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## Acculturation and Botswana Migrant Miners in South Africa, 1930–1980

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the acculturation of Botswana mine migrants who worked in the South African mines between 1930 and 1980. It shows how the compound mine system affected Botswana cultural practices. The study argues that some Botswana men ended up living permanently in South Africa and taking up the languages and cultural practices of South Africans and they came to be known in Botswana as Makgweelwa. However, the paper reveals that Botswana men kept contact with their families and relatives back home and that complete acculturation was not pronounced. It argues that Botswana men in the South African mines maintained their language and cultural practices, and that no dominant language existed in the compounds. The compound system also helped lessen acculturation because men were housed separately according to their ethnicities.

**Keywords:** Migration, Acculturation, Language, Mining.

### Résumé

Cet article analyse l'acculturation des mineurs migrants du Botswana qui ont travaillé dans les mines sud-africaines entre 1930 et 1980. Il montre comment le système minier de concession a affecté les pratiques culturelles Botswana. L'étude affirme que certains Botswanais ont fini par vivre de façon permanente en Afrique du Sud, et ont adopté les langues et les pratiques culturelles des Sud-Africains. Ils sont ainsi connus au Botswana comme les Makgweelwa..Cependant, l'article révèle que les Botswanais ont pourtant maintenu le contact avec leurs familles et leurs proches chez eux, et qu'une acculturation complète n'a pas réellement eu lieu. Il soutient que les Botswanais dans les mines d'Afrique du Sud ont conservé leur langue et pratiques culturelles, et qu'aucune langue dominante n'existait dans les concessions. Le système de concession a également aidé à réduire l'acculturation en ce sens que les hommes étaient logés séparément selon leurs origines ethniques.

**Mots clés:** Migration, acculturation, langage, activité minière.

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### **HisIntroduction**

Migration is an international phenomenon that is as old as mankind. International migration studies abound in the literature and they have largely focused on issues such as the causes of migration and its effects. These studies have attributed migration to pull and push factors such as depressed economies and the existence of opportunities elsewhere, and also to social and political factors (see, among others Todaro 1969; Konsinski & Prothero 1974). In Botswana, studies on migration have followed a similar trend. They have identified causes of migration to South Africa as the underdeveloped state of the country as well as the need to pay taxes and the bride price, to purchase cattle and ploughs, as well as the attractions of the cities.

On the effects of labour migration, the studies have noted the loss of able-bodied manpower to agriculture, diminishing tribal discipline, spread of infectious diseases and the exploitation of labourers by mining capital in South Africa (see for instance Isaac Schapera 1947; 1982; Taylor 1981). These studies have largely neglected the issue of migration and acculturation, which is the subject of the present work. Botswana started migrating to South Africa before the historic discovery of diamonds and gold at Kimberley and the Witwatersrand in 1887 and 1881 respectively. Then, small numbers worked in Boer farms across the border. The numbers increased steadily in the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was in the 1930s that migration rates caused concern to local authorities, and from then on, migration rates adopted a progressive trend, with 7,314 Botswana working in the mines in 1936; 7,000 in 1946; 10,400 in 1956; 21,000 in 1966 and 39,200 in 1976 (Kerven 1979:39, 49; Taylor 1981:41).

This paper uses language, ethnic awareness, loyalty and identity and general behavioural patterns to examine the extent of acculturation among south eastern Botswana mine migrants to South African mines. Cultural awareness refers to the knowledge by an individual of specific cultural materials of their cultural group of origin such as language, values, history, art and food. Ethnic loyalty means an individual's preference of his or her cultural orientation over the other. On some occasions, preference may be of relatively minor importance, as is the case when a person decides to engage in an ethnic-related activity for purposes of relaxation. At other times, preference may be crucial if it means ethnic self-identification, ethnicity of one's spouse or friends (Amado 1980:48).

Secondly, the paper explores factors that hindered or facilitated the process of acculturation. Under these two broad aims, the study seeks to find out the extent to which alien modes of behaviour displayed by returning migrants were a feature of acculturation. Most Botswana migrants to South Africa

worked on the mines, and many of them lived in compounds or hostels owned by mining companies. The paper shall examine the role of the compound system in the acculturation process. The extent to which Batswana maintained their ethnic loyalty and identity after contact with different cultures in South Africa shall be revealed, as well as the extent to which Batswana stuck to Setswana cultural values.

### **The Concept of Acculturation**

A critical concept that has been largely neglected in migrant labour studies in Botswana is acculturation. John Berry defines acculturation as: That phenomenon which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. (Berry 1980:9). Amado Padilla provides a similar definition by stating that acculturation refers to contact between two cultures and the resultant 'change in the behaviour of members of one cultural group'. Padilla adds that, ...acculturation is also used to describe the results of contact between two or more different cultures, a new, complete culture emerges, in which some existing cultural features are generated (Padilla 1980:47-48). Acculturation is usually in the direction of a minority group that adopts the habits and language patterns of a dominant group. Furthermore, the '...assimilation of one cultural group into another may be evidenced by changes in language preference, adoption of common attitudes and values, membership in common social groups and institutions, and loss of political and ethnic identity.'<sup>1</sup>

In acculturation, foreign cultural traits frequently diffuse into a society. It should be noted however that acculturation does not necessarily have to result in new, alien traits completely replacing the old indigenous ones. Normally, there is some syncretism or amalgamation of traditional and introduced features. The newly introduced traits may be mixed with or worked into the traditional cultural system so that they are more acceptable.<sup>2</sup>

The ethnic factor is a critical component of the total acculturation process and Padilla maintains that the maintenance of ethnic pride and identity should be assessed together with language familiarity and cultural heritage in any discussion of acculturation. He further asserts that acculturation depends in part on both degree of inter-ethnic interaction and inter-ethnic distance and perceived discrimination. There are ethnic groups whose members are slow in interacting with members of the host culture and these tend to show slower rates of acculturative change than will ethnic groups who easily interact (Padilla 1980:50).

### Some Key Aspects of Botswana Culture

The people called Batswana are one of the major divisions into which ethnologists and linguists usually classify the Sotho group of Bantu speaking peoples of central South Africa. It should be noted however that in today's Botswana, the term Batswana is all embracing as it is used to refer to citizens of Botswana, many of them non-speakers of the language Setswana. These groups, which speak different languages and have different cultural practices between themselves, and between them and Setswana speakers, are mainly the Bakalanga, Basarwa, Bakgalagadi, Baherero, Bayei, Basubiya, Babirwa, Batswapong, and Bambukushu.

The Tswana groups in the country are the Bangwato and Batawana in central and northern Botswana, and the Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Barolong, Bakgatla, Batlokwa and Balete in south and south eastern Botswana. On the whole, Tswana groups appear to be generally homogeneous and they have common cultural practices in their household production and division of labour according to sex and age (Schapera 1953:9-28). Batswana have *direto* (totems) that they revere such as phuti (duiker), kwena (crocodile) and kgabo (monkey) and they lived in large settlements. These totems are a core cultural trait of Batswana because they are used to identify one's ethnicity and even the historical roots of a person. People also demonstrated respect for their ancestors through the use of these totems (Rantao 2006:28; Thebe & Denbow 2006:151). Amongst Batswana, social status of rank, class, sex and age differentiation is very important. Isaac Schapera, a pioneering authority on the Tswana, holds that:

Social distinctions of various kinds also exist between men and women. They sit apart at feasts and other social gatherings, and certain spots in the village, like the *kgotla* (council place), are normally reserved for men... There is a well defined division of labour between the sexes, certain tasks being traditionally allotted to each. In tribal law women are treated as perpetual minors, being subject for life to the authority of male guardians (Schapera 1953).

An important aspect of Tswana culture is age and authority. This is because age forms the basis of social distinctions. Schapera buttresses this point by asserting that, 'In family life, people are entitled to respect from those younger than themselves, whose services they can freely command. Children are taught to honour and obey their elders'.

Generally, people are expected to respect those that are older than them. Thus, age, seniority and status are important in social matters (Rantao 2006:38; Denbow & Thebe 2006:135). People are also expected to respect those who are in authority, people such as headman wards and dikgosi (chiefs).

Batswana practised mixed farming, growing crops and keeping of live-stock; mainly cattle and goats. The cattle were kept a distance from the village and young men looked after them. The kgotla (council place) is a core pillar of Tswana culture because all crucial issues in the village are discussed here and in the past only men attended. Cattle were very important in Tswana culture. In addition to being a symbol of wealth, cattle were used to pay lobola (bride price) and slaughtered at important occasions such as funerals, marriages and other major social events. (Rantao 2006:35-36; Denbow & Thebe 2006:163-164). Young able-bodied men were expected to help their parents in looking after cattle and undertake arduous tasks such as agricultural work. Marriage was a long process beginning with patlo ya mosadi (asking for a woman's hand in marriage), and the uncles from the bride and the groom's side played a central role (Rantao 2006:28; Denbow & Thebe 2006:143). Language forms a key component of any people's culture, and for the Tswana, their language was Setswana, as previously mentioned.

### **Botswana Migrants and the South African Environment**

Although most Batswana ended up in the Witwatersrand at the gold mines and at the Kimberly diamond mines, some of them were also found in the scattered copper, coal, manganese and tin mines of South Africa. In most of the mines, Botswana miners lived in the compounds with other miners of different nationalities and ethnicities of South Africa. These compounds or hostels were single sex accommodation complexes owned by the mines and run by their management. Ten to fifteen men would be assigned to a single room (Moodie 1994:1-11). In these compounds and the workplace, Batswana came into contact with Zulus from the Natal province of South Africa who spoke the Zulu language and had their Zulu culture, the Xhosa and the Sotho from the Orange Tree State and Lesotho, the Venda from northern Transvaal, the Shangaan from Mozambique and the Limpopo province of South Africa, and other nationalities from Southern Africa.

In the compounds, these labourers were housed according to their nationalities, that is, Batswana would be allocated different houses from the Zulu and the Xhosa would be separate from the Sotho.<sup>3</sup> However, this did not avoid contact between the different nationalities and ethnicities because they were not forbidden to meet or mix within the compound. At work, there was also no regimentation of the workforce because the different African ethnicities worked together.<sup>4</sup>

There are indications that the migration of Africans from different countries to South Africa and their staying together with South African blacks, to some extent, fostered the idea of Pan Africanism. This is because the overarching white management of the compound system affected all Africans

equally. In mine work, all Africans were treated as boys, and subjected to demeaning and humiliating treatment, including beatings. This meant that all Africans identified as one entity, and they were distinct from their white masters. Africans were generally friendly to each other, but an important feature was that all of them feared the Boers.<sup>5</sup> This sense of shared oppression therefore promoted solidarity and a sense of single identity amongst the Africans.

### **Extent of Acculturation of Botswana Migrants**

As indicated, cultural awareness and ethnic identity are some of the key determinants in the acculturative process. Botswana migrant labourers in the mines were exposed to languages and different cultures from miners of other nationalities. In the mining compounds of South Africa, there developed a language called fanakalo.<sup>6</sup> According to Wilmon James, 'Fanakalo started as an industrial creole language used as a means of communication in a multilingual and multi-ethnic setting. Its origins were rooted in communicative necessity between various groups – white and black – who share no basic – language.'

Overtime, it became a language of instruction and command (James 1992: 75). Fanakalo was a lingua-franca of Zulu, English, Xhosa and other languages. Examples of this language, 'Buya lapha ka mina' (come here to me), 'Buyani thina hamba job' (come, let us go for work), 'Yena chaile madoda buyani thina hamba' (its time up, come gentlemen and let's go).<sup>7</sup> The language was used for communication purposes at work by the different ethnic groups and their white supervisors.

The use of fanakalo meant that there was no dominant or preferred language of any nationality or ethnic group. Botswana migrant miners learnt and spoke this language because it was essential for communicating with fellow workers. In their leisure time after work and during weekends, miners from different ethnicities interacted freely in the compounds. Here they used fanakalo, but many Botswana migrants also learnt other languages, especially Zulu and Sotho and Shangaan.<sup>8</sup> Setswana language is a dialect of northern Sotho, and it was not difficult for Botswana to learn Sotho language. In the townships, different languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Shangaan as well as Setswana were spoken. Many Botswana learnt these languages, especially Zulu, which appears to have been used more than other languages.

The fact that many Botswana migrants could use some of the languages in South Africa indicates that there was a certain degree of acculturation. As for the use of fanakalo, it could be argued that Botswana were acculturated to that specific culture, which arose from the compound system. However, it seems the level of acculturation in the compounds was mild because

Batswana did not discard or forget their language: Setswana. Between themselves, the migrant workers preferred to use Setswana.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural awareness and ethnic identity are tools employed to measure the level of acculturation. In the compounds, the different ethnicities staged certain activities during their leisure time at weekends. During these periods, and especially at the end of the month, the miners staged what they called *mechankolo*. These were entertainment activities in which different ethnicities demonstrated their cultural practices such as dancing and singing. Batswana played their song and dance such as *setapa*, *phatisi* and *borankana*.<sup>10</sup> Although they watched and liked some of the cultural practices displayed by other nationalities, Batswana migrants stuck to their own tenaciously, and proudly displayed this through music and dance. Again, although Batswana interacted freely with other nationalities they preferred the use of Setswana language and the company of their Batswana kinsmen, as previously mentioned.<sup>11</sup>

After work and during weekends, Batswana living in compounds met regularly in groups to discuss issues back home ('*go rera tsa ko gae*'). They met regularly with those who stayed in the townships to discuss these issues and get appraisal on the prevailing situation at home from those who had been home recently.<sup>12</sup> These are indications of a high level of cultural awareness and ethnic identity. The marked demonstration of ethnic loyalty and cultural awareness are testimony to the fact that acculturative levels amongst Batswana migrant miners were largely mild.

Indeed Botswana mine migrants, the majority of whom were in the Witwatersrand, had easy and open access to the suburbs and townships where they came into contact with different cultural groups. This is because, as Dumber Moodie relates:

Unlike the diamond mines, compounds on the gold mines were open. Migrants were not confined to them outside of working hours, and on weekend mine workers travelled all over the Witwatersrand on foot and by train, visiting, eating and sleeping with friends from home at other compounds. Migrants were thus able to sustain home networks across mines as well as within them (Moodie 1994:23).

Even with this situation, which enabled interaction between Batswana migrants and other ethnicities, the level of acculturation still remained mild. This was not due to the fact that Botswana were an ethnicity that found it difficult to interact with different groups, a factor that hinders the facilitation of acculturation (Padilla 1980: 50), but due to other factors that are discussed later. However, it is vital to note that, to some extent, the compound system helped in the integration of Africans from different countries. Barricaded together in the compounds, African workers came to appreciate each

other because of their shared experiences of exploitation by white management. The fact that some Botswana migrants spoke Zulu and other languages learnt during the mechonkolo weekend activities when Africans from different countries mixed freely, indicates a certain level of integration.

Earlier on, Schapera noted that migrants tended to stay for shorter periods at the mines before returning home. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s there began a tendency by migrants to stay for longer spells at the mines (Schapera 1947:168). There developed what became known as makgwelwa (deserters). These were a category of migrants who were not likely to return to Botswana. Schapera reveals that men were likely to become makgwelwa if they have not communicated with their families or relatives for a long time, those who have not paid local tax and would have been joined by their wives and children or have now married in South Africa (Schapera 1947:58-60).

On average, about 6 out of 100 Botswana migrants were classified by their relatives as having become makgwelwa. According to Schapera, this was a high proportion of migrants. Desertion was a result of conditions in Botswana, which were not sufficiently attractive to get all migrants to return. The tribes that experienced the highest rate of desertion were the smallest tribes such as the densely populated Balete and Batlokwa, which lay along the border with South Africa. These were the areas that also experienced higher rates of adult male out migration, with the Balete at 45 per cent, Kgatleng at 40 per cent and Batlokwa at 45 per cent (Schapera 1947:61 & 169-170).

The rate of desertion was highest among younger men who had migrated in recent years as compared to their elders. More of the makgwelwa were being followed by their wives and children, and this shows that they found it possible to lead a family life in their new destination (Schapera 1947: 64). Some makgwelwa got married in South Africa and established homes in that country. Among this category of Botswana migrants, this showed a high degree of acculturation because the preference of a different spouse from a different culture and settlement abroad are indicative of assimilation and adaptation. Some makgwelwa got to like foreign languages such as Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho.<sup>13</sup> However, it should be noted that although makgwelwa showed preference for the South African situation, that did not translate into total acculturation.

Most makgwelwa did not forget or abandon Setswana. In the company of fellow Batswana, at ethnic activities such as tribal meetings, and when with relatives, most makgwelwa spoke Setswana without any difficulty.<sup>14</sup> It would seem that most of them became bilingual. This means that makgwelwa,

in this case, adopted the intermediate option of bilingualism which lay between the options of either taking a complete shift to the language of the dominant group, or linguistically merging the two languages into a Creole (Berry 1980: 17). These makgwelwa belong to the category identified by Padilla as that of bilinguals who would speak the language of the host culture at work and other daily encounters with members of the larger society, but prefer the language of their culture of origin when they are with close friends, family members and at ethnic related activities (Padilla 1980: 48). Some Botswana makgwelwa, who later returned home or made visits, still knew Setswana ways of doing things, although they had forgotten some practices and procedures. Makgwelwa were relatively very few and mostly found from Botswana who stayed in the townships.<sup>15</sup>

There were complaints from different parts of Botswana, especially from dikgosi (chiefs) about the negative effects of labour migration on Botswana culture. One of the widespread grievances about migrant labour was that it made young people disrespectful and insubordinate. Dikgosi in particular lamented the fact that once these young men have migrated, they did not like being called upon to perform tribal labour and they neglected other tribal duties. The migrants were often accused of insolent attitudes towards dikgosi and their elders (Schapera 1947:168-169).

Respect and reverence for elders are some of the cornerstones of Setswana culture, and the adoption of common attitudes and values, which were against Setswana ways, was indicative of acculturation among Botswana migrants. Whilst it is generally true that some of the returning migrants exhibited this kind of behaviour, it was not very widespread and appears to have been a temporary move by young men who felt empowered by their newly found financial status.

An outcry on the negative effects of 'excessive' labour recruitment was voiced by dikgosi in the 1930s and 1940s. Dikgosi complained about the behaviour and attitudes of returning young migrants. Kgosi Kgari of Bakwena complained that, 'Youngmen from the mines, if they go every year and for long periods, lose contact with the tribe, and when they come home they do not care for the tribal work and they have no respect for their chiefs, headman, or their elders.'

Kgosi Bathoen of Bangwaketse retorted that, 'They are most unruly and mannerless, and some of them eventually become criminals.' He blamed foreign cultures for this. Dikgosi from different reserves also lamented that young migrants bring back new ideas from the mines that run counter to the old and encourage disrespect of old tribal authority and obligations. They voiced concern about the detribalization of young mine migrants.<sup>16</sup>

Although some young Botswana migrants were influenced by the culture that existed in South African townships and other areas, this does not symbolize high levels of acculturation. This is because these behaviours appear to have been transitory and Batswana did not abandon core Tswana cultural values of identity and ethnic loyalty for newly found ones. They still used their totems at the mines such as *kgabo*, *tholo kwena* according to their tribes when addressing each other, and they were proud of it.<sup>17</sup> The use of these totems was a sign of ethnic loyalty and reverence to the ancestors and a strong signal of inclination to one's origin.

In terms of conforming to tribal conventions of authority and respect, there appears to have been noticeable levels of acculturation among young Botswana migrants. Young people who have just started working in South Africa tended to display rebellious tendencies towards the norms of tribal life upon returning home. This was caused by their experience of relative freedom of different cultures in South Africa. Schapera observes that in the Union, tribal sanctions did not affect them directly and the authority of the parents and *dikgosi* was replaced by that of the employer and the policeman. These new migrants came into contact with kinds of new influences and ideas often in tandem with what they were taught at home and encourage disrespect for traditional forms of control. They arrive back tired of working and idle in the village showing off their new clothes and affectations of speech and behaviour, boasting of their experiences in South Africa and looking down upon those who had remained (Schapera 1947:171). Despite this, adherence to some core aspects of Setswana culture is signified by the fact that migrants who worked in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s maintain that most migrants respected the *kgotla* and would not miss meetings when at home.<sup>18</sup>

The above does show that some of the migrants spurned parental and tribal control. Informants confirm these tendencies in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and add that some young migrants tended to drink heavily and engage in love affairs openly in the eyes of elders. A few also tended to be violent and uncooperative, disobeying parents and tribal leaders. But, the informants emphasize the fact that these tendencies were normally pervasive among the young migrants who had just started the process of migration and that it was largely due to excitement. On subsequent visits home, these migrants would not indulge in such kind of behaviour.<sup>19</sup> Hence the new behavioural traits that young migrants may have adopted in South Africa do not seem to have made a lasting imprint on them, as they were not firmly rooted.

Migrant labour scholars in Botswana have noted that it had some negative social effects on family life because it led to the breakdown of the latter. Many of these effects have been revealed by the pioneering study of Isaac

Schapera. Carol Kerven, writing on the latter period, lamented the fact that returning migrant workers found themselves alienated from cultural and social values and norms of their societies. This was because they had developed 'heroic images'. These returnees scorned parental authority especially in cases where parents were financially dependent on the migrants. The returning miners drank heavily and they were not willing to undertake arduous farming tasks (Kerven 1979:89). Migrants, especially miners, were accustomed to heavy work at the mines and may have regarded their visits home as time for rest. Reluctance to do heavy work does not seem to have been due to acculturation and they do not seem to have imbibed it from a different culture in South Africa. Schapera has illuminated this argument by his assertion that in the past, young men were economically wholly dependent on their parents and were expected to help with small household activities such as ploughing, clearing fields and cattle herding. But, upon return from the mines, the young men usually regarded their visits home as deserved periods of rest (Schapera 1947:168).

Once more, it is essential to reiterate that the 'undesirable' forms of behaviour noted above were prevalent in the 1930s through to the 1980s. However, these behavioural tendencies, which ran against Setswana cultural conventions such as respect for elders and traditional authority, are indicative of acculturation, but they do not show total acculturation or high levels of acculturative changes. A statement by Schapera in the 1930s and 1940s also supports the view that the level of acculturation was not high. He maintains that the new kinds of behaviour displayed by migrant returnees did not persist. He reiterates that: ...among the south-eastern tribes, especially, many of the ward headmen and other tribal leaders of today have had considerable experience of working abroad, and yet they are now among the more conservative elements of the population (Schapera 1947:171).

This situation indicates that Batswana were, to a large extent, strongly attached to their tribes and country and cultural heritage and most resisted detribalisation. Emphasising the strong ties between Botswana miners and the link to their country, Schapera writes:

Nor is it correct to assume that all people who go to the union tend to become 'detribalised'. The great majority... return home sooner or later. While abroad, moreover, they seem to associate mainly with members of their own tribe, and the common tie between them is sometimes given concrete expression. In 1933, for instance, the Kgatla on the Rand organised a form of mutual aid society, one of whose main functions was to help unemployed fellow-tribesmen and to repatriate those who were sick or unable to pay the fare home (Schapera 1947:168).

The mild degree of acculturation of Botswana migrants is also shown by the ease with which migrants (even those who once became makgweelwa) adapted to societal conditions once they return. Although there was outcry from some quarters about the alien behaviour displayed by some returning migrants, as indicated, to a large extent the returning migrants adapted and integrated well into their societies. Returning migrants were accorded great respect and admiration by their communities in Botswana. Although some people accused them of wayward behaviour, many hero worshipped them and would say, 'Lekgoa le tsile' meaning (the white man has come).<sup>20</sup> This was because migrants had money and other western items such as bicycles and wristwatches not easily accessible to locals. Returning migrants were not ostracized by their societies and those who did not take further contracts easily melted into society. The returning migrants were highly valued in society. Schapera emphasized this aspect when he avers that:

Another important factor where youths are concerned is the marked preference shown by girls for those who have been abroad. On their return home, well dressed and perhaps with money to spend on gifts, such men, with their airs and glamorous stories, exercise a far greater attraction than those who have never been away (Schapera 1947:117).

Indeed labour migration had become something that young men aspired to, and a mark of maturity in society. Schapera further reiterates that those who did not migrate were labelled cowards who feared risking their lives in town. They were not favoured as husbands and it was held that they could not work and raise families (Schapera 1947: 117). These are some of the indicators of the fact that total acculturation was not achieved and that migrants returned to receptive communities. We now turn to some of those factors that hindered the total acculturation of Botswana migrants.

### **Factors militating against Acculturation of Botswana Migrants**

There were numerous factors that militated against high levels of acculturation, or total acculturation of Botswana mine migrants in South Africa. One of these was the compound or hostel system. While it permitted contact between different cultural groups after work and leisure time, it was also critical in hampering the facilitation of acculturation. Writing on the compound system and its effects on Basotho miners, Dumber Moodie reveals that migrants, '... lived in compounds, fifteen to fifty to a room, under the close surveillance of management and appointed police.' The hostels signified, '... a bifurcated identity' (Moodie 1994: 11).

It seems that the environment bred nostalgia among the migrants, which helped bond them together. Moodie related that Basotho returning from compounds would recite the names of the mountains, giving beautiful ex-

pressions of them whilst also singing proudly about their nation. He concludes that, 'mining was at one attached to male maturation, household responsibilities, and ethnic solidarity' (Moodie 1994: 14). Batswana who stayed in the compounds say that they spent a lot of time after work and weekends discussing different aspects of their country, valleys, past choir concerts and even describing livestock and game. On their return home, they would burst into traditional songs and discuss different aspects of their societies.<sup>21</sup> This shows that the period they spent together in the compounds was nostalgic and it made them more conscious about their societies.

Although Batswana could interact with other groups, the compound system bifurcated different cultures by accommodating ethnicities in different hostels. By accommodating Botswana migrants separately, the system accorded them ample chance to bond together by discussing ethnic and national issues and reliving past experiences and memories of home. The staging of mechonkolo at the compounds during weekends testifies how bifurcated the different ethnicities were. The separate traditional shows testify to the divide, which did not permit intensive contact to occur and hence facilitate acculturation.

The organisation of the compound system helped miners from different ethnicities to forge closer social networks with their own kinsman. According to Moodie: the formal organisation of the mine compound as a social institution was appropriated by migrant cultures for their own ends in a whole congeries of social practices and networks by those miners able to retain a social and economic subsistence base in the countryside (Moodie 1994: 21).

Botswana migrants in the compounds formed mekgatlho (societies) such as burial societies and others, meant to assist fellow migrants in times of need. These societies, also open to those who lived in the townships, assisted in transportation of the dead home, the repatriation of stranded colleagues and contributions towards developments back home.<sup>22</sup> These Botswana mekgatlho were crucial in maintaining a high level of ethnic loyalty and cultural identity because similar mekgatlho back home were an integral part of Setswana culture and hence their continuation. Similar societies existed for other cultural groups, which Moodie calls 'brotherhoods', with some organized along religious lines while others discussed rural politics. Commenting on the way in which these bodies strengthened solidarity among cultural groups in the compounds, Moodie says, 'Thus the mine compound left room for alternative cultural adaptations' (Moodie 1994:20).

Among the Botswana migrants, just like other migrant peasants from Southern African countries, the attachment to land and cattle was another factor that militated against full proletarianisation and total acculturation. Former migrants who worked in the 1940s, 1950s to the 1980s emphasize

the fact that agriculture has always been the source of livelihood for them. Batswana placed a lot of importance in agriculture, 'Botshelo jwa Motswana ke temo-thuo'. (A Motswana's livelihood is dependent on crop production and cattle rearing). They maintain that an adult man without land for cultivation and cattle was not valued in society.<sup>23</sup> The compounds particularly supported the idea of rural entrepreneurship. This situation, which also applied to Batswana, has been noted by Moodie for the rural Mpondo of South Africa. He relates that, "Although cultures other than rural – based migrant ones existed, even on mine compounds, compounds are particularly well suited for men with aspiration to rural patriarchal proprietorship like the Mpondo" (Moodie 1994:33).

This strong attachment to land and cattle and hence rural production meant that it was not easy for Botswana migrants to adopt any cultural practices that diverged from those relating to local peasant production, hence clinging to Setswana cultural values. Indeed, informants emphasize that upon arrival from the mines, they would not wait to proceed to the cattle post.<sup>24</sup>

Access to land back home strongly bonded Botswana migrants to their peasant communities and acted as a brake against intense acculturation. This situation was general and affected other migrant societies who had access to land. This statement is given credence by Moodie's assertion that:

Tenacious attachment to land and to agrarian production along with the necessity for infusions of capital into rural agriculture thus gave rise to cultural patterns in which migrant men (and women and children, and elders they left at home) forged communities between wage work and subsistence agriculture (Moodie 1994:22).

Botswana migrants emphasize the fact that they bought ploughs and other agricultural implements with wages obtained from the mines. They also purchased cattle that were used for drought power.<sup>25</sup> This attachment to land and injection of capital into peasant subsistence agriculture consolidated the bond between Botswana migrants and their societies back home, as crop production and animal husbandry were critical aspects of Tswana culture.

Land for Batswana, just like in other African societies, was a source of security and insurance against old age and any eventualities, whereas life in towns was insecure. Furthermore, many Tswana migrants described life in the cities of South Africa as full of tsotsis (petty criminals).<sup>26</sup> Through this close bond, Botswana migrants resisted proletarianisation, a process that would have facilitated acculturation. This confirms Moodie's conclusions about similar migrant societies in Southern Africa that, 'Peasant proprietors resisted proletarianisation as long as they had access to land and the means to work it, however dependent they were on the proceeds of wage labour (Moodie 1994:22).'

A critical phenomenon to be noted in the history of migrant labour in Botswana is the absence of inter-ethnic tensions or conflicts by Botswana migrants in South Africa. As earlier indicated, Botswana are not a homogeneous entity. In Botswana, the non-Setswana speaking groups were regarded as subject peoples and *bafaladi* (those who came seeking refuge). During the colonial period, there were tensions and struggles between the non-Setswana speakers and some dominant Setswana groups. The *Bakgalagadi* were held in a servile position by both the *Bangwaketse* and *Bakwena*, the *Bayei* were servile to Batawana, while *Bakalanga*, *Babirwa* and *Batswapong* were servile to *Bangwato*. *Bakgatla бага Mmanaana* were also regarded as subjects of *Bangwaketse*. Protracted and intense rivalries in the country during the colonial period were those between *Bakalanga ba ka Nswazwi* and *Bangwato* in the 1930s and 1940, the *Babirwa* of Malema and *Bangwato* in the 1890s and early 1900s and *Bakgatla бага Mmanaana* of Gobuamang and *Bangwaketse* of Bathoen I in the 1930s. However, although some of these resulted in the displacement of people they were not major conflicts.

The dominant and subject tribe phenomenon persisted in Botswana during the period of migration to South Africa and it is still a controversial issue. However, it would appear that the tribal 'tensions' or dominant and servile atmosphere that existed in the country did not percolate to the mines and cities of South Africa. All migrants from Botswana identified themselves as Batswana whilst at the mines and did not emphasize their tribal affiliation in Botswana. Informants emphasize that, '*Re ne re le Botswana fela*' (We were all Botswana).<sup>27</sup> Some of the reasons for the absence of ethnic rivalries were that in a foreign land, and in a land in which Africans were oppressed, it would have been folly for Batswana to evoke ethnic rivalries. Generally also, Botswana regarded some African groups such as the Zulu and Basotho as aggressive and warlike.<sup>28</sup> Rivalries among Batswana tribes would have exposed and divided them in case there were conflicts with the 'aggressive' tribes at one point. Overall, it seems the main reason was that even the ethnic rivalries in Botswana were mild.

### Conclusion

From the 1920s to the early 1980s, migrant labour to South African mines was a critical factor of wage employment in Botswana. Thousands of young able-bodied Botswana worked in the mines for various periods and were in contact with different ethnicities and cultures. Some of the migrants eventually became deserters and settled in South Africa, either with their families from Botswana, or having married there. Many young migrants, especially those migrating for the first time displayed behaviour, which was at variance with some Setswana cultural practices, much to the dismay of elders and chiefs.

These were signs of acculturation. But, the manner in which most migrants stuck to Setswana norms and values, and preferred the use of Setswana and also the company of their fellow tribesman, largely indicates that levels of acculturation were generally mild. Conditions in the mine compounds, and the strong social and economic bonds between migrants and their communities, acted as a brake that hindered effective acculturation of Botswana migrant miners.

It was not difficult for returning migrants to adapt to their communities because they were not ostracized, but rather seen as heroes. Some of their unwarranted 'heroic' antics were only temporary, and soon they were integrated into the community. The degrading treatment of African miners by their white supervisors and their regimentation in the compound system fostered some form of integration among different African nationalities. It also bred nostalgia, which strengthened the bond between the miners and their communities back home.

## Notes

1. <http://www.rice.edu/projects/HispanicHealth/Acculturation.html>
2. [http://www.anthro.palomer.edu/change/change\\_3.htm](http://www.anthro.palomer.edu/change/change_3.htm)
3. Interview with Seemiso Nkwe, Gabane 27 January 2007
4. Interview with Bothale, Ntekane Motogo and Mokate Mogodu, Ramotswa 26 January 2007
5. Interview with Mokhamena Sitwane and Sekara Motlhalamme 7 October 2007
6. All my 25 interviewees mentioned the use of this language and they spoke and understood it.
7. These were provided by seven interviewees.
8. Interview with Sekara Motlhalamme and Alfred Barei 29 January 2007.
9. All my interviewees emphasized this aspect.
10. Interview with William Bothale, Ntekane Motogo and Mokate Mogodu.
11. Interview with Alfred Barei.
12. Interview with Mokhamena Sitwane, Metsimotlhabe, 28 January 2007.
13. Interviews with Seemiso Nkwe, 27 January 2007.
14. Interview with Bosula Sitwane, 28 January 2007.
15. Interview with Seemiso Nkwe.
16. Botswana National Archives (BNA S. 385/5, Recruitment of Labour: Natives in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Adverse Effects of Excessive of Labour Migration; Also BNA S. 436/12, Moral Economic Effects of Withdrawal of from BP, 1935.

17. Interview with Mosana Nkile, Gabane 27 January 2007
18. Interview with Alfred Barei.
19. Interview with William Botlhale, Ntekane Motogo and Mokate Mogodu.
20. My interviewees mentioned that this was a fairly widespread expression.
21. Interview with Seemiso Nkwe.
22. Interviewees mentioned the existence of such societies
23. Interviews with Modisaotsile Thapelo, Kumakwane, 29 January, 2007
24. Interview with Alfred Barei, Kumakwane, 29 January 2007.
25. Interview with Sekara Motlhalamme, Metsimotlhaba,
26. Most interviewees mentioned the existence of these petty criminals.
27. Informants were unanimous on the absence of ethnic tensions between different Botswana ethnicities in South Africa.
28. The majority of interviewees held this view.

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