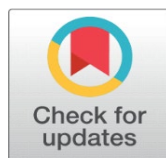
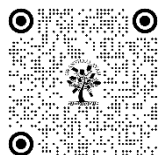


LEBOLLO AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION OF BASOTHO TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

This paper subscribes to the anthropological and sociological lens of Basotho's cultural and traditional practice known as Lebollo. In Basotho culture, the institute of Lebollo is referred to as a traditional initiation social institution. The Basotho people mostly found in Sub-Saharan Africa, with Lesotho being their dominant location. In Basotho society, Lebollo is a socially acceptable traditional school attended both by young men and women. However, in a religious context it is a practice that is stigmatized, especially by the Roman Catholic Church. The main focus of this paper is to explore on the institution of Lebollo as a social institution in the Kingdom of Lesotho drawing attention to its nature. The history of Lebollo is outlined in this paper tracing its origins in the society of Basotho and exploring on the significance of impact on the social structure of Basotho people. The study adopted a qualitative theoretical approach with the use of secondary source of data collected from literature, journals, libraries, books and internet and personal observations. The Kingdom of Lesotho is a Christian dominating country with 90% of Christian population, and with the Catholics dominating. The general conclusion draws a condemnation of Lebollo by the Catholic Church and bringing to light the societal impact and community perception. This paper concludes by putting forward the artistic abilities the initiates are taught to the skills to compose African poems and songs known as 'mangae' during their initiation process and social complications, societal impact and community perception of Lebollo.

Keywords: Lebollo; Social Institution; Basotho; Initiation School; Artistic Abilities; Culture¹.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper expatiates on the social significance of Lebollo as a social institution of Basotho people. It draws attention to the dualistic approach of anthropological and sociological phenomenon of the institution of Lebollo of Basotho and also draws attention to the similar initiation institutions found in other tribe of the world, such as the *Ulwaluko* initiation ritual in the Xhosa tribe found mostly in the Eastern part of South Africa. Even though these practices are seen differently from tribe to tribe, the element of bone of contention is that they are all traditional system of education. Cinnamon Okwandu (2023) viewed that the Xhosa people of South Africa have a rich cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in their traditions and rituals. Furthermore, insights of Lebollo from other regions such as Free State, and Limpopo are considered.

¹ Culture defines the beliefs, behaviours, sanctions, values and goals that mark the way of life of a group of people (Don Gorman, 2010).

The nature of this paper is to explore and evaluate the Basotho traditional initiation education (Lebollo: Basotho traditional initiation school) as a social institution. Ademuson (2021) points out that social scientists are interested in the various aspects of social institutions such as family, religion, economy and politics as they relate to the society. Social institution consists of structural components of a society through which the main concerns and activities are organized, and social needs. In this sense social institutions are the framework within the society that organizes key activities in line with the social needs. In this context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Don Gorman (2010) maintained that this framework indicate that people are motivated by different needs that can be classified in a hierarchy with the lower level needs having to be fulfilled before the higher level needs can be.

Lebollo has a major impact on the social structure of Basotho from the cultural point of view and is one of the only social organizations that instils a traditional outlook on life in young boys and girls, which makes it extremely important to do this study. Plooy (2006) argued that their education system was primarily characterised as being informal, besides, that is, the initiation institution, which added the only structured training individuals received. Das (1966) expounded that, those institutions are social arrangements that channel behaviour in prescribed ways in the important areas of social life.

Maharasoia (2006) stated that Lebollo is a traditional institution involving the process of initiating young men into adult roles. Lebollo is a cultural and traditional practice that the Basotho society follows to construct the manhood identity. It is a rite of passage in a sense that boys or also known as '*bashemane*' pass the puberty stage and enter the adulthood stage to become men or '*monna*'. Part of the rite of passage includes a traditional circumcision which is the removal of the foreskin covering the glans of the penis². Makhata (2018) opined that therefore, there are five stages which one needs to undergo to complete the initiation. Namely; Seclusion, instruction, physical impression, integration, and covenant. Moreover according to Makhata (2018), Lebollo is a rite which signified maturity from childhood to adulthood and teaches responsibility to boys and girls to own families, community and nation. Letseka (2013) argues that thus indigenous education is a process of cultural transmission and renewal whereby the adult members of society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of society.

2. METHODOLOGY

To explore the theme of this research, a descriptive research design and personal observations during the engagements in the field are applied as a methodological technique. Secondary data is gathered from a variety of reliable online databases, including books, review articles, and general media stories in a setting of *Lebollo la Basotho*. The application of anthropology and sociology in the context of Lebollo aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse aspects of the Basotho experience within society. The anthropological injection of Lebollo of Basotho draws attention to the existing rites of passage of the ceremony of the circumcision of traditional initiation, to trace the relevance of a cultural identity, and traditional practices among the Basotho. This traditional institution on its nature is sensitive but also secretive, as a result some of the information is a grey information. The sustainability of confidentiality of Lebollo represents the element of uniqueness of a long-time tradition of the institution throughout the Basotho society.

3. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LEBOLLO

Historically, the institution of Lebollo started by a man named Ratlali. Some oral tradition argued, "The Bushmen taught the Southern Sotho (also known as Basotho from South Africa and Lesotho) how to circumcise their youth. Other oral tradition credits Ratlali, in 18th century Koena chief, with having composed or perhaps codified much of his song used by the dominant Koena lineage in those ceremonies" (Makhata, 2018). It is estimated that on 18 March 1804, Morena Moshoeshoe and his fellow initiates (*thaka tsa mophato*) began their process of Lebollo also known as Basotho initiation. There, he would be given a name 'Letlama', and his *thaka tsa mophato* 'Matlama' (Makhele, 2021). Just months after completing the initiation, the Matlama would defeat Ramonaheng in battle. Under Moshoeshoe's leadership, they would cut like a razor (*Shoe-Shoe*) and seize cattle.

² Source: Lebollo la banna.docx - Lebollo la banna From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia Jump to navigationJump to search Male Initiation of the Basotho Men.

Sello M B Mohlaloka et al. (2016) revealed that initiation schools in Africa have traditionally been culturally entrenched among the different indigenous groups as part of the traditional education of the child and can include sexuality education or education for life. Ngale (2021) argues that according to Matšela prior to the nineteenth century and even early twentieth century, Lebollo (initiation rites) were a prerequisite rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood among the Basotho.

Makhata (2018) states that Ellenberger (the historian) subscribed to Basotho traditional initiation as school for boys and girls. "It is the base on which all their civil, political, social life rests, and is or rather was, to the idea of national security, what the cult of the manes was to personal well-being. It has always been the aim of circumcision to make the boy into the man, and a member and defender of the tribe. For years before they were initiated, boys considered initiation as an important, exciting part of their upbringing, without which they could not participate in some social activities and affairs. A great deal of mystery surrounded the initiation school, which took place in a lodge 'mophato' built at a secluded place in the mountains, and boys did not know what to expect.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LEBOLLO

The notion of Lebollo has several meanings, among the Basotho people. Between birth and puberty many things happen into person's life. Lebollo is a cultural and traditional practice that transitions young boys and girls in to adulthood in the Basotho society. The idea of Lebollo can be understood as a sociocultural practice that captures the processes through which individuals' transition into adulthood within Basotho society. It reflects the society's values, social norms, and collective identity, shaping the roles and responsibilities of young people as they integrate into the social fabric. Lebollo marks a change and passage to maturity. Magesa explains that "initiation also refers to the process induction into certain groups and societies, blood-friendships, oaths of secrecy, or commitments to a certain cause, and so on (Makhata, 2018). When young boys are initiated (undergoing initiation processes) at initiation schools, they are referred to as initiates and traditional practices in such schools are very reticent (Rathebe, 2018). Maharasoa (2006) revealed that the activities, which span a minimum period of six months, happen on a mountain away from the disturbances of village life for maximum concentration and increased chances of attaining training objectives. Strategies to tailor peace-building education congruent to the social and cultural context of Basotho (Mokotso, 2005).

Before one can investigate the role of initiation in constructing the moral fibre of men, moral values and morality need to be defined in a general socio-cultural context to provide a basis for the comparison and discussion (Ntombana, 2011). Mokotso (2005) brings to light that Lebollo symbolises the indigenous Basotho schooling system because it is institutionalised and includes a set of cultural curriculum content, cultural professional teachers and a specific period and location agreed upon. Matobo et al. (2009) on the other hand proposed that historically among Basotho. Thabane (2002) discovered that Christian societies of Southern Africa, traditional cultural rites were discouraged and discarded by the missionaries. Undergoing initiation is a stage when Basotho youth are trained for adulthood. As members of their society they are prepared to fit into the existing social structures. Monyela (2017) regarded Lebollo as a cultural and traditional practice that the society follows to construct the manhood identity. It is a rite of passage in a sense that boys pass the puberty stage and enter the adulthood stage to become men.

THE CONCEPT OF LEBOLLO AS A PASSAGE OF RITE FROM VARIOUS SCHOLARS

Various scholars subscribed to the description and interpretation of the rite of passage in context of Lebollo. In accordance to Matobo et al. (2009), Basotho people conducted an Initiation school, which was a rite of passage. The school played the role of moulding boys and girls to their adult duties and their roles in the community. Boys were taught endurance and courage while girls were taught how to take care of the young ones (Vin, 2019). Matobo et al. (2009) maintained that among the Basotho, traditional initiation (Lebollo) has several meanings, which mark a change and a passage to maturity. The first meaning refers to the tapering-off of the umbilical cord from a newly born baby (*ngoana o bolotse*) that also signifies the end of menstruation for its mother.

Rachel T. Lebese, Tebogo M. Mothiba, Mercy T. Mulaudzi, Ntsieni S. Mashau, (2022) postulated that separation, transition, and incorporation are the three characteristics of rites of passage. The institution of Lebollo, as a rite of passage among the Basotho people, covers significant cultural rituals that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is where human development begins, and there are physical changes and a shift from childish behaviour

to adulthood. Puberty, for example, is characterised by uncertainty and mystery, which can cause anxiety. Matobo et al. (2009) on the second meaning of initiation refers to circumcision at the modern hospital when a boy child or a man goes for genital operation that removes the foreskin at the hospital. The researcher further maintained that the third meaning of Lebollo refers to a rite of passage into adulthood of both adolescent boys and girls. It is this type of Lebollo that presents challenges to the rural communities in Lesotho and South Africa. On the other hand, (Plooy, 2006) maintained that in philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become another Mohlaloka et al. (2016) maintained that Lebollo is thus a systematic traditional model for developing and sustaining human factor character traits and values among Basotho youth, in order to positively direct the latter's energies and resources towards human and organisational flourishing. The individual dimension of Lebollo could be summarised as the emergence of an autotelic personality characterised by exceptional courage, magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation, calculated humility, integrity, self-discipline, and high ethical standards (Ngale, 2021) Lebollo shows the important shift in status for young individuals, preparing them for the responsibilities and roles associated with adulthood in Basotho society. Many rites are performed and prayers are said to enhance the individual's vital powers in other words, ancestors are considered the guardians, protectors and conscience of the community.

5. FUNCTIONS OF LEBOLLO AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Lebollo, as a social institution, is fundamental to the cultural fabric of Lesotho, blending traditional practices with the evolving needs of modern society. Maharasa (2006) revealed that the activities, which span a minimum period of six months, happen on a mountain away from the disturbances of village life for maximum concentration and increased chances of attaining training objectives. However, these days the duration of Lebollo in Lesotho takes two to three months. It differs from region to region. Mokotso (2005) revealed that Lesotho is currently beset with political, social, economic, cultural, religious, institutional and interpersonal violence. A study conducted by Makhata (2018) revealed that Lebollo promotes an element of togetherness amongst the initiates and the community benefits because things are done equal. The element of promoting togetherness in the society of constitutes Lebollo as of importance and significant social institution within Basotho people. Ngale (2021) claims that inputs relating to Lebollo comprise the Basotho general vision of peaceful coexistence (khotso), love and social justice through purity of heart, social justice, local grounding and universal ethos, unity in diversity and character transformation. Monyela (2017) proved that the boys are separated from all social activities and kept in a secluded place where their transition from adolescence stage into adulthood or from boyhood into manhood takes place.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE QUALITIES TAUGHT DURING LEBOLLO

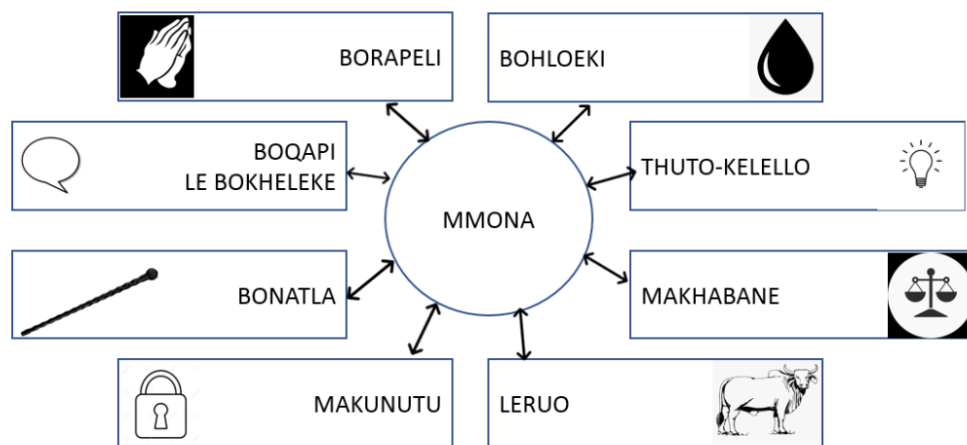


Figure 1. Adapted from Thabelo, (2020).

The above Figure demonstrate significant common features of Lebollo in Sesotho language, they are literally translated, starting with *Borapeli* (Spirituality), *Bohloeki* (Purity), *Boqapi le Bokheleke* (Eloquence), *Thuto-kelello* (Intellectual engagement), *Bonatl* (Warriorship), *Makhabane* (Virtues), *Makunutu* (Secrecy)³ and *Leruo* (Economic development).

³ The ability of initiates to maintain confidentiality is seen as a powerful lever for the preservation of what counts as unique to a tribe. War strategies were previously seen as some of the national secrets that males had to keep (Sello M B Mohlaloka et al., 2016).

The influence of Lebollo in context of Basotho society is natured in a form of preparatory institution or formation of young boys to become men. In accordance to Rathebe (2018), one of the mechanisms perceived to be important with regard to initiation schools is the given cultural instruction in relation to the roles and responsibilities of what is to be called a "man".

Mohlaloka et al. (2016) revealed that *Bohlweki* (purity): Initiates are taught about cleanliness in its literal form as it relates to a hygienic way of living; that is why they must wash before they eat. It also relates to metaphorical purity as it relates to the purging of mind and soul. Letseka (2013) argues that Lebollo sought to instil competencies such as *thuto-kelello* (cognitive engagement). that is, the ability to think strategically and at the highest level.

6. EDUCATIONAL ASPECT AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY OF LEBOLLO

Every society has their own educational system and through that their people are socialized. In this paper an attempt is made to get some information from a tribe located in Lesotho. The investigation of this area is imperative as it forms the foundation for social institutions dedicated to conventional education in society. Ngale (2021) proclaimed that in the light of linking education to character formation and human and organisational flourishing, it should be noted that pre-colonial indigenous Basotho education evolved around "the initiation schools that acted as informal institutions where learning actually took place. Boys and girls separately learned cultural values and philosophy, personal and family responsibility and duties to one's clan and people. Mohlaloka et al. (2016) asserts that cognitive engagement (*thuto-kelello*) is done through praise poems and learning about the history of a group. The initiates are taught to think strategically because thinking strategically and at a high-level means that they are being prepared to serve on the chief's cabinet. Mapesela argues that Basotho indigenous education inculcated good ethics, morals and values such as humaneness (Botho/ Ubuntu), neighbourliness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. It is his view that Basotho indigenous education (Ngale, 2021). Although Lebollo as a social institution of Basotho people, it has its own social negative forces. The idea that Lebollo caused youth to become deviants is supported by some research. Mohlaloka et al. (2016) wrote that it emerged that some boys younger than 18 often attend initiation schools. And further explained that some of the younger boys attend initiation schools without the consent of their parents. As a result, this causes problems, as explained by one of the *basuwe*, because once they are there, in accordance with the rules of the initiation schools, they cannot be allowed to leave.

7. THE ARTISTIC PERFORMANCES OF INITIATES AFTER THE COMPLETION OF TRAINING PERIOD:

Once the initiation process is complete, the initiates return to their respective villages or society from the mountain, also known as "*mophatong*." They gather with the elders and men to celebrate their completion, their faces painted with red ochre. During the celebration, they sing the songs they composed at *mophatong*.



Source: (Szydluk, 2023)

The above pictures portray the ceremonial acts performed by the initiates in front of the rest of their families and community members. The performance reveals the artistic songs known as *magae*, they would be singing for the community welcoming them back with gifts and new clothes in the society. Each initiate sings a song meaningful in relation to their personal experience and future plans. On arrival of the initiates at their respective communities together with their teachers and other *babolli* (Lebollo alumina), they would rotate at each an everyone's home to celebrate together the completion of their initiation period. During this rotation of ceremonial activities, a lot of artistic performances such as the representation of *tsoeli* is being displayed and inspire the young people to have an interest in Lebollo. Some of the "*magae*" songs are embraced by society because they convey powerful messages and reconnect with the historical

roots of the ancestors during wartime defence. These songs and poems are also featured in national cultural ceremonies and broadcasted on radio stations. The *Mesuo*, also known as the teachers at initiation schools, teaches the initiates how to compose praise poems. A man is supposed to 'ithoka'. In a literal sense to *ithoka* means a praise and oral poetry of the *Koma*, their ancestral heritage, the clan they come from in the Basotho clans and what they stand for as Basotho people (Thabelo, 2020). Sello Martin Blase Mohlaloka et al. (2016) viewed the songs that were sung and the poems that were recited by their forefathers are taught to the initiates.

8. CONFLICT BETWEEN CHURCH AND LEBOLLO

In context of the effects of Lebollo on the social action or phenomena as a cultural practice, the church also plays a major role as a social institution. This is an indication that the two institutions are subject to the structure of the society even the tradition initiation is negatively perceived by the church. In Lesotho, there is a saying "*Baruti ba Moshoeshe*" which means Moshoeshe's pastors/ministers of the gospel, which signifies the importance of the gospel, the church and missionaries, yet very little about the work that these people achieved while living in Lesotho and preaching the gospel to Basotho is recorded (Leanya, 2013). Moshoeshe reorganised the Basotho nation made up of the Sotho/Tswana and Nguni groups surviving the Difaqane upheavals (Resane, 2020). Christianity thrived among the Basotho due to Moshoeshe's influence and cooperation with missionaries. Makhata (2018) opined that historically, the missionary church found the Basotho having their own customs, the way they lived. Lebollo was one of those customs.

9. SOCIAL COMPLICATIONS, SOCIETAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF LEBOLLO

Lebollo has of late received criticism as it has contributed to the rise in negative social behaviour (Thabelo, 2020). The lack of physical strength and the emotional immaturity of these youngsters may result in physical and/or emotional harm because dropping out of initiation school is not an option and is seen as deplorable (Sello Martin Blase Mohlaloka et al., 2016). It seems as if too young learners do not reap any benefits from attending initiation schools. Health issues are another drawback. Due of a lack of knowledge regarding HIV awareness, the initiates in Southern Africa contracted the disease. Matobo et al. (2009) proclaimed that men are afraid of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, and circumcision could be the answer. Same application in Lesotho is relevant as the same practice is been applied.

The majority of recent publications investigate the role of initiation in reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS, as well as the issues related to the escalating deaths among initiates (Ntombana, 2011). This occurrence appears to be effective since Lesotho health expectations highlight the value of circumcision for all men. Gupta (2002) claimed that there is a great deal of singing, dancing, storytelling, chatting, fun and laughter. Most of the dances and games are sexually suggestive and provocative.

Monyela (2017) articulated that 'Lebollo' articulates personal growth and transience with mechanisms of social reproduction and continuity by reforming subjective identity, and in the process encompassing the domestic domain in the agnatically ordered collectively. Identify reasons for initiates' deviant behaviour at school after returning from Lebollo and offer some suggestions on how to reduce deviant behaviour that may be linked to Lebollo (Sello Martin Blase Mohlaloka et al., 2016). As a part of Lebollo, as in many other African societies, Basotho youth were taught about the structure of their social environment, their place in that structure, and how they were expected to behave towards everyone within it (Ngale, 2021). Mbiti (1986: 174), who defines morals from an African perspective, agrees with Lee when he mentions that: 'morals have been evolved in order to keep society not only alive but in harmony. Morals guide people in doing what is right and good for both their own sake and that of their community (Ntombana, 2011).

Merton (1957) subscribed to examples like education, which aims to educate students but also fosters social ties. Stop-and-frisk aimed to improve safety but resulted in racial profiling and distrust of police. Although manifest functions arise from a wide range of social behaviours, they are most frequently described as the results of the work of social institutions such as the family, the media, education, and religion, as well as the policies, regulations, and norms that govern society. The concept of latent and manifest functions was laid out by Merton is relevant to this paper in the sense that its focus is on the functionalistic perspective of the society. Understanding these concepts could help in analysing how societies operate and maintain their cohesiveness since a society is a web of institutions, beliefs and practices. Through the theory and concept given by Merton, one can get an understanding of individuals behaviour in society. However, the applicability of reference group theory is crucial in this context. Crossman (2019) viewed a reference group as is a

collection of people that we use as a standard of comparison for ourselves regardless of whether we are part of that group. In actuality, we depend on our reference groups to understand the social norms that influence our values, behaviours, and ways of thinking. It is merely a method of measuring or a tool to ascertain the actions or behaviours of individuals in a society. The application of reference group theory in relation to *babulli* (initiates) would help us navigate the complex landscape of social interactions and individual identity in Lesotho society. Some of Babuli's actions after attending Lebollo demonstrate this; they tend to become deviants and disturb society by engaging in immoral activities like stealing, fraud, or even murder.

The institution of Lebollo shapes and influences gender roles, normative perceptions and the behaviour in context of Basotho men. Traditionally, Thabelo, (2020), posited that Lebollo was not significantly associated with weakly rejecting Gender Based Violence (GBV) perceptions. This was the finding after adjusting for education and socioeconomic factors, that Lebollo was significantly associated with weakly rejecting GBV perceptions.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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