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# Insights from traditional initiation teachers (*Basuwe*) on the influence of male traditional initiation (*lebollo*) on the behaviour of schoolboys

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## Abstract

*This article aims to describe the outcomes of traditional initiation schools (lebollo), identify reasons for initiates' deviant behaviour at school after returning from lebollo and offer some suggestions on how to reduce deviant behaviour that may be linked to lebollo. The literature review has shown that lebollo aims to equip initiates with competencies that are necessary for adulthood. A content analysis of data emanating from interviews with two traditional initiation teachers (basuwe) identify initiates youthfulness, inadequate time spent at the initiation school, the erroneous view of initiates that they are adults, initiates' unwillingness to embrace the teaching of their elders, alcohol abuse and the inappropriate conduct of parents as reasons for initiates' misbehaviour. The study emphasises the need for close cooperation between formal schools' disciplinary committees and basuwe, as well as between the parents of initiates and basuwe to reduce initiates' misbehaviour.*

**Keywords:** Basotho; culture; education; discipline; male traditional initiation

## 1. Introduction

One of the key problems in schools is that teachers find it difficult to effectively manage learner behaviour towards creating a disciplined teaching and learning environment (Rossouw, 2003; Wolhuter & Meyer, 2007). Black South African school communities are especially plagued by many challenges related to learner behaviour (Masitsa, 2011). Researchers (Du Plooy, 2006; Mohlaloka, 2014) argue that potentially, cultural beliefs and values can cause tension within the school setting. One such a perceived tension is the view that exists among some black school teachers in the formal schooling sector that male learners who have been to initiation schools (*makoloane*) contribute to discipline problems at formal schools. Mohlaloka, Jacobs and De Wet (2016) found that while teachers in formal schools struggle with "generic discipline problems", they face additional challenges with the deviant behaviour of male learners who return from traditional initiation schools.

Traditional initiation schools are conducted over a period of time, away from settlements, in secluded areas. Supporters of this practice often refer to it with reverence as “the bush” or “the mountain” (Venter, 2013; Vincent, 2013). A particularly important group of role-players is the traditional initiation teachers or initiators (*basuwe*), elderly men of substantial political, economic and social standing, who teach initiates about cultural and health issues and perform certain rituals. (Meissner & Buso, 2007; Venter, 2013).

## 2. Problem statement

Researchers (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006; Ntombana, 2011; Mohlaloka *et al.*, 2016) argue that traditional initiation can make either a positive or a negative contribution to the behaviour of initiated boys. Proponents of traditional initiation (*lebollo*) believe that *lebollo* inculcates good moral values in boys and builds society by producing responsible, law-abiding citizens (Ntombana, 2011). Opponents of initiations schools (Ntombana, 2011: 636) however, believe that the behaviour and actions of the initiated boys “does not conform to the expectations that are carried by the ritual; even though they have undergone the ritual, their lives are the same as when they were boys”. Little research has been done on the possible influence of initiation schools on learner behaviour (Mohapi, 2007; Mohlaloka, 2014; Van Rooyen, Potgieter & Mtezuka, 2006) and even less on how to address behavioural problems seemingly stemming from initiation schools (Mohlaloka, 2014).

Mohlaloka *et al.* (2016) found that many formal school teachers struggle to deal with the deviant behaviour of boys returning from initiation schools. Examples of such behaviour that were shared by participants in the above mentioned study are boys refusing to take part in class discussions or to answer questions, acting with disdain towards female teachers and uninitiated teachers, refusing to do certain tasks and engaging in gangster activities.

Despite criticism directed against *lebollo* (cf. Mohlaloka *et al.*, 2016; Ntombana, 2011), there is an upsurge in young boys attending initiation schools in post-apartheid South Africa. It is argued that this is due to the resurgence of young people’s respect for traditional authority (Malisha *et al.*, 2008). In light of the conflicting views of the influence of *lebollo* on the behaviour of initiates, it is important that teachers and other role-players in the formal education system gain insight into traditional initiation. Mohlaloka *et al.* (2016: 11) recommend that schools should join hands with the traditional initiation teachers, as the formal school system and the traditional initiation school system have the same common goal, namely to “educate learners for their adult life”.

In order to provide readers with some understanding of this practice and to assist in understanding this specific group of learners, we pose the following research question: *What insights can be gained from traditional initiation teachers (basuwe) on the behaviour of secondary school boys and how to address such behaviour where necessary?*

## 3. Theoretical stance

In this paper, we look at the insights from traditional initiation teachers on the behaviour of secondary school boys from a comparative education perspective. Societal factors such as culture and philosophy, shape education systems and issues within education systems (Kubrow & Fossum, 2007; Wolhuter, 2013). Negative learner behaviour is a pressing issue in the contemporary education sphere and we need to take note of Arnove (2003: 13) who encourages comparative educationists to portray the “complex interplay of different social

forces and how individual and local units of analysis are embedded in multiple layered contexts". In this paper, we argue that it is imperative for the formal schooling sector to understand the importance and value of the traditional schooling sector within its cultural context and acknowledge the interplay between formal schooling and traditional initiation schooling towards a common goal.

#### 4. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to provide some insight into traditional initiation, its intended outcome, some of the reasons for initiates' deviant behaviour and ways to address such behaviour, through a literature study and interviews with traditional initiation teachers.

#### 5. Literature review

Traditional cultural practices, such as initiation and circumcision mirror beliefs and values held by community members for periods "often spanning generations" (Twala, 2007: 22; Venter, 2013: 140). This means that traditional initiation is a generational ritual that is passed from one generation to the next to ensure that the legacy of that community or family is kept alive for a long time. *Lebollo* is a traditional cultural practice involving the process that indicates the transition from boyhood to manhood (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004; Venter, 2013). Young men within the community are initiated when they reach a certain age in order to prepare them for their future roles in their respective communities. Mqgolozana (2009: 29) states in this regard:

*According to the elders, if a boy reaches a stage where he was problematic in society, there was only one way to curb this, and that was 'the obvious'. The boy's mischief was considered to be an indication of wanting a rite of passage into manhood. The things that were done at the mountain were held to be so powerful that they could root out any foolish notion from a boy's stubborn head, sending him back with a clear sense of right and wrong.*

Male circumcision forms an important part of the initiation process and is symbolic of the above-mentioned transition (Malisha, Maharaj & Rogan, 2008; Matobo, Makatsa & Obioha, 2009; Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006; Venter, 2013). This happens between an initiate and a traditional surgeon in a secluded area while other initiates wait for their turn. In the Venda culture, it is believed that the removal of the foreskin results in a metaphorical "sharpening of the warrior's spear". The spear denotes the penis, which is supposed to be used to "strike the elephant". The elephant here symbolises the woman (Malisha *et al.*, 2008: 587). Traditional initiation should, however, not be perceived as the mere act of circumcision. Matšela (1990) identified several changes and outcomes that are expected to occur. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, several researchers expanded on and made reference to these changes and outcomes highlighted in Matšela's (1990) seminal work. While these changes and outcomes are briefly discussed here, it must be stated that there are differences in the traditions of the different cultural groups (e.g. Basotho, Batswana, Tshivenda, amaXhosa, etc.) that have not been captured here.

**Bohlweki (purity):** Initiates are taught about cleanliness in its literal form as it relates to a hygienic way of living; that is why they must wash before they eat. It also relates to metaphorical purity as it relates to the purging of mind and soul. Purification of the inner self happens through the inculcation of principles, such as honesty and trustworthiness. For this to happen, folktales are told with the hope of discouraging unacceptable behaviour and to illustrate the consequences of negative conduct (Matšela, 1990).

**Thuto-kellelo (cognitive engagement)** is done through praise poems and learning about the history of a group. The initiates are taught to think strategically because thinking strategically and at a high level means that they are being prepared to serve on the chief's cabinet (*lekhotla*) (Letseka, 2013). Critical thinkers, who are members of the chief's cabinet, may help solve issues concerning community members (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004). Matšela (1990) asserts that it is important to remember that in the olden days, there was no formal schooling and *lebollo* was used as the main source of education for young males.

**Makhavane (virtues)**: The development of personal and communal traits is one of the objectives of *lebollo*. Hard work, respect for all, humility, perseverance, service to one's nation and patriotism are some of the traits that are nurtured at initiation schools (Letseka, 2013; Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004; Mgqolozana, 2009; Venter, 2013). Matobo *et al.* (2009) moreover assert that initiates are expected to acquire leadership skills, allegiance and dedication to their country, self-respect and self-discipline. Letseka (2013) likewise believes that indigenous education teaches good ethics, morals and values such as humanness, neighbourliness, responsibility and respect for self and others. Venter (2013) notes that physical suffering is used to cultivate endurance: through suffering, the initiate provides evidence of his capacity to endure difficult circumstances. Complications and death during male initiation is consequently seen as the normal course of life.

**Lenyora la tsebo (appreciation for knowledge)**: To facilitate the discovery of individual talents *inter alia* referred to under *Makhavane* above, each initiate is designated an instructor/mentor so that at the end of the schooling, the initiate and the instructor clearly understand where the individual's strengths and weaknesses lie (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004). This means that at the end of the training, each initiate must have an instructor who will ensure the initiate's talents are cultivated.

**Leruo (economic development)**: The initiates are taught and trained to be economically independent and self-sufficient, while at the same time leave room for uplifting community members who are in need (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004; Matobo *et al.*, 2009).

**Makunutu (national secrecy/confidentiality)**: According to Twala (2007) and Van Rooyen *et al.* (2006), initiation rites are characterised by some degree of secrecy, which varies according to the degree to which the groups of initiates are differentiated from the rest of the community. The ability of initiates to sustain confidentiality is seen as a powerful lever for the preservation of what counts as unique to a tribe. War strategies were previously seen as some of the national secrets that males had to keep. Traditional initiates furthermore associate with one another; they share their secrets and do not allow uninitiated people to interfere (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004).

**Bonatla (warriorship)**: Malisha *et al.* (2008) write that brave warriors are bred at initiation schools where they learn to live as 'real men' are supposed to. This can be seen in games, such as mock fighting for boys, which are used to prepare future adults for survival at war. Boys who come from initiation schools of some cultures engage for example in stick fighting, especially when new initiates are being incorporated into the community.

**Boqapi le bokheleke (the ability to compose/eloquence)**: Artistic abilities are held in high regard among Africans. During the period of initiation, initiates spend time at night practising and showing their artistic competencies, such as the ability to dance and compose

songs and poems. The songs that were sung and the poems that were recited by their forefathers are taught to the initiates (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004; Mohapi, 2007).

**Borapedi (spirituality):** Spirituality is the cornerstone of *lebollo* and in the lives of the initiates. Spiritual education serves as the initiate's introduction into the world of the 'unseen and supernatural'. It involves the teaching of, amongst other things, important rites, dances and ceremonies to please the gods, the significance of the careful observation of norms, customs and traditions in an attempt to give pleasure to and worship the ancestors and the adult's role in religious practices (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006). Through prayers and praises, initiates can invite their ancestors and God to be among them during the initiation process (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004). Maharasoia and Maharaswa (2004) emphasise that there is no tension between *lebollo* beliefs and other beliefs such as Christianity. To explain the harmony between *lebollo* and Christian beliefs, Maharasoia and Maharaswa (2004: 112) note that Basotho prayers call for an ancestral presence, which in turn, asks a blessing from God Almighty on their behalf. The Basotho prayer starts as follows: '*Modimo o motjha rapela wa kgale*' ('Young god praise/pray to the old God'). The young god refers to the ancestors and the old God refers to the Almighty.

**Kgokahayo ya sechaba le tlhompho ya maemo (national unity and respect for social structures):** Initiates have seen one another's best and worst aspects. Initiates can therefore assist one another to become their 'ultimate self'. It is however, according to Maharasoia and Maharaswa (2004: 112), also humbling to know that there are people who have seen one's weakest self. In essence, this suggests that lifelong friendships are created at the initiation schools and they are based on trust and respect. Traditionally, each initiation class had to have a prince among the initiates. The initiates were taught to respect the royal lineage, despite the weaknesses that the prince might show during initiation. The initiates' exposure to the strengths and weaknesses of the royal person "introduced a great sense of respect for social structures and an appreciation of the diversity of humankind". The initiates also take collective responsibility for whatever goes wrong at the initiation school because it is thought that the continued existence of society cannot be the responsibility of one person (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004). Initiates thus learn to honour the chief and the tribal customs; to have a high regard for those older than themselves; to appreciate the things that are important in the society and to respect and comply with tribal taboos (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006).

Based on the forgoing, it is clear that traditional initiation programmes aim at producing men who will be responsible citizens within their families, communities, societies and country. It may therefore be assumed that when an initiate returns to the formal schooling system, he would be an asset to the school and would strengthen the discipline structures at a school. However, according to Ntombana (2011: 632) there has been a 'general degeneration' in initiation practices. Ntombana (2011: 632) writes,

*The initiation school has become a place where criminal activities are committed and the practice of initiation no longer contributes to the building of society, but instead contributes to the moral decline of the communities concerned.*

It is thus important to get some insight into the processes and realities from the traditional initiation teachers themselves.

## 6. Research methodology

### Data gathering

The first author, who did the interviews, is an African male, who did not grow up in the region where the study took place and was never part of the cultural practice under investigation. He thus engaged with the interviewees as an 'outsider'. Towards understanding the current practices of *lebollo*, the first author conducted unstructured interviews with two traditional initiation teachers (*basuwe*) who were willing to talk to him. He gained access to the participants through gatekeepers who are in a position of trust with the participants. As the topic is not only sensitive but also very secretive, we had to take special care in terms of protecting the identities of the two participants. We undertook to refrain from putting any information in this work that could lead to the identification of the two men. Both participants are based in the Free State Province (South Africa) but one conducts initiations in the Kingdom of Lesotho, while the other runs an initiation school in the Free State. Both the traditional initiation teachers are between 50 and 60 years old. One has completed grade 5 while the other has completed grade 6. In terms of experience, one participant has initiated for 10 years, while the other has been practising for 12 years. The first author interviewed each of them at a site where they felt comfortable and safe. Each of them allowed the first author to record the interview after guaranteeing that their identities would be protected and any identifying information would be deleted from the data. The interviews were informal discussions. The first author was able to build a relationship of trust with the two initiates. When he interviewed them, he took the stance of the uninitiated and uninformed. He mainly listened to whatever information the initiators were willing to share. He respected their choice to refrain from responding to certain questions. The first author transcribed the interviews, and translated the sections, where Sesotho was used, into English.

### Data analysis

Content analysis was used to identify and summarise the content of the interviews. We were guided by Nieuwenhuis's (2007) systematic approach for qualitative content analysis in order to condense and group the content of the interviews. A coding frame was drawn up, also providing for verbatim reporting where applicable. We worked through the transcriptions independently and coded all the data. Thereafter, related codes were organised into categories. After we had completed our categorisation, we re-read the transcriptions to check whether we had captured all the important insights that had emerged from the data. From the categories, patterns and themes that could be linked to the research questions were identified and described. Thereafter, the three researchers entered into in-depth discussions. The first author led these discussions. He is fluent in English and in the other indigenous language used during the interview. Where we differed, his insights were paramount. The uncovering of emergent themes allowed us to analyse the information and juxtapose it with the literature. The following strategies were used to enhance trustworthiness and accuracy: the transcriptions and our preliminary findings were given to the interviewees for verification and accuracy. We gathered rich data. Interpretations are often substantiated by direct quotations from the data (Creswell, 2008).

### Ethical considerations

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, ethical issues were important. The protection of participants and their names were a priority in this study. Before the actual interviews took

place, the first author visited the participants and informed them about the intended research project and the importance thereof. The participants were given a letter asking for permission to conduct a study with them. They verbally agreed to take part but did not feel safe enough to sign the letters, in spite of our assurance that their identities would be protected. We thus had to be satisfied with their verbal permission in this regard. Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State's ethics office (UFS-EDU-2011-0034).

### Limitations of the study

It must be acknowledged at the outset that the insights gained in the study are partial. Firstly, literature on the topic is limited (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006). Secondly, the cultural practice of initiation is secret, with the result that it was difficult to find *basuwe* who were willing to be interviewed and thus the sample is very small. We also had to accept that the participants would offer only a selection of reality and would decide what to share and the manner in which to share it; in light of having to protect the secrecy of their practice (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006; Venter, 2013). Fourthly, this article is based on the views of Basotho traditional initiation teachers and thus does not represent the views of peers from other cultural groups such as Batswana, Tshivenda and amaXhosa. Lastly, all three authors of this document can be seen as a limiting factor in this study. We are educationists and not anthropologists and none of us are members of this particular cultural group. Thus, our ability to interpret the data is restricted. Nevertheless, we believe that even the incomplete understanding that was gained in this study can shed light on *basuwe*'s insights on the influence of *lebollo* on schoolboys' deviant behaviour in schools and thus be valuable to the education fraternity.

## 7. Findings

### Expected outcomes of initiation

The *basuwe* seem to agree that *lebollo* is the Basotho way of life, which has lasted for generations (e.g. "*lebollo is the Basotho culture, that is, the Basotho way of life*"). They also felt that *lebollo* is more than merely a tradition but also a place where the Basotho are taught the values of life. One of the *basuwe* said: "*Lebollo is where the Basotho are taught value in the mountain. It is the initial laws of our forefathers which are still being practised today*". These utterances encapsulate the essence of the outcomes for initiation schools as identified by Matšela (1990) and are discussed in our literature review.

A number of issues were raised when the participants were asked about how the *mokoloane* could be identified in the community. The *basuwe* agreed that an initiate should be identified through the dignity and respect he displays towards elders and his parents: "*The child has respect; he does not only see his biological parents as parent but he sees all the elders as his parents and he respect them, he respect them [emphasis by the participant] within the community*". According to one of the *basuwe* "*lebollo educate children of values such as botho [humanity], hlompho [respect], that is botho [humanity] as well as bokamoso [future]*".

It was suggested by one of the participants that *lebollo* may have a profoundly positive influence on boys by instilling in them respect towards their parents: "*At times a child leave his home already with no respect towards his parents; consequently, when the child comes back home we expect him to be a changed person knowing what a parent is*".



Findings from the literature study that the inculcation of moral values is an important outcome of *lebollo*, is supported by the interviewed *basuwe*. The insights by the *basuwe* that *lebollo* brings about a change in the behaviour of initiates, resonates well with Ntombana's (2011: 635) argument that unacceptable, anti-social behaviour is a "characteristic of boys and not men".

### Reasons for initiates' deviant behaviour

During the interviews, the *basuwe* suggested several reasons why traditional initiation practice is failing to produce virtuous and disciplined youths (cf. Matšela, 1990 and the literature review for the outcomes of *lebollo*, as well as Ntombana, 2011 for arguments supporting the disbandment of initiation schools).

#### *The youthfulness of some initiates*

Opposing views were put forward by the two *basuwe* in terms of the age boys should attend initiation school. However, both interviewees agreed that a person should at least be mature. One participant said that, "*they should be at the least 18 years old*" while the other said they "*should be at the least 20 years old and above*". The last quoted participant added that, "*according to the old tradition, a boy must attend initiation when he is 30 year because this age reflects maturity*". He added that at this age "*then it could be said you are going to take manhood, you are not a man yet*" [emphasis by the participant].

The literature also reveals a lack of uniformity regarding the age of initiation. It differs from culture to culture (Peltzer & Kanta, 2009; Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2006). Van Rooyen *et al.* (2006) write that initiation of the Southern Ndebele usually takes place between the ages of ten to twenty years. Ntombana's (2011) and Vincent's (2008) studies among Xhosas found that ritual circumcisions are most commonly performed on men ranging between the ages of 15 and 25. Venda, Pedi and Tsonga initiates can be as young as 9 years old (CRL Rights Commission, 2010). Provincial legislation regarding the age of admission also differs. For example, Limpopo's provincial legislature has set the age of admission at 10 years, while the Free State and Western Cape note that the maturity age for admission to initiation schools is 18 (CRL Rights Commission, 2010).

During the two interviews, it emerged that some boys younger than 18 often attend initiation schools. The participants mention that some of the younger boys attend initiation schools without the consent of their parents. This causes problems, as explained by one of the *basuwe*, because once they are there, in accordance with the rules of the initiation schools, they cannot be allowed to leave. Both *basuwe* stressed that the lack of physical strength and the emotional immaturity of these youngsters may result in physical and/or emotional harm because dropping out of initiation school is not an option and is seen as deplorable. Maharasoa and Maharaswa (2004: 110) write that indigenous communities ostracise boys who run away from initiation schools. *Mongala*, as the dropouts are referred to, are shunned and punished for "abandoning a worthy cause".

It furthermore seems as if too young learners do not reap any benefits from attending initiation schools. These initiates seem to return to their old, unacceptable and irresponsible way of life ("*you can see them in the street in gangs ... some drunk and other committing house breakings*"). Whilst not linking youthfulness with initiates' deviant behaviour, Ntombana's (2011) study exposes inappropriate behaviour.



### *Duration of the Lebollo*

The duration of the time initiates spend away at the initiation school may differ. Even though the interviewees are both from the Free State, they initiate at different places (one in the Free State and the other in Lesotho). It seems as if there is a difference relating to the duration of the process in the two areas. The participant practising in the Free State said that he and his initiates spend at least three months away while the Lesotho *basuwe* said he and his initiates spend at least seven months in the initiation school. The latter explain that the *“first two months is spent going to and fro [from the home to the mountain], then four months at the mountain not coming home – the last month we come home”*. The *basuwe* practising in Lesotho believes that the period initiates attend initiation schools in the Free State is too short: *“The period is too short because at this time you have not been given all the values and laws”*. Both mentioned that in the past, the *lebollo* took seven months. According to the literature (Maharasoia & Maharaswa, 2004; Malisha, Maharaj & Rogan, 2008) *lebollo* traditionally takes a period of six months in the Basotho culture and three months for Xhosa and Venda males. Van Rooyen *et al.* (2006: 28) argue that the duration of the isolation usually depends on the healing process after the ‘cutting’ (circumcision). The circumcision usually takes place on the second day at the initiation school while the healing takes place satisfactorily after two or three months.

### *Initiates claim that they are men and not boys*

Researchers (Malisha *et al.*, 2008; Mohapi, 2007; Mohlaloka, 2014) found that some initiates returning from the ‘bush’ are arrogant individuals who set themselves apart from uninitiated fellow-learners and formal schoolteachers. These initiates also believe that some school rules are not applicable to them because they are ‘men’. The two *basuwe* who took part in this study agreed that initiates are still children even after initiation (*“children who have attended traditional initiation school are children and they come back as children, there is no such thing as they are men”*). The participants however explained that while the community does not regard initiates as men, they are seen as men among their peers: *“Children who come back from a mountain come back as man, where, from his peers because he has peers who were initiated with him. They [were] initiated at the same time.”* Both participants are adamant that a boy only becomes a man when he has a family. It is only then, according to the participants, that he can be regarded as a man, not when he is still under the care of his parents.

According to the participants young initiates who call themselves adults cross the line. One of the participants declared that *“the cultural tradition does not say this children are men after initiation, they [children] cross the traditional law.”* According to this, participant initiates are taught that they should know that upon arrival from the initiation schools, they will still be sent on errands by their parents and that they are still children:

*Lebollo is a Basotho cultural tradition, because here you are taught Sesotho of our forefathers. We are taught games and things like respect, etc. So that when I arrive home I should know that I'm still a child, I'm sent on errands like any other child.*

Both participants indicated that the practice of initiates mocking uninitiated fellow-learners is unacceptable. One of them said: *“That is not supposed to happen because when a child has gone to the mountain is there for himself; they cannot mock others because they cannot make them to go to initiation.”*

Whereas the interviewees emphasise that young initiates are still children in the eyes of adults, the literature accentuates the elevated status of initiates after attending initiation school. Venter (2013: 142) opines, for example, that Xhosa boys will do almost anything in order to attend initiation school because, "if he participates and survives the initiation, he receives the sought-after state of manhood and is defined as a moral being with dignity and self-respect". Venter (2013: 145) finds that Xhosa boys who decide not to take part in traditional male initiation are at risk of "being sentenced to a perpetual state of boyhood". Barker and Ricardo (2005:9) emphasise that initiation schools reinforce the divide between men and boys, initiated and uninitiated and men and women.

#### *The initiates' unwillingness to embrace the teaching of their elders*

The participants blame initiates' misbehaviour squarely on the shoulders of the initiates themselves because they do not follow what they were taught at the initiation school ("*the problem is our children who bring this tradition into disrepute when they come back home; they do things that they are not supposed to do other than what we teach them*").

#### *The availability of alcohol*

Both participants mentioned that initiates who come back from initiation are guilty of alcohol abuse. They seemingly flock into taverns and compromise traditional values ("*now these children go to the taverns and these things – we do not agree with at the mountain. This kind of behaviour we strongly disagree with*"). Ntombana (2011) also alludes to initiates' alcohol abuse in his critique of initiation practices.

#### *The inappropriate conduct of parents*

One of the participants blames parents for the growing criticism against *lebollo*. According to this participant, parents buy alcohol for their children and drink with them upon their return home: "*We as parent we are at fault because when these children come from the mountain we give them money or buy liquor for them and drink with them*". Ultimately, these children disrespect their parents and parents blame initiation in return: "*Tomorrow this child becomes troublesome then the parents start blaming lebollo for his child bad behaviour. This is the reason why lebollo is given a bad name*".

#### *Suggestions on how to address initiates' deviant behaviour*

When the two participants were asked for suggestions on how to address negative learner behaviour that may be linked to *lebollo* (cf. Mohlaloka, 2014), both said that it should be easy to discipline initiates because they come from 'a place with order'. They both suggested close cooperation between schools' disciplinary committees and *basuwe*. It was mentioned by one of the participants that the *basuwe* might be able to give uninitiated formal schoolteachers insight into the underlying reasons for specific – often unacceptable – behaviour; for example, initiates' unwillingness to speak or claims that they are men and not boys. The participants furthermore stressed that the main role-players in a child's discipline should be the parents. It was pointed out by one of the participants that the relationship between *basuwe* and parents is very important. This participant accordingly suggested that parents should liaise with traditional leaders in pursuing the initiate's holistic and balanced upbringing.

## 8. Conclusion and recommendations

According to Matobo *et al.* (2009: 111) “among the Africans in South Africa a man who is not initiated and circumcised remain for the rest of his life a boy (*Nkwenkwe* – Xhosa; *moshemane* – Sotho and Tswana)”. A boy cannot attain any form of status within his family and community without undergoing initiation. Therefore, traditional initiation schools still remain an important part of the transition to adulthood in indigenous cultures. This article emphasises that *lebollo* is more than traditional male circumcision. The literature review has shown that *lebollo* aims to equip initiates with competencies that are necessary for adulthood. These competencies resonate with the formal South African curriculum that aims to equip learners “with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country” (Department of Basic Education, 2011: Section 1.3(b)).

The formal South African curriculum also states that it values Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Department of Basic Education, 2011: Section 1.3 [c]). While some of the competencies addressed by the traditional initiation schools are unique to these schools (e.g. the ability to uphold secrecy and warriorship) most are also explicitly or implicitly included in, for instance, the grade 10 life orientation curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2011: Section 3.1). The traditional initiation schools’ endeavour for physical and inner purity can, for example, be linked with the topic *recreation and emotional health* as well as *self-awareness, self-esteem and self-development* in life orientation while the personal and communal virtues of the traditional initiation school complements *social skills and responsibilities to participate in civic life* in life orientation. Traditional initiation schools address the boys’ spirituality, which can be juxtaposed to different belief systems in life orientation. A last example of the commonalities in formal and traditional initiations schools is the traditional initiation topic of respect for social structures and patriotism that aligns with *social skills and responsibilities to participate in civic life* in life orientation. These examples indicate that the formal school system and the traditional initiation schools intend to prepare boys to become mature and responsible adults. However, the behaviour by many learners in general and specifically the boys who return from traditional initiation schools are often in contrast with the above.

At present, it thus appears that *lebollo* has limited positive influence on learners’ behaviour. Mohlaloka *et al.* (2016: 715-718) found, *inter alia* that many of them act defiantly particularly towards female teachers and uninitiated male teachers in the formal schools and they engage in gangsterism. The views of the traditional initiation schoolteachers voiced in this paper provide insights in terms of possible reasons for the deviant behaviour of initiates. These reasons include the initiates youthfulness, inadequate time spent at the initiation school, the erroneous view of initiates that they are adults and should be treated as such, initiates’ unwillingness to embrace the teaching of their elders, substance abuse upon return and the inappropriate conduct of parents.

Comparative education works from the understanding that formal education systems are not isolated from the societal structures and influences and acknowledges the tension that the local-global dichotomy brings. Kubrow and Fossum (2007: 286) however applaud South Africa:

*The Indigenous Knowledge movement in postcolonial South Africa is but one example of how a democratic nation has sought to include local knowledge bases while simultaneously taking its place on the world stage.*

While schools should prepare learners to become global citizens, they should at the same time negotiate “community values at more local levels” and respect “diversities reflected in cultures and belief systems” (Kubrow & Fossum, 2007: 287). In the context of this study, it is thus important for formal schools to draw from the “local knowledge bases” that Kubrow and Fossum is mentioning above by forming partnerships with traditional schools and build harmony between the two. We caution role-players to take heed of the warning by Fox (2003: 142) that communication between different cultures is significantly influenced by the “relative positions of perceived powers of the speakers” and thus in order to find solutions, the formal school sector should not position themselves as the powerful during such communication. Close cooperation between formal schools’ disciplinary committees and *basuwe*, as well as between *basuwe* and parents is paramount in addressing initiates’ deviant behaviour.

By identifying the parents of learners who attended traditional initiation and by providing them with the necessary understanding of what the formal and traditional schools expect, the situation can possibly improve to minimise the number of learners who attend initiation schools at too young an age and initiates’ alcohol abuse, among other things. Consequently, this will also reduce deviant behaviour in formal schools among initiates. In the broader context of other countries and communities, the formal school sector should take note of the various cultures of the learners in their schools as part of the societal factors that influence education and involve parents and cultural leaders in dealing with learner behaviour.

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