

## DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY IN LESOTHO: A CASE OF PEKA

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### Abstract

Based on the anthropological study undertaken in Peka over a period of two years, and using the postmodernism theory of deconstruction, the paper deconstructs the socio-cultural practices of Basotho which seem to uphold and celebrate patriarchy in the society. The main practices the paper looks at are 'koae', extra-marital affair, bridewealth, social ceremonies and rituals and paramountcy and chieftainship in Lesotho and in particular at Peka area. Though deconstructive approach is problematic in analysing non-western societies, it is however a useful approach which can be successfully used to uncover different meanings and indicate how these meanings can change and shift.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, Patriarchy, Custom, Logo centrism, Multi-vocality

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to detect the shifted, deferred and concealed meanings of cultural and social texts. Accordingly, the term 'deconstruction' is perceived as a way of gaining access to the mode in which patriarchy is/was constructed or constituted in Basotho cultural customs and practices and social relations. In the deconstructive 'reading' of cultural and social texts, the discrepancies between what a text sets out to say and what it is constrained to say, are normally pointed out.

In Basotho thinking, there are certain concepts, which have assumed such great importance that they can be regarded as "transcendental signifiers" (Derrida, 1981:19). The assigning of meaning in terms of these concepts will subsequently be examined according to the following 'symptoms': logocentrism, binary-oppositions, multivocality and otherness. The first concept to be considered is the notion of "koae".

### "Koae": 'Pleasure of Patriarchy'

The notion of womanhood in the Basotho culture is closely linked to marriage. The Basotho marriage is a rite of passage from unmarried status to married status. However, most female informants mentioned the welcoming custom, that of "koae", which is a welcome to the husbands' home as one of the more important ones.

In everyday usage "koae" can, firstly, refer to any kind of tobacco. Interviewees informed me that tobacco

is not a westernised product of Basotho culture. Long before Western contact the Basotho planted tobacco called "*Marakoaneng*". The smoking of tobacco was supposed to enrich the mind, and it was regarded as a therapy for nervousness. Many smoke it for pleasure, while traditional healers use it to communicate with the ancestors when diagnosing a disease from which a patient may be suffering and when casting the divine bones to detect the cause of an illness. In most of the rituals where offerings to the ancestors are involved, among the items offered was a certain form of tobacco called "*Mohlothi*". This is sniffed and people sneeze as a sign of contentment; for those who do not want to sneeze, BB tobacco is substituted, which is smoked through a narrow tube with a bowl at one end. According to informants "*koae*" or tobacco snuff is also taken as medicine for headaches. Elderly women will also use the metaphor of tobacco as a play with young naked male children; they will touch the little one's penis and imitate snuffing it and say: "*Oh, this is nice and fulfilling*", meaning it is very good. The 'pleasures' associated with the use of tobacco are thus assigned to or assimilated with the male genitals. The sexual undertone subjacent to the meaning of "*koae*" is fore grounded more clearly in the second usage of the word.

"*Koae*" refers also to the sheep that is proffered by in-laws on the arrival of a new daughter-in-law ("*ngoetsi*") and shows that the husband and his new wife are beginning a new life. They are now officially allowed to have sexual intercourse, but it is expected of them not to eat the meat of the "*koae*" sheep. It is believed that the two might not have children if they eat their own "tobacco". The act is seen as having the power of weakening their genitals.

During the "*koae*" ritual the mother-in-law or other female relatives will clothe the new daughter-in-law with new attire as required by her new status. The new clothes symbolize that the daughter-in-law has undergone a change in status she is now a married woman. Part of her new outfit is a blanket with which the daughter-in-law must cover her body in order to keep it warm. There is much symbolism involved in the putting on of the blanket by the new daughter-in-law. It is associated with the *labia minora* which, it is believed, act as a 'blanket' for the vagina and keeps it warm, while the elongated *labia minora* are designed to cover a man's genital organ to keep it warm (like a blanket) during sexual intercourse. This will give more pleasure to the man.

The new experience of sexual intercourse is a painful one for the virgin, to the point that she might be unable to work or walk properly. She must hide this discomfort from people, especially the father-in-law and the paternal uncles, by wearing the blanket below her knees. This takes place for some time, depending on the particular lineage. After some time the woman replaces the blanket with a light shawl, indicating that she is warm all the time not so much her body as her vagina, and is therefore ready for sex at any time with her husband. Female informants revealed that it was difficult to bear the pain they experienced the first night of married life. However, they were told to bear the pain because as women they would meet with some problems in marriage, which they would have to endure and be patient, for that was the beginning of marriage. They declared:

*“Marriage is tough. This is a sign that you were well behaved and a man should be proud of being the first one to meet with a virgin”*. They declared unanimously:

*“Do not shout at the top of your voice, this is the stage of bearing pain; it shows that you are a woman. You are making fun of your husband who should enjoy sex with you. Stop crying and shouting, we have all passed through this stage. Your married equals will laugh at you. A woman should show perseverance in experiencing this pain”*.

This prepared a wife for childbearing.

Most of the older female informants mentioned that it was a disgrace to find that a girl's *labia minora* were not elongated. The man would complain of the wife being cold, meaning that his genital organ is not covered during sexual intercourse and that the woman takes time to become warm because her vagina lacked a “blanket” to keep it warm. The man would complain to his mother, and this was a form of disgrace for the new daughter-in-law. This was taken so seriously that girls would work on elongating their *labia minora* and old women would chase them in a form of play to find out whether they had done so.

Each rite of passage can, anthropologically speaking, be divided into three ritual stages, of which the final one is that of 'incorporation'. “*Koae*” is not only the welcoming of the new daughter-in-law, but her incorporation to a new position, that of readiness, availability and receptivity. When women were asked to respond to this new position, the simple answer came forth time and again. “*Ke Sesotho*” This is the Basotho way. The “*koae*” mode of assigning meaning to the married woman's role and position thus represents a 'logocentrism' in Basotho culture. Having dealt with the notion of “*koae*” let us turn to a patriarchal practice of “*bonyatsi*”.

### **'Bonyatsi': 'Spice of Life'**

“*Bonyatsi*”, refers to a concubine in an extra-marital affair. It is a general phenomenon in Lesotho although supposedly frowned upon. In addition, while the term “*bonyatsi*” (which is derived from the verb “*nyatsi*”) means to reject, it is on the contrary seen as a soothing and therapeutic mechanism for a miserable partner, or a break in the monotony of living with one partner. Accordingly, it is believed that a long period without sexual intercourse (for example, when the husband is away due to migrant labour) will cause serious illness, like the disturbance of the woman's menstrual cycle. The point is that although an adulterous affair can severely harm a marriage, it also fulfils a specific sociological function.

In the “*bonyatsi*” relationship, the man's (otherwise) patriarchal power is shifted away from the centre, as it is decentralized by the creation of a binary opposite the female “*nyatsis*”. Stated differently, although a man may maintain his 'normal' authority and power over his married wife (bonded in a social system), that is not the case with the “*nyatsis*”. She is not the repressed, ignored, marginalized 'other', while he has for obvious reasons, to be polite and kind, patient and loving, respect her wishes and so on. This situation confuses men. Male informants, for example, state: “*Those in the “bonyatsi” affair (women)*

have fascinating powers, we men become very stupid, to the extent that we forget our wives and our own children". The men have no adequate explanations for such powers wielded by women, thinking that "some women use 'muti' (traditional medicine) such as sheba-'na feela (meaning 'pay attention to me alone') and seletjane (*hermannia depressa*) which is believed to be a traditional aphrodisiac medicine prepared by women. Others state that: "These women give us some medicine called phehla", ("phehla" means a man follows the instructions given by a woman to hoodwink a man, diligently and without any questions).

The power of women in a "bonyatsi" relationship is vested in the concept of taking and giving. The woman is satisfied because she gains love, security and material things. In most cases, it usually serves as a safety valve or a survival strategy for abused, deserted, and sometimes even ordinary women. To show the power of "bonyatsi", women will sing songs at shebeens or during the "litolobonya" ceremony (welcoming of the new baby). Women will sing these songs denoting the power of love; they are proud that they have taken the husbands of other women and that they "own" them. A few of these songs are cited:

- "Mong'a monna ha a loana a nke chefo a impolae, na ke ikentse ka mahetla". (The owner of the husband should fight and take poison to commit suicide because I am carrying him with my shoulders). In singing this song a woman shows that she is deeply in love with the man, and the wife of the man can do whatever she wants, even to the point of committing suicide. The woman is in control not only of his love, but also of the man's economic resources.
- "Mong'a monna o teng, taba liteng ha ke mosheba oa ntšonyetsa taba liteng". (The owner of the husband is around; when I look at her she becomes sulky).
- "Helehele, ngoana moshanyana o ntšale morao ke mo nkile ha ke etsa tjena ke etsa motho famo". The woman implies that the man is completely hers and should follow her and she is going to enjoy sex with him to the fullest. "Famo" is a game in which the woman turns around quickly to make her dress show her underwear in order to entice the men.

In the same vein, men have a song addressing the love affairs attached to women's extra-marital lovers. For example, one of the songs goes as follows: "Ha ke ea nka mosali ke nkile lerato, lerato ke la ka mosali ke oa hau, nkutloele bohloko". This means, "I have given the woman love which is mine, however the woman is yours, please bear with me". In essence, the male "nyatsi" in this song is explaining that he is providing the woman with abundant love, while the woman is still the property of another man. The man should thank him and bear with him because the prospective husband has failed to give the woman love, now he is providing her with what she misses.

Informants comment that songs are a powerful mode of communication. For example, if the man has often reported the wife's "bonyatsi" to the family council or if he has been talking to his wife about the

issue in vain, the words of his song will be: “*Ntate mpitsetse bana ba ka mosali oa ka o nketsetsa mathaithai. Ke buile le eena maobane, tsatsing lena u nketsetsa mathaithai*”. This means: “My father, call my children. My wife is misbehaving. I talked to her very often about this even yesterday, but she continues cheating on me”. The man is morose about the bad behaviour of the wife, and he appeals to his father to call his children because he wants to inform them of the situation. He thinks that the children will confront the mother and in turn, the mother will be ashamed to realize that her children know about her “*bonyatsi*” affair.

In praising his “*nyatsi*”, the man will utter phrases such as “*mothepa oa ka banna lijo tseo a mphang tsona ha ho mosali a ka mphang tse joalo*”, which literally means: “My lover “*nyatsi*” is satisfying me with good food and no woman can compete with her”. The actual meaning of this, however, is: “My “*nyatsi*” satisfies me sexually and there is no other woman who can compete with her, she is my beloved one, her sexuality is under my control”. Sexual intercourse is regarded as a form of food which satisfies a man's appetite, and it is said that a man's blood should be healthy and he should be ready to service a woman regularly.

In the “*bonyatsi*” relationship, binary oppositions are created: The woman gains power and controls the man socially and economically to the point that he submits to all her demands. The patriarchal power of men in “*bonyatsi*” relations in most cases is suppressed and marginalized (Balking, 1996:38-39; Powell, 1998:102). In the “*bonyatsi*” relationship, men who otherwise are considered more powerful than women reverse their super-ordinate status and thus find themselves in a subordinate relation to women. Another custom to be examined is “*bohali*” custom.

### **“*Bohali*” - Confirming The Logocentrism of Patriarchy**

Over many years, the topic of bridewealth has been the focus of considerable anthropological discussion and debate (Bouwer, 1953; Cortez, 1935:219; Comaroff, 1980:167; Goody, 1973; Holleman, 1960:94; Lèvi-Strauss, 1969:61 and Mathews, 1940:1-24). For the purpose of this study, it is deemed unnecessary to deal with this debate here. Authors like Letsitsi (1990:36), Maqutu (1992:23) and Mosito (1997:359) confirm that bridewealth in Basotho society complies with the general structural and functional explanations and interpretations. For example, it is a compensation for the transfer of a woman or the rights vested in her from one kin group to another; or for the granting of rights through offspring; and so on.

The Sesotho word for bridewealth, '*bohali*', is a combination of the prefix '*bo*' = denotes singular + the suffix '*hali*' = which either means 'the place of residence of the husband's parents', or it indicates that the sex of somebody/something is female. The concept '*bohali*' thus has a symbolic meaning (home), as well as a referential one (sex).

Traditionally “*bohali*” was paid with cattle and even where money or goods may be used nowadays in response to new socio-economic demands, it will still be seen symbolically as 'cattle'. The taxonomy '*bohali* cattle' is based on the ideational notion that the cattle represent male as well as female animals. A

cow is regarded as a noble animal: “*khomo ke Molimo o nko e metsi*” (A cow is God with a dewy nose). In “*bohali*” a cow is an animal which expands the relationships among people, because it provides food, it reproduces and serves the needs of Man (e.g. used for ploughing the fields). The same kind of qualities, duties and functions are expected from a married woman.

Notwithstanding the changes that Basotho “*bohali*” practices have undergone, it remains intact and continues to provide a powerful means of control over women. Irrespective of how much “*bohali*” a Mosotho man has exchanged for his wife, he obtains exclusive and absolute rights in/over her. However, “*malome*” a patriarchal figure in the “*bohali*” negotiation is important to be examined.

### **“*Malome*”: A Pillar in Basotho Society**

There is a Sesotho maxim which indicates that: “The “*malome*” is the one who bites from both sides”. Indeed, he possessed multiple voices/speaks with two quite different voices. He, on the one hand, fulfils in his own family / patrilineage the 'normal' patriarchal roles and duties, and enjoys the privileges associated with and ascribed to a male person. His influence, on the other hand, extended into his sister's family-in-law where he safeguards her interests, and thus directly those of his patrilineage. He:

- has to be informed about events that take place regarding his sister and her children;
- conducts, or is involved in various rituals and ceremonies on their behalf (e.g. contributions to their '*bohali*' and initiation, as well as during times of sickness and misfortune);
- is the one who introduces the newborn children of his sister to his/her lineage's ancestors, who appeases the ancestors, who calls upon them for the well-being of the children, and who will firstly be called upon during the pouring of soil in the graves of his nephews and nieces as a sign of beating farewell to the dead, and to inform the ancestors that their child is back with them; and
- is the one who makes sure that there is frequent contact with the mother's kin.

Although the Basotho is a patrilineal-orientated society, the '*malome*' ensures that the 'story' of the mother's side is also told; that the married sister has a firm link with her natal lineage through her brother; and that the importance of the matrilineage is not being underplayed by the in-laws.

In the elementary Basotho family, the relation between a father and his children can be described as formal, strict, while the frequency of contact is low and the children have to pay the necessary respect at all times. As '*malome*', the same person will stand in a completely different (warm, intimate and close = mild joking) relationship to his sister's children. Although the '*malome*' will act as a kind of father for his nephews and nieces and must be respected by them because he is from a senior generation, he is forbidden to punish them, because it will offend the ancestors. Nephews and nieces, from their side, will acknowledge the involvement of the '*malome*' in their lives, as well as the contributions he has made on their behalf over the years. For this reason the nephew will give his first salary to the '*malome*'. This gesture is called '*masalieo*' (*mosali* = woman + *eo* = that one), meaning: “I am doing this to show '*malome*' that when the time comes for my marriage, he is the one who will help me.”

Ceremonies and rituals which have ramifications of a patriarchal logocentrism are analysed in the section

below.

### **Ceremonies and Rituals: Ramifications of Patriarchal Logocentrism**

The ceremonies and rituals deconstructed here, only affect women. In the Basotho (cultural, social and ritual) context, these stylised performances serve the same purpose, namely the reinforcing of patriarchal power.

#### **'Bipa'**

During the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy of a first child, the daughter-in-law is sent back to her natal home to perform the "bipa" ceremony, and to deliver the baby. According to Basotho legend, one of the wives of a polygamist was at loggerheads with another co-wife and decided to give her millet to eat, with the intention of murdering her. This was not eaten. However, the woman who was given the millet enjoyed it very much and gained weight. The people began regarding the millet as an important grain; the seeds could be sown for making porridge ("motoho" and "papa" meal-pap) and it could be used as yeast for making Basotho beer. It is the latter use of millet that gives rise to "bipa". After the millet is softened in water, it is put into a sack, covered with blankets, to germinate, while it is stirred from time to time. After germination, the millet is spread out in the sun to dry, whereafter it is ground into flour ("mela") that is used as yeast in the making of Basotho beer.

A baby is seen as being similar to millet; first it is the seed which is 'germinating' inside the uterus. In order for it to 'germinate' well, the mother is provided with the following clothes: a loose pink flannel shirt and a half skirt of traditional Basotho dress. These clothes are meant to be loose to allow the child to move freely. The mother's hair is shaved and a mixture of butterfat, or vaseline, mixed with red ochre (*letsoku*) is applied to her body, and she has to go barefoot. The mixture applied keeps the body warm and it allows the child to grow well, while the mother must go barefoot, with her head shaved, to resemble the baby in the womb who is covered by a membrane only. The red ochre must be collected from the east, implying *Ntsoanatsatsi*. It is said that the child moves in the mother's womb with the amniotic fluid membrane surrounding the placenta like water snakes from *Ntsoanatsatsi*.

Lesitsi (2002:37) asserts that a visitor can easily identify the clans in a village by identifying the mark ("khoetsa") on the necklace ("rempi") that expectant mothers of firstborn babies wear during the "bipa" period. Informants explained that, for example, in the case of the Basia clan (whose totem is the wild cat) a turned softened skin in which the foot of a wildcat and the end of its tail are worn, and which is decorated with black and white beads is worn around the neck. It is alleged that the wildcat prevents evil spirits from attacking the expectant mother and the foetus. The black beads show that the child is living in the dark inside the mother's womb and should be well protected, while the white beads are used to represent light and symbolize the child's eventual departure from the darkness of the womb and its life on earth where there is light.

After the birth of the firstborn at her natal home, the nursing mother sleeps on the floor next to "Ba faat[e]" (ancestors) who are believed to be taking care of her and the baby. The same applies during her bereavement after the death of her husband.

## **Bereavement and 'Thapo'**

When the corpse of a deceased husband is laid out, the head must face east (in the case of a deceased wife, she should face the opposite direction, in other words, west). As a sign of respect, the mother of the late husband will lie during the night-watch opposite the feet of the corpse. Informants suggest that the mother's position shows that she is the one who kept his baby feet warm and took care of him. The ancestors will be very pleased because they notice that the mother is at the feet of her son acknowledging his seniority.

During the period of mourning, the widow is, out of respect, supposed to speak softly, not to undertake any journeys and to perform the "thapo" ritual. The name "thapo" refers to a plaited grass rope made from grass called "loli" or "moli" that grows near the marshy areas of *Nsoanatsatsi*. There is a Sesotho saying that a bereaved woman "*o ithoetse meli hloohong*" is putting "meli" (in other words the plaited grass rope) on her head, meaning that she is mourning her beloved husband. The widow also wears a softened sheepskin and applies black clay, called "*moking*", daily on her body to denote her sorrow. The black colour indicates that life within the deceased's family has been disrupted because of the loss of the husband. The implication of the wearing of "thapo" is to please the dead and the ancestors, and to show that the family cares for their departed son and husband.

## **Cleansing Period**

The cleansing of a widow takes place when the late husband's "thapo" is removed. This ritual takes place at the widow's natal home, so that bad omens are left there. The natal home is the place where the widow's impurities after the birth of her first child were hidden at the ash-heap (for example, the umbilical stump and the first hair which was cut). Cleansing at the natal home denotes that it is the home of the mother's ancestors who have to take care of their child and to bestow good fortune on her.

During the cleansing period, a sheep or a cow is slaughtered to appease the ancestors. Part of its blood is mixed with the chyme from the small intestines, its bile and pieces of aloe maculata "*lekhala la bafu*". According to the informants, the chyme of the small intestine of an animal and the substances from the bile purify the blood of an animal. The Basotho value the bile because its bitter taste is believed to expel evil spirits. It is used for most of the rituals, for example the ancestral ceremony, the purification of orphans after the death of parents either the mother or the father. The mixture is put into the bathtub in which the widow takes a bath with the help of one of the older women. The following words are uttered while bathing: "*M'antang our child we thank you for respecting your husband and his blanket ('thapo'). Today you are a new person. The bath you have taken removes all impurities. You are entering into new life*". The woman's parents have to bear the cost of the cleansing ritual. She is thereafter thought to have regained her purity and virginity and her social status reverts to what it was before she married. Relatives give clothes and blankets as gifts. She will be praised for having met the demands of the mourning period. Manifestation of patriarchy are not masked in ritual ceremonies and cultural practices but are also marked in the chieftainship and paramountcy of Lesotho.

## **Unmasking the Nature of Paramount and Chieftainship**



The centre (truth/essence) on which all Basotho thought is based, and which guarantees all meaning, is the institution of chieftainship. Without it the Basotho cannot operate, function or exist. Machobane (2001:10) emphasizes the power and meaning of the Paramount Chief as follows: "In Basuto eyes he is at once the custodian and embodiment of Basuto national aspirations. He is regarded as the head of the Basuto Government to whom all Principal Chiefs, Ward Chiefs, Chiefs and headmen are subordinate. No Chief, however powerful, can claim to share authority with him, once his status has been recognized and declared."

All land (whatever the purpose may be: grazing lands, forests, graveyards, allocation of sites for initiation schools, etc) belongs to the King (His Majesty, King Letsie III). Chiefs (Principal chiefs, area chiefs and sub-chiefs and headmen and their committees) represent the King at village level, and work on his behalf for the people. Basotho chieftainship is a mark of security of the nation hence the villages in Lesotho are named after or related to their chief, for example Peka ha Lechesa, Peka ha Leburu.

The nation belongs to the King, and all are answerable to him, he is the father of the Basotho nation, the head of the Lesotho state and the mark ("*khoetsa*") of the nation. Various Sesotho proverbs confirm and uphold the importance of the King and his chiefs: "*Morena o matsoho a malelele*" (the King's hands are long, which implies that chiefs work for the good of the King); "*Morena ke khomo e tjicha*" (the King works in different ways for the good of the nation); and "*Morena ke morena ka batho*" (a chief is a chief by the people).

Although chieftainship is still a very strong patriarchal institution in Lesotho which capitalised on male-domination, it is not unfamiliar for a woman regent to act as a chief (In a certain way, one can think of this as the development of a binary opposition). For example: chieftainess 'M'ant[e]bo Seeiso is still remembered for her efforts to prevent the passing of a law against women to forbid them to sell home-brewed beer. Chieftainesses 'M'amathe Masupha and Makopoi Api were articulate in fighting for the women's franchise. These developments have assisted the nation at large. On several occasions, the late Queen Mother, 'M'amohato Seeiso, acted as regent during the absence of her husband. She performed well, making a valid contribution to the nation's well-being.

## **Conclusion**

To a large extent, this paper has attempted to deconstruct Basotho ethnographic 'texts' on patriarchy. Derrida proposes certain procedures for the deconstruction of literature texts (Powell, 1998:106). In Anthropology, the study of meaning involves more than the decentering of a hierarchy. To make an ethnographic text means the opposite of what it originally appeared to mean. To begin with, there is the unique and particular interpretative dimension that resides in all cultural and social expressions. And although the researcher must focus, for example, on the binary oppositions within an ethnographic text, (s)he must at the same time remain aware of the problematic and interpretative dimension of the other culture. Society reaches further than merely taking on the point to show how these opposites are related, and how one is regarded as central and privileged and the other ignored, repressed and marginalized. Cultural and social experiences cannot be understood simply as a free play of meanings in which the researcher could wallow at any given time or manner.

The real issue of this paper is more than merely one of exploring patriarchy. Because the histories of gender relations were not used as linguistic texts, but as social history which is always transmitted through cultural meanings and social practices, the central (hermeneutical) question of the accessibility of subjective experience and the understanding of sense via ethnographic texts, presented itself anew in the study which this

paper forms part of. For example: Is the produced ethnographical knowledge on patriarchy and the Basotho's everyday experience of it (in) compatible? Is there a paradox between the method of analysis and interpretation used here and the self-interpretation of one's own life histories? Did deconstruction after all, given the translation problems of life histories which intend to articulate and present the otherness of everyday experiences and modes of behaviour, provide any new insights into patriarchy?

There is no simple 'yes' or 'no' to the above-mentioned questions. It must be remembered that all anthropological enquiries have their own intrinsic limitations when it comes to translating another culture and way of life. Despite the reductions which are found in the presentation of the discourse on Basotho authority and gender power relations (which will, for example, not stand up to testing concepts like "uni-sex", or gender relations in an industrial-capitalist, commodity-producing society which Lesotho is not), deconstruction has substantial validity. The approach, for example, leads to a fundamental questioning of the centralist, unilinear way of seeing, understanding and experiencing patriarchy in Basotho society. Although the deconstruction of ethnographic texts is not a common practice in Anthropology with its clear, prescribed guidelines and is thus not without its problems and difficulties, it is possible to uncover different meanings and to indicate how these meanings can change and shift.

## Endnotes

1. Most female informants saw it as a retaliation strategy against their abusive husbands, while men's justification was patriarchal: "There is nothing wrong with "bonyatsi" practice. I also want to be loved and taken care of economically". This emphasis on extra-marital affairs gave them status and added masculinity. Some female informants found it to be a sophisticated type of survival strategy that seems to be an important aspect of the whole practice.
2. Sesotho songs sung at beer halls or at social entertainment occasions relating to love affairs have got thrilling, comforting and vengeful words as well as appealing ones, for those who have been disappointed in love.
3. In various African societies, according to Scheider (1981:87), the number of rights a man receives varies in accordance with what is given for "*bohali*".
4. *Ntsoanatsatsi* is regarded as the place of origin (the home) of the Basotho. It is a place with dams, water snakes, swamps, marshes, reeds and good vegetation. The eastern cardinal is the rising sun; it is a place of peace and sunshine and all the ancestors reside there (Rakotsoane, 2001:30). In the past children were told that babies come from *Ntsoanatsatsi*. After delivery, other women might tease the mother who has just delivered by asking her: "How were the snakes? Were they wild?" This is in reference to the severity or mildness of the labour pains. If the pains were very severe, it denotes that the snakes of *Ntsoanatsatsi* were wild. In order to calm the snakes (pains) and to ease labour different medicinal herbs were used.
5. With the coming of Christianity the wives of white priests introduced the black cloth which they wore in their home countries during bereavement. Western traders introduced black fabric cloth which was purchased as a "*thapo*" cloth.

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