

An Anthropological Investigation of Sotho Worldviews, Myths and Stereotypes Attached to Immigrants in Lesotho, Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT It is universal for different societies of the world to attach myths and stereotypes towards strangers and people of other cultures. It should be noted that some of these myths are as a result of the historical experiences and encounters. The main assumption of this study is that generally, there are myths and stereotypes that are associated with foreigners in all human societies, in which case the Sotho of Southern Africa are no exception. However, the curiosity to know and document the extent to which this inclination really holds in daily interaction between foreigners and local population in Lesotho motivated this study. The population of this study consists of residents of *Hata-Butle* in Roma valley, near the National University of Lesotho. It is mainly characterized of homogeneous attribute 'local residents', from where a representative sample of twenty individuals which cuts across social categories was purposively selected. A combination of indepth and key informant interview methods was used as the efficient technique of collecting the required data. The study found mixed feelings of responses from the interviewees, which range from negative to positive notions. However, most of the negative notions were held comparably stronger than the positive ones. Immigrants have been described in various ways, including being labeled as "*makoerekoere*" and perceived as interlopers, opportunists, undesirable, witches, cheats, women snatchers among others. In addition, specific notions and stereotypes about different nationals, such as Zimbabweans, Nigerians, Chinese, Indians and the Whites were revealed. The conclusion suggests a need to strengthen the positive notions about these immigrants in Lesotho, owing to their highly quantifiable contributions to the economy of the country and that of Southern Africa in general.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is the continuous movement of people from one area to another. It is a common and universal phenomenon because it exists and happens in spite of various human limitations in and around the world. It is the movement of people into and out of a specified territory (Macionis and Gerber 2005: 545). Some observers have amply described Africa as a continent perpetually on the move. It is a process that has been going on long time ago. Lesotho as part of Africa has also been affected by migration. In most cases, it involves individuals or groups travelling from their origin to another country with the intention of permanently or temporarily settling down in that particular country, where such persons are generally known as immigrants until their citizenship is confirmed (Wehmeier 1948: 743). The most important reason for immigration is for employment purposes to better one's job prospects which might involve immigration on a mass scale from one country to the

other. Immigration laws generally vary from country to country and are often based on the country's foreign policies and its domestic labor requirements. There are also many other reasons why people immigrate of which some are the pull or push factors. In most cases, people are being pushed to migrate. The decline in regional income, causing localized recession in terms of less trade and less industrial activities, loss of employment from causes other than recession, for example, use of machines to produce also makes people to migrate, political instabilities, religious fulfillment, ethnic differences and other forms of oppressions or discrimination. Little or no pathways to improve personal development in structures such as marriage, status or careers and catastrophe such as floods, fire, earthquakes, war and others may also push people away. Poor rural setting, no night life, economically depressed areas, fear and crime force people off the areas they live in (Khoanyane 2009). However, some people migrate to other countries due to other interests that may not be basic. They are at-

tracted to migrate in order to increase income and wealth, economic security and to improve social status (Stuart1995). This includes having a prestigious job, being looked up to in the community, obtaining a good education and having power and influence.

However, the social phenomenon of migration is connected to some myths¹ and mythically related notions. In all human societies over the world, the attitude and practice of attaching myths and stereotypes on strangers and people of other cultures is somewhat universal in existence. In this regard, culture exists as a divisive rather than a unifying force in the global world of human existence. Human culture, therefore, serves as an identity which is owned and practiced by specific societies and a mark for recognizing the distinctiveness and otherness of various human societies. This includes knowledge, beliefs, skills, morals, customs and values carried out from one generation to another, which are subject to change as the society makes contact with others. Unfortunately, members of various cultures develop xenophobia, ethnocentrism² and xenocentrism³ as they meet different kinds of people both in the process of migration and integrating with others. Among all these inclinations, ethnocentrism has been perceived as the root to other ills such as xenophobia, which develops after some period of incubating ethnocentrism. It leads to harmful discrimination⁴ against people whose ways differ from one's own without recourse to cultural relativity⁵ and tolerance.

In all human societies, the tendency of people to attach myths and stereotypes on foreigners is universal. In which case the Sotho of Southern Africa are not different, rather like other people of the world they have a tendency of attaching myths and stereotypes on strangers and people of other cultures that have immigrated to their society. Even though the origin of myths may not be entirely known, in most cases, such myths are founded on the bases of historical antecedents and experiences of different cultures rooted in racism, prejudices, xenophobia, ethnocentrism and fear. Often times, people's negative experience, social interactions and interpretations shape their worldviews about others, especially immigrants, with high tendency to forget and ignore the importance of the immigrants because these notions stem from their social background. At this juncture, it is reiterated that the Sotho

people are human beings with specific cultural practices, worldview, ethos, norms and values, which shape their perception about others, especially the immigrant population in their midst. However, the curiosity to understand the extent to which this inclination really holds in daily interaction between foreigners and local population in Lesotho motivated this study. This is crucial especially at this particular period marked by reversal of migration pattern in the continent, where South Africa is perceived as the new destination for emigration from other countries in African continent, as opposed to the period when black South Africans migrated to other countries in Africa. Against this background, this study investigated the origins and nature of the myths, stereotypes and beliefs associated with the immigrants among the Sotho people or the notions held by the Sotho of Southern Africa about immigrants.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

The data was collected in an area known as Hata-Butle in the Roma valley, near the National University of Lesotho, about 30 kilometers to Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho. The area was highly populated by both local residents of Lesotho origin and foreigners due to the location of the university and other Catholic Mission establishments. The population of this study consisted of residents of Hata-Butle in Roma valley, mainly characterized by homogeneous attribute 'local residents.' A representative sample of twenty individuals which cuts across age, sex, occupation and educational level was selected purposively from the study population. During the data collection a combination of the indepth and key informant interview methods were complementarily used as the efficient technique of collecting the required data. Following the objectives and theories encapsulated in the study, the qualitative analytical data method was used for summarizing gleaned field information.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Explaining Myths, Stereotypes, Ethnocentrism and other Notions Attached to Migration

There are several myths and stereotypes that are attached to the immigrants. A myth is an ex-

planatory story that is said to be sacred and narrative, which tells us how the world came into what it is today. It is also a sacred narrative that informs about the super natural beliefs and heroes as well as the origin of things. It is through myth that explanation of the creation of things is developed, how things came to be the way they are through activities of sacred beings (Nanda 1980). Myths function to validate the beliefs, values, and customs particularly those that have to do with ethical relations as Malinowski corroborates. There is sometimes an intimate connection between the sacred tales of a society, on one hand, and its ritual acts, moral deeds and social organization on the other (Malinowski 1954). It exists not merely as an idle tale, but a hard work, active force the purpose of which basically is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events (Nanda 1980: 354). Myths in their characteristics and purposes are believed to influence and determine social character and social tradition of a people, which is reinforced to enhance solidarity, cohesion and distinctiveness.

Stereotypes, according to Feldman (1989), are a kind of schema in which beliefs and expectations about members of a group are held simply on the basis of their membership in that group. Stereotypes represent one particular damaging consequence of our tendency to form general impressions of others. More often than not, people tend to form some sort of immediate impressions of what that person is like. Feldman buttresses that some of the prevalent stereotypes have to do with racial and ethnic categorizations. But stereotypes are by no means confined to racial and ethnic groups (Katz and Brayly 1933; Weber and Crocker 1983). In general, people tend to develop less favourable opinions about members of a group of which they are not a part and more favourable opinions about members of a group to which they belong. For instance, among the Basotho people those who are from West Africa are referred to as “*makoerekoere*” because of the way their languages sound and the way they speak. This can only be attributed to the fact that they are outsiders. The whites are called “*baroa*” because of the color of their skin. However, there are also historical assumptions about the existence of the myths and stereotypes. It is therefore through the myths and stereotypes that various attitudes towards immi-

grants are developed, which is reinforced by high sense of ethnocentrism.

Human beings are different because of various cultures and their relativity. There are generally acceptable differences among human groups, which can be understood by observing the importance of culture and human adaptation. Development and crafting of stereotypes and myths about different people are strongly connected to the unacceptable human behaviours called ethnocentrism. This usually lead to tendency of people to view the world through the narrow lens of their own culture (Nanda 1980: 17), which subsequently manifest in full blown prejudices⁶ and intolerance.

As people judge the cultures of others by the standards of their own, resentment and rejection usually follow this practice. The present global trends both in life style and otherwise is almost what the western domineering cultures and traditions aspire it to be. For this reason therefore, people develop xenophobia for the purpose of safeguarding and protecting their culture and because of the acclaimed competition that exist among different societies and nations of the world. Xenophobia in this sense include undesirable sense of jealousy and protection of one's culture against other cultures, even to the zealousness of taking up arms or whatever means to resist the apparent or imagined domination by an external culture people.

In a more pragmatic sense, poverty and keen competition for scarce resources usually propagate a ready fertile ground and basis for stereotyping and mythical attachment to peoples of other cultures. Poverty gives rise to all sorts of social ills, including xenophobia when the poor are forced to compete amongst themselves, for scarce resources. In this situation, each group naturally adopts various tactics in order to out play the competing group, which may include labeling, stigmatization, dehumanization, demonization and even to criminalize the opposite group if the ways and means to achieve it avails.

Myths and Stereotypes Held by Basotho towards Immigrants

This study dwells much on the peculiar problem of resentment faced by the immigrants as they settle in the country of their destination. An important observation in this regard is the

complexities of beliefs and attitudes of the host communities and citizens. In most societies, immigrants are associated with myths and believe that are both positive and negative. Common legend of some societies have revealed how myths have worked in the favour of immigrants to the detriment of the host societies and citizens, especially those immigrants that were perceived to be in possession of magical and supernatural powers. Most of them used these acclaimed powers to institute control and leadership over and above the local host communities. Positive myths exist also from the recognition that immigrants play vital role in their host countries through various contributions to improve economic, political, educational, environmental, and social aspects of such societies. As such, the treatments that the immigrants receive determine to a large extent the level of their contribution to the host country.

From the Basotho perspective, myths that are attached to foreigners or immigrants in Lesotho is a function of many factors, which include race, country of origin, gender and even the primary occupation of the immigrants. While some of these stereotypes can be adjudged to be malicious and baseless, others appear to have enough substance and connection with the true life situation at a particular point in time. In broad terms, they can be categorised into culturally, economically or socially related myths and stereotypes.

Culturally Related Myths and Stereotypes

Worldview is a system of beliefs which assist people of a particular society or culture to understand community life and thought. This system of beliefs help people to understand the way they live and the way they think with regard to values and norms. In general, human culture exists as a tool that helps us to make sense of the way other people behave. It is a common opinion of most of the interviewees in this study that their cultural practices and observances are deteriorating as a result of influx of foreigners into Lesotho. They expressed unhappiness about the diffusion of other cultural practices into their own, which dilutes the content and characteristics of their original culture. According to them, the Sotho culture has been dissolved into the Western culture, which has rendered it inconsistent with the common beliefs and aspirations

of the people in the society. One of the interviewees, a housewife stated: "long time ago, women were not allowed to attend the funeral service. Only men did and the dead were buried very early in the morning. However, this has changed drastically, as women nowadays attend the funeral ceremonies without even covering their heads, they have turned a funeral ceremony into a fashion show, and they wear stilettos, pencil skirts, deep make-up and sunglasses." The speaker believes that most of the observations that she raised have much of foreign influence, which has gradually but strongly permeated the social fabrics of their culture.

From another perspective, the Basotho also perceive foreigners as people who had arrived to spoil their language and the meanings attached to expressions. Most participants illustrated that the foreigners do not want to learn Sesotho language; rather they misuse it and turn it into something else. Bearing in mind that language is a very important aspect of human culture; they therefore believe that the foreigners abuse their culture through improper use and abuse of Sesotho language. Thato (not real name) made an example of how the Chinese misuse the lexis and structures of the Sesotho language; according to him "the Chinese are not even ashamed to say, *Uena tsamaea ausi, maybe 'na ke tla fihla uena palama*. This is not proper Sesotho language" said Thato aggressively.

Economically Related Myths and Stereotypes

Immigrants usually have different economic reasons for leaving their countries of origin to another destination, which can be justified substantially. Most interviewees believe that some immigrants come into their country or might have left their country for some undesirable reasons, which have brought hardship and poverty in Lesotho as a result of increasing unemployment caused by their presence. Most Basotho who are illiterate and unexposed to the global phenomena and to some extent the educated ones do not see any positive impact or contribution of immigrants in the Lesotho economy. Their views have always been based on allegations that these foreigners come to steal away their jobs, and their children take up educational spaces of the bona fide Basotho children in the schools. These allegations have been sustained for many years, which had caused series of xe-

nophobic attacks on foreigners in the neighboring country, South Africa.

Some educated persons among the interviewees alleged that some immigrants sell narcotic drugs and forge certificates and other official documents like passports. The substance in this particular allegation is that the foreigners concerned are creating illegal avenues in adapting to the economy of Lesotho. Invariably, they are cheats and undesirable elements that consistently live or get along by subverting the institutionalized norms and structures of Lesotho. Under severe desperation, they are alleged also of planting the seed of corruption through their bribery and illegal offers to some officers of the law, especially when they are caught up by the law of the land. The alleged irregular and illegitimate survival strategies of some of the foreigners are akin to Merton's Anomie theory, where he explained various ways that different individuals or characteristics of people adapt to their societies. Those who are not able to survive economically through the legitimate channels adapt to the society in different negative ways through the illegitimate means, as posited by Merton in his goal attainment hypothesis. It is a commonly held belief that as most immigrants become unemployed and poor, unable to afford proper housing, some female among them resort to prostitution as a survival strategy, which is an illegal occupation in Lesotho. Through this means they become more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In other words, Basotho dislike the immigrants because their existence in the country hinders development to a very large extent and brings about misery. They insist that immigrants should also be tested for various diseases like HIV/AIDS that may be hazardous to the Basotho people in order to guarantee the health and security of Basotho.

Foreigners are also alleged to contribute to an already existing corruption in the body polity and economic arena in Lesotho. In demonstrating the level and reality of corruption among Chinese immigrants, one of the male interviewees said angrily: "A Chinese man told me one day that he will tell the big man if I call the police after knocking on my car from behind. When the police arrived, he bribed them and even today, the case has never continued. He told me the big man was the minister." The concept "big man" expressed by the Chinese may mean several things to the average Basotho. However, the

most common interpretation by most Basotho people in Lesotho is that the Chinese immigrants might have bribed or influenced some important and strategically positioned men and women in the government, to the extent that they assume the euphoria of "sacred cow." Irrespective of whatever wrong doing that they are involved in, it is their belief that the "big man" will let them off the hook. The extent to which this notion is a reality in daily life experiences of Basotho people may still need more clarifications and investigations.

Socially Related Myths and Stereotypes

The notion and assumption that the foreigners are not trustworthy has come to be a commonly accepted view of most Basotho people of Lesotho. Some Basotho strongly believe, though not with enough evidence to prove that foreigners come to Lesotho to enrich themselves and by implication suppress the local population. This has been internalized by most males who happened to have worked in the mines during apartheid system in South Africa. According to them, during apartheid, the whites tried by all means to suppress the black population in many ways and that was why they did not allow for equal social relations between races. The emphasis is that during the apartheid, there was a myth that the Whites poured some poisonous tablets into *mageu*⁷, which were meant to make the Africans infertile. This according to this myth was made with the aim of decreasing the population of the Black people.

In relation to the above, with regard to health matters, Basotho are afraid of the foreigners because they believe that immigrants transmit nasty diseases into their country. They have two unconfirmed hypotheses about foreigners with regard to the origin of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho. First, the foreigners, particularly the Indians and Nigerians have been associated with the existence of HIV/AIDS, which is assumed to be a foreign disease as the Basotho calls it "*Koatsi ea Bosolla Hlapi*." Interviewees illustrated that HIV/AIDS came with West African in 1986. Second, it is also believed that the disease came with the homosexuals of the United States of America. The claim that the disease has also affected the cultural aspects in some ways, such that polygamy and levirate are no longer practiced due to the spread of this human virus, seem to expose the

ignorance of the people with regard to the sequencing and common hypothesis about disease causation because the above mentioned cultural practices might have contributed towards the high rate of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho, when compared with what obtains statistically in the countries where the Basotho alleged that HIV came from. Similarly, the alleged link of the origin of HIV/AIDS to the arrival of a West African is unfounded but has blossomed out of the figment of the people's imagination and deep rooted mythically related hatred about West Africans.

Aesthetically, some Basotho, through the opinion of the interviewees believe that immigrants are also associated with polluting the environment. They are believed to normally settle at places which are overcrowded. They use anything from concrete and corrugated iron to cardboard boxes, plastic, cans and rags for building houses. As such, they contribute to the environmental problems of Lesotho particularly the urban areas. They live in unhealthy areas that influence poor health for the people.

Myths and Stereotypes held by Basotho towards Immigrants of Specific Nationalities and Identities

In spite of the common and generally held views about immigrants, the study found that there are specific sets of stereotypes and myths held by Basotho about different immigrants or people generally from various countries that are referred to as *Makoerekoere*. This specific mythical and stereotypical attachment to different immigrants from various countries emanates from the Sotho conception that as cultures of people differ from society to society, so do their behaviours in all aspects. As a result of different behaviours of foreigners, Basotho also have different attitudes towards them. This study however focused specifically on the myths and stereotypes held by the Basotho towards Nigerians, Chinese, Whites and Zimbabweans among other nationalities.

The Myths and Stereotypes held towards the Whites (Makhoaa)

The whites refer to anyone who is fair in complexion despite the nationality except the Boers⁸. The Basotho perceive those from America or England as the same because of their complex-

ion. Most interviewees expressed that in the past, the white people try as much as possible to integrate with the Basotho in order to help them in many ways. According to them, the white people go all out to donate good clothes and food to the Basotho people's survival. They are excited as they opined that their integration and relation with the White people is sweet, harmonious and that life is improving because white people understand personalities of people in all aspects. In her words, a middle aged woman and trader reiterated: "The best thing I also like about them (the Whites) is that they treat us just like other white people; honestly they perceive us as valuable, worthy and fundamental to them. We are even satisfied at our work places because they pay us what we deserve, they are..." The above statement somewhat reflects the feelings and perceptions of the Sotho people of Lesotho about the White people, particularly of European and American origin. They appear to hold the White population in high regards and reverence, which makes some of them to ironically wonder whether the Whites are specially created superior beings.

Myths and Stereotypes Held towards the Chinese

There are Basotho people who perceive the immigrants as nothing but a burden to Lesotho as a country and Basotho as a nation, even across the borders of Lesotho into South Africa. These categories of people include educated middle aged male and female Basotho. They complain that the Chinese presence is one of the major reasons why Lesotho is not yet developed. They emphasize that the existence of the Chinese in Lesotho largely impacts negatively on the economy of Lesotho, as they come in large numbers into Lesotho to exploit the Basotho because they use them as cheap labour. It is a commonly held view among the interviewees of this study that most Chinese left their country because they are very poor at home in China. However contradictory these views may appear, even the petty traders among the Basotho believe that the businesses of the native people go into folding up because of the stiff competition from the Chinese traders who have dominated the distributive business in the country. They attribute the reality of the Chinese high competitive spirit and business mastery to the tendency of the Chinese producing and selling the fake, "*fonkon*"

with the low prices, which drives other competitors underground. Based on the above, among others, a growing number of Basotho blame Chinese immigrants for the non stabilization of the small scale entrepreneurs and the ongoing poverty of the small landlocked country, which has few natural resources and depends heavily on remittances from workers in South Africa. Mabela's reaction, stocked by opposition parties... A former business woman justified that, "if this government was not in power and we had a new government, we would just take all the Chinese nicely out of the airport and send them back home. They are killing Basotho's businesses all over! Up in the mountain you find Chinese; they are all over and they are killing us!" It is widely alleged that the Chinese are also associated with bribery, as previously mentioned above because they get documents which they are not entitled to. Most Chinese have been found with Lesotho passports and drivers licenses that they are suspected to have gotten through bribery, which in a way contributes to the high level of corruption that already exists in Lesotho.

Myths and Stereotypes Held towards the Nigerians and Zimbabweans

With regard to the responses of the participants, most middle aged males complained that they missed their wives and girlfriends because the Nigerians and Zimbabweans took them away. They claimed that these categories of immigrants have money with which they tempt and lure their women, especially the Nigerians, who are usually very free in giving out money. This stigma about coveting people's wives and girlfriends have been a source of worry to many immigrants from these countries because lives of their brothers and relatives have been lost as a result of this suspicion even in the neighbouring country, South Africa.

Another stigma that is also attached to the Nigerians and Zimbabweans is that of witchcraft. One of the interviewees, a taxi driver narrated this dubious incident where he threatened a Zimbabwean hawker with a knife and took all his stock, money and a cell phone away. As he (the taxi driver) went with all the possessions, the Zimbabwean said sadly, "you can go with all that stock but you will see what will happen to you." This statement made the taxi driver to be over-

whelmed by fear, which made him to return the stock and money. In his own words with strong belief in the efficacy of the Zimbabwean witchcraft he said: "I know the Zimbabweans are good in witchcraft. I returned his possessions but amazingly, I am still scared he might trace me and bewitch me." Similar to the Zimbabweans, most Sotho people are also scared to offend Nigerians in any circumstance. They hold very strongly that an average Nigerian has the ability to use some supernatural powers to harm or destroy those who offend them. This myth about Nigerians is somewhat connected to the ongoing catalogue of fictions documented as Nigeria movies, which tend to be popular among many Basotho and other societies in Southern Africa.

In a demonstration of the reality of this notion of witchcraft, a Mosotho widow reported that after the death of her husband, she became involved in a love relationship with a Nigerian who offered her expensive gold earrings, wrist watch and necklace. As time went by, the lady was overwhelmed by the holy spirit of God and was subsequently revealed in the church that all the jewels had an element of witchcraft. According to her, she saw a vision where the entire jewel is being rapped together with some skin of a snake. This vision was interpreted as a charm for that widow to actually fall madly in love with that Nigerian guy. In her words: "the congregation in church said I was screaming out of fear and moving like a snake with saliva spitting out like that of a snake and tears were flowing endlessly. I thought I hated not only him but all the *"makoerekoere"* from that day, but who am I to judge, mine is to thank God for his deliverance and forgive him as God forgives me too."

Like the Chinese, the Nigerians and Zimbabweans are also associated with bribery, fraud, and selling of narcotic drugs. "As far as they are concerned, *'tjotjo'*⁹ is the order of the day," exclaimed one respondent angrily. According to the Basotho from their expressions, the Nigerians and Zimbabweans are aware of the opportunities Lesotho as a country offers, which is an eye opener to the Basotho that if they use their senses a little bit, they may enjoy such opportunities. The Basotho complain that they are hungry while sitting on the heap of money and possession of foreigners. As some of them have lived in foreign countries, they believe that their notions and beliefs about these foreigners are not as a result of being xenophobic; rather their

problem is that wherever immigrants are the chances of drugs and computer hackings being imported are very high.

Historical Origins of the Myths and Stereotypes Perceived by the Basotho

Among the Basotho people, people who are from West Africa are referred to as “*makoerekoere*” because of the way their languages sound and the way they speak. This can only be attributed to the fact that they are outsiders. The whites are called *boer* or “*baroa*” because of the color of their skin. However, there are also historical assumptions about the existence of the myths and stereotypes. It is therefore through the myths and stereotypes that various attitudes towards immigrants are developed, which are consequently reinforced by high sense of ethnocentrism. However, most Basotho show and believe that they are a people of peace. This belief is rooted in the fact that Lesotho as a Kingdom was founded by the man of peace and a champion of reconciliation, the Great King Mosheosheo who advocated for peace at all times. He invited the missionaries in 1833, who subsequently introduced their ways of living that drastically changed the culture of the Basotho. They forced the Basotho to abandon their culture and adopt Christianity, which eliminated most of the cultural practices of the Basotho because they believed they were evil. Some abolished their culture but some never did because they wanted to cling on to their culture because from their knowledge, “*Sechaba se se nang moetlo sea timela.*”¹⁰ Those who adopted this western culture believed that the Whites were always right.

The study from the expressions of the people found that in the past, the immigrants were given more attention, respect and they were envied by most people in Lesotho due to the fact that they knew many things as a result of the development stage of their countries. According to some Basotho, this singular perceived advantage over the local population made the immigrants to be pompous and feel that they are more intelligent even if they were not educated. Their being pompous led them to undermine many Basotho, even the very educated ones. As a result of this scenario, many Basotho began to develop some disposition of anger towards them, more especially when they perceived that their educational level

was undermined. In general, the immigrants became more ethnocentric and arrogant.

Moreover, some of these myths are rooted and associated with colonial period and the mining revolution. This was the time when the Sotho came in contact with the White foreigners and several incidences of wars at that period also contributed to the formation of the beliefs they have about the immigrants. In most cases, there are issues that gave rise to particular set of interpretations with regard to the foreigners. For instance, the issue of land is the main reason why the Basotho dislike the Boers (the Afrikaners) and in extension the whites (British) because they tricked the Basotho to put down their guns as they claimed that Lesotho was their protectorate. The legend has it that at that period, the Basotho had been fighting for two decades against the Boers, who settled in the present Free State Province of South Africa but suddenly were told to give up their arms and depend on Britain or the cape colonial troops to protect them. One of the aged male who happened to have worked as a minister after the 1970 elections in Lesotho asserted that, “it was a total oppression and racism, when the cape colony did not tell the Boers to disarm and they remained with their guns and therefore gained power over Basotho and exercised their power by enslaving and exploiting Basotho in their farms. Based on the above, the cape colony showed a clear discrimination against the black people and hatred by not disarming their fellow Whites (the Boers). Basotho of course refused to disarm and so began what was called the gun war. In general, it is unarguable that history is the main source of the existence of the myths and stereotypes that the Basotho have on the immigrants. I mean we would have survived without their help. Why did they have to come all the way to Africa to treat us like dogs in our motherland?”

Similarly, enduring socialization pattern at homes and the associated tales and role takings influenced the way the Basotho perceive the immigrants. As children, parents usually internalize the seed of otherness and discrimination in them, which manifests in several ways as children grow to become adult members of the society. When children are growing up, it is very common to observe parents instruct their children on whom to play with and whom not to, based on individual reasons and experiences. In sharing her true life experience, a middle aged

woman mentioned that when she was young, she was not allowed to play with the Indians because there is a myth that the Indians are serial killers. They use parts of the human body for medication in order to be rich.

As one of the agents of socialization, the mass media also contributes towards the formation of various myths that are prevalent today about the foreigners among the Basotho. Active aspects of this channel include the radio, television and the print. What is said over the radio for example, influence the way people think, relate, regard and perceive immigrants. A good reference in point to this is the influence of the Nigerian home videos in shaping the perception of most Basotho about Nigerians with regard to two basic things; first their possession of mystical powers and the obsession with materialism. The western oriented movies that show how men and women are involved in love making also has differently influenced the opinion of the Basotho about the exaggerated level of immorality that prevail the western societies.

Positive Perceptions and Perceived Contributions of Immigrants towards the Basotho Economy and Well-being

The study found that in spite of the commonly held notion about the immigrants, there are other Basotho people who perceive the foreigners as good people. According to some Basotho interviewees, it has been pointed out mainly that immigrants are of significant importance in Lesotho because they actually create a world better for the Basotho economically and socially. This is in terms of employment opportunities, which have been made possible by immigrants, especially the Chinese. The factories built by the Chinese have accommodated and given jobs to a lot of Basotho men and women who were hitherto unemployed. The realization of these positive contribution of the Chinese to the economy of Lesotho somewhat made the local population of Lesotho to also think positively about the Chinese in a reciprocal manner. In this vein, a female factory worker who resides in the study area, *Hata-Butle* illustrated in Sesotho language thus: "*Rona rea rata Machaene a re fa mesebetsi*"¹¹ expressing that they love Chinese people, who give them jobs and the little which they get from them is better than nothing.

Apart from the Chinese, most other foreigners have businesses such as supermarkets that normally create jobs for the Basotho people. For instance, the Indians (including Pakistani, Bangladeshi etc.) own most of the supermarkets in Lesotho. Considering the contributions and importance of the immigrants, some Basotho believe that the immigrants also come up with the new strategies, skills and knowledge which actually make life easier for even Basotho. Typical example from the interviewees' point of view includes the fact that it was the immigration of some White people that made some Basotho know how to read and write. They acknowledge that the economy and future of Lesotho lies completely in the adaptation to modern advanced technology, which can only be diffused to Lesotho by foreigners, as the world is a global village where technology is the main driving force.

In perceiving education as an important and obvious stimulus to the economic development, there is an honest belief among few Basotho as represented in the sample that foreigners play a very crucial part in the educational development of Lesotho. A convincing example was made by some Basotho with the contributions of the foreign staff members of the National University of Lesotho, when the interviewees concurred that the foreigners (lecturers) do their job effectively and efficiently. These foreign staff members were comparatively adjudged to be more committed and competent than some of their local counterparts. Some students interviewed on this claim emphasized that their honest observation leads to the conclusion that a foreign lecturer will not miss a class for no good reasons, which rarely is the case with some of the local lecturers.

The realization of the economic contributions and impacts of the immigrants on the economy and social life in Lesotho by a section of the Basotho has inspired these few to encourage others to accept the foreigners, at least based on their good deeds. These categories of people, who are invariably an exception believe that people all over the world need one another and should live in harmony. This few upholds that Basotho should be encouraged to accept foreigners like their brothers and sisters through proper channels of information and parents should be equally discouraged in telling their children about the generally unfounded myths and stereotypes about people of other nationalities

and identities, which creates disharmony. In addition, they also opined that the immigration laws should be strict in such a way that it protects the immigrants, while those who engage in criminal activities should be summarily dealt with accordingly. However, a reservation to the above inclination is that the government of Lesotho should also protect her citizens by regulating the number of immigrants into Lesotho so that they do not eventually outnumber the Basotho (this is one of the genuine fears that drive xenophobia in Lesotho, especially as the country Lesotho appears to be experiencing little or no noticeable growth in population).

Some of the respondents said that they understood the true meaning of humanity because the interaction between human beings is very important for several reasons. For a human being to survive, he needs other human beings as Sesotho adage says: "*Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang.*" which means "I am because we are." Some interviewees echoed in line with King Moshoeshoe philosophy as follows: "foreigners should live in harmony in Lesotho, as King Moshoeshoe the founder of the nation taught us that peace is the weapon to fight all troubles. As such, people should not have ill attitude towards others despite the experience of the past.

CONCLUSION

Generally, all societies around the world possess myths and stereotypes about immigrants, which differ from culture to culture on the basis of various internal and external factors. Therefore myth formation and stereotyping of foreigners by Basotho is nothing peculiar to them. As far as the Basotho are concerned with regard to the immigrants, various myths, stereotypes and attitudes emanated from their historical encounters, daily experiences with the immigrants and the way they were socialized. The experiences and antecedents of the Basotho had generally shaped their worldviews, myths and stereotypes about immigrants in Lesotho. These perceptions range from negative to positive and with different notions attached to immigrants from specific countries in some cases. The negative aspects which are embodiment of resentment against the foreigners are descriptive of disillusionment and hostility to the foreigners, especially with commonly held suspicion that the foreigners arrive in Lesotho mainly to exploit the already poor

country and to outnumber the local population demographically if not checked. However, the existence and widespread of these negative notions does not becloud the fact that there are some exceptions to these feelings in the positive direction among those who never perceive immigrants as parasites or destroyers of Basotho culture and economy. As was revealed in the study, some Basotho strongly acknowledge the contributions of immigrants towards the development of Lesotho, especially in rare skill areas where the country lacks the required personnel.

NOTES

1. A myth is a story that originated in ancient times, especially one concerning the early history of a person or explaining natural events. It is a story that whose truth seems self-evident because they do such a good job of integrating our personal experiences with a wider set of assumptions about the way society, or the world in general, must operate (Schultz and Lavenda-1995:501).
2. Ethnocentrism is a mixture of belief and feeling that one's own way of life is desirable and actually superior to others. It is because of ethnocentrism that one can feel surprised, disgusted, horrified, amused or skeptical when encountering another lifestyle (Spradley, 1989:12).
3. Xenocentrism refers to an assumption or attitude that other cultures are better and normal than one's own cultural practices. Xenocentrism in practical terms is the belief that the products, styles, or ideas of another society are better than those of one's own culture (emphasis, mine).
4. Discrimination is an act of unfair treatment directed against an individual or a group. Racism refers to unfair treatment and violent behavior towards a certain group of people on the basis of race (Wehmeier, 1948:959).
5. Cultural relativity is the tool for understanding other cultures. Cultural relativity does not mean that all patterns must be judged as equally "good", but it means that other patterns of culture make sense, even if we would not want them for ourselves, (Nanda, 1980: 22).
6. Prejudice is an attitude and unreasonable dislike towards a group.
7. Mague is a type of recreational drink found in Lesotho
8. The Boers are the White South African people referred to as Afrikaners
9. Bribery
10. the nation without culture diminishes
11. 'we love the Chinese, they give us jobs and the little that we get is better than nothing.'

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