

LESOTHO

Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa

John E. Bardill and
James H. Cobbe



LESOTHO

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ABOUT THE BOOK AND AUTHORS

Wholly surrounded by the Republic of South Africa, the ethnically homogenous state of Lesotho was created in the 1830s by the genius of Moshoeshoe I in the aftermath of the *lifaqane* and owes its independence today to its rugged terrain, the tenacity of its people, and Moshoeshoe's diplomatic skill.

In this introduction, authors Bardill and Cobbe outline the features that make Lesotho unique, tracing its history and discussing the peculiar structure of Lesotho's labor reserve economy and the effects it has on development, politics, society, and culture. They examine Lesotho's fascinating mixture of social and cultural unity and diversity, its problems with rapid social change, the autocratic nature of the government, and sources of political cleavage and constraints on political change. They conclude that despite strong support from the international community since independence, the country has unfortunately been able to do little to promote development, reduce dependence on South Africa, or quell internal dissent. In closing, the authors look at Lesotho's complex international relations—still dominated by South Africa but diversifying in sometimes unexpected ways—and survey the country's prospects for the future.

John E. Bardill has taught at the National University of Lesotho and the University of Manchester. **James H. Cobbe**, currently associate professor of economics and associate dean of the College of Social Sciences at Florida State University, was a research fellow at the Institute of Southern African Studies, National University of Lesotho, in 1981/1982 and has also taught at the London School of Economics and Yale University.

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Preface

Lesotho is a beautiful country, but a desperately poor one that has been cursed by geography and history with few resources and many problems. In the chapters that follow, we attempt to give the reader a feeling for the history, economy, social and cultural structure, politics, and international relations of the kingdom. Many of the topics we deal with are open to a variety of interpretations, and some have been the subject of heated debates in the academic literature, reflecting the widely different paradigms of contemporary social science. There are also many issues that, by the nature of things, simply cannot be positively decided one way or the other. To give a simple but illustrative example, there is continuing dispute over whether the country's relatively treeless state is a natural condition or the result of recent deforestation.

Given the introductory nature of this work and the limited space available, we have avoided detailed involvement in academic debates. Instead we have tried to provide a coherent narrative, reflecting our own interpretation of reality and events—an interpretation that owes much to mainstream Anglophone social science, but also much to the Marxist tradition. The resulting eclecticism may well offend purists of all persuasions, but it is unavoidable in a work of this kind, especially when the two authors do not agree on everything. We have tried to note where others have interpreted matters significantly differently from the way we have, but the book is not a survey of points of view on Lesotho. It is our point of view, and if we spur the interests of others sufficiently to generate alternatives, so much the better.

This book has taken us far longer to produce than we originally expected. In the process of writing and revising it, we have accumulated debts to many people, unfortunately far too numerous to mention. Important categories include our colleagues, students, and friends in

Lesotho; library and secretarial staff in Roma, Lesotho, Tallahassee, Florida, and elsewhere; and of course our long-suffering spouses and children. However, a few individuals have helped us so much beyond the calls of either duty or friendship that their efforts should be acknowledged explicitly. These include Colin Murray, who read the whole manuscript in draft, saved us from serious errors, and gave valuable comments; Larry Bowman, series editor, who also made extremely helpful comments on the draft; David Ambrose, who commented on drafts and with his staff in the Documentation Centre of the Institute of Southern African Studies at the National University of Lesotho (NUL), helped us in many other ways; Lucas Smits, for comments; Robert Kukubo, archivist of the NUL Library; Linda Kight and Martha Crow for speeding countless versions of the manuscript through the word processor; and the editorial staff of Westview Press, who were always cheerful and efficient, even when being told another deadline was being missed. None of the above are responsible for the shortcomings of this book, but they share credit for any virtues it possesses.

John E. Bardill
James H. Cobbe



Southern Africa.

LESOTHO

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Introduction

The modern Kingdom of Lesotho inherited its boundaries from the British colony of Basutoland. It has a land area of 11,716 square miles (30,350 sq km), slightly larger than the state of Maryland. It is completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa, filling in the area between the Cape Province, Orange Free State, and Natal in east-central South Africa. Much of the country is mountainous, with elevations above sea level ranging from 5,000 to over 11,000 feet (1,500 to over 3,300 m). No country in the world has a higher lowest point.

The country lies entirely outside the tropics in the Southern Hemisphere. The climate is thus technically temperate but involves great variability in annual, seasonal, daily, and local weather. Four geographic regions are conventionally recognized within the country: the lowlands of the western plateau, the foothills, the Senqu (Orange River) Valley, and the mountains. Four seasons are apparent everywhere, with frost recorded in every month even in the lowlands, but temperatures are normally substantially lower in the mountains than the lowlands, where mean maximum temperatures in January (summer) typically range from 25° to 30° C (77° to 86° F). Absolute minimum temperatures in June and July (winter) may range from -8° C (18° F) in the lowlands to -17° C (1° F) or lower in the mountains. Temperature changes of 50° F (say from 30° to 80°) within twenty-four hours are not unusual. Rainfall is markedly seasonal and variable both from place to place and year to year; Lesotho is in the "summer rain region" of southern Africa, with winters normally dry, although some snow usually falls in the mountains. The average rainfall is *theoretically* adequate for arable agriculture in the lowlands and foothills. However, precipitation most often comes in sudden, violent downpours, frequently in thunderstorms with hail common. Runoff tends to be rapid, and soil erosion (both sheet and gully) is a widespread



Senqu River Valley. Photo courtesy of L.G.A. Smits.

and serious problem. Crop damage from hail and storms is frequent; so are drought, which can be local or nationwide, and frost, which damages maize (corn), the most widely grown crop.

Although the population is predominantly rural, with only 10 percent living in towns, the country is not well suited for arable agriculture. Only about 13 percent of the land area is suitable for cultivation, which implies much less than an acre of cultivable land per rural person. Historically and potentially, pasture for livestock is excellent in much of the foothills and mountains, but the quality of pasture has been seriously degraded by overstocking and poor management. The estimated size of the national livestock herd in 1981/1982 included 560,000 cattle, 1,330,000 sheep, 930,000 goats (mohair-producing), over 100,000 horses, 97,000 donkeys, and 60,000 pigs. Horses and donkeys are important means of transport for both goods and people in much of the country; most ploughing is done with oxen, and the ox-drawn cart is common.

The common root *Sotho* is found in the name of the country, *Lesotho*, the language, *Sesotho*, and the words for a person, a *Mosotho*, and the people, *Basotho*. Because many adult Basotho males temporarily migrate to South Africa to live and work, it is customary to distinguish between the de facto population, those physically present in the country, and the de jure population, those who are legal permanent residents. In mid-1985 the de jure population was a little more than 1.5 million and relatively homogeneous ethnically. Sesotho is the



Semonkong Falls. Photo courtesy of L.G.A. Smits.