried, in order to express myself and feel contented, like a Christian would open a page in the bible, with me I went to the shebeen to sing these things. I had gone (to town) to visit my husband and I found him but we separated. I suffered alot because of that. So I had to go to these places and get some joy out of life and unburden myself (Coplan 1985:101).

The Professionals: Studio Shebeen Singers and Sesotho

Local recording companies had been on the lookout for material for the growing African market since the 1920s. The Basotho concertina tradition was already highly developed, and in the 1940s a number of recordings of solo male singer/players appeared that featured astonishing virtuoso performances on that small instrument ("Tshetla" and "Kroonstad," T. Makala. Gallotone GB1604.Y591). Complex melodic runs that imitated the vocalic qualities of sung poetry were not suitable for dancing however, and thus lacked an important selling point. The rhythmic three-chord instrumental accompaniment made women's shebeen singing a good sales prospect, and by the 1950s migrants could buy seoeleoelele recordings spiced up with tell-it-like-it-is female vocals (Famo Ngoanana, Mamapetle Makara koa Famong. Gallotone GB2012). In 1960, the great Malitaba was "discovered" singing in her Soweto shebeen by a talent scout and made several recordings which brought her fame throughout Lesotho and Sesotho-speaking South Africa. Her texts concentrate on the terrors and excitements of russian warfare, and her desire to return to Lesotho:

> I always tell them I was not born so [in hardship]
> but compound my mistakes, my child Lenka [the
> accordionist].
> When she's there, 'Malitaba of Mphoso, you won't see
> hardships, things just go smoothly.
> I am not afraid of a giant, even one full of cunning.
> Knives they can clean miss me,
> Sticks swing over my head,
> Cracking (together) over my head, man!
> the fighting sticks of men.
> Who can be asked bad news [whether she is dead]?
> They can be asked of Sanaha [her husband], the man jo!
> the master of love.

I always tell them oe! The person from Chele's, well!
I won't stay in Naledi [Soweto],
Jo! A person of (Chief) Shale's, well oe!
To your home [Lesotho] (you devil)!
I won't stay in Naledi, Tlali, or Moletsane, my child
[all townships in Soweto]
I say, among cannibals [russians] yonder,
in Mapetla or Senaoana [in Soweto],
When the State of Emergency[2] was fought.
It's finished I'm leaving, time up I am going,
Time up I am going [to Lesotho]....

It was also during the early '60s that the piano accordion (koriana) appeared in South African music stores and was adopted by Basotho instrumentalists in the mining compounds and shebeens in preference to the pedal organ. Combining the portability of the concertina with the musical range and full-textured volume of the organ, the piano accordion enabled its most serious exponents to make live performance something like a full-time profession. Shebeen owners could afford to buy accordions and supply them to musicians playing in various locations. The musicians could sling the instrument over their backs and tour by bus and foot from the black townships of urban South Africa to the remotest village shebeens in Lesotho. Others made longterm agreements modelled on mineworking contracts with female "shebeen queens" (bo-mamosali) in the border towns to stay and play daily for the patrons. Although many Basotho women found it easy enough to evade the anti-migration statutes or establish legal South African residency by some means, the repatriation of thousands of them under the new regulations in 1963 brought a great many fine female singers back to the shebeens of Maseru, Lesotho's growing capital, and other smaller communities throughout the country. Ensembles were completed by the addition of a drum (moropa) constructed of a twenty-litre tar can topped with a piece of tire inner-tubing, above which was fastened a row of bottlecaps or metal jangles (manyenenyene) to provide a jingling beat to alternate with the thump on stretched rubber of drumsticks made from slices of tire.

Famo and shebeen music was now everywhere that working-class Basotho gathered for drink and entertainment, with most of the
singing provided by the brewers and customers themselves. What was needed to turn this neighborhood barrelhouse entertainment into a Basotho national music was the emergence of major recording personalities among composer/singers and accordionists. Among the first and most enduring of these professional recording ensembles was Tau ea Matskeha ("Lion of Matsekha," a district in northern Lesotho). Both the accordionist, Forere Motloheloa, and the vocalist/composer Apollo Ntabanyane, had acquired their performing skills and experience at the mines, where they entertained their fellow workers in their spare time, and played in shebeens for extra cash. Notably, now that enhanced financial rewards were possible, male likheleke were joining women in shebeen singing. The group's early albums, such as Ha-Peete Kea Falla ("Peete's Place I'm Quitting" EMI) were phenomenally successful, and their name became synonymous among many listeners with the form itself, so that this type of music was often called "Tau ea Matsekha." By the early 1970s Ntabanyane, a fine, athletically comic stage dancer as well as vocalist/composer, decided he could do better for himself by leading his own group. In 1974 he had himself proclaimed "King of Famo Music" at a major concert at Maseru's Airport Hotel, an occasion attended by Her Majesty 'MaMohato herself,

the wife of Lesotho's King Moshoeshoe II.

Since then a number of well-known recording groups have emerged, including David Motaung's Tau ea Linare and the first from southern Lesotho, Mahosana Akaphamong. Only a very few can afford to give up non-musical jobs to go on concert tours, and most must be satisfied with revenues from occasional recording sessions and royalties. The shebeens however, provide an actual living for a significant number of itinerant accordion players. Good female singers are much respected and sought after, and shebeen owners in Maseru stage paid competitions between the top composer/singers among the matekatse. Of the women, the long-time and current champion is indisputably Puseletso Seema, who in forty-some years has suffered all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and every shock a Mosotho migrant woman's flesh is heir to.

Puseletso was born in Seteketekeng ("place of [drunken] staggering"), a fierce, shebeen-strewn section in Johannesburg's old Western Areas. In the early 1960s she was removed with her mother to the Soweto township of Orlando East, where they both presently reside. At twelve she was sent to stay with her grandmother in rural northern Lesotho, and put to a boy's tough task of herding cattle. The village proved no safer for the maturing girl than the city, and within a year she was kidnapped into marraige (chobeliso) and gave birth to her first child. Escape from her abusive in-laws did not prevent her husband from tracking her down and impregnating her once again, so at age fifteen she was back in Soweto with two infants to care for. Working in her mother's shebeen, she developed her talents at composing and singing, and soon set off on a career as itinerant as any male migrant, brewing and singing in shantytowns throughout the Free State and Transvaal. The object of rivalry among "russian" commanders, she contracted lengthy liasons with three of them, and attended numerous russian faction fights around Johannesburg. After the death of her last man in 1976, she began her professional recording career. In the mid-1980s she mysteriously suffered a loss of voice for an extended period. The diviner diagnosed "spirit sickness" and prescribed initiation as a traditional diviner and healer. During her training her voice returned, and she is now a medical as well as musical practitioner.

So has she achieved a summa of proletarian Basotho cultural knowledge, combining the three professions of migrant shebeen queen, kheleke, and ngaka. Her shield has been that powerful voice that sends seoeleoelele! chills down her listeners' spines, and led russian commanders to kidnap her just to sing for their side in famo dance-song competitions. The success of her recordings, backed by the superb accordionist Maele Phuthiang and studio singers, guitarists, and drummers, have enabled her to retire to stable single motherhood in Soweto. The studio process has affected her performances, forcing her to shorten solos to fit arrangements for popular singles. Perhaps as a result, each of her songs on record focus on a different aspect of her experience, rather than concatenating experiences into a mutual resonance as is usually the case with extended shebeen texts. This song from an album she made in 1981 with Tau ea Linare, He O Oe Oe! (Globe Style ORB003), concerns a trip from Soweto home to Lesotho:

Hae! ha lele! lelele! lelele! ee! ho eoho ee!
Ho eoho! Men of Leribe, come so we depart, 'Molo ee!
So we tramp in silence going to Maputsoe at Ntate Sekekete's! Hey! towards the "school" at Maputsoe,
Where we first take out (our) passports,
at the home of my child Lerato.

I remember the infant child,
Khele! My child Lerato, 'Malerato ee!
'Me'Malerato you Motaung's wife, draw me water
to slake my thirst oe!
I say Helele! Manchild oe!
I am not pleased I'm (so) angry I just pass by!
I, the sister of 'Maboy,
Hee! My mother and father, brothers and sisters,
are still crying oe!
Hee! My mother you cry looking into the kraal;
My father you cry looking deep inside the house.
My friend, manchild, I have no dishes, I have no cattle ee! No! No cattle, but I
am mad about sour milk,
I the little last born girl.
Hee! I remember the woman who brought me up girls ee!,
'Me'Mathabo of Nqabe's,
When I go to her home girls, which way should I take ee!
I leave Maputsoe still feeling angry,
I reach Hlotse [Leribe],
Even here at Hlotse I am still impatient oe!
As I head towards Khanyane I saw my fields of Likhakeng,
The low-lying fields of my home ee!
Hey! I saw the beautiful mountain of Litaung,
my friend the manchild,
That's when I first started to laugh oe!

Here, Puseletso calls to her men friends, "homeboys" from Hlotse town, capital of Leribe District, to accompany her to Lesotho, even if it means a long and (uncharacteristic for Basotho travellers) sullen march. She crosses the border at Maputsoe, a rough boom town, and passes the notorious Sekekete Hotel, a "school" of drinking and prostitution where migrants fresh from the mines find beer and willing but often predatory female companionship. She meets 'MaLerato, wife of David Motaung, (whose group is backing her on this recording) and asks her to bring some water before she gets angry, possibly indicating strained personal relations. Apropos of that, she recalls her own forced elopement by a man who never paid any bridewealth for her. So her mother cries, seeing the kraal empty of cattle; her father cries, seeing a house empty of possessions. Turning from the subject of her poverty and misfortune, she recalls her dear grandmother with whom she lived in the Lesotho village of Mohobong. So long has she been away she has to ask the way there. A car offers to take her, but she is irritable and suspicious until at last she spies the farmlands and mountains of her home. So strong is the identification of this lekholoa (one who has disappeared into South Africa) with her original family home that she feels only joy, forgetting the poverty, forced marriage, and mistreatment that drove her away. Puseletso's success has evoked some jealousy and gentle satire among Lesotho's shebeen singers, including Hlotse's Thakane Mahlasi:

We met at the crossroads,
We didn't recognize one another, jo, my darling girl!
Puseletso, little girl of Seema:

Her short stature is hers by nature;
Her light complexion is self-made [with skin-lighteners],
Oh girl!....

Popular Song and Sesotho: Mutual Infusions, Emergent Tradition

To return to the theme of Sesotho, nothing is more central to the ideology of Basotho culture as a fixed tradition than lebollo, the circumcision schools that initiate boys and girls into adulthood. Lebollo was once an institution whose variant procedures and geographical focus served to differentiate politically independent communities and clans. Boys initiated in the company of the son of a sponsoring district chief were bound to him in political and military service. Lesotho's founder, King Moshoeshoe I, attempted to gain control of the educational and military systems by transforming initiation into a fount of national unity; sending his sons to be initiated with those of his vassals, where they would become comrades-in-arms treated with the same local chief's medicine horn (Guma 1965:243). Although only a small proportion of Basotho children presently undergo these lengthy secluded rites, attendance seems to have been increasing since independence in 1966, and lebollo remains in any case one of the most powerful symbolic complexes of Sesotho. Certain ceremonies of the initiation take place in public, but most are guarded with the most extreme secrecy. Such secrecy is embodied and symbolized in the sacred, esoteric likoma songs:

The corral of the ancestors
Has no door:
It is simply round.
Call traditional healers
To come and circle [doctor] it.
While they circled it,
Having circled (it) once,
Inside it
There arose a foal
Of the hidden head...
...It (foal) turned itself into a mountain
A mountain of settlement,
Of the settlement of villages,
Those many villages
That belong to our uncles,
They do not belong to our forefathers.[3]
(Guma 1967:124, revised by Coplan)

Other important types of performance taught at male lebollo include mangae (sing.:lengae) songs, which provide a choral accompaniment to the recitation of self-composed initiates' praises, lithoko tsa makoloane, at graduation. Nowadays virtually everything associated with lebollo is regarded as secret, and the identification of these ceremonies as the essence of Sesotho has intensified to the point where in the minds of many, Sesotho itself is all likoma, knowledge both to be kept from outsiders and free of outside influences. But not so to the migrants, whose self-image as rural yeomen and keepers of the true cultural knowledge of Sesotho is tempered by their lack of benefit from or investment in the present

boundaries and existence Lesotho as a political state. Thus the realities of migrant labor and the influence of South Africa affects performance in lebollo itself, through the words and music of lifela and seoeleoelele. Interestingly, Guma (1967:116–7) reports that his informants regarded lifela as another name for likoma, and offered that as the reason that the Christians had taken the term lifela to indicate sacred hymns, as in the famous hymnal, Lifela Tsa Sione (1843), "The Hymns of Zion." While my own informants denied this association, citing secrecy as the distinctive characteristic of initiation likoma, it is thought provoking to consider a possible association between the latter and the revelatory, rudely open "truths" (linnete) of the lifela songs of the profane migrant workers.

The mangae songs composed at lebollo today reveal the influence of South Arican popular culture. The following lengae was recorded at an initiation graduation at the village of Sephokong, Mafeteng District in March 1989, and was performed in two choral parts by younger and older initiates, respectively. Part one is the refrain of a currently popular song by recording star Apollo Ntabanyane:

> Hey! Hey do you see him, that hardened criminal?:
> "Somoria napau, napau napau" (twice).

The second line is not Sesotho, but replicates the slang street gangsters use so they cannot be overheard by others. The original lines come from from one of the "cops and robbers" dramas frequently broadcast over Radio Sesotho, the South African government service from Johannesburg. Part two of the song, or the "response" continues:

> Na mabele a butsuoe? Has the sorghum ripened?
> A bolilana se ka maeba. It is distasteful to the rock doves,
> Selemo se lekana le hlabula, Spring is followed by summer,
> Loetse e lekana le Mphalane. September is followed by October. Le Mafeteng ka fetella, And Mafeteng compounds its vices, Le ha Mojela ba ntjella, And at (Chief) Mojela's they live off others' harvest,
> Le Ntate Molimo oa khotso And Father, God of peace,
> Le rona likhutsana rapeleha, And we, orphans, are moved to prayer,
> Le rona litsamaea-naha, And we, inveterate travellers,
> Le manyeloi a matsoho. And angels of hands (bless us)

I have included the Sesotho text here so that readers of this clever, sardonic lengae may note the typical homophonic word play on Mafeteng/fetella and Mojela/ntjella. The answer to the opening query is that it must be May, for this is the month when the sorghum grains are hard and ripe enough so that birds cannot eat them, thus the Sesotho name for May, Motsehanong, "Laughing-at-birds." As one season or month follows another, the wrongs committed by Mafeteng people mount up, the people of Chief Mojela (to the south Mafeteng town and the area where the song was recorded) still live off the labors of others, in particular the "orphans" and our ubiquitious sefela-singing "travellers," who must go to the mines and look only to God for assistance.

Among the most interesting male singer/composers today is David Sello Motaung, leader of Tau ea Linare. In 1986 Motaung, at the age of thirty eight, decided for the first time to

attend lebollo and become an initiate. The reasons for this, he stated, were to immerse himself in Sesotho and to learn more deeply the variety of performance genres taught at the circumcision lodge. This would provide him with skills, techniques, and inspiration for compostion, and enable him to relate the latter more directly to his own strong feelings of identity as a Mosotho. On his latest album, Litaba Motaung (CCP L4 RAIN (EO) 4062294, 1988), there are two songs which Motaung says directly resulted from his experience at lebollo. On one, Makhooa, "Whites," the chorus is performed by four male singers in the style of a lengae initiation song, though backed by the usual accordion, drum, and bass. The solo takes the place of an initiate's praises. The subject matter might seem rather surprizing:

chorus:

Whites, whites, hey! whites,
Hey, jo! Whites are of no use: (twice)
They don't appreciate a man who knows his work,
Whites are of no use. (twice)
Hela! Whites, whites, whites,
Hey! Those are whites, they have no use. (twice)
Pretoria is the final court, hey!
Those are whites, they have no use. (several repeats)

solo:

Pretoria is the final court, (twice)
You, man, Seshoba,
Hee! You my child, drive we are leaving,
So we go to to the place of Europeanism (the mines),
Hey you ee!
Hee! We should take our tax receipts,
President Brand, President Steyn (mines); mine
compounds are the same,
The child who slips away to join (the mines) does
not complete (the contract),
Se jo'na! (alas) Hardships!
Many men, we fear moqhasheoa [heat-tolerance test],
Jo! Manchild across (the river) in Johannesburg (the mines),
Hae oele! oelele! oelele! oelelele, man!
[after the opening formula of female shebeen songs]
Pretoria, the far away lands,
Jo! My child, Jo! My child bo!

This blend of initiation song, praises and seoeleoelele appears to mix categories and put the meaning of Sesotho in question. But it is clear that the post-initiation experience of migration to the hostile world of the mines, where indolent white mine team captains lord it over real workers (Basotho), backed up by the distant but inescapable authority of Pretoria, has crept into Sesotho.

Conclusion

"We use our mouth to crack palm-kernels on the surface of the road" - "Song of Prostitution in Lagos," Irewolede Denge 1937
(HMV, J.Z. 3/OAB.5.)

A good part of anthropology's particular value as a discipline, deriving from the methodological centrality of fieldwork, is the study of social groupings and their "whole life process" from the inside out, the ground up (Marcus and Fischer 1984:143). To those who see the controlling hand of political or economic colonization in every African social and cultural form (cf. Ranger 1984; Wolpe 1972) anthropologists have demonstrated that Africans are agents in the making of their own history, using cultural resources to give meaning to life as a strategy for survival. Jean Comaroff (1985:197-198), to cite a notable example, argues that syncretic reinterpretations of historical and experiential metaphors as well as micro-level continuities in cultural practices can be explained essentially as forms of resistance to incorporation in a capitalist political economy (Spiegel 1990b:8).

But as Christopher Waterman (1990) demonstrates in his recent study of Nigerian Yoruba popular juju music, cultural process is ideologically charged through productive mediation by social actors with particular values and experiences of power. So both continuity and syncretism can as easily mask empirical structural relations through the upholding of what Raymond Williams would call the "selective tradition," hegemonic social understandings, as they can serve subversively the interests of the oppressed (Waterman 1990:9). Performative signification encodes the social relations and contradictions of power as they arise in a particular history. These relations shape communicative interactions, just as their character is reflected in the constitution of symbols and meanings (Ulin 1984:118,123).

In black African cultures, aural performance replicates and reinforces principles of social order (Waterman 1990:219-220), which serve to ground its inherent potential for social critique. Africans explicitly regard performance as a context for metacommentary, and the interpenetration of politics and art appears to them as both normative and demonstrable. Performance genres in black Africa are treated as neither independent of social and material forces nor epiphenominal to them, but rather as thoroughly integrated modes of social action in political contexts. Realized through creative structures that legitimate its content, auriture both records and shapes the operation of social forces (Finnegan 1970:142). Its analysis depends upon an understanding of the association of expressive forms with the periods and structures of society that gave rise to them (White 1982:10).

As I hope the texts herein interpreted suggest, the study of popular performance is one significant way to address the problem of "how to represent the embedding of richly described local cultural worlds in larger impersonal systems of political economy" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:77). In contemporary Nigeria, juju music and its public performance mediate the disjunction between conceptions of pre-colonial polity and nation state, and help to maintain the post-colonial invention of a unitary, pan-Yoruba identity (Waterman 1990:147). This identity in turn serves to extend and reinforce the historically rooted moral economy of hierarchical but reciprocal patron-client relations in the face of ethnically unmarked processes of class formation. The juju metaphor, as Waterman puts it, "may help to transform the world by sustaining the illusion that it remains, in some deep and essential sense, the same" (Waterman 1990:227-228).

Among Basotho shebeen singers and their listeners, in contrast, there is no confidence whatever that the Basotho economic or political elite have any commitment to practicing or upholding precolonial values of hierarchical reciprocity or communal social exchange. Hence

the assonontal parallelism 'khooana tsoana ("little black whitemen") as a working class term for the Basotho bourgeoisie is contemptuous rather than critical, suggesting a self-defeating abandonment of Sesotho while still falling short of European status. The army, who presently rule Lesotho, fare even worse. Although the rank and file and many of the officers come from humble backgrounds, their exercise of power is more repressive than that of the most autocratic pre-colonial chief. "When you ask the soldiers the reason for something," despaired an elderly wisehead, "they show you a gun." The contingent exception to these negative views about resident elites is that towards the traditional land-controlling aristocracy, chiefs who are weighed in the scales of the hierarchically reciprocal social values their hereditary offices embody. These offices comprise a political geography and a source of identity for aural composers, but as individuals chiefs are either disparaged or hailed to the extent that they are seen to violate or uphold the social morality of leadership in Sesotho. With formal and mass technological modes of communication closed to the migrants, urban workers, and resident "peasantariat," communal and popular song becomes a vital and significant medium for creatively reflecting on their experience and inserting it into public political discourse (Waterman 1990:10,88).

Like the composers of Yoruba juju, Basotho migrant singers employ cultural metaphors by turns profound and comic to cross social boundaries and integrate opposing social domains. Both share a double identity as traditional bards and contemporary existential heroes, using their moral and creative cultural imagination to make one world of many in time and space. Their performances relate theories of power to theories of the person, shaping motive and action by images and ideals of what constitutes goodness in people, relations, and conditions of life. Such judgements are always made in reference to a process of rhetorical self-definition. Because culture is an essential constituent of the self, the operation of "local knowledge" (Geertz 1983) in performance contexts depends upon the emotions attached to reflections about the nature of persons and social relations (Marcus and Fischer 1986:46). Sentiment is a primary constituent of performance as a social practice, a practice in which affect is essential to effect:

> ...The day I decided to go to the mines,
> I had a talk with my heart, and we compromised.
> My eyes are crying, though nothing has got into them;
> I feel like vomiting, though nothing bad have I eaten...
> (Makeka Lihojane, "Ngoana Mokhalo")

This is why Williams' (1977) concept of the "structure of feeling," relating the articulation of experience to larger social forces and expressions of ideology; emotions, perceptions, and reflections to the structure of reality, is so valuable in understanding the production of performance.

There is value in the effort to get at the "reciprocal determination of material forces and cultural forms" (Comaroff 1985:xii) through excavating the instrumentalities of symbolic structures enacted in metaphors of semantic opposition, but in so doing the Comaroffs (1987) have underestimated the tendency of these metaphors towards reversal and resolution. Home and exile, reciprocity and self-interest, secrecy and exposure, truths and lies, law and crime, culture and deracination turn into one another like the impersonating monsters in southern African folktales.

The indigenous concept of Sesotho, like any other reified and consciously mobilized

notion of tradition, is composed of continuities, reinterpretations, syncretisms and inventions that are alike situationally contested. As with Yoruba for the juju composer, Sesotho for the migrant aurator is the vehicle of what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community" of the Basotho, distinguished not by its sociological falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which it is imagined (Anderson 1983:15). Unlike the Yoruba performer, the Mosotho migrant kheleke may recognize that his people are today divided by social class, but in a deeper sense they all share Sesotho, just as they share the larger disabilities historically enforced by the predatory South African leviathan next door and its economic partners abroad. As one Mosotho university colleague reproved me gently in response to an impertinent cultural observation: "You don't know who we are."

Forms such as shebeen songs have long been extending Basotho culture into new domains of experience and across the borders of Lesotho. But never have the boundaries of what is regarded as Sesotho 'nete 'nete, true Basotho culture, been more strongly defended than they are today, when Lesotho has little economic or political autonomy. In such circumstances Sesotho becomes a precious resource, a reservoir of identity, self-expression, and social entitlement that appears crucial to any meaningful form of national survival. Moshoeshoe I understood this when he sent his sons to be initiated with the sons of his allies and vassals, and it is no accident that institutions such as lebollo initiation are not dying out, but are if anything increasing in attendance. Migrant workers and their women, without whose labour Lesotho cannot, even for a short time, survive, are producing elaborate forms of auriture which do not simply preserve but enlarge and revitalize Sesotho in direct confrontation with the social forces that threaten it. Basotho migrant performers do not cast aside historical Basotho culture but root themselves deeply within it. The resonant images and shared understandings of Sesotho are used to comprehend, assess, decry, and even celebrate the quality of Basotho participation in a world they cannot control, but which must not be allowed, at any cost, to control their collective and individual sense of self, their continuing reformulation of a national culture.

Today seoeleoelele music is popular to some extent with virtually all segments of Lesotho's resident and non-resident population. For the exclusively Sesotho speaking, this is their favorite music; but even the highly educated enjoy it, no longer look down upon it, and appreciate it's sagacity, humor, and Sesotho aesthetic and cultural qualities. Recorded in Johannesburg, seoeleoelele is the nearest thing to a contemporary popular Basotho national music. Sesotho, as an invented and guiding meta-tradition of useful fictions, would become not a saving but a patent falsehood without the infusions of performance from and through the border, the songs of its migrant vagabond orphan-like lintho tsa molimo ("creatures of God"), the healing efflorescence of its songs and dances of the wild(er)ness.

Jo! Eloquence is not stuck on like a feather (in a cap):
The year before last I should have been respected,
For showing I know how to speak.
The Lion is here, at the ridge on the plain
It's eye shines with anger
Heroes lost their minds
When they saw the Lion roaring....
...These little creatures of God, men
People who speak by shells [behind cupped hands]
They whisper breathily

They fear to speak, they are noiseless, soundless:
Jo! evil words or innuendo.
Let unity be written; peace increase
Cases should cease to take up appeals
Let the guilty be forgiven at the courts here,
Men guilty of great crimes....
...However well you may sing
I, Sporty, can never be beaten
The way I speak, travellers,
This eloquence runs in my family:
Father Mareka was born eloquent,
Mother Mary was born eloquent
My sisters and brothers were born with this eloquence,
Father surpasses in (singing) the likoma of the veld
[initiation lodge]
Mother surpasses in ululation,
My sisters and brothers surpass in dancing,
The beautiful initiation girls, whose women are they?

(Sporty Mothibeli)

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1. Further developing the concept suggested in the term orature popularized by Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a replacement for the oxymoron "oral literature," I would propose the term auriture to represent vocal art in which verbal text, sonic qualities, and rhythm are interdependent expressive resources. This term does not, unfortunately, go far enough in glossing the synesthetic integration of performative media in African cultures, revealed for example in Sesotho terms such as ho tlala, "to dance praises."

2. The singer is comparing this russian battle to the State of Emergency declared by Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan after his loss of the parlaimentary elections of 1970. The winning party, to which the singer belongs, was the Basutoland Congress Party, whose protests and supporters were violently suppressed by Chief Jonathan's forces.

3. These lines suggest the founding of the Basotho nation by King Moshoeshoe I of the invading Bakoena, whose mother Kholu was a member of the aboriginal Bafokeng, and thus her brothers and by extension the Bafokeng clan stand as maternal uncles to the royal house of the Basotho and the ruling Bakoena aristocracy.