Basotho and the Mines: a Social History of Labour Migrancy in Lesotho and South Africa, c1890-1940

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Basotho and the Mines is the first major study of migrant labour in Lesotho, dedicated to the period 1890 to 1940. It examines the position of Basotho migrant workers in South Africa, Lesotho's dependency on migrant labour, and the social and cultural consequences of sending so many men away to work. These issues are placed within the framework of the history of colonialism in Lesotho and South Africa and its impact on the current geopolitics of the two interconnected nations. The study is unique in that it provides an in-depth historical analysis of migrant labour, combining aspects of political economy, and cultural and social history. It is exhaustive in its coverage and use of primary historical sources on labour migrancy in colonial Lesotho.

Central questions addressed include balancing structure and agency, examining issues such as how Basotho migrants coped with death and mourning in the mining compounds, the social history of commercial beer-brewing and commercial sex in Lesotho, and the relationship of all these factors to the system of chieftainship, missionaries, and the British colonial demonstration. The volume compels greater thinking about the dynamics of agency, and the complex ways that Basotho men and women coped with the impact of labour migrancy on their country.

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