

Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women: a case study

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Literature on labour in Lesotho has concentrated on the problems of male migrant workers and female dependents, saying little about women as migrant workers themselves, as wage employees within Lesotho, and as entrepreneurs in the informal sector. There are few statistics and no published studies of women in these categories, yet such women form an important part of Lesotho's work force and an as yet uncalculated portion of the unemployed and under-employed. This article does not presume to fill the gap in national statistics; it reports a case study of women from a single lowlands village who have been or presently are migrant workers in South Africa or are wage employees within Lesotho or independent entrepreneurs within the village. It is hoped that it will stimulate similar research on a national level as well as concern for wages, working conditions and employment needs of Basotho women.

**Table 1 : Basotho Migrants 1911-1979
with Female Absentees expressed as percent of Total Absentees**

| Year of Census | Female Absentees | Male Absentees | Total Absentees | Females as % of Total Absentees | Total De Jure Population |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1911 | 2 972 | 21 658 | 24 630 | 12,1 | 427 549 |
| 1921 | 9 314 | 37 827 | 47 141 | 19,8 | 544 147 |
| 1936 | 22 669 | 78 604 | 101 273 | 22,4 | 661 809 |
| 1946 | 32 331 | 95 697 | 128 028 | 25,2 | 689 919 |
| 1956 | 41 992 | 112 790 | 154 782 | 27,1 | 794 253 |
| 1966 | 19 550 | 96 350 | 115 900 | 16,9 | 965 913* |
| 1976 | 23 551 | 129 103 | 152 654 | 15,4 | 1 216 654 |

Based on a summary of National Census figures and unpublished 1976 census data.

* In 1966 absentees were defined as 'persons away from Lesotho continuously for less than five years.' This strict definition is a partial explanation for the reduction of absentees in that year. However the percentage of female to male absentees indicates the differential effect of 1963 legislation on female dependents and workers.

Census figures show that 27,1 per cent of the Basotho who were absent from the country in 1956 were female, and in 1976 women still made up 15,4 per cent of absentees, despite present restrictions which prevent most Basotho women

from going legally to South Africa. (See Table 1). If women, both in the past and present, make up such a considerable proportion of Basotho's migrants, why is it that there has been so little mention of them in the literature and so little data available?

One reason is that neither the migrant labour recruiting organisations nor Lesotho's Department of Labour deal with female migrants, and it is these groups which have provided much of the data to researchers. Another reason is that present South African laws are such that most Basotho women migrants must seek work clandestinely. Further, women in wage employment away from home deviate from the normative family pattern of a wage earning husband supporting a dependent wife who is occupied with subsistence agriculture, domestic work and child care. But in fact there are many women who must themselves take the responsibility for supporting their children: unwed mothers and separated, divorced, deserted and widowed women. It is most often these women who are driven by marital problems and economic necessity to seek employment outside the rural areas. In so doing they develop considerable independence and self-reliance which appears threatening to the stable rural family structures on which the migration of men and thus the South African labour system depends.

The population Studied

This report is based on research conducted in a large village of 296 households in the lowlands of southern Lesotho, near one of the country's ten major towns. Table 2 shows the number of men and women over the age of 17 who reported some type of wage employment, whether full or part time, during 1977. The most striking feature is the contrast between the numbers of men and of women employed in South Africa. However, although female employment is limited both at home and in the Republic, almost 20 per cent of the village women engaged in some type of wage employment during the research year.

Basotho Women Workers in South Africa

The first generations of Basotho who worked for the white settlers did not go as migrants; they were engulfed, as Boer and British moved into land traditionally occupied by Sotho peoples. In her study of the economic history of Lesotho, Judith Kimble observes that "many Basotho who had been living in the disputed territory simply remained there working for the new owners of the land." She cites Arbousset's reference in 1842 to Basotho employed as domestic servants in the Cape Colony and Maeder's remark in 1856 that Basotho were "good neighbours" who provided grains and domestic servants for farm work to the Boers.¹

It is only as the boundaries of Moshoeshoe's domain became restricted and as the movement of Africans came under the control of Boer and British colonial regulations that we can speak of migrant labour out of Basutoland into the Cape Colony or the Boer Republics. Genealogical records from the village studied show that many families came from what is now white South Africa and indicate splits between collateral lines, some of which moved into the mountains of Lesotho, while others remained scattered as labour tenants on white farms or moved to the growing urban centres. These family connections provided the contacts which

**Table 2 : De Jure Village Population Over Age 17
by Sex and Place of Employment in 1977**

| | number | male percent | number | female percent | total |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| RSA | 246 | 65,8 | 20 | 4,6 | 266 |
| urban Lesotho away from home | 13 | 3,5 | 15 | 3,5 | 28 |
| Town near village | 24 | 6,4 | 30 | 6,9 | 54 |
| Village | 32* | 8,6 | 20 | 4,6 | 52 |
| Not working | 59 | 15,8 | 348 | 80,4 | 407 |
| Total | 374 | 100 | 433 | 100 | 807 |

* Many of these men working locally are independent builders. Herdboys have not been included in this tabulation, nor have independent women brewers nor those self-employed in agriculture.

helped later generations move back down from the mountains to seek employment on the white farms and towns which came to surround Basutoland. Such family connections were not critical for men who were recruited to go to the distant mining centres, but they were of great importance for women who left parents, children and in-laws to set out on the long lonely search for work.

Of the 433 women over the age of 17 in the village, 74 reported that they had once worked in South Africa, and 20 were doing so in 1977. We shall consider first the group who had once been migrants, examining the circumstances under which they went and the work they did. The information is derived from the employment and marital histories of all village residents and detailed interviews with 21 women. Incomplete memories and a reluctance to reveal personal details limit generalization.

Reasons for going to South Africa

One group of women were born in South Africa or went as children because their mothers were employed on white farms or in the growing mining or urban areas. They began working as girls but eventually returned to reside in Lesotho.

Another group who were born in Lesotho said that after marriage they went to work (along with their husbands), on South African farms; the women working in the farmers' homes and doing occasional agricultural tasks and often brewing in their spare time. Women who went with their husbands said they had gone

together to earn livestock, or because they lacked fields in Lesotho, or because of times of drought, dust and famine such as Lesotho experienced in the 1930s. As long as both mining and agricultural sectors competed for labour, some families chose the agricultural sector where husband and wife could work together and keep their children with them. However, couples who began working together on the farms often drifted apart, the husbands moving on to the better paid mine work, the wives moving from one domestic job to another, and the children being sent back to relatives in Lesotho to attend school which was rarely available in the white farm areas.

A third group first went as married women to follow or find their migrant husbands on the Witwatersrand and in the Free State gold mining areas. Since the men generally lived in mine compounds, the women had to find housing in the urban locations, usually with relatives already there or with women who brewed and gave housing in return for help with their businesses. Some went because their husbands had failed to write or to send money home and they hoped to re-establish marital ties as well as to earn money for themselves. Some women said they had gone as wives but had separated after a few years of urban living, each partner blaming the other for destroying the marriage by taking lovers. It was clearly much more difficult to maintain a family life in the urban locations, mine compounds and domestic servants' quarters than on the farms.

The fourth and largest group of women said they had initially gone to South Africa because of desertion, separation or divorce. Most said that the husband had married another woman and ceased to give financial support, forcing the wife to leave her home in Lesotho and seek the means to support herself and her children. *Others were barren and hence had been rejected by husbands and in-laws.* Having neither husbands nor children upon whom they could depend in their old age, these barren women sought work for themselves; and interestingly, several of them returned after years in South Africa with children, either fathered by men other than their husbands, or adopted while there.

The last group of women were older widows who only went to work after their husbands had died, leaving them unable to support and educate their children.

The economic and marital circumstances, which led certain women to seek work in the Republic while the majority, dependent on subsistence agriculture and male migrant workers remained behind, are inseparable. Economic problems involved the failure of both subsistence agriculture and migrant remittances. In a way which is unique for women, economic distress is inseparable from marital and reproductive failures. Where the primary wage earners are men, it is the nature of the marriage bond and the husband's willingness to fulfill his marital obligations which determine whether women can survive as dependents or must attempt to earn a cash income for themselves. But for women to enter the labour market necessitates a break from traditional female roles and attendant social constraints, a shift which had already begun for some women as a result of mission education for girls and *prohibitions against polygyny and the leviratic marriage of widows.*² Such female independence posed a threat to the male dominated social system upon which men depended in order to counterbalance the insecurities of their own migrant lives. Thus we read in the British Colonial Report of 1908 that Basotho men complained

about "women absconding from their husbands and taking refuge in the Colony".³ But for women, the chance to work in South Africa opened up new social and economic opportunities as an alternative when dependence on migrants failed.

Type of work

The following list shows the incidence of different types of full time work reported by the 93 village women who had worked in South Africa in the past or were doing so in 1977:

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Domestic work | 68 |
| Brewing | 8 |
| Factory work | 8 |
| Agriculture | 3 |
| Sales clerk | 2 |
| Weaving and sewing | 3 |
| Religious order | 1 |

Domestic work was and continues to be the most important category. Studies of the sexual division of labour often contrast unpaid female work within the home with male wage labour in the public domain. But in South Africa it is precisely through sale of their domestic work that African women have been able to enter the public labour market. As a result they must normally delegate all other domestic tasks of their own, except that of bearing children, to others. From the earliest period of slavery there has been a constant demand for female workers in white homes and, as a small but growing black middle class has developed, they too have begun to hire domestic help. Several village women said they first worked on white farms, but found wages low and sought better paying jobs in the white suburbs of Johannesburg and Pretoria. Murray reports Basotho women to be working for Indians in Johannesburg at wages far lower than those paid to legally resident South African black women.⁴ Furthermore some of my informants indicated that their first jobs in urban areas had been child care or housework in the locations of African women who themselves held regular jobs. Thus stratification is a marked feature of the paid domestic labour market in South Africa with newcomers from rural areas taking the lowest paid jobs.

If we include part-time and supplementary work, the second most frequent way of earning money in the Republic was through illegal beer brewing. Just as women used their domestic skills as housekeepers, cooks and child minders to provide what I call the "domestic infrastructure" for white society, so they used their domestic skills as brewers and hostesses to provide the "domestic infrastructure" for the black working class which turned for its recreation to the *shebeens* and homes of women in the locations. Women not only brewed in the towns, but wherever men were recruited for work, women followed, as the following case illustrates:

Mamohau, who had been deserted by her husband told how she had been earning only R10 a month as a house maid in South Africa in 1958 so had

gone to brew in a part of the Orange Free State where new gold mines were being opened up. She said that she and other women made temporary shelters in a farmer's field, giving the farmer the strainings from their brewing to feed his pigs in return for squatting rights, firewood, and a degree of protection from the police. They bought ingredients for brewing and contraband brandy from itinerant Indian traders. They hid what they had brewed in pits in the ground and in the evenings they sold the beer to men who had come to do the initial digging for a new mine. Once the mine was opened, the land was fenced, and the company had established its own facilities, the women were forced to move on to a new frontier.'

Such women were female pioneers who participated in a unique way in the expansion of the South African mining industry. Three other village women who were middle-aged widows engaged in such brewing during the 1970s, living in rough wooded areas near very isolated construction projects. Conditions were spartan and arrests frequent, but profits of up to R40 a week were much higher than domestic salaries. Such self-employed women who brewed, sewed, traded in pottery, old clothes and even illicit diamonds said they enjoyed the independence and freedom from degrading subservience required in work for a white "madam". They had severe problems as women on their own, without husbands and lacking the labour, cash, cattle or fields to invest in agriculture. With few employment opportunities at home, they used their own resources to survive and to provide for their children's education by obtaining a share in the wages which men were earnings.

Apart from domestic work and brewing, very few alternatives were open to migrant women from rural Lesotho. Several from the village worked in factories, shops or asbestos mines, and one or two have daughters who are now permanent residents of South Africa working in such jobs or in hospitals.

Only three women mentioned regular agricultural employment, but in informal conversations older village women said how nice it had been in their youth when any woman who had needed extra money could just go for a few weeks to hoe or pick maize in the Orange Free State. Until 1963, white farmers, wanting seasonal workers could come to Lesotho and recruit women, particularly for fruit picking in the worth. Village women now lament the fact that such seasonal agricultural work is no longer available. Such women are not aware of the transformation which mechanisation has brought to South African agriculture, nor of the shift to employment of blacks from South Africa's own "homelands". But they are well aware of the limited employment opportunities in Lesotho and the "influx control" measures which prevent them from legally seeking work across the border. These legal restrictions which have almost completely closed the border to Basotho women workers distinguish the situation of female migrants of today from that of earlier generations.

Restrictions on Basotho women migrants

The complex and ever-increasing legal machinery restricting the rights of Blacks to live and work and travel in South Africa has been described by Rugege and

others.⁵ Women now fall under the same basic legal restrictions as do men, but because of the continuing demand for male labour, special exemptions from the restrictions are arranged for those who are hired on a legal contract basis. Since there is no legal recruitment of Basotho women, the full weight of "influx control" measures falls on them.

Even before the mid-nineteenth century, men from Basutoland were required to carry passes when travelling to the Cape and the Free State to seek work, but passes were not issued to women.⁶ However, it was assumed then, as it is now, that a woman must have the permission of "the man whom she is under" in order to leave home and seek work elsewhere in Lesotho or in the Republic. In 1947 officials in Basutoland itself became concerned about the movement of Basotho to South Africa, and in that year an order was issued by the Paramount Chief of Lesotho "forbidding women and children to proceed to the Union, especially to Johannesburg, in view of the shortage of accommodation there."⁷ Apparently, however, this regulation was not enforced with any rigour, and it has only been with the development of South African legislation after the National Party came into power that the movement of African women to urban areas of South Africa has been halted.

In 1952 various laws controlling movement were consolidated into one Act and women for the first time were required to obtain "reference books". This legislation touched off a series of protests by women in South Africa and many Basotho returned home at this time rather than join or defy the Pass Resistance Campaign. However, others obtained the passes knowing that from 1960 onwards their right to continue working depended on compliance. One woman told how the change had affected her, putting her under the control of both her husband and of the government:

I found life much harder then I found that if you have no rights and no permit for living there you are just like an animal. You'll live in the wilderness. At 3 a.m. you'll have to run away from the police and sleep out in the fields, hiding. This was after I had quarrelled with my husband. I had gotten a Malan Pass. But we quarrelled and he took away my pass and all my documents which showed my right to be there. Then I began to have problems and found life in South Africa hard. That is when I realised that I would just have to try to get used to my own country, Lesotho, even though there is no work here.

In 1963 additional regulations were passed and border posts were established. Workers born in Lesotho were defined as "foreign blacks" and after 1963 they could only remain as workers in the Republic with Lesotho passports and under the most restricted conditions: (1) they must have worked continuously for one employer for 10 years, or (2) they must have been in continuous residence and employment for 15 years, or (3) they must be granted a "no objection" certificate from a Bantu Labour Bureau and a stamp in their passports to be signed monthly by their employers. These certificates and stamped work permits are routinely arranged for men under legal contracts, but can only be obtained by women as well as privately employed men under special circumstances. A few Basotho women

who had documentary proof of employment prior to 1963 were able to qualify under conditions (1) and (2) but many were forced to leave after 1963 or risk fines or prisons.

Present employment of Basotho women in South Africa

The situation for Basotho women today is that with few exceptions they can only seek employment and remain working within The Republic by clandestine means. The sharp decrease in the ratio of female to male migrants shown in the 1966 census reports (Table 1) reflects these increasingly stringent restrictions. However, the 1976 census shows that women still made up 15,4 per cent of all Basotho absentees and 9,4 per cent of all Basotho in wage employment in South Africa, despite the legal restrictions. In the village women made up 7,5 per cent of all those in wage employment in South Africa in 1977, as is implicit in Table 2.

Some Basotho women experience a continuing need for wage employment which cannot be met in Lesotho and which is denied in South Africa. This limitation on female employment is felt with particular pain by younger women in the village who have grown up with the knowledge of the work-experiences of their mothers' generation, yet realise the difficulties they face if they seek employment in the Republic now.

**Table 3: Place of Employment of Women over Age 17
by Marital Status
From a Village in Lesotho – 1977**

| | Working in RSA | | Working in urban Lesotho | | Working in nearby town | | Working in the village | | Not working | | Total |
|------------------------|----------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | Number | % | number | % | number | % | number | % | number | % | |
| Unmarried | 4 | 20,0 | 8 | 53,3 | 8 | 26,7 | 3 | 15,0 | 24 | 6,9 | 47 |
| Married | 1 | 5,0 | 1 | 6,7 | 11 | 36,2 | 6 | 30,0 | 215 | 61,8 | 234 |
| Widowed | 3 | 15,0 | 1 | 6,7 | 3 | 10,0 | 7 | 35,0 | 84 | 24,1 | 98 |
| Separated/ Divorced | 12 | 60,0 | 5 | 33,3 | 8 | 26,7 | 4 | 20,0 | 25 | 7,2 | 54 |
| TOTAL | 20 | 100 | 15 | 100 | 30 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 348 | 100 | 433 |

One feature which is characteristic of the 20 women working in South Africa in 1977 is the absence of a wage earning husband, as can be seen in Table 3 showing the marital status of employed women. Fifteen are separated, divorced or widowed and all but three of the group have children to support. Most of the 20 went to work because of problems in relation to men, problems which forced them to find for themselves the means to support their children whom they left behind in the village.

How do such women manage to circumvent the legal restrictions we have des-

cribed? Some take 14 day visitors' visas and, if they find work, attempt to get the proper papers from the South African Labour Bureaux through their new employers' pleadings, although a passport official in Lesotho said he had not known of a single case in his district of a Mosotho woman managing to obtain a legal "no objection certificate" during 1978. Some women establish residence with distant relatives and get new documents as citizens of Transkei or Bophuta-Tswana, and some find other means to obtain documents. But many simply run the risk of working on an isolated farm or in an urban location, afraid to enter the town centres and hidden away if a police car approaches, and not daring to come home on leave until they slip back across the border when their year or two of work is over.

Table 4 : Comparison of Home Leaves of Male and Female Migrant Workers from a Village in Lesotho 1977

| | Average number of visits home per year | Average number of weeks or weekends at home per year | Average number of working months in which no leave was taken |
|------------|--|--|--|
| MEN (253) | 2,26 | 8,73 | 8,34 |
| WOMEN (20) | 0,5 | 1,75 | 11,35 |

Table 4 shows that male migrants from the village returned more frequently, spent more weeks at home and spent fewer uninterrupted months per year at work than did women migrants. Increasing pressures on the mine companies to improve the conditions of migrant workers have made it easier for men to take home leaves.

An Anglo-American spokesman in 1978 announced proudly that 56 per cent of their Basotho mine workers visited Lesotho every six weeks or less.⁸ Yet there are no such pressures to improve working conditions for women migrants. Thus Basotho women workers, most all of whom are illegal in South Africa and unrecognized in Lesotho, can barely get home for more than a week or two a year to see their own children. Even those who are working legally dare not take more time for fear of losing pay and breaking the continuous employment record on which their right to work depends. As one widow who had worked 26 years said "I was both mother and father to my children, so I never actually came for a leave. If I had come for more than a few days where would they have gotten their school fees? There was no one to help but me."

Why should anyone hire women who run such risks of detection? Often it is because the employers can demand excessive work at the lowest wages from workers who dare not protest for fear of being reported. Some black employers, who must themselves manage on substandard incomes, cannot afford to compete with the wages paid by white employers. New regulations which took effect in July

1979 raised the fine for employers of "illegal blacks" and threatened the dismissal and repatriation of thousands of employees, many of whom are Basotho women of the kind we have been considering.⁹

Employment of Village Women in Lesotho's Urban Centres

The legal restrictions on employment in South Africa have turned the attention of Basotho women to employment within Lesotho and encouraged internal rural to urban migration of women. However, employment opportunities are limited. Increased mine wages in 1975 precipitated a movement of men from civil service, clerical and teaching jobs into mine employment, opening such posts to trained Basotho women although the wages for many young women, even with twelve years of schooling, remain at an average of only R64 a month in civil service posts. The commercial sector has expanded greatly with more shops, supermarkets and wholesale houses in the larger towns and small cafes in rural areas, all offering employment for women as clerks at about R30 to R40 per month in the largest of these businesses, but as low as R10 to R15 in the small cafes. The movement of educated women into paid employment and the influx of expatriates into Lesotho has increased the employment of women as domestic workers within Lesotho, often at very low wages. Publications orienting expatriate newcomers circulated in 1975 suggested R10 to R15 per month plus food and uniform as typical wages for female house servants in Maseru.¹⁰ Wages for women at all levels in Lesotho continue to be substantially lower than wages for most men within Lesotho and in South Africa, and lower than wages for comparable female work within South Africa. But despite the disparity in wages, the number of girls and women seeking work in Lesotho's towns far exceeds the number of jobs available, as women come seeking professional careers or driven by the same type of economic and marital problems which led earlier generations of women to seek employment in South Africa.

Table 3 showed that in 1977 there were 30 women in the village studied with full or part time wage employment in the nearby town, to which they could walk daily, and 15 women who lived and worked in other parts of Lesotho. The total of women in wage employment in the Republic, the nearby town, elsewhere in Lesotho and in the village itself made up 19,6 per cent of the village women over the age of 17. Although this is probably a higher rate of female employment than is possible in the remote villages of Lesotho, it is typical of those along the main roads and near the urban centres. The high figure indicates the eagerness of village women to earn cash, despite their other duties: maintaining subsistence agriculture, managing household assets, and carrying on routine domestic work and child care.

It must be noted that going away from home to work elsewhere in Lesotho, like going to work in South Africa, necessitates a more complete break with rural family life than does working in a local town or in the home village. As a result it is not surprising that females who migrate within Lesotho tend to be young, on average only 24,3 years of age. And, as indicated in Table 3, they are generally either unmarried girls who are seeking career opportunities, or young separated or divorced women who must support children and hope for more successful relations with men in a new environment. On the other hand, those village women

who are employed in the town near home or in the village are older, averaging 34,6 years, are mostly married or widowed and have responsibilities for children, houses and fields which they cannot leave.

The majority of the village women employed in the nearby town and in other urban parts of Lesotho are engaged in domestic work just as in South Africa. A few are employed by white households but most work for Basotho families, usually in homes where the wife is working as a teacher, shop clerk or civil servant. Town women who are themselves earning perhaps R30 to R60 in the larger shops, or R60 to R100 in teaching, clerical or Government jobs, may pay a girl or woman doing their domestic work anywhere from R6 to R15 a month plus food and sometimes housing. There are even some women who find well-paying domestic jobs in the capital who themselves hire village women to work in households they have left behind. Thus within Lesotho itself there is a hierarchy of women's employment, based on education, professional status, salary, and the ongoing need to provide both financial support and routine domestic care for a woman's household. It is generally the rural areas surrounding the urban centres which provide the lowest paid workers from the large pool of women with limited education, skills and access to better paying jobs.

A few of the women from the village studied, particularly those with some secondary schooling and commercial training, are employed in the modern urban sector at salaries ranging from R25 to R60 for sales clerks, R56 to R64 for hospital and post office work, and R60 to R100 for teaching, book-keeping and civil service jobs. However only 4 of the 65 women working in Lesotho were earning more than the average minimum salary of R65 per month earned by an uneducated male mineworker in 1976.¹¹ Virtually every Mosotho man, regardless of education, is able to earn more than all but the most fortunately placed Basotho women. It is not only the limited number of job opportunities and the low pay available to women, but the comparison with male opportunities, which is a constant frustration to Basotho women.

Employment within the Village

In addition to village women working in South Africa and in Lesotho's towns, there are 20 women with wage employment within the village itself, as well as a number of others engaged in occasional "piece work" jobs and independent brewing which have not been included in the tabulations in Tables 2 or 3. Apart from the two village school teachers, two women who manage cafes and the woman who is village chief, all of the others working in the village are domestic workers or cafe clerks at salaries which are lower than those paid to women working in either South African or Lesotho's towns. Jobs in the village have lower pay and lower status than those in the towns. Nevertheless there are some women who need work and cannot find it in the towns, and others who cannot get away from children for the entire day, for whom the low paid unprestigious jobs within the village are better than nothing. Within the village, as in the towns, women are hired to do domestic work by village women who have found better paying jobs in the town and occasionally by widowed men who have not remarried. There are also village women who are paid in cash for occasional "piece-work" jobs such as grinding

grain, smearing floors and gathering firewood, and other women who occasionally assist more prosperous neighbours in domestic tasks in return for food and other assistance. The women who take such full or part time domestic jobs within the village, and those who attach themselves to village patrons, tend to be those in most desperate need of cash because they lack the support of wage earning men. They are mostly unwed mothers, widows or separated or divorced women.

Just as women are sometimes paid for doing the domestic work of others within the village, so some are paid for agricultural work. Harvesting and winnowing is generally paid for in kind, but hoeing generally in cash, normally at 50 cents per day in 1977. Households which hire others to hoe are generally those in which the wife herself has a regular paid job or those which have planted several fields but lack sufficient female labour to weed them all. Researchers concerned with agricultural development in Lesotho often point to declining yields and unhoed fields and speculate that the problem is lack of sufficient "manpower" (sic!) for agricultural work, particularly at peak seasons.¹² Yet the eagerness of young women to migrate for wage employment and of older women to take local jobs or to hoe the fields of others for cash suggests that the problem is not an absolute lack of "womanpower" but rather the inability of many to invest in cultivation, the uncertainty of returns from subsistence agriculture, and the overwhelming need for cash income.

In 1977 there was a Government scheme introduced for planting sunflowers. When harvest time came the Government sought women to process the harvested seeds, and 20 women took this brief opportunity to earn R1,50 a day, more than any of them had ever earned per day before and more than many educated women in town jobs earn. In other parts of Lesotho there are Government and agency sponsored projects such as tree planting and road building which offer women the chance to earn money or food. Where there are financial rewards women respond enthusiastically. They show less enthusiasm where the reward is only in the form of Food Aid, but there is so little local employment available and so much need for supplementary income that village women throughout Lesotho remain eager for such projects.

Apart from domestic and agricultural work, many women earn cash through trade at the village level. Some help manage or are employed in the five cafes in the village. Others sell locally prepared cooked food, beer, grain, vegetables, pigs, fowls, eggs, hand sewn or knitted clothes and woven grass articles, and a few sell clothes, utensils and pictures imported from South Africa. Where women can sell or exchange what they themselves have produced, they control the profits, just as women usually control income from their own wage labour, even though as jural minors their income technically falls under the control of husbands or fathers. Female income-generating activities provide not only money but a degree of independence for women.

Unquestionably the most important income-generating activity is the sale of home brewed beer. Through brewing Basotho women have long contributed to ancestral rituals, celebrations of lineage and village solidarity, and have been able to command labour for agricultural and building activities. It is thus not surprising that brewing remains a central activity of village women and is now a means where-

by many earn a share of the repatriated earnings of male migrants fifty-one per cent of the households reported that they brewed beer for sale at least occasionally and 21,1 per cent of all households sold beer at least once a week. A study of the income of 33 village households showed that 6,5 per cent of the average cash income was derived from brewing and 2,9 per cent from the sale of dry or sprouted sorghum for brewing, and several households with no migrant earner derive their entire cash income from beer sales.

The average net profit from two or three days of brewing and one day of selling ranges from R2 to R5. Some women work daily brewing for others in the village or town, some sell sprouted sorghum regularly, and some sell firewood gathered on the mountainsides to those who brew. And those who brew regularly use the strainings to feed pigs and fowls, which in turn supplement their income. The profits from all of these income-generating activities are small in comparison with the earnings of men employed as migrant workers. Nevertheless they are of critical importance to households at the lowest income levels, particularly to women who are unable to enter the very limited wage labour market.

Conclusions

Female labour and income-generating activities are vital to the economic survival of many Basotho households in this highly monetised, consumer oriented, migrant labour economy. Female earnings are particularly critical to those women who have no dependable male wage earner to support them. They are important not only to supplant dependence on the vicissitudes of agriculture, and the unreliability of remittances from migrant husbands; but also in that they create a sense of worth, self-respect and security among women eager to use their own training, talents and energies to contribute to the support of their families.

On the other hand, independent earning by women may pose a threat to male social control under the conditions of migrant labour where men are already torn apart from their families and prevented from establishing close cooperative conjugal relations. Thus there are some men who forbid their wives to take employment, fearing the independence that female incomes will create and the extra-domestic social contacts which working women can establish. We have seen that the majority of female wage earners are women who do not have husbands. Male anxiety over the autonomy of working women may contribute to the problem with which this paper began, the official neglect of female employment within the total economy of Lesotho.

Nevertheless, as long as wages for all black workers remain so low in relation to the total southern African economy, and as long as oscillating migration remains the norm with its attendant strains on family life, the efforts of women to contribute to the household cash income will remain a vital part of economic survival in Lesotho. And given the educational level, the abilities and determination of Basotho women, who make up the bulk of Lesotho's *de facto* population, female labour remains an important resource which must be considered in national development planning. Basotho women have had to develop strength, resourcefulness and self-reliance under the conditions of predominantly male migrant labour. These women have the potential to make a much greater and more varied con-

tribution to national development than merely by the maintenance of subsistence agriculture, routine domestic work and reproduction of and care for the labour force. It is of vital importance for the social health of the nation that this female potential be channeled into productive contributions to national development rather than being dissipated in passive dependence, consumer spending, or the sale of beer and sex which has become such a tragic feature of other societies where women are denied the rights to productive employment, equal wages, and recognition as full contributing adult members of society.

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