

**Eddy Tshidiso Maloka.** *Basotho and the Mines: A Social History of Labour Migrancy in Lesotho and South Africa, c.1890-1940.* Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004. 257 pp. \$47.95, paper, ISBN 978-2-86978-128-3.



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In this book, the author, Eddy Tshidiso Maloka, sets out to write a history of Basotho miners from the bottom up. That is, he intends to show how Basotho miners shaped their own experiences in the South African gold mines.

The first part of the book introduces the reader to the gold mines and the labor shortages that plagued the industry in the late nineteenth century. Maloka then shows how the mines sought to alleviate this problem through the use of labor recruiters in Lesotho. As Maloka correctly notes, more than the efforts of labor recruiters, worsening environmental conditions drove increasing numbers of Basotho men to the gold mines during the first third of the twentieth century. Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of how Basotho miners became associated with shaft-sinking. Chapter 2 examines the growing dependence of migrant earnings and the forces competing for those remittances. Chiefs, the colonial state and various family members all sought to control migrant earnings. Maloka then spends several pages discussing the role of labor agents; while this is interesting, it seems to take the focus away from the

Basotho miners. Maloka adroitly states that miners took advantage of loopholes in the system; however he does not fully explore how they did this. The last chapter in part 1 examines the journey to the mines. Most of the chapter literally discusses the various modes of transportation the Basotho employed in traveling to the mines, and it is not until the end of the chapter that the author discusses how the Basotho rationalized this experience. Migrants compared the dangers of traveling and working in South Africa to entering the land of cannibals. Lastly, he mentions how Basotho attitudes towards South Africa were connected to the incorporation question.

Part 2 examines the lives of Basotho migrants in the compounds. In chapter 4, Maloka explores the struggle over how the miners spent their leisure time. Sport, religion and films at different times all played significant roles in the lives of miners, but Basotho miners distinguished themselves through games such as *morabaraba* and Moshoeshe's Day activities. Besides these few specifics, much of the information presented is very general and could be used to describe the ex-

perience of almost any ethnic group working in the mines. Chapter 5 more closely explores missionaries and their converts at the mines. The first half of the chapter offers a good summary of missionary activities and their relationship with the mines, but there is little on the Basotho and perhaps too much on the missionaries themselves. This could be the result of relying heavily on missionary sources and the newspapers they published. Maloka provides an insightful history of the Paris Evangelical Mission Societies' (PEMS) attempts to establish themselves on the Rand. As the PEMS was considered by many to be the national church, it is logical that considerable time would be dedicated in the book to the societies' activities on the Rand, but it comes at the expense of the miner's perspective. Maloka accredits the failure of PEMS on the Rand, in part, to its intolerance towards many Basotho practices, but he also shows how the Basotho miners fought to retain control over their leisure time (for example in singing and beer drinking). Space also played an important role in explaining PEMS' failure in the mines, as miners felt that they belonged at home, and not at work. Thus, Maloka provides some good insights into why the Basotho miners were not more receptive to the work of PEMS on the Rand.

The last chapter in this section examines how miners dealt with death in the mines. Working in the mines involved serious risks; there were a number of accidents that killed and injured Basotho miners in addition to the presence of diseases such as tuberculosis and scurvy. In general, Basotho miners and their families received little compensation for fatalities or serious injury. However, the Basotho were not passive about this and the miners and chiefs sought to insure greater compensation. Through organizations and the acts of individual miners, Basotho families were informed about the death of a relative and efforts were undertaken to ensure the return of the body to Lesotho for a proper burial. Death in the mines and returning the body were viewed within the religious beliefs of the Basotho regarding witch-

craft and ancestors. Death in the mines was seen as being caused by witchcraft, while proper burial was essential to appease the ancestral spirit of the recently deceased. Here Maloka clearly demonstrates how Basotho culture shaped the actions of miners working on the Rand.

Part 3 focuses on the impact that migrant labor had within Lesotho. Prior to Maloka's work, most works, albeit excluding the work of Colin Murray in *Families Divided*, have primarily focused on Basotho migrants (both male and female) while they were in South Africa.[1] Maloka's investigation of alcohol and prostitution within the borders of Lesotho is a significant contribution to the field and expands our understanding of the social disruption and adaptations to the migrant labor system. Migrant labor altered the existing marriage patterns, as many migrants engaged in a practice known as *chobeliso*, which was a form of elopement. As no cattle were exchanged, this left newly married women in a vulnerable position, and many fled to avoid abusive in-laws. In order to survive, runaways and widows resorted to prostitution and the brewing of beer. The book explores the efforts of the colonial government and the Basutoland National Council in trying to curb the growing abuse of alcohol in Lesotho. Maloka offers an account of two famous prostitutes in Lesotho, Sake and Mainyatso, who illustrate how prostitution functioned in Lesotho. In addition to sexual services, these women carried migrants' luggage and provided other domestic services. A song about the two women reveals the importance that prostitutes played in the migrant's world, and in the reproduction of migrant labor (p. 228). It is here that Maloka perhaps makes his strongest contribution to the social history of migrant labor. It also demonstrates in the historical context the destructive impact that migrant labor had on the Basotho family as far back as the 1920s.

Although the book is well researched from an archival standpoint, the author's limited use of

oral sources undermines the stated intent of the book. In order to truly write a history of Basotho miners from their own perspective, one would need to conduct more than twelve interviews. The author defends this by stating the difficulty of finding oral informants; however, the fact that the author seemed to only conduct interviews in three towns causes one to question how diligent he was in trying to locate informants.

I found this to be a very good book, and it provides a solid study of the South African mines and the Basotho who worked there. However, I often found myself noting that the author focused more on the general history of the mines and not enough on the Basotho miners themselves, or how they actively engaged in shaping their experience.

Note

[1]. Colin Murray, *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Philip Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable Women? Liquor, Prostitution, and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cherryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990).

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