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**SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF AGRICULTURE FOR HUMAN PROGRESS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICA: EVIDENCE AND LESSONS FROM LESOTHO**

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**ABSTRACT**

Agriculture is the lifeblood of majority of people in southern Africa. It has been the mainstay of development path for years in the region, and it remains the most important sector for food, income and employment for many southern Africans. Whilst subsistence farming is historically the most practiced form of agriculture in southern Africa, there are many parts of southern Africa where agriculture demonstrated its possibility of becoming a growth sector in economic terms. The case in point here is the 'granary economy' of Lesotho in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Although, it is now hardly possible to recall that Lesotho ever produced an agricultural surplus, the fact is that Lesotho was the net exporter of maize until around 1930s (Gill 1993). Using evidence from the 'granary economy' of Lesotho in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this paper notes that, with its largely untapped potential, it is possible for agriculture to become southern Africa's growth sector for human progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond if its 'social embeddedness' is elevated. The paper, therefore, concludes that there is great potential for harnessing the benefits of the social embeddedness of agriculture for human progress as evidenced from Lesotho in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Lesotho, officially the Kingdom of Lesotho, is a landlocked country and enclave, completely surrounded by its only neighbouring country, Republic of South Africa. Despite its unique position in the continent of Africa, Lesotho has always lead many of the sub-Saharan African countries in terms of social indicators (Nseera and Bhatia, 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014; Maleleka, 2009). For example, literacy in Lesotho is among the highest in Africa (Nseera and Bhatia, 2014: 10). In economic terms, however, it is one of the world's least developed countries (Nseera and Bhatia, 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014; UNDP 2000; World Bank 1999), and it ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world (Maleleka, 2009; GoL 2000). Nevertheless, in terms of macroeconomic management, it has historically been an above-average performer in sub-Saharan Africa over time (see Nseera and Bhatia, 2014; Maleleka, 2009; Epprecht 1996; World Bank 1995; Murray 1981, 1979; Burman 1976; Germond 1967). Indeed, the heydays of Lesotho's macroeconomic management prowess can be traced back from 1860s.

It was during this epoch when Lesotho was described as "the granary of the Free State and parts of the Cape Colony" (Germond 1967). Murray (1981) vividly describes the Basotho [people of Lesotho] of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a prosperous and self-sufficient people, who were quick to grab the economic opportunities for grain export offered by the newly opened diamond mines in Kimberly in the present-day Northern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. In 1873, Basotho exported some 100,000 bags of grain as well as other products such as wool and mohair (Ferguson 1990).

In the foreword to the National Vision 2020 document launched in 2005, the Prime Minister of Lesotho, Pakalitha Mosisili recalled this time when Lesotho earned the reputation of being the 'Granary of Southern Africa' as a major supplier of wheat to meet the unprecedented demand for grains for a population that had come into sudden wealth (GoL 2005). Regrettably, today Lesotho is an impoverished and dependent country economically (George 2014; Booysen 2013; Crush and Dodson 2010; Maleleka 2009; Epprecht 1996). For instance, while only about one third of the GDP is produced locally, most of it comes from either foreign aid or inflows of migrant labour remittances or receipts from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which have also dwindled in recent years (CBL 2010).

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Indeed, for most of the 20th century, Lesotho has been economically dependent on one of the highest rates of migrant labour in the world (Corno and de Walque 2012; Crush and Dodson 2010; Epprecht 1996; World Bank 1975; Breytenbach 1975) and has been the world's largest recipient of foreign aid as well (Horta 2006; Matlosa 1999, 1995). In fact, it is now hardly possible today to recall that Lesotho ever produced an agricultural surplus, and that Lesotho was the net exporter of maize until around 1930s (Gill 1993), and a granary of . Against this background, this paper attempts against historical background to stimulate and inform discussions on this important topic of the social embeddedness of agriculture for human progress, and explores positive lessons that could be learned today from the management of the Basotho's granary economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for future agriculture-led socio-economic development for human progress.

### **Lesotho - macroeconomic management of granary economy in various contexts**

Historically, Lesotho was not always as economically dependent and poor as it is today (see Motsoene 2014; Maleleka, 2009; Matlosa and Sello, 2005; Epprecht 1996; Murray 1981, 1979; Germond 1967). In contrast, from the ashes of devastating *Lifaqane* wars in mid-nineteenth century, Basotho staged one of Africa's most remarkable comes back (Epprecht 1996, p.186). They emerged from these crippling series of wars to become the industrial heartland of southern Africa (Riep 2011). The loss of livestock and inability to reap crops due to wars seemed not to have hampered their remarkable recovery as they presented the appearance of a "thriving and well-ordered people" (Burman 1976, pp. 42-46). For example, they resourcefully adapted to the loss of their livestock: they used their horses for ploughing and transport, and demonstrated their industrious character in the larger economy in southern Africa at the time.

The Basotho recovery was attributed largely to the discovery of diamonds in 1867 in the Northern Cape Colony – Kimberley, now the capital city of the present-day Northern Cape Province of South Africa and that of gold in 1880 in the Transvaal, now Gauteng Province in South Africa (Moodie 2006; Harington *et al* 2004; Maloka 2004; Crush 2000). This South Africa's mineral boom rapidly and irreversibly incorporated the Basotho into a larger economic system in southern Africa. By the 1870s they had become the principal suppliers of grain for South Africa's emerging mining sector, and when the grain market began to diminish in the early 1900s, they diversified their production to include wool and mohair (Epprecht 1996, p. 186).

The industriousness of Basotho and their trade considerably benefited the British colonial revenue (Burman, 1976, p. 46). For example, it is recorded that in 1873 Basotho exported 100 000 bags of grain – wheat, maize, and sorghum – and 2000 bags of wool (Burman *ibid*). In the same year goods of British or foreign manufacture worth about 150 000 pounds were imported into Lesotho (Burman *ibid*). Indeed, in the 1870s Basotho made an excellent livelihood from production and the sale of grain (Murray 1981, 1979). The fluctuating economic conditions in the late 1800s and early 1900s due to savage depression and drought did not hurt the spirited industrious character of Basotho.

If anything, the emergent conditions spurred the Basotho industriousness and business acumen. For example, in early 1900s whilst lice and drought destroyed wheat and maize crops, the exports of wool and mohair steadily increased (Murray 1976). And though the steadily declining per capita income from agriculture due to poor harvests meant low imports of manufactured goods during this period, the sale of grain and livestock products was still the most important means of generating a cash flow in Lesotho (Murray 1981, 1979). The First World War sustained high prices in wool and grain and the Basotho were able to take advantage of this – maize and wheat production was particularly vigorous. For instance, wheat exports in 1919 were a record 256 000 bags (Pim Report 1935, p. 191), and 100 000 bags of maize were exported in the 1928 (Murray 1981, 1979). However, wool and mohair were by far the most important exports at this time (Pim Report *ibid*). Notably, this was the case despite serial economic depression and climatic vicissitudes such as drought that the Basotho experienced at the time.

The Basotho response to the market and trade incentives at the time with such zeal and success amid all odds attracted attention from a score of interested observers (Murray 1981, 1979) and earned Basotho notable accolades. In 1870 a newspaper "The Friend of the Free State" in the Orange Free State, now Free State Province of South Africa, was moved to remark, "Nowhere else in South Africa is there a more naturally industrious nation, as honest and as peaceable as the Basuto [Basotho]" (Germond 1967, p.319). In 1871, partly because of their business acumen, the "Jews of South Africa" (Theal 1964, p. 876) were much admired by the early missionaries: "superior intelligence, that spirit of enquiry, and that craving for good government . . . reveal themselves in this people to a greater degree than with any other in South Africa" (Germond 1967, pp. 325-326).

As late as 1942, the British described Basuto [Basotho] as "comparatively wealthy and progressive," while according to Sir Alan Pim's 1935 study, "this tranquil state of affairs" was such that "conditions were in fact too easy" (Pim 1935, p. 70). Indeed, whilst in the South African mines, Basotho men made a name for themselves performing skilled, and elitist work of being "reader" (clerks) on the surface and "shaft-sinkers" below (Epprecht 1996, p. 186). Basotho women acquired an early reputation of being the most intelligent and resourceful "native women on the South African locations, with skills in entrepreneurship and evasion of the law (Bonner 1990). Hence, one commentator once remarked "... the Basotho people are not, as is so often claimed, inherently devoid of entrepreneurial abilities" (Williams 1971, p. 165).

### **Lesotho – the social mainstay of granary economy before 1930s**

The historical literature on Basotho granary economy centers on twin themes of how such an obviously industrious people first came to be, and then how they came to their present parlous state. However, the concern of this section is to shed light more on the former than the latter. The industrious Basotho of the nineteenth century owe its coming to be from the robust role social capital played in sustaining their granary economy.

Silici *et al.* (2011, p. 4) define social capital as “the social relations within and among groups and communities, and the features and norms that characterize these relations, which enable the individuals to reach desirable outcomes.” They identify two types of social capital, namely structural and cognitive. ‘Structural’ social capital refers to the types of social interactions that can be established (networks, formal and informal associations, kinship and friendship ties, etc.) whereas ‘cognitive’ aspects include the attributes (such as behavioral norms, shared moral values, personalized and generalized trust) as well as the informal and formal agreements through which these relationships work (Silici 2009).

During the nineteenth century, social capital to agriculture became the mainstay of granary economy in Lesotho. Through its agricultural sharing mechanisms, it sustained Basotho livelihoods and their granary economy. The sharing mechanisms through social capital were skillfully directed at crop and livestock farming (Turner 2005). In fact, farming in Lesotho at the time had an intrinsic cultural value and was ‘an activity characterized by a high level of sociality’ (Boehm 2003). Farming was thus not only deeply rooted in social processes, but it simply constituted the ‘social backbone’ of Basotho (Boehm 2003, p. 17). Whence, farming and the associated social networking activities formed a set of social contexts and relations around farming-actors across Lesotho in the nineteenth century. The farming strategy of the Basotho at the time was to make a wealth of agreements with other community members to raise implements for agriculture – land, labour, traction power and seeds. Indeed, institutions of productive relations or sharing mechanisms (Turner 2005) were extensively used to facilitate the pooling of different resources needed for agriculture – crop and livestock production.

The literature on Sesotho land tenure, farming and culture discusses various forms of these sharing mechanisms that sustained granary economy in the nineteenth century Lesotho (see Maro 2011; Turner 2005, 1978; Bloehm 2003a; Franklin 1995; Lawry 1993; Murray 1981, 1976; Phororo 1979; Robertson 1987; Sheddick 1954; Wallman 1969). *Seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), *tsimo ea lira* (the field of enemies) and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) were the most prominent forms of institutions of productive relations and co-operation used by the Basotho for the purpose of agriculture – ploughing, planting and harvesting (Robertson 1987; Spiegel 1979; Turner 1978). Thus sharecropping has long been an essential part of farming in Lesotho, enabling those without all the necessary inputs, draft power or equipment to share their land and harvest with those who can provide what they lack. It still remains an important livelihood strategy for Basotho agricultural production even today typically supported by institutions of productive relations and co-operation discussed below.

*Seahlolo* was the common and practiced sharecropping agricultural mechanism among the Basotho in the nineteenth century Lesotho. It was associated with the entrepreneurial retributive function of helping people out of temporary difficulties or longer-term resources shortages by pooling land, cattle and equipment (Turner 2005, p.42).

Through *seahlolo*, farming partners got their fields ploughed and planted and had enough labour to fulfill weeding and harvesting obligations. For example, Lawry (1983) describes Basotho entrepreneurs entering into *seahlolo* sharecropping agreements with widows that last for the rest of the old woman’s life and guaranteed certain funeral expenses when death finally closes the contract.

Another commonly practised sharecropping mechanism for the Basotho to sustain their livelihoods was *tsimo-ea-lira*. It was a traditional practice where chiefs retained some land to grow food stuff for the support of not only orphans but other vulnerable groups in the community such as the disabled and widows. The chief’s public fields (*lira*) were cultivated by the community to help them in times of hardships, and to provide social protection to the needy. The surplus of the produce of *tsimo-ea-lira* was also extensively used to sustain the granary economy – buying agricultural implements for farming. The *tsimo-ea-lira* was thus an important institution of productive relations and co-operation managed by the chief to produce a grain reserve for the needy and to sustain the Basotho granary economy in the nineteenth century Lesotho (Turner 2005b).

*Letsema* was also a central sharing mechanism in the granary economy of the nineteenth century Lesotho. The older literature about Lesotho makes references to the centrality of *letsema* to the livelihoods of Basotho. In his book on farming in Lesotho in the old days, Mohapi (1956) gives a description of *letsema*. It literally refers to the use of organized, co-operative work parties in all phases of agricultural work – ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting. Casalis (1861, pp. 162-163) writes thus about *letsema*, “the Basutu [Basotho] assemble every year, to dig up and sow the fields... it is interesting to see on these occasions hundreds of [people] in a straight line raise and lower their mattocks simultaneously, and with perfect regularity. The air resounds with songs, which serve to invigorate the labourers and keep time in their movements.” *Letsema* was the most efficient traditional institution of productive relations and co-operation for shared ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting that sustained the granary economy.

*Mafisa* was also the prominent traditional institution of productive relations and co-operation amongst the Basotho of the nineteenth century Lesotho. In *mafisa*, one household has a long-term custody of some or all of another household’s livestock, and the right to use them and consume their produce (Mahao 2006, p.28; Ashton, 1967:181; Casalis 1955, p.155; Sheddick 1954, pp. 109-10). Under the *mafisa* system, livestock have traditionally played a central role in the economy and society of the Basotho. To some extent their cultural roles included the payment of *bohali* (bridewealth) and the ploughing for which teams of cattle have traditionally been used. Overall, however, livestock remain an important asset: both for their direct productive functions and also for their role in household savings and liquidity. Sheep and goats were an important source of income for many Basotho during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the mountains, as wool and mohair were sold and marketed internationally through a relatively efficient network of producer groups and government shearing sheds.

Thus during the nineteenth century Lesotho, the “social embeddedness of fields” in a way was a strength of agriculture (Boehn 2005, pp. 38-39; Boehm 2003, p.14). Its various exchange arrangements worked as channels of diffusion of wealth and facilitated access to agricultural resources (Boehm 2003). This social capital thus became the critical agricultural skill for Basotho that they used cleverly to sustain their granary economy. As a means to support institutional agreements, avoid conflicts and foster community participation, social capital also helped to solve the problems related to the use of common pool agricultural resources. More generally, its presence supported a receptive attitude towards the cultural and institutional changes that any innovation process implies. Whenever an innovative farming practice was introduced, enhanced cooperation and collective action facilitated extension and field activities, and encouraged adaptive research by enabling the formation of groups and networks among farmers (Boehm 2003). Perhaps, this explains why Basotho were able to absorb innovations and accumulate wealth successfully during the nineteenth century to support and sustain the granary economy. Put differently, it explains what kind of society existed before the 1830s when resources management and agricultural techniques introduced by the missionaries and traders were rapidly absorbed by the Basotho to sustain the granary economy (Epprecht 1996, p. 27).

Until 1899, migration for Basotho was discretionary rather necessary (Murray 1981 1976). Production and export of grain was the most important source of income for the Basotho. Indeed before 1900 the Basotho movement that was taking place beyond Lesotho frontiers produced then no other effect than to increase the export of wheat and other cereals to a most remarkable degree. The valleys of the Lesotho, composed as they were of a deep layer of vegetable mould, watered by numerous streams, and favoured with regular rains in the good season, required little more than a modicum of work to cover themselves with the richest crops to support and indeed sustain the Basotho granary economy. However, the sustainability of the Basotho granary economy took a knock from a series of labour laws (Murray 1976), which steadily declined the per capita income from the Basotho agriculture. That decline was invidiously linked to the establishment of the railway from Cape to Kimberly, which modified the economic situation of Basotho because the latter produced less and found no outlets for their products.

The land Act of 1913 also had its share in undermining commercial agriculture by the Basotho and thus holding back people to engage in commercial agriculture (Moyo 2008; Murray 1976). With these economic, legislative and other agrarian pressures (Bundy 1980; Wilson and Thompson 1982), by 1899 Lesotho was irreversibly made a labour reserve (Murray 1981, 1976). It supplied the sinews of agriculture in the Orange Free State. It also kept going railway works, coal and diamond mines at Jagersfontein, Kimberly, the gold mines of the Transvaal, now Gauteng province and furnished a large amount of domestic services in the surrounding territories in South Africa (Lundahl and Petersson 1991; Strom 1986). There is no doubt the all the alluded changes curtailed the natural industriousness of the Basotho, and of course, their ability to successfully support and sustain the granary economy over time.

However, it is worth noting that until around 1930s, what is now Lesotho used to be a rich and very efficient agricultural economy. It was both self-reliant for food and certain handicrafts products and well-integrated into the cash economy of South Africa through large exports of wheat, maize and sorghum, as well as through the consumption of manufactured goods. Initially, the Basotho had extensive control of the most fertile region along the Caledon River. This made it easy to produce enough grain for their own use and to sell to Cape Town markets where they made huge profits. The money earned was mainly used for agricultural production. The diamond discovery in Kimberly in 1867 and gold in the Witwatersrand in 1866 attracted thousands of people who needed to be fed. Whence, Lesotho became one of the main suppliers of wheat, maize, and sorghum to Kimberly and Witwatersrand. For example, Lesotho was able to supply Kimberly with more than 100 000 bags of excellent quality grain each year (Ferguson 1990; Burman 1976) With the might of agricultural prowess that Lesotho boasted at the time, Lesotho thus earned the reputation of being the granary of southern Africa, an advantage that she has not managed and developed well enough to keep that enviable status. This brings us to the need to understand what human values (socio-ethical and cultural) underlined the Basotho’s ‘social embeddedness of agriculture’ during their granary economy in the nineteenth century Lesotho.

#### **Lesotho – normative foundation of granary economy in the nineteenth century**

In his book, *Blessed Unrest: how the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being*, Paul Hawken (2007, p.165) describes the global sustainability movement and the human network upon which it is built: Individuals are associating, hooking up, and identifying with one another. From that meeting and experience they are forming units, inventing again and again pieces of a larger organism, enjoining associations and volunteers and communities and groups, and assembling these into a mosaic of activity as if they are solving a jigsaw puzzle without ever having seen the picture on its box. The insanity of human destructiveness may be matched by an older grace and intelligence that is fastening us together in ways we have never before seen or imagined.

Lesotho's history is replete with stories of an “older grace and intelligence” that has bound the Basotho together through time. Rising from the ruins of the *Lifaqane* wars in mid-nineteenth century, Lesotho became the industrial heartland of Southern Africa, and indeed truly became the granary of Southern Africa. Lesotho’s granary economy standing depended less on the advancement of the Basotho agricultural technology but on the human values that informed, shaped and underlined Basotho’s socio-philosophical reflection about agriculture in the late 19th century. By human values, the author means, a set of socio-ethical and cultural principles, standards, convictions and beliefs that Basotho of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lesotho adopted as sufficient 'habits of thought' or life-embedded ideas, ideals and precepts for building a more equitable and ethical agricultural system of their time, which became the backbone of their granary economy. Indeed, from time immemorial the Basotho were depicted as a people with a moral foundation overall (Coplan 2003).

It is not surprising therefore that ethics and agriculture have always been intertwined in Lesotho to address the societal concerns of social, ethical and cultural impacts of agriculture. In general, 'ethics' is defined as the ideals, values or standards that people use to determine whether their actions are good or bad. Ethics in agriculture therefore encompass value judgments that cover the production, processing, and distribution of food and agricultural products. These ethical values were integrated with socio-economic sharing and networking mechanisms across Lesotho for supporting livelihood security, and were cohesive with the cultural values of the country. Below some of the key Basotho human (socio-ethical and cultural) values that informed, shaped and underlined their philosophical reflection about the social embeddedness of agriculture for socio-economic development and human progress in the nineteenth century Lesotho are highlighted.

**The value of unity:** Basotho are historically attached to the cultural value of unity. Unity (*kopano ke matla*), working in harmony with one another, is a traditional Basotho value considered to be important to the health and welfare of the society. In fact, Lesotho was formed as a unified response of several disparate groups who joined together under the leadership of King Moshoeshoe I to face adversity as a single people. The importance of alliance for the common good is evidenced in Lesotho's history and expressed in the traditional proverb, "*Leis'oele le beta poho*," which translates to, "A crowd can easily overpower a bull" (Mokitimi 1997, p. 18). Unity was identified as a key Basotho value that informed, shaped and underlined the Basotho's philosophical reflection about social embeddedness of agriculture for socio-economic development and human progress in the late nineteenth century Lesotho.

**The value of sharing in the community:** Interdependence has always been at the core of Basotho livelihood strategies. This has been possible because of the traditional institutions of reciprocity that continue to function today. Basotho have always been able to expect economic and social support from their kin and neighbours, and – in ways mediated by their status – have felt obliged to give it. Such support ranged from the traditional *tsimo ea lira* (a communal field belonging to the chief and worked by his subjects) to the widespread livestock-loaning institution of *mafisa* (Mohasi and Turner 1999, pp. 31-32; Ashton 1967, p.182; Sheddick 1954, p. 10). One of the other examples of the institutions of sharing concern pooled inputs to agricultural production - *Letsema*. The *letsema* or work party, where people come together to do a day's farm work in exchange for beer and food, was a standard way of getting the season's tasks in agricultural production done as communal activity.

**The value of sharing and support:** Sharing in the community is part of the context for Basotho livelihoods. It offers social and economic networks that are important kind of livelihood asset for Basotho. The support may have an element of mutuality, through some sort of sharing arrangement, or may take the form of a straight subsidy to livelihoods. Mohasi and Turner (1999) quote the example of *lijo tsa meelela*, or work in people's fields for payment in grain or other produce as one of the key sharing and support mechanism for Basotho.

This is the kind of 'claiming' livelihood strategy, incorporating an element of patronage, that can only succeed in an institutional framework where claiming is viewed as legitimate.

**The value of industriousness and wealth:** The work ethic of the Basotho valued work as a virtuous activity. One implication for economic development of the Basotho work ethic is that hard work and the accumulation of wealth are considered virtuous and indicative of a worthwhile life. Whence, industriousness and the need for achievement are specific values broadly held by the Basotho culture. The individual who has learned the value of industriousness while young is most likely to have a high need to work hard and achieve something meaningful (Matsela 1979). Industriousness, prudence, and frugality were the taught traits that would allow a man to achieve his competency, maintain it, and pass it on to his children. Basotho socio-cultural values encourage the need for achievement, love for work and self-resilience as an individual's life is to be judged by her or his accomplishments.

**The Value of Service to Others:** From their birth as a nation in the 1830s, Basotho have maintained as their motto noblesse oblige--commonly translated as "to whom much is given, much is expected." And throughout the nineteenth century Basotho indeed delivered on that expectation. Of course, the effects of that service rippled well beyond the monetary amount assigned to the time that is volunteered. It simply became a mainstay of the Basotho granary economy. Such service paid invaluable dividends in community relations among Basotho and disposed community members to support farming initiatives i.e. *seahlolo*, *tsimo ea lira*, *letsema*, *lijo tsa meelela*, *mafisa* and others, which became the backbone of Basotho granary economy. These service initiatives were popularized by King Moshoeshoe during the *Lifaqane*. They were important political strategies in attracting communities who were driven off land and who had left behind crops and livestock as they escaped, defeated by the war. Indeed, as Gandhi once said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Basotho found themselves as a prosperous and industrious nation in the nineteenth century through unapologetic service to others.

#### **The value of service for the benefit of society**

The Basotho see themselves in terms of their membership in and servitude to a family and a wider community (Mpeli and Monnapula-Mapesela 2009, p.7). Indeed, in Lesotho a person's usefulness is measured in terms of her or his contribution to the observable welfare of family and community (Matsela 1979, pp. 132-137). There is no doubt that the Basotho granary economy was based on King Moshoeshoe's ingenuity and wisdom that the Basotho hold deeply in their way of life. As the first leader of Lesotho, he used the ancient resources of African chieftainship to unite several fragmented tribes into a single people. He united communities fleeing without livestock by lending them cattle under the *mafisa* system – each man took cattle and became responsible for the care and well-being of the animals, receiving in exchange the right to their milk and some of their offsprings (Mahao 2006, p. 28).

Under *mafisa*, herds of cattle that were captured in war also became property of the chief, and the subjects gladly became the depositaries and guardians of these new acquisitions for they could use them for farming i.e. oxen as a beast of burden, cattle as source of milk and keep the calves, thus obtaining cattle of their own eventually.

**The value of the pursuit for peace and justice:** Basotho place high value on each individual human life. This explains why the pursuit of peace (*khotso*) and justice (*toka*) is one of the highest Basotho socio-cultural values. Whence, Basotho social institutions primary purpose is to promote the values of peace and justice in the people, and to teach the pursuit of peace and justice as the purpose of life. It is not surprising therefore that the values of peace and justice are stressed in the family and within the entire community. Mpeli and Monnapula-Mapesela (2009, p.7) note that much emphasis in the Basotho way of life is on peace – peace of an individual within herself or himself, peace within members of the community, and peace between communities.

With deep conviction, the Basotho believe that without peace the development and enjoyment of other values i.e. justice and charity would be difficult to nurture and harness for the benefit of society. To build the culture of peace, Basotho have consciously made the value of peace a frequent tool of communication – in greetings (*litumeliso*) and in opening and adjourning meetings or gatherings (*ho bula le ho koala liphuthetheho*). The much often used phrase “*Khotso* (peace)! *Pula* (rain)!! *Nala* (plenty)!!!” captures in general the essence of the value of peace in the Basotho’s way of life.

**The value of human life:** All Basotho socio-cultural values are based on the precious gift of life. In fact, every social activity – birth, marriage, funerals rituals and other ceremonies – are about celebrating the sacredness of human life and the need to defend, protect and promote it. Basotho believe in *Molimo* (God) and *Balimo* (Ancestral Spirits). The songs of prayer in times of *nala* (plenty) or *thloko* (need) are a witness to Basotho’s faith in *Molimo* as the ultimate guardian of the value of human life. *Balimo* are used as mediators between people and *Molimo* (Matsela 1979, pp. 132-137) for protection and blessings.

For example, in the rite of renewal – the ritual of the first fruits – the first-fruits were ceremonially consumed at the chief’s place for thanksgiving to *Molimo* and *Balimo*. The pulp of the leaves was rubbed onto the body and a new fire was kindled. Jean Comaroff quoted in Buti Tlhagale (n.d) writes that “this ritual served to tie the maturation of the crops to the recreation of the social community. The rubbing of parts of the body with pulp from the leaves of the first fruits suggests an intimacy with nature as it renews itself. In their symbolic interaction, human beings participate in the process of revitalization. The kindling of a new fire symbolized the release of new personal and social energy needed for protection, preservation and promotion human life”.

**The Value of shared humanity:** The Basotho acknowledge the fundamental moral value of a shared humanity. In Lesotho, the word *Botho* in Sesotho (language spoken by the Basotho) refers to recognition of shared humanity, in the sense mentioned by Archbishop Tutu (1999, p. 31) that “. . .

A person with *Botho* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole...” The duty of *Botho* thus morally requires Basotho to conduct their relations with each other in accordance with ethical principles consistent with the intrinsic value and dignity of a shared humanity. Indeed, the Basotho have always attached a great significance on the important contribution that the family and the society as a whole should have in providing social protection to the needy and vulnerable. To every Mosotho, this translates into provision of love, care and support to all regardless of their economic and vulnerability status out of sense of shared value of humanity.

In a nutshell, the above human values have been ascribed as the mainstay of Basotho granary economy in the nineteenth century Lesotho. It is these set of values that tell us the story about the psyche of Basotho that earned Lesotho a reputation of being the *granary of southern Africa*. This explains why the former Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili (2001, p.1) made call for Basotho to honor these core social values that made name for Lesotho in the nineteenth century, and to revive them as part and foundation of Lesotho Vision 2020. He encouraged the Basotho to revive the values associated with expressions such as *khotso* (peace), *kopano ke matla* (unity), *u ka nketsang ha e ahe motse* (tolerance), *boitlhompho le tlhomphano* (self-respect and respect of others), *bana ba monna ba arolelana hlooaana ea tsie* (sharing), and *ntlo ea motho e mong ha e na boroko* (self-reliance). This brings us to appreciate the lessons that can be learned from the Basotho granary economy in the nineteenth century Lesotho for socio-economic development and human progress today.

### **Lesotho – some lessons to be learned from the Basotho granary economy today**

Thomas Jefferson once remarked, “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds” (USDA 1937). Jefferson’s remarks ring true of the Basotho of the nineteenth century Lesotho for the agrarian values and ethics they demonstrated to make Lesotho the granary of Southern Africa. There is no doubt that the work ethic and commitment to work they deeply embraced has had an important cultural impact for the Basotho granary economy.

As Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, correctly pointed out that some cultures achieve more than others because of the values of their people. Indeed the Basotho of the nineteenth century Lesotho achieved more based on the socio-ethical values highlighted earlier in the previous section. Such values shaped their worldview and behavior patterns towards social embeddedness of agriculture for socio-economic development and human progress. Tapping into the agrarian strength of the Basotho of the nineteenth century Lesotho in order to make agriculture once again a growth sector for Lesotho today and by extrapolation southern Africa is surely a worthwhile effort. There are numerous lessons that can be learned from the Basotho’s social embeddedness of agriculture for socio-economic

development and human progress in the nineteenth century Lesotho. Without attempting to be exhaustive, some of the lessons are enumerated below.

**Changing attitude towards agriculture:** For agriculture to become truly a growth sector for Lesotho and by extrapolation southern Africa today, there is a fundamental need to change the attitude towards it. Generally, agriculture has been approached as primarily a technical activity – a product of a carefully designed technical plan and technical experiments (Boehm 2003, p. 3). Indeed, mainstream development models continue to favor “transfer of technology” to agriculture at the expense of social capital. As much as agriculture has technical dimension to it, there are social aspects to agriculture that make it a social activity as tool (Woodhouse, 2002; Devereux and Maxwell 2001; Mehta *et al.* 1999; Leach *et al.* 1997; Long and Villareal 1994; Scoones and Thompson 1994; Richards 1993; Berry 1993). Under the granary economy, the Basotho of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lesotho seemed to have long understood the nature of agriculture as both a technical and social activity. Borrowing the words of Richards (1993), Basotho understood that agriculture is “a product of improvisational skills, resources access negotiations and technical experiments.” Indeed, the outstanding achievements of the Basotho under the granary economy can be attributed to their primary attitude to agriculture as an outcome of a social, cultural, technical, political and economic processes and contexts. This is the attitude that earned the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lesotho the accolade of being the granary of southern Africa.

#### **Creating agriculture social support infrastructure**

For agriculture to become a growth sector, there is need to create a social support infrastructure for it as the Basotho did under the granary economy. Generally, Neo-classical and Marxist economics continue to view culture (social activities) as a subordinate aspect of economic activity (Berry 1993). This view has long been demystified by the Basotho of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lesotho who comprehensively demonstrated that agriculture as an economic activity is embedded in a wider array of social dimensions. They skillfully used socio-economic sharing and networking mechanisms – *seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), *tsimo ea lira* (the field of enemies), *lijo tsa meelela* (work in people’s fields for payment in grain or other produce) and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) – across the 19<sup>th</sup> century Lesotho for supporting agriculture production (see Turner 2005, 1978; Bloehm 2003a; Franklin 1995; Robertson 1987; Murray 1981, 1976; Phororo 1979; Wallman 1969; Sheddick 1954;).

These have been used by the Basotho as the means of negotiation of resources access for farming under the “granary economy”. Speaking about the importance of socio-economic sharing and networking mechanisms as a means of production, Berry (1993) writes “as resources access and use is determined by mobilization of potential allies and social networks, farmers need to keep options open and strengthen the position from which they ultimately have to negotiate their farming strategy.” And Boehm (2003) agrees that “the social embeddedness of fields ... used to be strength of agriculture in Lesotho because the various exchange arrangements worked as channels of diffusion of wealth ad facilitated access to land even for landless households”.

#### **Strengthening ethics in agriculture**

For agriculture to become truly a growth sector for Lesotho and by extrapolation Southern Africa today, there is a need to strengthen ethics within agricultural institutions of productive relations. Generally, there is a feeling that ethical standards have declined in agricultural institutions of productive relations. As Boehlje (1987, p.372) has observed, “There appears to be changing standards in communities compared to earlier years. The ‘your word is your bond’ attitude is no longer standard. People are not necessarily becoming blatantly dishonest, but they are more willing to accept the gray area between right and wrong and accept less than pure business decisions.” The change that Boehlje refers to has had far-reaching consequences – unethical behavior is increasingly been woven into the very fabric of sharecropping and *mafisa* contractual arrangements. In the study commissioned by Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network (SARPN), it is reported that some community members are showing reluctance in engaging in sharecropping and *mafisa* arrangements with people affected by HIV and AIDS (Mphale and Rwambali 2003, p.5).

Reasons put forward for this unbecoming behavior are: (i) the HIV and AIDS affected households were increasingly dishonouring the agreements by abruptly selling land or livestock, sometimes without alerting their contractual partners, and (ii) the infected and affected households are often forced to sell some of the *mafisa* livestock in order to cater for the medical treatment expenses or to meet funeral expenses once the infected individual passes away. Mphale and Rwambali (2003, pp.5-6) note that, “In some cases, when the ailing partners eventually die, trouble emerges between the remaining family members and contractual partners on agreements (which are often not documented) and unreasonable expectations are made on the partners. For instance one of the participants related an incidence where he was expected to bear the burial expenses for his dead partner just because he had been utilizing his assets in a sharecropping arrangement.”

#### **Building conflict management & resolution mechanisms within agriculture**

For agriculture to become truly a growth sector for Lesotho and by extrapolation southern Africa today, there is a need to strengthen the existing conflict management and resolution in the agrarian sector. It is widely acknowledged that sharecropping contractual arrangements in agriculture in Lesotho will, for a long time, remain important to the livelihoods of the Basotho (Turner 2005; Mphale and Rwambali 2003; Boehm 2003). However, Turner (2005c, p. 64) states that Basotho “society is becoming more individualistic and mercenary” with sharing mechanisms and inter-household support in decline. At the heart of the decline is conflict associated with these sharecropping contractual arrangements as discussed earlier. Whence, the need to have appropriate institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution within agrarian sector is paramount. Such institutions and mechanisms should be built on local institutional capacities for handling conflict to reach decisions, so long as they conform to basic principles of law and justice (Hendricksen 1997).

They should also provide a neutral space for encouraging a collective analysis of conflict, which sees conflict management as part of a broader process of social and economic change (Hendricksen 1997). In fact, resolution of conflicts must come from within the society itself. Referring to the conflict arising from sharecropping and *mafisa* contractual arrangements, Mphale and Rwambali (2003, pp. 5-6) argue the conflict management mechanisms "...should be legalized to protect the rights of the infected and affected households since they are often cheated out through the same arrangements. In the same token the other partners would be assured of the fact that arrangements would not be terminated abruptly. There should be a mechanism to institute witnesses when contractual arrangements are made. Chiefs and close relatives should be involved in such arrangements."

### Promoting ethical leadership for agriculture

For agriculture to become truly a growth sector for Lesotho and by extrapolation Southern Africa today, there is a need for ethical leadership to lead the agrarian revolution. Historically, Lesotho shifted from a period of prosperity, based on Basotho's high level of agricultural skills and knowledge, from early 1800s to the early 1900s (Eldredge 1993; Ferguson 1997; Murray 1981) to being classified as a "least developed" country. It could therefore be described as having undergone de-development over the last century, which has been associated with colonialism and industrialization (Keegan 1986), environmental degradation (Eldredge 1993) and more recently, with development programmes (Ferguson 1997; Quinlan 1995).

All these referred to shifts point to the importance of ethical leadership and by extrapolation the unique ethical qualities that distinguish leaders from one another in building nations through agriculture as the growth sector. The Basotho of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lesotho owed their existence from the ethical legacy of King Moshoeshe who became their undisputable leader in 1831. It was under his ethical leadership that Lesotho became the Granary of Southern Africa. He was the mastermind behind institutions of productive relations or sharing mechanisms that became the bedrock of Basotho granary economy. He popularized *seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), *tsimo ea lira* (the field of enemies), and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) during *Lifaqane* to the extent that these activities became the second nature of the Basotho. He walked the talk and led by examples as the building blocks for the granary economy were set in motion. He would use the "*pitso*," a community meeting, to gather feedback from the community, to learn of the dreams and desires of community members so that he can be of good service to them.

### Concluding remarks

Although the Basotho have been a net food importing nation since the 1930s (Mbata 2001), the paper has provided evidence that this was not the case. Basotho were once the most prosperous nation from the early 1800s to the early 1900s (Ferguson 1997; Eldredge 1993; Murray 1981). Basotho emerged as a nation around 1831 under the leadership of King Moshoeshe who formed alliances with clans and chiefdoms of southern Sotho people. His power and influence grew because he offered his defeated enemies land, livestock and assistance to cultivate crops through institutions of productive

relations or sharing mechanisms (Turner 2005) – *seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), *tsimo ea lira* (the field of enemies), *lijo tsa meelela* (work in people's fields for payment in grain or other produce) and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) among others. These were extensively used to facilitate the pooling of different resources needed for agriculture – crop and livestock production as highlighted in the body of the paper.

Traditionally crop production was the women's responsibility in Lesotho. The fields were quite small and cultivated by hand hoes (Gill 1993; Ashton 1967). Women engaged in agricultural activities while men herded animals, hunted or built stone houses and kraals (Gill 1993). Ox-drawn ploughs were introduced by the first missionaries (Ashton 1967) and the ploughing became a job for the men (Gill 1993). The new technology allowed more land to be cultivated and the amount of land under cultivation grew remarkable. For example, by 1879 Lesotho exported between 20,000 and 40,000 tons of grain annually (Gill 1993). Much of the grain was exported to the Free State (Gill 1993) today's grain basket of South Africa.

The industriousness of the Basotho was grounded by socio-ethical values associated with expressions such as *khotso* (peace), *kopano ke matla* (unity), *u ka nketsang ha e ahe motse* (tolerance), *boithompho le tlhomphano* (self-respect and respect of others), *bana ba monna ba arolelana hlooaana ea tsie* (sharing), and *ntlo ea motho e mong ha e na boroko* (selfreliance). These values have been ascribed as the mainstay of Basotho granary economy. They were responsible for the profit Basotho endured between 1830s and 1930s. They were also equally responsible for putting more and more land under the plough – land was not allowed to lie fallow but was planted for agricultural produce to sustain the Basotho granary economy.

There is no doubt that there is so much that Lesotho today and by extrapolation southern Africa can learn from the Basotho of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century if they want agriculture to become the growth sector for the region. Some the valuable lessons in this regard have been discussed in the body of the paper. Like the Basotho of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who responded rigorously to new agricultural market opportunities then, Africans should emulate them by positively responding to the emerging global agricultural market opportunities, and explore agriculture potential as the hub of socio-economic and industrial development for Africa's future.

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