

AN EXPLORATION OF THE BASOTHO TRADITIONAL FOOD**David Seetsa Makateng, Dr. Arun Pandya**Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University,
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Surat-395007 (Gujarat, India).**Abstract:**

This paper explores on the traditional food of Basotho, specifically the ethnic group based in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. An introduction and background of the Basotho people and examination of the influence of nutritional values and benefits of their traditional food within the context of a rich cultural heritage is outlined. This paper uncovers the food customs at ceremonial occasions in context of Basotho people. The method applied in this paper is a historical and ethnographic approach to understand the cultural aspect of traditional food of Lesotho. The Basotho people have a rich traditional farming practices that emphasize sustainable land care and food security. Their food culture includes selecting, preserving, and sharing seeds, growing diverse nutritious foods, and fostering community through collective planting and harvesting activities. The findings emphasize the various traditional foods of the Basotho, the methods used to prepare them, and their effects on health. This paper concludes by putting forward the significance of seasonal nutrition of Basotho.

Key Words: Basotho; Traditional food; Seasons; Culture; Lesotho**Introduction and background:**

The Basotho people are mostly found in Lesotho, a small landlocked country. Lesotho is a small landlocked country that is an enclave of South Africa, meaning it's completely surrounded by that country. It contains the highest peak in Southern Africa, called Thabana Ntlenyana. The people of Lesotho known as Basotho are known of living a peaceful and simple life. This simplicity of Basotho is proved in various kinds of food. Most Basotho are farmers, and relied heavily on agriculture and animal husbandry for food supply and their survival. The significance of food in Basotho tradition in reflection to the agricultural value. The Basotho diet consisted of a variety of foods such as maize, millet, melons, pumpkins, peas, beans and ground nuts. The principle domestic animals included sheep, goats, fowl and cattle with cattle being the most sought after animal. Wild berries and other wild fruits that were found seasonally came as a welcome variation to their diets. Traditional alcohol, known simply as joala ba Sesotho, played an important role in the Basotho culture, especially during traditional ceremonies. In highlands people depend on these vegetables as they are affordable and possess valuable nutrients such as minerals, protein, iron, fibre, and vitamins

Methodology:

A historical and ethnographic approach has been applied in this paper to unpack the historical component of importance and exploration of Basotho traditional food. The application of primary and secondary data and personal observation is employed in this paper. For the

authenticity of the primary data, a researcher consulted elder people residing in Lesotho in a form of interview. An interview was conducted in Sesotho, the language spoken by the Basotho people, and the researcher translated it into English.

Introduction of Basotho Tribe:

Tšiu (2008) postulated that the concept “Basotho”, originates from the word, lesôtô, which according to Mabile and Dieterlen means ‘a leg of a tanned skin used to tie the thari¹ on the back of a woman. The broader meaning of ‘Basotho’ refers to people who share the language and culture of Sesotho, inside and outside the borders of Lesotho(Phafoli & Zulu, 2012). Basotho people speak Sesotho also known as Sotho, which is an essential element of their cultural heritage and identity. Sesotho is spoken in everyday communication, on ritual activities such as ancestral traditional ceremonies and traditional storytelling known as litsomo. In context of social structure of Basotho, it is rooted in a hierarchical system that reflects both historical traditions and contemporary influences. It is constituted of the institution of family, various communities, political institution, kinship ties and the role of the constitutional monarch governance. These visions determine the idea of social structure that consists of institutions that constitute the understanding of the structure of Basotho society. From the sociological perspective the concept of social structure is the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together (Wilterdink, Nico and Form, 2020). The Basotho culture is rich and complex, deeply rooted in historical experiences, social norms, and traditional beliefs. It is constituted of various characteristics, such as family and social structure, religion and various beliefs, educational practices, clothing, music and food all of which reflect the unique identity of the Basotho people. Understanding these cultural elements provide insight into how culture shapes daily lives and societal relations of Basotho people.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions of Basotho:

In the rural villages of the Kingdom of Lesotho, cultural rites are predominately centred around the sacrifice of a cow. Funerals often drain a poor family's assets as a cow must be purchased at great expense. A family's honour is dependent on the quality and quantity of food at wedding and funeral gatherings spit-roasted cow and chicken are mandatory (Advameg, 2021). In the highland, in rural zones, people tend to cook the more traditional Basotho foods, while in the lowlands families cook some of the traditional foods with a few variations of the original recipes. They also prepare dishes influenced by Western cuisine and some Asian cuisine. In the lowlands, you will also find an influx of fast-food restaurant (Pitse, 2021). People living in the rural areas such as Mokhotlong, Thaba-Tseka, Qacha's Nek and Quthing districts area are still holding the tradition of preparing traditional food they have produced from the fields.

A three-stone fireplace in the courtyard is the focal point of the Basotho women's daily activity. Here they prepare the pot of cornmeal porridge (papa²) which is the staple of the Basotho.

¹ Thari is a baby carrier made of animal skin.

² Papa is a staple food in Lesotho enjoyed in almost every household. In the highlands, maize is taken to a local mill for grinding into maize meal or mealie meal, and it tends to differ in both colour and taste from that used in the lowlands, which is more refined and is store-bought (Pitse, 2021).

Usually a sauce of peas, chopped greens, or other vegetables accompanies the thick porridge, and on special occasions a chicken is added to the pot. In the summer, local peaches and small, firm fruits bring variety to the diet. During the winter, family members gather around the traditional three-stone fireplace to roast ears of dried corn.

The cuisine of Lesotho includes African traditions and British influences. The national dish of Lesotho is Motoho (porridge), a fermented sorghum porridge eaten throughout the country. Because Lesotho has limited food resources, a majority of families in the country raise their own food and livestock to support themselves and their families. Some staple foods include papa, a cornmeal porridge covered with a sauce consisting of various vegetables. Tea and locally brewed beer are popular choices for beverages (Lesotho, 2015)(Today., 2018).

The most famous meat dish is slow-cooked oxtail stew also known as mohatla oa khomo. It is served with dumplings, a mix of vegetables such as moroho and beetroot salad. The steamed dumplings are made with fermented maize meal and known as leqebekoane. During the winter, mountain herders and shepherds residing at Motebong hunted wild game and hares in the veld to support themselves during their extended stays (Tourism, 2021).

List of Basotho traditional food:

Lipabi: Lipabi is a preparation of roasted, ground corn that can still be found in rural areas of Lesotho. The variety of corn used to prepare lipabi is called khoahla, which is a winter variety. To make this product, the corn is removed from the cob and dry roasted until fully cooked. Then, it is crushed into a fine powder using a quern (hand mill), adding a pinch of salt and sugar to taste, and blending well. Lipabi has a unique texture resulting from being crushed by hand and a pleasant, toasty aroma (Luglio, 2021). Traditionally, Basotho people would make lipabi as a dish to take as provisions on long journeys. It is a convenient product for travellers, as it is filling and stays fresh for a long time. It is often eaten simply mixed with water. It was also prepared for workers during letsema (collaborative work) during harvesting time or any other major work in the fields.

Moroho (Leafy Greens): Although moroho is not prepared with maize, it has to be next to papa because that is exactly where it belongs. You can hardly have moroho without papa. Moroho is made of leafy greens such as spinach, rape, and others. Some weeds such as white goose are also enjoyed as moroho, as well as herbs such as stinging needle and many others. Cabbage is also used as moroho (Pitse, 2021). There are different kinds of moroho but here few have been selected, most people in the rural areas harvest it from the bush or nearby fields.

Poone (Roasted Maize): This is one of the most enjoyable snacks for Basotho. In the highlands people normally use an open fire to cook and warm themselves, so the green maize cobs are roasted with hot ashes by placing them next to the open fire. It can also be roasted green maize kernels by placing them in a frying pan made of a scrap steel sheet and wire and shaking continuously over the open flames until the maize kernels are golden brown. This is usually prepared in the evening while the rest of the family is sitting by the fire.

Likhobe (Boiled Maize Kernels): Likhobe is also a great snack option or side dish. It is prepared by simply boiling dry maize kernels until they are soft and seasoning with salt.

Nyekoe: To make this dish, you cook the sorghum till the water boils and add the beans. Then you cook until both the sorghum and beans are cooked and season with salt. There are various recipes of nyekoe. Some enjoy it as is, while others add chopped pumpkin to the sorghum and beans, and others add wheat. You find it mostly sold by street vendors rather than prepared at home.

Joala ba Sesotho (Traditional Sesotho Beer): To make joala ba sesotho, take equal parts of maize meal and malt and a handful of wheat flour and mix well. Add cold water to the dry ingredients and mix into a paste. Gradually add boiling water and stir. Then cool it to just about warm but not cold. Add a traditional liquid starter called tomoso and cover the container. Leave the mixture to ferment overnight or longer. Boil it again for a few hours and let cool to just warm. Add malt and tomoso to the mixture, and let it ferment further until you see some bubbles. After it is filtered to remove coarse particles, your beer is ready. Traditional beer is mostly found in mountainous areas where old people enjoy it after work and on special occasions like weddings, funerals.

Lihoapa (Biltong): In most rural areas of Lesotho, many people still enjoy lihoapa, it is a type traditional and a convenient source of protein of dried meat made up of beef, donkey or horse. A dried animal meat that can be roasted or fried. It is normally dried in summer and eaten in winter. Nowadays the significance of traditional food has lost its value due to the western influence and change of times. The foreign influence is mostly introduced by Basotho immigrants who went to South Africa and overseas countries for work, study and other personal agendas.

Basotho traditional food in Summer:

Papa: Basotho's staple made from mealie meal and boiling water. It is often served with vegetables and meat. Basotho prefer it that it is best served hot. By doing so it allows them to feel the best taste of whatever it will be served with and fills up the stomach fast. Papa is mostly enjoyed with moroho (leafy greens), and papa ka moroho is a staple meal in Lesotho. For a more balanced meal, you can also serve papa ka moroho with meat, tinned fish, eggs, or any protein of your choice. You can also enjoy it with both fresh and sour milk, or beans, peas, or vegetables of your choice (Pitse, 2021).

Thahameso: breakfast meal that is prepared by newly wedded wives. In most cases the dish served here is sorghum porridge as it acts as an appetiser to Basotho men before heading off to work or for young boys who are tending to the animals in the fields.

Sebera: maize meal that was put into some water for some time in order to make it soft, then be fried.

Lepu: fresh pumpkin that is cooked with its leaves and sometimes added milk from the cows for better tasting. It is normally served with hot pap.

Maqebekoane: It is a wheat bread that is prepared with steam, best enjoyed hot with the help of intestines cooked after the animal is slaughtered.

Monakalali: A plant that is found in the fields that has features like the one of an onion. It is normally eaten by herd boys when they are still looking after their animals.

Mokongoana: a meat that is cut into small pieces into small pieces, be half cooked, then dried on the sun.

Qolosi: porridge prepared by mealie meal and mixed with the grains that are left during the preparation of traditional beer.

Potele: It is a traditional pap mixed with moroho and prepared as a single dish.

Seketsa: Seketsa is a traditional papa mixed with pumpkin.

Bohojana masatsoana: It is a bread that is prepared with a wheat that is not fully grinded.

Lesokoana: it is a bread prepared with a dough left when the fat cakes also known as “makoenya” were being prepared.

Basotho traditional food in Autumn:

Lehoetla: It is also a roasted maize meal that is soft and can be eaten by small children and the old ages. Basotho people believe that it should not be eaten in half before Easter because that's bringing a curse in the family.

Mokopu: after autumn harvest pumpkin is being cooked and squashed and it is normally eaten as a side dish.

Mafatsi: pumpkin seeds that are roasted and they are considered as snacks.

Moroho oa mokopu: pumpkin leaves are cooked with little of oil and onion to make a dish tasting nice and nutritious.

Maleboti: a fried pap that is seasoned with salt to give it a taste.

Seshoi: any kind of food taken from home to herd boys that lives in the mountains.

Talane: sorghum that was taken from the fields before their time and be grinded then prepare porridge.

Basotho traditional food in Winter:

Lipaibi: a fried maize that is grinded and added sugar and salt to it for taste.

Setampo (Samp): dried maize kernels that are pounded and cooked until soft. It is often served with beans or meat making it filling winter dish.

Nyekoe: it is a simple dish made from sorghum and beans, sometimes enhanced with pumpkin. It is a nutritious option that warms the body.

Motoho: a fermented porridge made from sorghum meal typically served warm. It can be sweetened with sugar and enjoyed as a breakfast option.

Likhobe tsa poone: a popular snack made of well-cooked maize and it be roasted maize, enjoyed especially in the evenings by the fire.

Khemere known as (Ginger drink): a traditional drink made from brown sugar and ginger, served chilled at family gatherings. To make it, boil about 2 liters of water with 1 kilogram

brown sugar, 50 grams ginger powder, 12 grams tartaric acid, and 12 grams cream of tartar for about 30 minutes in an uncovered pot. Dilute with about 8 liters of cold water, leave overnight, and serve chilled. Some people add pineapple pieces or store-bought fruit concentrates. This drink is served at family gatherings and on special events. It is also locally produced commercially especially in the taxi ranks. It is also served in winter because it has ingredients to cure common cold.

Sebutsoabutsoane: it is newly picked pumpkin roasted on the fire by the herd boys in the fields. They peel the cover gently while creating a whole for them to pour water in it just so it does not burn.

Letsete: a maize that was put in Sand River to be soft and roasted after it became soft. It is normally eaten by the herd boys when they are looking after their flock.

Mafi (Sour Milk): It is a fermented milk, a traditional delicacy, is consumed as a refreshing accompaniment to pap or likhobe. Its tangy flavor pairs well with the lighter meals of spring.

Lehlaka (Sugarcane): Fresh sugarcane is enjoyed as a natural sweet snack during spring. It can be the one of maize meal or sorghum but the two have best tasting.

Nama ea khomo (Beef): While meat is often reserved for special occasions, spring celebrations may feature beef dishes, particularly stews or grilled meat, cooked with local herbs. This is often dished with pap or moroho.

Moroho oa naha (Wild Edible Plants): It is a wild plant like Thepe (wild spinach) and hloenya that are foraged and cooked as side dishes.

Shobatana: It is a dried vegetables prepared in winter.

This seasonal approach to traditional food ensures that the Basotho people consume foods that are both locally available and nutritionally beneficial, adapting to the environmental conditions throughout the year. Jacobs, (2021) stated that Basotho, developed delicious but simple recipes that reflect a largely agricultural lifestyle and a need for body-warming foods for cold winters and ingredients that can be grown or obtained in a mountainous terrain.

Conclusion:

This paper has presented the most popular traditional food of Basotho people. The importance of Basotho traditional food highlights the need to address the potential risks of malnutrition. These traditional meals are designed to be filling, providing energy to endure the cold and hot weather while offering nutritional balance. The dietary practices and food choices of the Basotho people that are influenced by the changing seasons. Traditionally there are food that are only reserved for older people and not recommended to children, such food including cow kidneys. The researcher did not find any significant reason for this practice, as in Sesotho culture, it is considered a taboo to ask elders the reason behind something.

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