


Resistance to Lutheran missionary activities through antagonism, traditional beliefs, customs and practices: The case of the Bapedi tribe in Limpopo province, South Africa

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Before the intervention of the missionaries in Bapedi society, the traditional beliefs, customs and practices, such as traditional healing, circumcision, polygamy, indigenous music and rituals, had a vibrant existence. These practices had been prevalent for centuries before the arrival of Christianity. After the missionaries of all church denominations were welcomed in Bapedi society to establish churches and schools as the main vehicles for the dissemination of European culture, confusion started to build. In this article, I will highlight the reaction of Bapedi people of Sekhukhune district, Limpopo province, South Africa, to the missionary activities of Berlin Mission Society (BMS), Germany, from 19 July 1860 to 08 July 2018. The purpose of this study was to explain the conflict or integration of different cultural norms and the missionary influence on the Bapedi indigenous way of life. The questions that I attempt to answer in this article are: (1) how do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience? and (2) who are to blame, the missionaries or the Bapedi people themselves? I address this question by analysing the missionary influence on Bapedi traditional beliefs, customs and practices. Primary data were collected through video recordings of cultural and religious rituals, interviews and observations. Secondary data include publications. It was concluded that in spite of fundamental and multi-consequential changes that Christianity brought about in Bapedi society, a large percentage of Bapedi people, independent churches inclusive, have used and are still following their traditional beliefs, taboos, customs and practices.

Keywords: resistance; Lutheran missionary; antagonism; traditional beliefs; customs and practices; Limpopo province; Bapedi tribe; South Africa.

Introduction

The Bapedi tribe is one of the ethnic groups found in South Africa. It is situated in Limpopo province. Bapedi people constitute a major tribe in the Sekhukhune district. The language spoken by the Bapedi people is Sepedi.

Sekhukhune district is the largest area of Sepedi speakers in South Africa. The Bapedi are a deeply religious people (Lebaka 2017:15) whose traditional beliefs, customs and practices have received very little attention in terms of research and publication. Belief in ancestors is foundational to Bapedi people's religion, traditional beliefs, customs and practices. They not only venerate ancestors but also believe that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth, and that human life has its origin and ultimate meaning in God. As in many other African religious traditions, among Bapedi people too ancestor veneration is an attempt to influence and manipulate the supernatural forces with a view of gaining positive outcomes. These supernatural forces are known to possess powers to control the different objectives of the communities and individuals (Lebaka 2017:47). With these practices being followed almost on a daily basis or when the need arises, a large percentage of Bapedi people, however, have no intention at all to abandon their traditional beliefs, customs and practices.

Western influence came to South Africa through the normal processes of cultural encounters between people of different cultures (Bavinck 1948:58). Culture change usually took place over an extended period, but in Sekhukhune district (see Figure 1), acculturation¹ took place at a tremendous speed (Lebaka 2017:165).

1. Acculturation implies culture change through assimilation and hybridisation, where 'culture A' invades 'culture B' through music, religion, language, attire, etc. (Lebaka 2017:165).

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.



Source: Ingersoll District Chamber of Commerce, 2017, *Super South Africa & Dubai Information Night*, viewed n.d., from <https://ingersollchamber.com/event/super-south-africa-dubai-information-night/>

FIGURE 1: Geographical location map of South Africa.

Missionaries of all church denominations from different cardinal points across the globe were heartily welcomed into the Bapedi society in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo province, to establish churches and schools as the main vehicles for the dissemination of European culture. Schools and tertiary institutions established in different districts in the Bapedi society include: St Marks College – Anglican (Jane Furse); St Ritas School for Girls – Roman Catholic (Glen-Cowie); Christ the Priest – Roman Catholic (Luckau); Lobethal Primary School – Evangelical Lutheran (Lobethal – Ga-Phaahla village); and Kilnerton Teachers' Training College – Evangelical Lutheran (Botshabelo² – Middelburg). These are boarding schools, and the education system in these schools promoted Western values and desires, namely, to spread the gospel. For the purpose of this study, the missionaries of Berlin Mission Society (BMS) from Germany have been chosen for discussion. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the missionary influence on the Bapedi way of life in three sections, namely: (1) overview of the arrival of the first two Berlin missionaries in the Bapedi society; (2) problem of the missionaries; and (3) Bapedi and Missionary belief systems: compatibilities and incompatibilities and reasoning surrounding the Christianising of the Bapedi people. In the first section, I give a very brief overview of the history of Lutheran missionaries in the Bapedi society, and some problems that were encountered during the rapid growth of Christianity in Sekhukhune district are pointed out. The second section highlights the problem of the missionaries and the third section discusses the Bapedi reaction to missionary activities.

The arrival of the first two missionaries from Berlin in the Bapedi society

Brief historical overview

The establishment of the Lutheran missionary work in Swaziland and Sekhukhune districts in particular, and in

2. According to Rikotso (2003:76), Botshabelo means 'a place of refuge for Christians'.

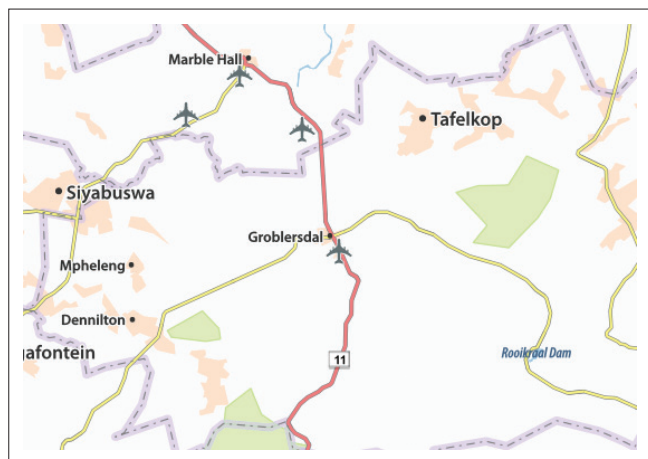
Africa in general, was accompanied by many hardships and trials (Boshoff 2004:449–460; Rikotso 2003:64).

This finding was endorsed by Pawliková-Vilhanová (2002:55) and Löytty (2012:54) by stating that 'life was not easy for the missionaries'. According to them, the average life expectancy of missionaries in Africa was very low, as many died in Africa after a short time or had to be sent back home with ailments. Firstly, while in Lydenburg, the first two Berlin missionaries, Anton Berthold Merensky and Carl Heinrich Theodor Grütznert, were granted permission by the Executive Council of the newly formed South African Republic to establish a mission among the Swazi (Boshoff 2004:449). Boshoff goes on to explain that 'under very difficult circumstances they travelled to Swaziland and eventually received an audience with the king'. According to Boshoff, King Mswati wanted to know whether the missionaries would be prepared to sell children as slaves to the farmers of Lydenburg, if granted the privilege of working among his people. He also wanted horses and demanded a gun. This fact was further articulated by Rikotso (2003:3), Trümpelmann (1957:xxi) and Merensky (1996:39–43) who commonly say that 'the missionary refused to consider compensation and based their refusal on the laws of the South African Republic'. According to Merensky (1996:39), these laws made it illegal to supply horses or firearms to natives. In view of the aforesaid, Rikotso (2003:64) and Boshoff (2004:449) pointed out that finally, the king was furious and ordered them to leave his land and they returned to Lydenburg. Secondly, in 1860, history was made in the Bapedi society when Berlin missionaries, Alexander Anton Berthold Merensky and his missionary³ associate Carl Heinrich Theodor Grütznert, arrived at Thabantsho (see Figure 3), which is situated in Tafelkop village (see Figure 2), Sekhukhune district, Limpopo province, South Africa, and had their first meeting with Kgoshi Boleu Rammupudu on the 19 July 1860 (Boshoff 2004:452; Küsel 2008:14; Rikotso 2003:60). A contract was signed and the land and site of their new mission station (Rietkloof) was allocated to them (Boshoff 2004:453). After they had settled, the name of the mission station was changed from Rietkloof, the name of the farm on which it was situated, to Gerlachshoop (Gerlach's hope),⁴ (Boshoff 2004:453).

Deeper investigations into the challenges faced by the missionaries, oral accounts and literary evidence revealed that after the initial cordial relationships with Boleu, the situation changed gradually, and Boleu started to be constructively destructive (Boshoff 2004:456–458). For example, Firstly, quite a large group, comprising approximately 90 people (unruly audience) instigated by Boleu, would typically turn up for a church service for deliberate disruption. There would be loud chatting, laughing

3. The term 'missionary' here refers to anybody who actively participates in the church's involvement (mission ecclesiae) in God's trinitarian mission (mission Dei). Hence, a missionary is not necessarily a person from outside the African context (Steinert 2003:17–28; Steinert & Karecki 2004:482).

4. Gerlachshoop is the commemoration of the role played by the Prussian general Von Gerlach in the Berlin Missionary Society and his dream of extending the society's work into Central Southern Africa (Boshoff 2004:453; Rikotso 2003:3; Wangemann 1957:2).



Source: Michelin, n.d., *Map of Groblersdal*, viewed n.d., from <https://www.viamichelin.com/web/Maps/Map-Groblersdal-0470-Limpopo-South>

FIGURE 2: Geographical location map of Groblersdal showing Tafelkop.



Source: Photo courtesy of Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

FIGURE 3: Northern part of Thabantsho (Tafelkop village, 03 April 2004).

and social interaction, with the *kgoshi* [chief] at the forefront. They shouted and jeered as long as the service continued. Secondly, Boleu accused Grütznér that while his own dogma taught that children should obey their parents, the missionary was the one who prevented them from being obedient. He then prohibited his entire family (children and wives) who were interested in the gospel not to attend church service; Thirdly, he also organised public events like hunting trips every Sunday to force his subjects to make a choice between communal activities organised by him and the church service, and his disposition towards the believers grew worse and threats to kill them all were often made (Boshoff 2004:458; Rikotso 2003:5; Wangemann, 1957:51).

According to Boshoff (2004:260, 460), after Grütznér realised that war was eminent, as Boleu and his neighbouring tribe, the Ndzundza – Ndebele of Mabhogo, were planning to attack farms in the vicinity as well as the mission station at Gerlachshoop, he patrolled the animal pen and fired a shot to prevent the attack that was underway, and for convenience, the decision taken by the missionaries was to vacate the mission station immediately. From the foregoing, it was obvious that the missionaries' lives were at risk, and to rescue the missionaries from the attack, a small Boer commando contingent arrived on Friday 23 October 1863 and accompanied the missionaries from Gerlachshoop to the closest Boer lager (ox wagon circle). Therefore, by 14 December 1863, the missionaries had moved to Lydenburg, where they met with the delegation from their mission society (Boshoff 2004:460; Rikotso 2003:4). Endemann et al. (1980:11) and Rikotso (2003:4) confirmed that few weeks after the missionaries had vacated the mission station, all the farm houses in the area, the church inclusive, were burnt to ashes.



Source: Photo courtesy of Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

FIGURE 4: Remains of the church at 'Gerlachshoop' mission station. Only the foundation can be seen (Tafelkop village, 03 April 2004).

Figure 4 shows the remains of the church at Gerlachshoop mission station. Only the foundation can be seen.

Fourthly, in spite of criticisms, antagonism, resistance and all problems encountered by the missionaries at Gerlachshoop and in Swaziland, in 1861, Merensky was persistent and brave to re-enter Sekhukhune district.

He again visited Chief Sekwati and was given permission to build a new mission station a few miles from Tjate near Kgalatlou hill, Sekhukhune district. When Sekhukhune took over from Chief Sekwati as chief, his initial relations with the missionaries were friendly. Gradually, the situation worsened as Chief Sekhukhune felt that the missionaries were undermining his supreme authority. Finally, the plight of the Christians became so intolerable that on the night of 18 November 1864, the Christians led by Merensky fled to settle at Botshabelo near Middelburg (Küsel 2008:14; Rikotso 2003:38). Fifthly, after the Sekhukhune War, the Berlin Mission was allowed to re-enter Bapedi. They built a new mission station on the site of the ruins at Tjate called the Thaba Mossegu Mission Station. Winter was sent as a missionary. He was of the opinion that Christianity in Africa had to make provision for African cultural practices if it wanted to succeed. Winter adopted the Bapedi way of life. His superiors expelled him. In 1889, he founded the Bapedi Lutheran Church, one of the first of the separatist church movements in South Africa. Winter later played an important role in the history of the Bapedi (Küsel 2008:15).

Sixthly, the great challenge of the missionaries as Boshoff (2004:456) wrote was communication, because almost all of them could not express themselves in Northern Sotho but could speak only a few words.

Highlighting the solution to the problem, Boshoff further pointed out that a consensus was reached among the missionaries to learn Northern Sotho language like their colleagues who worked among other language groups in

Southern Africa. Attesting to the observation above, Pawliková-Vilhanová (2007:254), wrote that, 'it was believed that without effective and active communication, it was impossible to pursue the conversion of the Africans'. This resulted in the missionaries not accomplishing their mission but achieving only minimal results in converting the Bapedi people into Christianity. The finding above is corroborated by Gorringe (2004:487) who is of the view that, 'the gospel⁵ is "good news", but what is good news for some may, of necessity, be bad news for others'. Van der Merwe (2016) resonated this stating that:

[T]he gospel can only be truly relevant to the African situation if it has to do with culture, and culture has to do with the total life of the person. (p. 562)

Seventhly, to strategise on how to manoeuvre, in the fifties, BMS then delegated young post-war missionaries who were expert trumpeters but somehow managed to play and teach all Brass instruments (Serote 1979:iii). According to Serote, on their arrival in Sekhukhune district, there was some hope that through music created using Brass instruments, the Bapedi people would be easily converted into Christianity. Serote further mentions a few names, for example: in Leipzig there was Rev. Dr P. Beyerhaus; in Lobethal there was Rev. G. Wahl and later Rev. R. Schiele; in Kratzenstein there was Rev. P. Sandner and later Rev. H. Garthe; and in Lydenburg there was Rev. Otto Eberhardt (Serote 1979:iii). It was further observed in this study that Rev. Dr P. Beyerhaus was transferred to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Maphumulo in Pietermaritzburg (Natal), and while there, he aroused the interest of a few students. Among those who became interested in learning how to play Brass instruments were Rev. U. Seakamela, Rev. M. Moremi, Rev. T. Thage, Rev. C. Ntsana, Rev. S. E. Serote, Rev. J. M. Senona, Rev. P. M. Malatjie, Rev. R. Raphunga and others. Rev. M. C. Mminele was at this stage already an assistant to Dr P. Beyerhaus (Serote 1979:iii). This study also found that at the Marang Theological Seminary, a Brass Band was established and some of the students, for example, Rev. Mehlape received tuition in Brass music there. Data on the development of Brass music have revealed that Rev. Otto Eberhardt relocated to Makapanspoort (Potgietersrust – Mahwelereng) in 1974, established the church Brass Band and trained a group of young boys and girls in music, introduced them to staff notation and the joyful intricacies of Brass music (Serote 1979:iii). Similarly, Rev. Richard Schiele established the church Brass Band at Lobethal Church Centre in 1975, and the two Brass Bands had seminars together during school holidays and performed together during church rallies, seminars and conferences (Serote 1975:iii). As the product of the efforts of the two missionaries, namely, Rev. Otto Eberhardt and Rev. Richard Schiele, I wish to confirm and acknowledge their missionary activities. I was a member of the Lobethal Brass Band playing the trumpet, and later other instruments. Sincere thanks are due to them for their enormous contribution. May their souls rest in peace.

5.Gorringe (2004:487) further mentioned that in its encounter with cultures, the gospel leads to changes, but in the process, it may be, and often is, radically changed by culture.

In this discussion, I have highlighted (1) the encounter between the Bapedi people and the missionaries, (2) the conflict or integration of different cultural norms and (3) the resistance and compliance. What has become clear is that the encounter was characterised by emotions, antagonism, hidden agenda, resistance and persistence. This suggests that the missionaries were not considerate and sympathetic towards the Bapedi culture when establishing a relationship with the Bapedi people, and the Bapedi people were not passive recipients of the gospel.

Based on the discussions by different scholars, my investigations have led me to conclude that the purpose of the intervention of the missionaries in the Bapedi society was to convert the Bapedi people into Christianity, and acculturate the Bapedi people to forget about their indigenous knowledge systems and cultural identity. This implies that the missionaries were ignorant of the fact that Christianity in the Bapedi society had to make provision for Bapedi traditional beliefs, customs and practices, if it wanted to succeed.

Problem of the missionaries

Missionary activities in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent have generated a great deal of debate in the scholarly arena. It is evident from a thorough review of the literature that ample indigenous African knowledge in music has been systematically suppressed and repressed during centuries of Christianisation, Westernisation and colonisation of indigenous African people (Adedeji 2008; Garfias 2004; Hellberg 2007, 2010; Lebaka 2017; Tönsing 2013). This was predicated on the myth that African people are not musically literate and could never become exemplars in the advancement of the society. The above view is consonant with Yolo (1986:164) who observed that many of the cultural traditions of African countries had been suppressed in colonial days because they were said to be manifestations of paganism.

A review of literature also shows that many scholars have been preoccupied with rigorous technical studies of the missionary activities in South Africa in order to establish different perspectives on the resistance to Lutheran missionary and colonial activities. Some of the representative scholars who have tried to provide an understanding of the Lutheran mission in Africa include Adeogun (2006), Boshoff (2004), Adedeji (2008), Lebaka (2017), Rikotso (2003), Garaba and Zarvedinos (2014), Scriba (2003), Scriba and Lislerud (1997), Tönsing (2013), Steinert and Karecki (2004), Steinert (2003), Mojola (2004), Herskovits (1948), Wilson (1966), Pawliková-Vilhanová (2007), Louhivuori (2008), Löytty (2012) and Hellberg (2007, 2010). According to Adeogun (2006:5-13), 'Europeans claim that they sent missionaries to Africa to rescue Africans'. The question is: rescuing Africans from what? Van der Merwe (2016:559) argued that Christianity in Africa was certainly not founded with European involvement like organised missions to Africa or colonialism. According to him, the roots of the

Christianising of Africa date back to the missions of the Apostles. On a similar note, Adeogun (2006:5–13) further mentioned that many scholars have realised that missionaries were sent to Africa to establish European cultural Christianity. Like Adeogun, Pawliková-Vilhanová (2007:257) pointed out that missionary school masters provided a total culture pattern, including church attendance, Christian morality, table manners, etc. All these led to the segregation and alienation of converts from their families and their societies.

The missionaries rigorously attempted, although unsuccessfully, to detribalise the Bapedi people (Lebaka 2017:165). A serious attack, for instance, was launched on Bapedi traditional and religious beliefs, customs and practices – polygamy, ancestor veneration, initiation or circumcision, traditional healing systems, etc. Attesting to the observations above, Pawliková-Vilhanová (2007:256–257) observed that the primary goal of all mission societies in Africa was the winning of converts⁶ and therefore the importance of religion was emphasised in all mission schools. He further mentioned that the education provided by the missionaries had the effect of detribalising their African converts. In the same vein, Strayer (1976) wrote that:

[C]onverts gradually came to recognise education as the key to becoming Europeanised South Africans, and they were made to go through the whole gamut of experiences, such as from conservation to gradual acceptance, rejection of traditional values and customs, and full acceptance of the gospel. (p. 10)

These observations are congruent with Mead's (1955:111) assertion that Western education served to withdraw children (converts) from their homes and prevented them from participating in those communal celebrations and social processes by which values of an African community are transmitted from generation to generation. In view of the above comments, assertions and observations made by different researchers, it is evident that the purpose of the intervention of the missionaries in the African continent was to indoctrinate and detribalise the Africans to forget about their cultural identity.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the present investigation is linked to the theory of acculturation. The current study corroborated the views of scholars such as Padilla (1980), Lakey (2003) and Kim (1979) whose views about acculturation will be discussed below. Padilla (1980) is generally credited for his enormous contribution in the assessment of the concept of 'acculturation'. He postulated that there are three stages of culture change, namely, contact, conflict and adaptation. According to him, measurement of culture change must consider each of these three stages at both the group and the individual level. He emphasised that the purpose of the contact must also be considered. He further asserted that the history, persistence, duration, purpose and permanence of

⁶Conversion, according to Arabestani and Edo (2011:20), is not just a personal decision and a spiritual shift, but it is an entry into a particular religious community that inevitably makes changes in traditional ways of life and social orientation.

the contact, the nature of conflict and adaptations to this contact, as well as the individual's exposure to the second culture, interpersonal conflicts and personal adaptations, must all be considered. The Bapedi context is ideal for this theory because when the missionary influence on the Bapedi people's way of life is analysed and examined through the theoretical framework of this study, it was established that there was interaction between the Bapedi people and the missionaries, and contact, conflict and adaptation were realised, and the purpose of contact, as well as persistence, duration, nature of conflict, interpersonal conflicts and interpersonal adaptations were considered. Padilla (1980) further expanded his understanding of acculturation by arguing that the dynamics of acculturation include selective adoption of the value system, and the integration and differentiation processes.

The present research complies with Padilla's argument because the Bapedi people are in need of a contact and integration process, which is dynamic and understands the impact of culture upon their own lives, and can adapt to the presence of their culture. This theory is adopted for this study because a review of literature has shown that the missionaries had no understanding of the Bapedi people's way of life. They have failed to adopt the Bapedi people's cultural value system, traditional and cultural beliefs, customs and practices. Similar to my argument, Lakey (2003:104) rightly observed that, 'communication is the tool assisting immigrants to satisfy their basic personal and social needs in the new host culture'. According to his view, to acculturate themselves to the new culture, immigrants must acquire the host cultural patterns and develop working relationships with the new environment. Consonant with the above observations, Kim (1979:437) asserted that, 'communication and acculturation occur in and through the interlocking interaction process of "push" and "pull" in the relationship between an immigrant and his new sociocultural surroundings'. He advocated that in reality, the validation of acculturation ultimately occurs in the host society. The theory is applicable for this study because according to oral accounts and literary evidence in the context of this study, there was an interlocking interaction process of 'push' and 'pull' between King Mswati and the missionaries, Chief Boleu and the missionaries, King Sekhukhune and the missionaries, as well as a large percentage of the Bapedi people who resisted against the missionary activities. I concur with Kim, Lakey and Padilla because in the Bapedi culture, there are words of wisdom like *moeng o naka di maripa*, which means that a visitor must behave well or be respectful. In this study, the theory was used for reference while investigating the missionary influence on the Bapedi people's way of life. The theory also assisted in determining how the missionaries have attempted but failed to detribalise the Bapedi people.

Research methods and design

I started the fieldwork research among the Bapedi people in April 2004, aiming to reveal their traditional beliefs, customs and practices, as well as their resistance to and compliance with missionary activities. Specific ethnographic data were

collected mainly from five Bapedi villages (Tafelkop, Ga-Phaahla Mmakadikwe, Mashite, Mabule and Kotsiri) in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo province. Within the context of this study, I considered elderly people who still recall the missionary activities in the Bapedi society as the primary subjects. Secondary subjects included indigenous musicians and traditional healers. Subjects for this study were identified because of their knowledgeable and informative qualities. Many of these elderly people⁷ who provided me a lot of valuable information have surprisingly good memories of the missionary activities. With their cooperation and collaboration, I explored their memories and obtained information deriving from their verbal accounts of the past. My observations of the present state of missionary activities had to include an investigation of the past. All the information procured orally (and aurally) was tested comparatively and chronologically with data coming from other written sources. Library research was in the form of published books and articles on the Lutheran missionary activities in South Africa, particularly in the Bapedi society. I also collected information through the role of a participant observer at traditional healers' religious rituals called *malopo*.

This study employed a historical research approach, and the analysis is based on acculturation and the principle of elimination by substitution. Data were collected through video recordings of cultural and religious rituals, interviews and observations. This approach is supported by Porra, Hirschheim and Parks (2014) who argued that:

[H]istory writing has spread to disciplines outside history and the purpose of this approach is still to interpret past events and to present the interpretations in order to understand what happened and why in the context of historical environmental forces. (p. 538)

They further asserted that in history writing, however, evidence and not methods or techniques must drive the process. According to them, this means that a historian must examine, at each step of the process, many possible techniques that could be used and find one that works with the evidence at hand. They further emphasised that the historical method is an attempt to narrate an accurate account of some aspects of life and its scientific analysis and presentation. They all agree that the process involves investigating, recording, analysing and interpreting the events of the past for the purpose of discovering generalisations that are helpful in understanding the past, understanding the present and, to a limited extent, in anticipating the future. As my research approach focusses on investigation, recordings, analysis and interpretation similar to their study, I support the assertion of Porra et al. that these are the necessary tools for the smooth running of any historical research. The primary questions the study addressed are: (1) how do people understand one another when they do not share common cultural experiences? and (2) who are to blame, the missionaries or the Bapedi people themselves?

7. Maapa Samuel (24 July 1932); Tshwaana Abram (03 August 1932); Mathumetše Maria Ngwanamphaga (29 October 1934); Mogoane Mathibela (20 August 1934); Sefolaša Mapogo (13 April 1935); Malau Stofel (23 May 1936); and Matsepe Motšedi (13 May 1940).

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Bapedi and missionary belief systems: Compatibilities and incompatibilities

Missionary influence on rituals and traditional healing practices

When asked about the attitude of the missionaries to rituals and healing practices, Tshwaana Abram, born 03 August 1932 (personal communication, 05 April 2004), mentioned that his parents told him that the missionaries had a negative attitude towards the traditional healing practices of the Bapedi people and had made several attempts to discourage their converts from consulting with traditional healers or using traditional medicines. According to Abram's parents, they did so for two reasons. Firstly, because it was felt that traditional healers encouraged the belief in witchcraft, which was considered one of the greatest obstacles to Christian missionary work, and secondly, because the missionaries regarded the traditional healers as 'witchdoctors'. During an informal interview (05 April 2004), Abram indicated that his parents also told him that the missionaries discarded traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Bapedi people as 'myth' and 'superstitious'.

In contrast to the above observations, Semenya and Potgieter (2014:1) underscored the fact that the Bapedi traditional healers could play a leading role in both the preservation of indigenous knowledge and the primary health care sector. Semenya and Potgieter (2014:2) further stated that a considerable number of health-related problems treated by Bapedi traditional healers in the poor rural areas of the Limpopo province strengthen the fact that traditional medicine and traditional health practitioners represent the first line of health care for the majority of people in this province. Figure 5 is a testimony that



Source: Photo courtesy of Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

FIGURE 5: Ancestor veneration to appease the ancestors (*go phasa*) (Mashite village, Schoonoord; 29 September 2007).

the missionaries could not accomplish their mission in detribalising the Bapedi people, and a large percentage of the Bapedi people are still venerating their ancestors and have no intention at all to forget their roots.

Prohibition of initiation or circumcision school

Oral accounts and literary evidence have revealed that the missionaries regarded education as schooling (Lebaka 2017:117). For them, education connotes the process of learning in a classroom or in any form of institutionalised Euro-contrived formal schools. Consonant with the above observation, Sefolaša Mapogo, born 13 April 1935 (personal communication, 07 April 2004), at Tafelkop village, indicated that her mother told her that the missionaries who settled at Gerlachshoop (Thabantsho) were unnecessarily strict, not (friendly, considerate, sympathetic or socially adjustable). According to Sefolaša, the converts were compelled to abandon their traditional names and were instructed to choose better names from the Bible such as Amos, Luke, Samuel, etc.

The above narrative is consonant with Yoloye (1986:164) who observed that many of the cultural traditions of African countries had been suppressed during colonial days because they were said to be manifestations of paganism. Figure 6 is a testimony that the missionaries could not accomplish their mission of detribalising the Bapedi people, and a large percentage of the Bapedi people, particularly the youth, are still attending initiation or circumcision school. During an interview with Madikedike Simon Sete, a senior traditional healer, who also has the authority to host and conduct an initiation school (06 July 2018) at Kotsiri village, Sekhukhune district, it was pointed out that according to statistics from a reliable source, in Limpopo province alone, from 10 June to 06 July 2018, approximately 40 000 young people (boys and girls) attended the initiation school.

The above observations are supported by the general agreement among scholars such as Herskovits (1948), Adedeji (2008) and Mojola (2004). In answering the question: who are



Source: Photo courtesy of Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

FIGURE 6: Initiates (girls) are welcomed back home (Kotsiri village, Schoonoord, Limpopo province, South Africa, 06 July 2018).

to blame, the missionaries or the Bapedi people themselves?, for these scholars, the missionaries are the focus of blame. For Herskovits (1948:310), it should perhaps be noted that while some non-literate societies lack formal educational institutions, this in no sense means they have no educational system. In his view, obviously, culture persists, and because culture is learnt behaviour, learning must take place. He observes that, 'the confusion for most Westerners lies in the distinction between education and schooling'. Herskovits argued that, 'the lack of formal institutions in no way suggests that education, in its broadest sense, is absent'. These views are consistent with the observations that the formal education system has affected the African socialisation processes that subject recipients to cultural ethics (Gumo et al. 2012:534). According to Gumo et al., the missionary-founded churches condemned traditional beliefs and practices, including their belief in taboos and totems. They further commend the locals for still upholding their culture, especially their religious belief system. On a similar note, Adedeji (2008:76) stated that, 'to me, it is still an irony how and why peoples as great as Africans could be captured by the Euro-Americans'. Adedeji is concerned about the unpopular African enslavement and colonisation by the Western World, which caused a substantial damage to African heritage, her greatness, her pride and self-esteem, her cultures and civilisation, her science and technology and sadly, her arts.

An interesting observation by Adedeji (2008) and Mojola (2004) about Euro-American researchers in Africa conducting research is that:

[T]he West 'sold' Christianity to the Africans and not only condemned but made them throw away their traditional religious and musical heritage, only for them to come back now to be demanding for what they had once made Africans throw away. (Adedeji 2008:77 & Mojola 2004:495)

In this study, it was observed that when all interviewees were asked the question: who is to blame, the missionaries or the Bapedi people themselves?, there was consensus that the missionaries are the focus of blame. Attesting to the observations above, Wilson (1966:15) asserted that the problem was that the early colonialists and missionaries had no understanding of the fact that education is itself part of the social organisation of any society, whether or not that society has anything that might be recognised as schools.

They did not take into consideration the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Bapedi people. Instead of adding to the Bapedi cultural practices, in my view, they applied the principle of elimination by substitution. Similar to my argument, Opoku (1985:508), Flint (1969:102), Adeogun (2006:3–14), Rikotso (2003:v) and Lebaka (2017:166) rightly argued that the attitude of the missionaries showed an unwitting ignorance of the positive values of the African way of life, and Africans were compelled to abandon their indigenous practices and beliefs, and all aspects of African culture were to be looked down upon. In light of

the above concerns and observations, African scholars⁸ agree on the necessity for an indigenous African Christian theology and inculturation (Van der Merwe 2016:562).

Prohibition of polygamy

Polygamy is most common in Africa, and it is indeed part of the African culture (Falaye 2016:18). It has been a persistent problem in Africa for the Christian missions that brought the gospel to the continent (Muthengi 1995:55). Matsepe Motšedi (born, 13 May 1940) endorsed this observation. During a personal interview on 07 April 2004 at Tafelkop village, she pointed out that her parents told her that on arrival of the missionaries at Thabantsho, confusion started to build because the missionaries were not happy with polygamy as was practiced by the Bapedi people, and they endorsed monogamy, as the biblical norm. On the same note, Mogoane Mathibela (born, 20 August 1934) elaborated that his parents told him that the endorsement of polygamy caused division among the Bapedi people. Mathibela further mentioned that his parents also told him that the missionaries not only threatened not to baptise the converts who were practicing polygamy but also prohibited them from having the holy communion (interview, 06 April 2004).

Contrary to monogamy endorsement made by the missionaries, Falaye (2016) wrote that:

[T]he early European missionaries brought Christianity to Africa, however, unfortunately, did not take into consideration the culture of the Africans like polygamy, mode of dressing, mode of worship and other peculiar traits of the Africans. (p. 19)

In his view:

[T]he European missionaries had no sympathy for the culture of the Africans but rather imposed the European culture on the Africans alongside with Christianity which ought not to be so at all. (p. 19)

On a similar note, Mbiti (1969:142) argued that, 'polygamy helps to prevent or reduce unfaithfulness and prostitution, especially on the part of the husband'. He further asserted that, 'the custom fits well into the social structure of traditional life, and into the thinking of the people, serving many useful purposes'. Idang (2015:108) endorsed Mbiti's observations by commenting that, 'a look at the African reveals that marital rites and practices are usually carried out in line with the custom of the society concerned'. According to Idang (2015):

[T]he polygamous marriage was more preferable; not because the African is naturally polygamous as some would say, but because it was associated with wealth, power, influence, social status and the strong African desire to be surrounded by many children and relations. (p. 108)

8. Mbiti (1995), Bediako (1995), Danfulani (2012), Ela (1986), Kalilombe (1994), Kanu (2012), Maluleke (1996, 1997), Masango (2006), Metuh (1996), Obijole (2012), Oladipo (2006), Orobator (2008) and Pato (1997).

The demise of indigenous music

One of my interviewees, Maria Ngwanamphaga Mathumetše (born, 29 October 1934) at Thabantsho, whom I interviewed (05, 06, 07 April 2004), and with whom I talked several times during my research visits in 2004, indicated that prior to the establishment of the missionary activities in the Bapedi society, the Bapedi people composed songs that were deeply rooted in myths, taboos and beliefs that formed basic philosophical foundations of the Bapedi cultural heritage. She mentioned that the purpose was to uphold their communal ethos already established and passed on from generation to generation as values that must not be breached.

Mathumetše is deeply grateful that the encounter between Christianity and the Bapedi culture had minor impacts on the Bapedi indigenous knowledge systems and culture. In the same vein, during an interview with Maapa Samuel (born, 24 July 1932) at Tafelkop village (06 April 2004), it was pointed out that before the arrival of the missionaries at Thabantsho (Tafelkop), indigenous Bapedi music was based exclusively on songs and dances associated with traditional beliefs, customs and practices. In support of the above viewpoints, during an informal discussion with Malau Stofel (born, 23 May 1936) at Tafelkop village (07 April 2004), it was established that as the Bapedi people became interested in the gospel, the missionaries threatened that if the converts continued to play their traditional musical instruments, they would be excommunicated from the church. Figure 7 is a testimony that the missionaries could not accomplish their mission in detribalising the Bapedi people, and a large percentage of children in the Bapedi society are still learning their culture through traditional music accompanied by the use of traditional musical instruments. The testimony is corroborated by an interview with Senamela Mahlatse, indigenous musician (28 October 2017), who was of the view that, 'Bapedi people transmit their musical heritage from one generation to another orally, as a means of protecting, supporting, perpetuating and preserving the Bapedi cultural heritage'.



Source: Photo courtesy of Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

FIGURE 7: *Dipepetwane* music ensemble (Mabule village – Schoonoord, Sekhukhune district – Limpopo province, South Africa, 23 June 2018).

When asked the question, is it a noble idea for the Bapedi people to keep, uphold and promote their indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage?, all the interviewees agreed. Senamela Mahlatse (28 October 2017) explained, 'observing and transmitting our traditional beliefs, customs and practices from one generation to another, will help us to promote and preserve our Indigenous Knowledge Systems and cultural identity'.

Corroborating the above observations, Mugovhani (2015:s94) and Rikotso (2003:v) opined that according to the missionary mentality, to be a Christian meant to abandon all that you have inherited from your forefathers and be educated by all that comes with them. According to these scholars, all these factors have primarily contributed to the demise of indigenous African music and dance practices.

Discussion

Several significant findings have emerged from this study. It was shown, among other things, that Lutheran missionary activities were not in accordance with the Bapedi people's traditional values, beliefs, customs and practices. The results yielded have shown that in spite of the fundamental and multi-consequential changes Christianity brought about in Sekhukhune district, a large percentage of the Bapedi people, independent churches, such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), St John Apostolic, St Matthews Apostolic inclusive, have used and are still using their indigenous systems of observing their culture – ancestor veneration, initiation or circumcision, indigenous music, etc. (Lebaka 2017:174). The investigation has also revealed that the role of traditional healers in the Bapedi society is still going strong, and rituals such as ancestor veneration are organised and attended very often. It is worth noting that the missionaries considered the Bapedi traditional and religious beliefs, customs and practices as perverted beliefs and practices, and strategically made an attempt to prohibit the Bapedi people from observing their traditional culture, religion and heritage. However, the Bapedi people were not passive recipients. From the interviews and literature review, it was established that the process of culture exchange through assimilation and hybridisation was shaped by their choices and needs. In this study, we also observe that the missionaries did not take into consideration the fact that Christianity in the Bapedi society had to make provision for Bapedi cultural practices, if it wanted to succeed. When analysing data, it becomes evident that in spite of the diffusion of beliefs and religious practices because of cultural contact, a large percentage of the Bapedi people tend not to be interested in abandoning their traditional beliefs, customs and practices.

Although a small percentage of the Bapedi people has shown interest in missionary activities and have abandoned their cultural practices, indigenous music inclusive, the study has shown that the Bapedi people have survived acculturation, irrespective of all the challenges they have encountered. Although Christianity has had a strong influence on the

Bapedi culture, traditional beliefs, customs and practices still have an important role in people's lives.

Closer investigation has shown that in spite of the misunderstanding of cultural issues, the missionaries generally managed to establish good and friendly relations with a small percentage of the Bapedi people who converted to Christianity. Evangelical Lutheran churches are still found in some Bapedi communities that are still active.

The data analysed have confirmed that the missionaries had a hidden agenda, and they had no intention at all to localise the church. The missionaries did not take into consideration that adaptation is necessary in order to make Christianity more genuinely African. From the observations and interviews, it is evident that the interaction of the missionaries and the Bapedi people had minor impacts on traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Bapedi people. An analysis of missionary thinking reveals that the missionaries were not able to adapt themselves to the way of life of the Bapedi people, and their mission was to detribalise the Bapedi society.

Specifically, in this article, the discussion portrays that the encounter of Lutheran mission work and the Bapedi culture was characterised by 'push' and 'pull'. This is suggestive of the view that the missionaries and the Bapedi people could not find each other or one another. Findings imply that in converting the Bapedi people into Christianity, it would have been better for the missionaries to localise, indigenise and Africanise the Christian message. These results highlight the need for further investigation into cultural relevance in Lutheran liturgical church service.

Conclusion

Much has been said about the missionary influence on the way of life of the Bapedi people and the resistance to missionary activities through antagonism, traditional beliefs, customs and practices. It is important to mention here that this study pictured an unpleasant encounter between the Bapedi people and the missionaries.

What is noticeable in the encounter between the Bapedi people and the missionaries are conflicts of different cultural norms, anger and impatience. From the observations, interviews and literature review, it was established that even though the missionaries could not accomplish their mission as planned, they have managed to convert a small percentage of the Bapedi people into Christianity. From the literary sources consulted, observations, interviews and videos, it is evident that in spite of the diffusion of beliefs and religious practices because of cultural contact and the efforts of the missionaries to impose their way of thinking and music on the Bapedi people, in the end a large percentage of the Bapedi people, independent churches inclusive, have observed and are still observing their traditional beliefs, customs and practices. In my interpretation, the reason for this is that, they do not want to forget their roots. From my own experience, a

large percentage of the Bapedi people still observe all cultural practices, but they never ever forget their own.

What remains the factual ground for this study is that there is a need for the Bapedi people to keep, uphold and promote their indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage, and refuse to sell it out in the face of intimidation, racial prejudice, discouragements and socio-economic hardships. This is because in developing their arts and way of life, their spiritual empowerment needs to be strengthened. What remains unanswered is: why were the drums and dancing prohibited in congregational singing or liturgical church service? I am asking this question because Psalm 150 verse 4 clearly states, *Praise him with drums and dancing, Praise Him with harps and flutes*. So far, reading from the Bible, nothing supports such exclusion. In conclusion, the results of this study have shown that the missionaries had no sympathy for the Bapedi culture.

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