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Experiencing Boundaries: Basotho Migrant Perspectives on the Lesotho-South Africa Border

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Abstract The Lesotho-South Africa border is regarded as highly porous with many Basotho migrants seizing work and educational opportunities in South Africa, while simultaneously maintaining strong ties to family members, businesses, and land in Lesotho. The fact that Sesotho is spoken on both sides of the border is one of the particular factors that has made it possible for people to move back and forth with relative ease. The border nevertheless remains an important political and socio-cultural barrier in the lives of those crossing it. While some have managed to acquire the permits that enable them to cross the border freely and take up formal work, others occupy a precarious legal status, which limits their housing and employment prospects. Moreover, the lives of all African migrants in South Africa have been affected by growing xenophobic violence in recent years. This has reinforced distinctions between insiders and outsiders, and limited the opportunities migrants have to experience belonging to South African society. Despite these emerging dynamics, the ways in which the border is perceived by migrants—as both a physical barrier between countries and as a social barrier distinguishing peoples—has yet to be explored. Drawing on narrative interviews conducted with Basotho migrants living in Bloemfontein, South Africa in a variety of legal and employment circumstances, this paper aims to highlight the meaning of the border in the migrants' day-to-day lives.

Keywords Lesotho; Borders; Belonging; Work; Everyday Life

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> It should be obvious that the construction of borders reflects existing ethnic, group and territorial difference (subsequent) just as it is often responsible for the creation of those differences in the first place (antecedent). [Newman 2006:155-156]

Borders are material in that they can be viewed as lines separating two sovereign territories. They are also much more than that, however, insofar as they influence culture, identity, and peoples' territorial belonging. As Morehouse (2004:20) puts it, borders, like all boundaries, "are material and metaphorical spatializations of difference." People actively reproduce boundaries and borders through their perceptions of difference and the various ways they perform identities and modes of belonging. However, they may also challenge material borders through transgressive practices carried out in their everyday lives.

Lesotho's position as a landlocked country inside South Africa makes it a unique case study by which to study borders and border crossings. Lesotho is the only UN member "entirely enclosed by another member" (SAMP 2002:9).

Geographically, socially, and economically South Africa and Lesotho have long been closely linked. Due to the relative strength of the South African economy, however, there has been a strong historical tendency towards movement from Lesotho to South Africa (Murray 1981). From the late 1800s

Figure 1. Positioning of Lesotho.

Source: Self-elaboration.

until the 1990s, many Basotho men came to work in the mines. The number of migrants grew exponentially over time, and during the 1970s and 1980s as much as 50% of the working age population of Lesotho was temporarily employed in South Africa (Cobbe 2012). Moreover, according to recent statistics, in 2013 Lesotho was represented among the top ten source countries for migrants receiving temporary and permanent residence permits for South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2014:17, 37). The economy of Lesotho has become very dependent on funds generated through migrant labor, which are usually sent back to Lesotho in the form of household remittances (Mensah and Naidoo 2011).

While migration from Lesotho to South Africa has remained steady over time, the characteristics of those moving have gradually changed. Since the 1990s, there have been fewer opportunities in the mining sector, which has reduced the number of men moving for work (Coplan 2001). Instead, more women have been moving to South Africa to seek work in the domestic and agricultural sectors (Ulicki and Crush 2007). That said, today both male and female migrants from Lesotho can be found working in a wide range of employment sectors, ranging from the informal to the formal, from the less skilled to highly skilled. There are Basotho migrants working in the healthcare, beauty, education, agricultural, retail, and domestic service sectors. It can therefore not be said that all migrants have a similar, homogeneous perspective or standpoint from which to experience the Lesotho-South Africa border. Any investigation of the border experience must therefore take into account the different circumstances encountered by these migrants, and the different opportunities they have to transcend the border between the two countries.

Most migrants from Lesotho to South Africa move to the neighboring Province of the Free State, where there are numerous linguistic and cultural similarities. That said, growing xenophobia in South Africa in recent years has raised the importance of South African citizenship as a prerequisite for belonging to the nation state, something which has heightened the socio-cultural meaning of the border between the two countries. Hence, while migrants from Lesotho may experience fewer cultural and linguistic barriers than most migrants to South Africa, they still experience xenophobia, restrictive immigration policies, and they are excluded from opportunities which are open to South African citizens.

Researchers have written about increasing female migration, the recruitment of farm workers, and employer demand in shaping labor migration from Lesotho (Ulicki and Crush 2000; 2007; Johnston 2007). However, little effort has been made to understand how Basotho labor migrants view the border—as a physical/political barrier and as a socio-cultural construct. In this article, a phenomenological approach is adopted to explore the experience of Basotho labor migrants who cross the South Africa-Lesotho border in order to obtain work. The article investigates how these migrants perceive, experience, and make sense of the border, and in doing so, aims to build an understanding of how the migrants under study attribute meaning to the border in their everyday lives.

Placing the South Africa-Lesotho Border

As Morehouse (2004) points out, context is key to understanding how boundaries are shaped and attention must therefore be given to their historical, geographical, and socio-economic formation. In Southern Africa, borders are a colonial construct. In many cases, these borders were drawn arbitrarily and were the outcome of power struggles between colonial powers. Interestingly, Lesotho was formed when the Basotho people resisted colonial rule during the wars in the Orange Free State of South Africa in the 1860s (SAMP 2002). Aided by a mountainous geography, the Basotho people were able to defend their territory. While some mobility restrictions between South Africa and Lesotho were put in place from that time, in practice, people moved freely across the border. It was only in 1963 when passports were first required to cross into South Africa (SAMP 2002). The apartheid government in power in South Africa at the time practiced isolationism and viewed people coming from Lesotho as a potential security threat. Anti-apartheid activities were indeed often planned and executed from Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. While security concerns are no longer an issue between the two countries, Lesotho is today treated just as all other foreign countries, and Lesotho citizens require visas to enter South Africa. Justifications typically given for this are "unauthorized immigration, employment, free use of South African social services, and criminal activity in general" (SAMP 2002:4). In reality, however, the South Africa-Lesotho border is a very porous boundary. While employment and study permits are more difficult to acquire, one can easily acquire a one month visitor's visa which can then be renewed by simply returning to Lesotho and then reentering South Africa. Moreover, according to a recent SAMP [South Africa Migration Project] report (2002), immigration and customs regulations can easily be overcome due to corruption at the border, and many people continue to cross the border illegally by way of swimming the river that divides the two countries or by crossing at other unpatrolled areas.

A tradition of moving across the Lesotho-South Africa border has been well-established for generations and even today, despite the imposition of visa requirements, some Basotho cross daily for school, work, or shopping, while others move for longer periods of time. Such migration patterns are well-established between South Africa and Lesotho, but also between South Africa and other countries in the region, such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Botswana. Ethnic and linguistic similarities between people on both sides of the border, as well as family and kinship ties have encouraged migration flows in the region. Recognition of the linkages between South Africa and the countries neighboring it was given at the end of apartheid in 1994, when the country became increasingly open to African migrants. Disparities between South Africa and its neighbors in terms of political stability, infrastructure, resources, and services, as well as the greater number of job opportunities in South Africa have also contributed to the significant influx of migrants from neighboring countries since that time (Peberdy 2001).

In recent years, however, there has been growing resistance to immigration in the South African

context. Following the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, expectations were very high, with Black South Africans feeling that they would finally receive what had long been denied to them under apartheid: financial security and a better quality of life. Instead, competition for jobs, housing, and other state resources has led to a growing emphasis on legal belonging in the country at the expense of linguistic and cultural commonalities or kinship ties maintained across borders. There has therefore been growing violence and resentment directed at migrants, who are often blamed for the high unemployment and crime rate, over-crowded informal trading sector, the growth of the drug trade, and for bringing diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and AIDS (Crush 2000; Peberdy 2001; Gotz and Abdoumaliq 2003; McConnell 2009; Dodson 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010).

Migrants have been frequently subjected to harassment by the police, detention, and deportation, and have been the targets of day-to-day xenophobic attitudes which exclude them from full participation in and belonging to South African society (Crush 2000; Madsen 2004; Neocosmos 2008; Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni 2009; Dodson 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010). Migrants may be identified by their lack of official status in South Africa, but also on aspects of their physical appearance, their dress, their accents, or their language skills. A study conducted by Crush (2000) found that the majority of immigrants, refugees, and non-citizens in general living in South Africa had, according to their own perception, at some point experienced harassment by both South African citizens and the authorities. Given the growing opposition to migration in the South African context, migrants from Africa in particular have faced growing risk of deportation and arrest. They have been increasingly subjected to police raids of their homes and workplaces, and to road blocks (Neocosmos 2008; Kihato 2013). It is not uncommon even for documented migrants to face such difficulties, with many relying on bribery as a way to overcome harassment (Madsen 2004; Sidzatane and Maharaj 2013).

So, despite the seemingly arbitrary meaning of the borders in the region, in the postcolonial context, there have been strong nationalist movements in many Southern African countries which have served to strengthen the importance of borders between states. In the post-apartheid context of South Africa in particular, this has resulted in an increased importance being placed on citizenship and a reluctance to honor multiple citizenship claims, and more generally—to welcome migrants, especially those seeking asylum or looking for work.

Borders and Everyday Life

Borders are physical, geopolitical entities, but they also greatly impact and are impacted by identities and constructions of difference (Newman and Paasi 1998; Gielis 2009). As Jenkins (2015:14) points out: "It is at the boundary during encounters with Others that identification occurs and identity is produced and reproduced, along with the group in question. Group boundaries, in this view, can be said to exist simultaneously in *individual knowledge* of them, in *practice and interaction*, and as encoded and embodied in *institutions*." To date, there has not been a great effort to link the literature on group boundaries and political borders. While the former considers the social processes by which "ethnic" categories are maintained despite the mixing and movement of people between these categories, the latter is associated more with geopolitical concerns. Hence, the studies of political borders and socio-cultural boundaries are divided by discipline, terminology, and conceptualization (Newman 2006). But, material borders are one type of boundary among others, and in this study, the goal is to explore the relationship between the material border and less tangible boundaries separating and connecting Lesotho and South Africa.

Central to this endeavor is moving away from a top down view of borders that favors only the perspective of the nation state, to instead consider how citizens and migrants perceive, perform, reproduce, and challenge physical borders in their daily lives (Johnson et al. 2011). As van Houtum (2011:60) puts it: "We are not only victims of the border, but also the producers of it." Through othering, displays of nationalism, performances of national belonging, as well as through various claims-making processes related to mobility, human, and political rights people enact borders in their everyday lives (Gielis 2009; Johnson et al. 2011; Jenkins 2015). As Newman and Paasi (1998:187) put it, even if boundaries "are always more or less arbitrary lines between territorial entities, they may also have deep symbolic, cultural, historical and religious, often contested, meanings for social communities." Hence, it is not only borders, but also the process of bordering itself that impacts on people's everyday lives.

The space in which bordering occurs can extend well beyond the line of the physical border itself to encompass the lived spaces of those who cross the border. As Gielis (2009) has emphasized in relation to those moving between Germany and The Netherlands, borders can therefore be understood not only in their material form, but also as something that is lived and experienced. Several recent studies have emphasized the everyday lives of borderlanders who may live lives that transcend a physical border. The everyday lives of these migrants are frequently depicted as cosmopolitan and hybrid, with the border itself being conceptualized not only as a place of division but also as a meeting point between places (Morehouse 2004).

It is also important, however, to understand the order, categories, and limitations imposed by the physical border as something that can be resisted and challenged by those living in border spaces. As several scholars have pointed out, the political division imposed by the presence of a physical border is not something that necessarily coincides with the perceptions, agenda, and everyday practices of those living on either side of the demarcation. As Jones (2012) notes:

> People accept that the state is there and a categorical order has been imposed, but they do not necessarily accept those categories. When required, they perform their role as subjects of the state, but at other times they continue to think and live in alternative configurations that maintain connections across, through, and around sovereign state=territoriality. [p. 697]

Hence, people may challenge the border by engaging in various transgressive activities such as illegal crossings, the smuggling of goods, and otherwise refusing to abide by state regulations (Jones 2012). While not necessarily overtly political in motive, such initiatives challenge the top down understanding of borders and instead highlight the way people live their everyday lives in border spaces.

Of particular interest to our study is the work of scholars like Struver (2005) who have drawn on the work of de Certeau to understand the everyday practices migrants use to overcome the challenges people face through the process of migration in their everyday lives. According to de Certeau (1984), the daily practices people adopt in order to "make do" are sometimes in opposition to the practices and strategies used by states to control citizens. In this sense, migrants should not be seen as simply responding to institutional and social structures they encounter, but also as active agents who find ways to circumvent these structures in order to achieve their goals. As Highmore (2002) notes, de Certeau offers an alternative way of looking at the political. Everyday life, according to de Certeau, is inventive and its politics is one that emerges from everyday practice, whether conscious or unconscious.

Several studies have considered the everyday experiences of migrants in South Africa, as well as how they "make do" and "get by" despite the challenges they face. For the many migrants who are not legally entitled to work, working life can be very difficult with low wages being the norm, and on account of their precarious legal status, exploitation and abuse are also common experiences. This creates an inability to plan ahead financially (Dinat and Peberdy 2007; Ulicki and Crush 2007; Griffin 2011; Pande 2014) as they are never sure how long they will be working in a given place and with what wage. In order to deal with their lack of economic security, many migrants may work overtime or take on multiple jobs. For those with higher levels of skill, who may find it easier to secure work, not having citizenship or permanent residency may pose as a barrier to career progression.

The living conditions of the migrants are similarly shaped by their place in the labor market. A number of factors including the temporary nature of their stay in South Africa, their official legal status, their income, and the contacts they have (or lack) in the country may influence how and where they choose to live. A number of studies have addressed how housing is a major concern for migrants who are lacking in resources and security (Chireshe 2010; Munyewende et al. 2011). As they attempt to get by in the new country of residence, the migrants may experience poor living conditions, overcrowding, and threats to their security. This negatively impacts them psychologically and in terms of health.

The precarious living status and livelihoods of migrants in South Africa raise questions concerning how they perceive and experience the border and the spaces associated with the border. This article aims to build on the existing literature on the everyday lives of migrants in South Africa, but in doing so, goes beyond a specific focus on living and working conditions to instead consider how they make sense of their situations as border-crossing labor migrants.

Narrating the Border

The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm which, according to Gray (2014), focuses on how individuals interpret their lifeworlds. Interpretivism is especially interested in the uniqueness of individuals, and as such it lends itself to a qualitative approach. The study follows a narrative design. The interest of this study is in the experiences of Basotho migrants as told by them. That is similarly the interest of narrative inquiry, according to Chase (2005). Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests that narrative inquiry is an appropriate design when we want to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals. The study is therefore following in the vein of thought adopted by border studies scholars such as Newman (2006) and Newman and Paasi (1998) who argue that narrative is a useful way for understanding how people make sense of the borders that affect their daily lives. As Newman (2006:152) puts it: "Through narrative, we perceive the borders which surround us, which we have to cross on a daily basis and/or are prevented from crossing because we do not 'belong' on the other side."

The purposive method of sampling is used to obtain the study participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting people who are knowledgeable about the topic of interest. The researcher relies on his/her judgment and prior knowledge to choose participants (Neuman 2012). By studying knowledgeable participants, Patton (2002) observes that the researcher will be able to answer the research questions. With our interest in understanding how Basotho labor migrants negotiate belonging in their everyday lives, we choose Basotho labor migrants themselves as participants since they are the most knowledgeable about their experiences. We choose participants with a range of backgrounds, skill levels, and legal statuses. More than half are labor migrants in the informal sector without work permits, while others hold valid work or study permits, or even South African identification documents.

Fifteen participants relate their experiences to us: eight women and seven men. The semi-structured interviews used to gather data are based on open-ended questions. This gives participants the space to express themselves, but is structured enough to ensure that specific information is obtained from participants (Merriam 2009). The interviews are guided by an interview schedule formulated on the basis of the research questions, concepts from the theory, and the review of the literature. A pilot interview is first conducted in order to check the effectiveness of the interview questions. After finalizing the interview schedule, we meet with participants in their places of work, residence, or leisure, which, according to Creswell (2013), constitute their world of lived experience. It therefore offers the greatest possibility of getting a deeper understanding of their experiences. These meeting places are also convenient for the participants. As Roulston (2010) urges, interviews must be scheduled at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and participant. All the interviews are audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews are conducted in either Sesotho or English. All Sesotho interviews are transcribed and subsequently translated.

Study Findings

As already emphasized, the border between two countries can be looked at in a variety of ways: as a material entity, as a lived political reality, and as a social construct or socio-cultural marker of difference. Naturally, these different types of boundaries overlap in a number of ways. For the purposes of analysis and presentation, however, in what follows, the findings of the study will be presented by considering how the participants perceive, experience, and imagine the "physical," "lived," and "socio-cultural" boundaries separating South Africa and Lesotho.

The Physical Boundary

For many of the participants, Lesotho is divided from South Africa as much by geographical features as it is by a political boundary. Many make reference to the Caledon River dividing the two places, as well as the mountainous geography which distinguishes Lesotho and gives it a slightly different climate. While Lesotho is associated with rural landscapes, the move to Bloemfontein denotes a shift to urban life; hence, from the perspective of the participants, migration from Lesotho to South Africa can be considered a case of internal rural to urban migration rather than a move across an international boundary.

As discussed, South Africa and Lesotho are highly integrated, and there is a longstanding history of migration between the countries. Hence, it is not surprising that the participants regard the political border between the two countries as highly porous and easy to cross; movement across this boundary is regarded as expected, and in all ways unexceptional. A SAMP (2002:22) survey indicates that most Basotho see borders between South Africa and Lesotho "as an unnecessary and artificial construct." The same can be said for the participants in this study. The border is the physical manifestation of a political arrangement that is beyond their control and strategies are needed to overcome it.

The majority of the participants have Lesotho passports and enter South Africa on a monthly visitor's visa, which they find relatively easy to acquire. Some also mention, however, that South Africa can be entered without first acquiring a passport, for example, by knowing the right people and/or offering bribes to the border guards.

One woman, Rethabile,[1] who is currently working in the informal sector, tells the following story:

> At the time when I first came here, I didn't have a passport. It's the point that I don't have a passport, but I am going to Bloemfontein. Then she [the woman helping her] showed me where I should wait when I get to the border gate and what I should do to be able to leave. I waited there while she talked to some guys at the border gate. Then she told me: "These people who are standing there can be able to help you cross to South Africa." They were still being paid R50 then. So they showed me how I must go, and that lady went through the gate directly. When she got to the other side, she stopped the car and we got in. By the time I returned home, she told me what I should do when I get to the border gate. She called some guy she knew who helped us cross the last time, and told him that: "Hey, that girl is going to pass at a certain day. She will call and you will make a means of how she can cross." He called me, indeed, he called me. I got to him and he helped me cross, and I passed there. I first came here in 2007. In 2007, I didn't have a passport. Then it was 2008, and I still didn't have a passport. In 2009, I still didn't have a passport. In 2010, I applied for a passport. [Rethabile]

[1] All participants' names have been changed to pseudonyms.

At present, most of the participants in the study opt to have a more secure status in South Africa, although this ranges from holding a work or study permit to having a monthly visitors permit which requires returning to Lesotho on a monthly basis for the purpose of renewal. The issue of permits affects how the participants perceive the physical distance between South Africa and Lesotho, and the porosity of the border. While not far in geographical distance from Bloemfontein, Lesotho still takes time and money to reach, especially when going by public transport. Most travel by shared taxis (minibuses) which cannot cross the border and hence travelers must make multiple transfers and physically walk across the border. Those who have to go back every month bemoan the time and cost it requires and the frequent trips back are something most would avoid, given the choice. Since Rethabile, cited above, received her passport, she is among those making the monthly trip:

> If it wasn't for the passport, I wouldn't go home every month, I would maybe skip a month. If I don't go this month, then I know next month I'm going. This month I should at least just send them [the family] money so that when I give it to them this month, they should be able to see what they can do. The R200 that I use for transport to Lesotho, I should know that instead of using it for transport, I add it to what I give them so that they can see what to do. [Rethabile]

Her preference that the money used to travel to Lesotho be spent on other things such as additional remittances for her family members back in Lesotho is shared by a number of the participants in the study who live in Bloemfontein on visitors' permits.

For those who have been able to secure proper work permits, however, the perception of the border is very different. These participants tend to have higher incomes and, in some cases, even access to personal vehicles. Hence, for them, trips home are motivated by personal rather than economic reasons, and the travel distance and financial cost is much less of a barrier. These migrants are also more likely to be from middle class families, and as such they have grown up crossing the border regularly for the purposes of shopping, medical appointments, or entertainment—something that has given them the impression from an early age that the distance between Lesotho and South Africa is relatively insignificant. While some use their privileged status to make more trips across the border (for example, every weekend, in order to maintain their personal and family lives in Lesotho), others use their relative stability to stay in South Africa for months at a time without making trips back. These migrants therefore have much more choice in terms of how often they cross the border.

While some migrants have a more secure status in South Africa than others, this is not something they take for granted and almost all the participants are interested in improving their status in South Africa. While for lower skilled migrants acquiring a work permit in South Africa denotes increased freedom and security, those with work permits are interested in what kind of opportunities being a permanent resident might bring. Legal status is something few of the participants can take for granted, as even work and study permits eventually expire and another permit has to be sought.

Overall, the physical border demarcating South Africa and Lesotho is regarded by the participants as porous, but inconvenient and unnecessary. Interestingly, however, it is in the border spaces, beyond the line of the border itself, where the migrants experience and live out their daily lives, that the border has the greatest impact.

The Lived Boundary

Although the participants regard Lesotho and South Africa as very similar in many respects, their political status as outsiders, non-citizens, and, in some cases, undocumented workers greatly impacts their experience in South Africa, and they feel the power of the border between the two countries impacts many aspects of their lives.

The issues that many of the participants have with documentation and, in particular, the fact that they lack work permits, has made them vulnerable to exploitation. At work, many are paid very low wages, have encountered unfair hiring and firing practices, and/or feel they cannot progress in their field of work due to discrimination or policies that overtly favor South African citizens. Kutloano, a man who works in the informal sector, says he tries to hide the fact that he is from Lesotho in order to avoid these setbacks:

> They will take advantage of me, if they know I'm from Lesotho. Isn't it a fact that people from Lesotho are undermined? And you should know that if you work for an employer who knows that you're from Lesotho, you will find that your salary is not equal to other people's salaries. Yes, you are paid less. You are going to find that people are being paid R150 a day, while you are only paid R120 or R100. Eh, I realized because I saw, my first employer knew that I am from Lesotho. When I came to check my salary, I found that: nah, man, my salary is little. These other people have more. Then I thought that maybe it's because I found them already at the firm. Then I learnt those who found me already at the firm, these people are also getting more money than I am. Then someone said, "No, it's because that person knows that you are from Lesotho and there is nowhere you can complain." After I left that firm, moving from that firm to the next, I never again disclosed that I'm from Lesotho. [Kutloano]

Their precarious position in both South Africa and the labor market means that employers can threaten to have the migrants arrested if they are knowingly undocumented. Alternatively employers may abuse their power by firing and hiring people at will, thereby forcing migrants to accept employment expectations that they know are beyond those normally expected of South African workers. The Basotho migrants endure these conditions because the wages they receive are often still much higher than what they would receive in Lesotho.

Among those migrants with higher levels of skill job security is still not guaranteed and the general perception is that it is often difficult to compete with South African citizens and/or permanent residents. Sometimes official regulations prevent employers from hiring people without such permanent status, while in other cases, the participants simply feel that employers are not willing to do the extra paperwork needed to secure them a proper work permit. Mamello, a woman who holds a Master's degree and is working as a professional social scientist, encountered such difficulties:

> Again, when I applied for another position [at a local institution], I was told that I was not going to be given that particular position because I am from Lesotho. So that position, or most of the positions are only for permanent residents. There were so many issues so they did not want to go through that. [Mamello]

A secondary effect of the poor labor market position occupied by many of the participants is that they typically also have limited options in the housing market. Rethabile, a woman working in the informal sector, describes the situation as follows:

> The only problem is that the houses we normally live in are not good. In fact, the houses that people rent out in Bloemfontein are not good houses, especially if they rent them out to people from places like Lesotho. Even if you tell the landlord: "You see how it is here?" She/he will not even take the initiative to maintain there. I think it's caused by the fact that we are not taken too seriously. [Rethabile]

While earning higher wages in South Africa, the migrants are often forced to live in crowded, substandard living conditions relative to what they are used to in Lesotho. For those with more financial means, this is naturally less of an issue, although even those with steady jobs and good incomes sometimes willingly choose to sacrifice their own comfort in favor of meeting the needs and desires of their families in Lesotho. One woman, who works as a nurse and has a relatively secure salary and a car, chooses to live far away from her place of work, in an area which she perceives as unpleasant and unsafe, in order to save money for investments she is making in Lesotho.

The participants emphasize that having a South African ID, or at least a proper work or study permit, is essential when trying to access medical services, banking, and education for one's child. As Limpho, an undocumented participant working in the informal sector, puts it:

> The most painful part is that whenever you go, if you don't have an ID, they won't…You won't receive services, have you seen? When you say: "No, I hold a Lesotho passport," they say: "No, we don't want passports, we want South African IDs." [Limpho]

The findings reveal that the everyday border space as experienced by the participants extends well beyond the border itself. To live in South Africa without proper documentation is challenging,

despite the proximity of Lesotho to South Africa and longstanding patterns of migration between the two countries. While the Basotho migrants acutely experience the political boundary between South Africa and Lesotho in many aspects of their lives, their perception of the socio-cultural boundary between the two countries is more complex and nuanced.

The Socio-Cultural Boundary

The participants feel that there are many similarities between South African and Basotho society which facilitate ease of movement between the two places. It can even be said that the participants view the socio-cultural boundary between South African and Basotho society as blurred, thereby challenging the political boundary between the two countries. This should be considered carefully, however, as the participant narratives point to complex constructions of similarity and difference across the Lesotho-South Africa divide.

It is typically assumed that there is no language barrier between the Free State in South Africa and Lesotho because of the large presence of Sesotho speakers in the Free State. The participants, however, have a number of different views on whether or not their knowledge of the Sesotho language makes it easy for them to find work and live in the city. While some participants feel that Sesotho facilitates their integration into South African society, others feel that differences in the way Sesotho is spoken in South Africa and Lesotho sometimes limit their communication with local residents. As one participant, Liteboho, perceives it:

> Mm, it [Sesotho] is a spoken language, which is mostly spoken [is the dominant language in the area]. But then again, when you speak Sesotho, people from Bloem still don't understand. I don't know what kind of Sesotho they speak. There are instances where they don't understand when you speak… Mm, it's important that one knows English because this Sesotho can only take you as far as the Caledon River [border between Maseru and South Africa]. [Liteboho]

A common perception among the participants is that while Sesotho is enough to secure a livelihood in Lesotho, one must know more languages to perform well in South Africa's labor market. Proficient English was a requirement for many jobs, while Afrikaans, a language to which Basotho have little exposure, is widely spoken in Bloemfontein. Finally, while Sesotho may be the dominant African language in the region, it is also common to encounter people who instead speak Xhosa, Zulu, or Tswana, which pose difficulties to communication. Interestingly, while some make an effort to change their accent to match the local way of speaking, others take pride in maintaining what they consider to be a purer form of the Sesotho language. Hence, the issue of language is not clear-cut across the Lesotho-South Africa boundary, and is experienced differently by the participants.

Lifestyle differences between the two countries are also noted and debated. South Africa's economy is more based on the exchange of money and goods than Lesotho's where many people still live on farms and are therefore more self-sufficient. Moreover, those who move to Bloemfontein from the villages of Lesotho experience a number of other differences on account of adapting to an urban environment. Cultural differences experienced on a national scale, however, are relatively small, and include things such as the types of food available and consumed, clothing styles, or ways of meeting and greeting and interacting with neighbors. These differences are generally asserted positively in favor of the Basotho way of life which is regarded as more simple, traditional, and "pure." Some participants refer to South Africa's diversity as problematic, insofar as it "contaminates" traditional Sotho norms and ways of life. A common assertion is that Sotho people in South Africa, on account of mixing with other ethnic groups and adopting a more capitalist way of living, have forgotten their traditions. Limpho explains her point of view as follows:

> You know, Basotho are quiet people, who are reserved, or respectful. Here, I think because of many ethnicities…I don't know how I can say, it's like. Just like I was complaining about children. That you will find them loitering at night, dancing at the shops. I mean, we are not the same, we are not the same! So these ones, I don't know, maybe it's because they will imitate the ways of Xhosas, imitate the ways of, what are they called, Coloreds. I mean, it's like they don't exactly know where they stand. [Limpho]

One point that is repeatedly emphasized is the perception that children are raised in a more desirable way in Lesotho, where traditional values such as respect for elders are held in higher regard.

> In Lesotho, we are not able to do as we please as children, and we still have respect for our parents. Children here do as they please. They don't like school, and they don't respect their parents. This is what I see, that here it's different from home. [Kutloano]

Such perceptions of difference are shared by participants across the skill spectrum. Thato, who works as a university lecturer, states the following:

> It's important that I still know who I am. You know? As much as I'm here in South Africa, I want it to be known that I'm Sotho, I'm not really South African. You know? At least with my language, my values. OK, not culture as such. Somewhere, somewhere… Because culture evolves, circumstances don't always agree with culture. One needs to change. I can't really say "my culture." No…But, values. There are certain values that we have that I regard as very important, which I am trying to instill in my child, as well. [Thato]

Hence, the socio-cultural boundary between the two countries is something to be reproduced and reinforced in order to preserve what are considered valuable modes of being in the world. The majority of the participants wish to raise their children in Lesotho in order to ensure that they are raised the "proper" way. And if this is not possible, they will try to raise them in accordance with "Basotho values" in Bloemfontein.

Compared to South Africa, Lesotho and the Basotho people are regarded as relatively innocent, naive, and untouched by some of the social difficulties faced in South Africa. South Africans in this regard are perceived as a less innocent Other who is, among other things, capable of violence and crime.

As Pule, a male skilled professional, puts it:

> And coming from Lesotho I was probably very ignorant. In my town, I can walk at nine in the evening, or ten, and you don't really feel something could happen to you. But, later in that area, it's called Willows, it's a high crime area because of the students that stay there. It was ten pm, some guys came at me with a gun, demanding cell phone and wallet. Coming from a country like Lesotho you become ignorant. From where you come from it's probably way different. But, here it's a different environment. You have to remember, these people, they mean business [laughs]. They are not scared to exhibit raw violence. I've had to learn quickly, to choose where I stay. When you're driving, you always feel that you have to be extra careful. Crime is everywhere, particularly in your poorer countries, but because of our conservative nature, if somebody steals something from you, they usually come in daylight and they sort of come behind you and pull it out without you feeling, and if they react, they simply run away. But, here it's sheer violence. [Pule]

On the other hand, however, one female participant, Liteboho, notes some positive things about South African culture and society, such as how she has more freedom to choose her way of life and how she is less often the subject of ridicule and gossip:

> So back home you know that even if you do this hairstyle [bob cut] I have on, it's a problem. I have cut my hair like prostitutes, in such and such a way. I mean, back home they look at even the tiniest detail from your nails to your hair, including how you walk. It's a huge difference, it makes people to end up…You understand, when you get here, you feel like you have arrived at a completely different world. You feel free about everything, it only depends on what you want. [Liteboho]

Moreover, while Lesotho is less diverse than South Africa, some participants feel that it is, somewhat ironically, more open to people from different backgrounds as it has not endured the same experience of racial apartheid and national isolation that South Africa has. One participant notes, for example, the ease with which he socializes and studies with White people while undertaking tertiary studies in South Africa, something that many Black South Africans still struggle to do.

It can be argued that many of the differences experienced by the participants can be considered social in nature rather than cultural. By far the issue of greatest importance in their narratives is not how they perceive South Africans, but rather how they feel perceived *by* South Africans, especially in a context of growing xenophobia and intolerance towards outsiders. Kutloano sums up a number of the various accusations that he feels Basotho people are subject to:

> When they [South Africans] talk about people from Lesotho, you can hear that they don't…They don't like us. Eh, firstly, they say we take their jobs. Secondly [pause], they say we are the criminals here in Bloemfontein. Thirdly, they say we are the ones killing people here in Bloemfontein. [Kutloano]

It is a commonly held perception that South Africans perceive people from Lesotho as a threat, just as they do migrants from neighboring countries. While those working as undocumented migrants are most fearful of violent attacks in their homes and workplaces, those working in more professional environments appear to be somewhat less exposed and affected by such discourses. They nevertheless believe that Basotho migrants are viewed negatively in South Africa, and that their position in the society is therefore not secure. Given the attacks experienced by many migrants just months before some of the participants were interviewed, it is not surprising that they generally perceive the situation of foreigners in South Africa as getting worse rather than better.

Basotho people deal with the Othering they experience in the South Africa context by identifying and asserting what they see as the positive aspects of their Basotho identities, often expressed in socio-cultural terms. A common argument, for example, is that rather than stealing jobs from South Africans, Basotho people are simply more hardworking and entrepreneurial.

The socio-cultural boundary between South Africa and Lesotho is more difficult to define than the physical border or the lived border spaces experienced by labor migrants. There are clearly many similarities across the boundary that facilitate movement between the two places. At the same time, however, subtle cultural differences and a social context that encourages the view that Basotho people are Other because they cross an international boundary to enter South Africa lead Basotho people to be self-conscious and aware of what differentiates them from their South African counterparts.

Conclusion

The physical boundary between South Africa and Lesotho is highly porous, and movement across it cannot be considered new, or in any way exceptional. What has changed, however, is the way this border is treated, with Lesotho citizens becoming increasingly regarded as foreigners. This has created a number of difficulties for migrants from Lesotho in South Africa, insofar as they require visas to enter the country and are frequently the subjects of xenophobia, exploitation, and even violence once they have entered South African territory.

The departure point of this article is to consider how the migrants perceive the border in their day-to-day lives. For the participants in this study, who work in a range of employment sectors ranging from the informal to the formal, the unskilled to the highly skilled, the border is merely an inconvenient boundary demarcating two highly connected national spaces. While it can be claimed that there is a common language and culture that transcend the border, it is because of the political boundary and economic inequalities between South Africa and Lesotho that the migrants are easily exploited, and are limited in what they can achieve in South Africa. That said, many continue to disregard official regulations concerning who can and cannot work in the country, and use their networks to take up jobs without the proper documents. They do what is necessary in order to achieve their economic goals, often finding ways to save money through working multiple jobs and living in substandard conditions. Where necessary, they may use bribes in order to avoid arrest or deportation. Hence, they

employ what de Certeau would consider tactics that circumvent the intentions of the state to control who can and cannot cross the border.

The physical border has nevertheless created a number of powerful socio-cultural effects, many of which have impacted the way the participants view themselves and South Africans. Perhaps most significantly the physical border has reinforced a sense of "pure Basotho" identity among the participants, which is positively asserted, especially in the face of growing xenophobia and anti-migration sentiment in South Africa. In this sense, the boundary between Lesotho and South Africa is reproduced by the participants themselves who tend to idealize Basotho traditions, values, and ways of life. Most have a great deal of pride in being Basotho and do not wish to assimilate to South African norms. The ability to maintain a Basotho way of life is in turn reinforced by their (often) insecure legal status in South Africa, and hence an enduring feeling of temporariness; visa regulations require migrants to frequently return back to Lesotho to renew their visitors' visas, which has in part contributed to the fact that most migrants maintain strong ties to their villages of origin.

To be sure, the legal status of migrants, and the level of job security they are able to attain, has some impact on how they perceive the border. Legal migrants in professional positions find it easier to cross the South Africa-Lesotho physical boundary and therefore perceive the distance between the countries as less of a barrier. They are also less often the targets of xenophobia and anti-migration discourses. Even so, these migrants are acutely aware of what they believe distinguishes them as Basotho migrants and have a strong sense of Basotho identity. Like their less legally secure counterparts, they would also prefer to raise their children in Lesotho and maintain what they regard as traditional Basotho values, irrespective of their intentions to stay in South Africa for the long term.

In conclusion, one of the key findings of this study is that there is a great deal of overlap between the physical, lived, and socio-cultural boundaries separating national entities; the relationships between these different types of boundaries should be contextualized in the context of specific border space contexts. It is hoped that more studies will pursue this endeavor in the future, so that border studies can adequately engage with more sociological understandings of ethnic groups and boundaries.

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