

A History of the Molemas, African Notables in South Africa, 1880s to 1920s

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Short abstract

This thesis is a family history of Silas Molema and his three children from the late 1880s to the late 1920s. The Molemas were a family of devout Methodists and educated chiefs in Mafikeng north of British Bechuanaland (part of the Cape colony in 1895) but they held extensive landholdings across the border in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The thesis explores education, landholding and political office as strategies through which the Molemas attempted to maintain their position of class, status and power. Chiefs perceived formal annexation by Britain in 1885 also as opportunity to pursue greater self-determination, preserve the institutions of chiefly rule, and sustain respectable livelihoods. These aspirations had come to be experienced and understood as *sechuana*, which was a fluid reconstruction of tradition that helped Molemas and other Bechuana notables straddle incongruous cultural spheres along a racially and ethnically diverse colonial frontier. The thesis argues that nationhood was a key identification through which Molemas and other educated Bechuana saw themselves, and considers why they imagined their nation *within* the British Empire. The thesis also points to the various historical transformations and private entanglements that enmeshed various conceptions of nationhood into the everyday experience of the family as an emotive and socialising institution. These sentiments of nationhood profoundly shaped this family's self-understanding, and mediated the choices children made about work, marriage and other significant relationships. The challenge to transfer inherited privilege across generations shaped identities, intersected with the reconfiguration of the local political economy, and impinged upon structural transformations in southern Africa.

Long abstract

This thesis is a family history of Silas Molema and three of his children from the 1880s until the 1920s. The Molemas were a family of devout Methodists and educated chiefs in Mafikeng north of British Bechuanaland (part of the Cape colony in 1895) but held extensive landholdings across the border in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, only 30 miles from Mafikeng. By the close of the 1880s, Silas Molema had emerged as the owner of a large wagon business, an influential sub-chief, and a large landlord. There exists an unusually rich depository of family papers and other records that enable a reconstruction of their family as an emotive sphere that moulded its members, and mediated their relationships with other institutions. The study investigates how the Molemas attempted to maintain their position of class, power and status mainly through education, political office and landholding. This thesis analyses the intersections between strategies of everyday living and how people imagined themselves. It considers the various tensions between the language through which individuals describe their identities and experiences, and how they actually live. It also reveals how notions of ‘family’ and ‘nation’ were mutually reinforcing, and shaped the course of everyday life in Silas Molema’s home as well as the private and public roles his children aspired towards.

Chapter 1 argues that northern Bechuana chiefs largely perceived formal annexation by Britain in 1885 as opportunity to pursue greater self-determination, preserve the institutions of chiefly rule, and sustain respectable livelihoods. Annexation quelled protracted wars against European conquest and established secure territorial boundaries, enabling various chiefs to carve their own political projects on the social landscape, and compete for power. Protestantism had encouraged the establishment of ecclesiastical statehoods in Bechuanaland from the mid-nineteenth century. It had also facilitated Christianised and literate Bechuanas’ self-imagination as a ‘nation’ by the turn of the twentieth century. Everyday life was collectively understood and experienced by Molema and his educated counterparts as *sechuana*. This was

a fluid reconstruction of tradition which permeated the imagination of nationhood, helping them to carve ambivalent niches in between incongruous cultural spheres along a racially and ethnically diverse colonial frontier. Various aspects of European modes of living were being selectively integrated into older patterns of everyday existence. Chiefs reconstructed tradition to strengthen the workings of the political economy, resolve various crises in the existing pathways of accumulation, and lend resilience to institutions of chiefly rule and patriarchy.

However, chiefs were finding it increasingly difficult to sponsor their subjects' aspirations. Respectability within *sechuana* had come to include formal education, white-collar occupations, and many western commodities. The crisis reached its peak at the turn of the twentieth century, as the bulk of mission educated Bechuana were absorbed into the countryside, rather than by surrounding towns and cities. At this time, educated Bechuana expressed nationalist sentiment in Silas Molema's newspaper *Koranta ea Bechuana* (1901-4), urging the nation to reawaken along the lines of 'progress' (*coelo-pele*). Paradoxically, the nation was imagined *within* the British Empire. As more Africans sought formal schooling, educated Bechuana perceived a threat of meritocracy that pushed their conception of nationhood deeper into the imperial frame. It was hoped that a powerful Empire could assist chiefs to mitigate declining white-collar prospects and a loss of respectability, and thus encourage general compliance under chiefly and patriarchal authority. The opportunities open to women to leave homesteads and seek paid work were particularly unsettling for educated men. Silas Molema and his family were in the forefront of these nationalist sentiments, not least because they considered themselves divinely ordained by God to be leaders of the nation. The thesis argues that Molemas' commitment to consolidate and defend the nation was also an important strategy to preserve inherited privilege in a context where chiefly rule could no longer be taken for granted. It involved many moments of sacrifice but was in itself a key investment into the family's survival and future fortunes.

Though Molema and other notables controlled extensive landholdings, exploiting marked opportunities for cattle ranching and trade in grain was largely constrained by political imperatives. The way in which notables toed a delicate balance between private accumulation and political power suggests that constraints to the development of African capitalist farming in southern Africa were largely situated within Africans' political economies, and did not merely derive from the dynamics of European conquest and colonial rule. Nevertheless, decades of acculturation and the exchange of various practices and vocabularies around landholding and work enabled Molemas and other notables some routes through which these constraints on accumulation could be circumnavigated. Chapter 2 explores these dynamics and reveals that Molema and other notables were rent-extracting elites, exploiting a racially and ethnically diverse tenantry, including many European farmers. Most of the tenants were African subjects themselves. The institution of 'contract' through which notables extracted rents from those considered as 'foreigners' was grafted onto existing obligations through which Africans made payments to notables in culturally appropriate ways. Notables accumulated cash and especially 'improvements' such as dams, cottages, stables and windmills from European tenants. There were also sharecroppers, indentured servants and wage labourers of various skin colour, language or ethnic identifications, who were also considered 'foreign'. Notables exploited them for rents and labour. These relationships preserved the pattern of landholding that legitimated and distributed chiefly power amongst Africans throughout the polity, but also significantly increased the margin of notables' profits on the land.

Whilst African landlordism over European tenants continued for many years in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, it was challenged by European settlers in the Cape colony. The existence of such a pattern of tenancy subverted the hierarchy of race that underpinned the terms of peace following the South African War. From 1904, Molema and his son Sebopioa Molema were in the forefront of the chieftaincy's resistance against repeated attempts by

European settlers and the Native Affairs Department (NAD) to do away with the pattern of tenancy in the reserve. This local struggle illuminates how the NAD sought to introduce territorial segregation after Unification in 1910. The chapter argues that the NAD was reluctant to implement a blanket approach, opting rather to pay attention to regional dynamics, and purchase the cooperation of Africans. From 1904 until 1913 the chieftaincy resisted segregation and defended its right to self-determination through the colonial courts, and, for an even longer period, through the structures of the South African Native National Congress. Chapter 2 discusses how their resistance reached the Supreme Court of Appeal during a moment of fragile cohesion in the Union government at the end of 1912, and argues that the case tilted the balance of forces towards the Natives Land Act of 1913. By then however the NAD's concentrated efforts to implement segregation in the reserve had already undermined Molema and other notables' positions as sub-chiefs and landlords.

Chapter 3 is an exploration of everyday life on Molema's farm Mabete in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. It focuses on the intricate relationships between an African landlord, his European tenants and his African subjects on the farm. Ambivalent nodes of acculturation and mutual cooperation in the social landscape are evident, and were constructed through an affective language of empathy and mutual cooperation. The obligations of 'contract', which lease agreements stipulated, were taken very seriously, yet landlords and tenants claimed to live as 'brothers' and members of one Christian family. Despite the prevalence of racial stereotyping, the harshness of the terrain in the northern hinterlands, and the degree of insecurity households experienced encouraged interdependence. Nevertheless there were tensions between European tenants who defended private property and African peasants who frequently resisted it. The tide of landless European settlers' migration into these northern hinterlands ebbed in the 1920s, but by then African peasants' cash rents to notables were becoming institutionalised.

The thesis considers formal schooling as another route through which Molema and other notables attempted to generate wealth, given fetters against private accumulation in their agrarian economy. Chapter 4 considers how education structured the lives and opportunities of three Molema siblings. It argues that private impulses and ideals of nationhood shaped children's decisions about work and intimate relationships at critical stages of their lives. Children's understanding of the nation and their roles in it shaped their aspirations and influenced their choices at critical moments in their lives. These dynamics splintered dynastic families like Molemas along different but overlapping trajectories of class and status. Whilst some members of the family became highly successful, many more slipped into irregular low paying jobs and sometimes complete deprivation. In addition to economic vulnerability, young notables were also plagued by alcoholism in the 1910s and 1920s.

The chapter argues further that children's understanding of the nation was steeped in the imaginations of plural ethnic nationalisms in southern Africa. The same religious influences that shaped nationhood in Bechuanas' hinterlands in the nineteenth century encouraged similar sentiments elsewhere in the countryside, though the first Christians in other areas were largely not chiefs. By the 1910s reserves were considered as landscapes of progress and cultural flourish, each home to a particular ethnic nation. A national newspaper, cultural productions in vernacular languages, modern agricultural techniques, trade and crafts, school and churches, roads and dams – all of these indicated a successful nation and a 'progressive' reserve. An analysis of two generations of Molemas' participation in its structures reveals that the South African Native National Congress was more a platform through which various representatives of these various ethnic nations brought attention to their particular concerns and less a movement mobilising for what the historiography conceives of as 'broad based *African* nationalism'. These plural nationalisms were also situated in educated Africans' anxieties about declining white-collar opportunities. Although the 1920s saw a closer conceptualisation

between nation and race (rather than ethnicity), reserves remained part of the political imagination within the Congress family.

The involvement of Molema's sons in the Native Advisory Council of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the 1920s shaped how Bechuana notables collaborated with the colonial government to improve reserves through so-called 'tribal treasuries'. Chiefs provided some opportunity for educated subjects and supported a vulnerable peasantry by investing in their reserves. Chiefs also negotiated themselves into the structures of 'native administration', sowing seeds of enduring political ramifications. The emergence of Botswana as a democracy under chiefly and patriarchal authority has its genesis in this period. Noblewomen's evangelical and welfare activities through Seventh Day Adventism from the 1930s helped to encourage ordinary people's loyalty to chiefs.

The thesis highlights the opportunities Empire presented in its various hues of informality in the nineteenth century, but how these opportunities later proved jarringly at odds with the imperatives of formal Empire, settler power in South Africa and 'indirect rule' in Botswana. It argues that the challenge to transfer inherited privilege across generations shaped identities, intersected with the reconfiguration of the local political economy, and impinged upon structural transformations in southern Africa.

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List of abbreviations

Divisional Council of Mafeking – DVC

Native Advisory Council of the Bechuanaland Protectorate – NAC

Native Affairs Department – NAD

South African Native National Congress – SANNC

Note on the use of names

*It is only in the Introduction and the Conclusion that Silas Molema is referred to by his surname, 'Molema'. As many members of the Molema family appear in the thesis, they are each generally referred to by their first names to avoid confusion.

*The thesis refers to the town of Mafikeng, but European settlers spelt it as Mafeking. Although the latter spelling was sometimes used by Africans, they generally spelt and pronounced it as Mafikeng, meaning 'place of rocks'. Unless it appears as such in a direct quotation, or is being used with reference to the Divisional Council of Mafeking, the thesis makes use of Mafikeng.

Introduction

This thesis is a family biography of Silas Molema and three of his children, from the late 1880s to the late 1920s. They were a family of African chiefs, but educated and devout Methodists. Their main residence was in Mafikeng, in the north of British Bechuanaland, which became part of the Cape Colony in 1895, whilst some of their landholdings lay 30 miles across the border in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. (Map 1) This cross-border polity was one of a conglomerate of Bechuana chiefdoms in southern Africa. From the 1880s Molema amassed significant wealth as an owner of a large wagon business, who controlled extensive landholdings. Although he was not the polity's paramount chief, Molema's position as the most influential chief along the Molopo basin was uncontested. Simultaneously he sponsored the education of his children in universities in Britain and the United States of America. Though Molema had other children, I focus on his two sons Sebopioa and Modiri, and his daughter Harriet, who matured into adulthood in his lifetime, making it possible to explore intergenerational dynamics. Blood ties were certainly not the only criterion to become a son or a daughter. Whilst Sebopioa was biologically Molema's nephew, Molema was not involved with the children of his second marriage, a levirate arrangement, as a father.

Despite its use of concepts like 'trajectory' or 'journey', this study is premised on the understanding that lives are characterised by discontinuity, arbitrariness and much unpredictability. Nevertheless, people often talk about their lives as coherent and purposeful.¹ Certainly this is how Molemas spoke about their own lives in their dense archival record. Furthermore, the project of Empire was often incoherent, as statesmen tried to hold a spiralling web of interests and conjunctures under one imperial thumb. The response of colonial subjects,

¹ P. Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', in Paul du Gay et al (eds.), *Identity: A Reader* (London, 2008), 301.

amongst various other segments of the Empire, was similarly disjointed. This messiness is typical of social practice in general, yet individuals gloss their behaviour with various discourses that iron out arbitrariness. Individuals' descriptions of what they do are akin to a map resting open on a table but one rarely used. Rather, they follow those 'beaten tracks', their tried and tested pathways, to navigate changing circumstances whilst improvising along the way. This embodied, typically unspoken common sense is 'practical reason'.² For British statesmen such practical reason produced a 'grammar', following Gallagher and Robinson, which historians have to learn in order to 'disentangle the continuities of purpose from the play of circumstances and personalities'.³ This thesis adopts this conceptual frame to explore how Molemas experienced European expansion and colonial rule in southern Africa and how their everyday lives intersected with historical transformations along this colonial frontier.

Molemas' records are most voluminous along the themes of education, landholding and political office. The chapters that follow tease out the relationship between these themes as everyday practices, as well as the competing ideas that gave them meaning. The chapters are a historical exploration on timeless questions around how calculations of interest are intimately linked with a sense of who people understand themselves to be. Choosing a profession, finding a suitable spouse or even playing the trumpet were some of the countless strategies through which the family tried to maintain their position of class, power and status over the half century covered in this thesis. But these manoeuvres were also how Molema men understood themselves as leaders of their families and their nation. These two entities, 'family' and 'nation', were separated often by a permeable boundary, as they shaped and reinforced each other. The thesis explores how these two categories were constructed through very unstable

² P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, 1980), p. 35; *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford, 1998).

³ J. Gallagher and R. Robinson with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1983), xx.

boundaries of race, ethnicity and language. Who and how one qualified as a member of the family, or belonged to the nation, were tacitly derived from hierarchies of labour, authority and respectability in a deeply patriarchal society. Where these boundaries lay, and what they meant, were questions that could be as divisive between fathers and sons as they were between African chiefs and the colonial government.

My approach demonstrates how the history of an elite African family can be a valuable tool for exploring nationhood and political community. In his study of the ‘decline and fall’ of the aristocracy in Britain from the 1870s, Cannadine relegates family history to a ‘private history of the gentry and the grandes’ which is ‘concerned with the realm of aristocratic emotions, with states of feeling, with sex, marriage and child-rearing, [and] upper-class style’.⁴ It is difficult to imagine how Cannadine conceived of a ‘private history’ given that the very nature of our shared discipline is to identify the locomotive of social change. The wheels of history are never hinged on the private innovations of men and women’s lives, but where these meet the dynamics of their society. The themes Cannadine describes have relevance in their own right but I argue that Molemas’ history can only be understood by analysing mediations between the private domain and the public realm. In Molemas’ case, the emotive spheres of home and family were directly implicated in how inherited privilege was transferred and transmuted across two generations. Moreover, the very consistency of family names over time lends important coherence and purposefulness to the messiness of everyday living.⁵ In this case, Molemas came to associate their name with a divine ‘calling’ to be custodians of the nation. This self-image coloured how they perceived the contingency of their territory’s formal

⁴ D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1996), 7.

⁵ Bourdieu, ‘The Biographical Illusion’, 301-5.

colonisation by the British government in 1885, and its ceding it to the Cape government a decade later.

Although some influential European settlers like Cecil Rhodes lobbied hard for its annexation, the imperial government took over Bechuanaland very reluctantly. British expansion in Africa in the late nineteenth century was driven largely by the circumstances at play in the periphery, often ones beyond the imperial government's control. This continued to be the case as the British, and later the Cape and Union governments, ruled Mafikeng. In the particular instance of Bechuanaland, annexation was largely an urgent strategy to block any possible railway links between Kruger's republic and Bismarck's new acquisition along the coast of today's Namibia. It ensured Britain remained a dominant influence in southern Africa, for economic but primarily strategic reasons. Whether or not this was the case, at the time of Bechuanaland's formal annexation, the Empire perceived itself to be vulnerable in southern Africa.⁶ Yet very little of these feelings of insecurity are reflected in the only focused scholarly analysis of the colonisation of Molema's people. Rather, Shillington's account is a bold narrative of Bechuanas' resistance and their heroic efforts to avoid being swept away by a continuous and ever strengthening current of 'colonisation'.⁷

This thesis, on the contrary, argues that although Bechuana resisted conquest during protracted wars with Europeans, formal Empire was largely received with optimism by calculating colonial subjects. British 'protection' and security on land was one key reason why annexation was welcomed, but Africans perceived other interests also. In mapping and establishing secure territorial boundaries and warding off European speculators and

⁶ Robinson and Gallagher with Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, xx, 25, 201-53.

⁷K. Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870-1900* (Braamfontein, 1985).

mercenaries, formal colonisation also created room for ruling elites to build what they deemed to be a 'progressive' nation (*morafe*), and compete for power. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Protestantism and literacy allowed Bechuana chiefs, who were the first African evangelists among their people, to take hold of the ideological tools that build states and construct nations. As Hastings has argued, the mythology of nationhood required the Biblical narrative of a 'peculiar people', and the dissemination of this idea in indigenous languages, alongside the production of other texts also in these languages.⁸ In the event that chiefs were not converted or literate, like the old paramount Chief Montsioa in Mafikeng, they nonetheless had influential educated advisors like Molemas who were in this case often *de facto* rulers. Though he mentions the global constraints that forced the imperial government to annex Mafikeng and other Bechuana chiefdoms, Shillington does not consider how the same imperial vulnerabilities that necessitated annexation made for an Empire hurried in negotiation, and ready for compromise.

Rather than a pitiless last nail on the coffin of autonomy, this moment of British annexation presented hope to realise significant self-determination. In not separating the designs and vulnerabilities of the British government from the interests of European settlers who wanted conquest, Shillington imposes an all-encompassing notion of 'colonisation'. He also makes little of the different ways in which the British government handled the more southern chiefdoms that had been completely destabilised by the time of annexation, and the northern kingdom like Mafikeng which were still relatively solid. This leaves only resistance, followed by resigned collaboration, as the only possible African responses. Shillington may have been limited by his sources, a problem he notes in his biography of the 'resistance hero',

⁸ A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2001).

Chief Lukas Jantjie, further south of Mafikeng.⁹ Indeed there are few records illuminating African chiefs' thinking at the moment of formal annexation apart from what was reported by or through missionaries and government officials. Perhaps these discussions went undocumented. Molema's family archive does however offer an alternative viewpoint. Chapter 1 presents a reconstruction of family life in a household of African rulers in Mafikeng, whose understanding of themselves shaped how they thought of power and rule. In addition to the family papers, narratives from Molema's newspaper *Koranta ea Bechuana* (1901-4) offer a glimpse into the internal dialogue between members of a political community. Editorials and letters to *Koranta* express concerns that are not so easily discernible in chiefs' correspondence and their dialogue with European missionaries and colonial officials. What emerges is that educated Bechuana's 'nationhood' was both ideologically and economically inseparable from Empire. The Empire was essential if educated Africans were to continue fashioning an 'indigenous' and quintessentially African subjectivity (*sechuana*) despite lifestyles that closely resembled those of their European counterparts.

Nationhood was a self-imagination situated in what educated Bechuana, both chiefs and commoners, perceived as a threat of meritocracy. The lower classes were learning how to read and write, while women had greater opportunities to earn independent livelihoods. Under these circumstances, aspiration welded educated Bechuana and their chiefly patrons into the imperial frame. Molemas were among the respectable and educated families attempting to maintain their position of class, status and power in this context, with limited control over the future. As Padgett and Ansell argue, everyday strategies to establish families' power and prestige can have profound historical consequences in the public as well as private sphere. Through an account of the rise of the Medici family in early 15th century Florence, they

⁹ K. Shillington, *Luka Jantjie: Resistance Hero of the South African Frontier* (London, 2011).

demonstrate how multiple, unplanned decisions and relationships over the course of families' lifespans are behind the emergence of social structures and the consolidation of institutions. Padgett and Ansell's own conceptual bridge between these fluid decisions and informal relationships on the one hand, and the more concrete structures on the other, is family history. The old Florentine oligarchy thought that marrying their daughters to families beyond their own neighbourhood was to compromise status. The unintended consequence was that they were unable to square themselves with their opponents who had diversified marriage and other ties across the city. In trying to maintain status through respectable marriages, the Florentine elite inadvertently divorced themselves from new networks of power. How individuals 'maintain multiple lines of play' in order to accumulate wealth and status may have profound structural influences. To trace these, as Padgett and Ansell argue, we must

penetrate beneath the veneer of informal institutions, groups and goals down to the substrata of people's actual lives.' Ambiguity and heterogeneity, not planning and self-interest are the raw materials of which powerful states and persons are constructed.¹⁰

For the Molemas, successful pursuit of these strategies often meant straddling incongruous ideals. Amassing wealth from land presented a political liability because Molemas were notables. They were part of a class of ruling families in Mafikeng who were related and intermarried, and controlled vast landholdings. Notwithstanding deep rivalries between them, these families typically acted in concert to preserve chiefly rule and the institutions of inherited privilege. They carried a sense of chiefly distinction and expected deference from commoners and even many Europeans. Their everyday roles in distributing the vast landholdings amongst commoners and adjudicating cases legitimated their political power. The pattern of settlement on the land, as Chapter 2 argues, stabilised and legitimated chiefly power but severely curtailed

¹⁰ J. Padgett and C. Ansell, 'Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400 – 1434', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 6 (1993), 1259

private accumulation. Exploiting their large landholdings for cattle ranching (to which the terrain was well suited) and accessing other markets for agricultural produce had to be weighed against political imperatives.

This colonial world, we much remember, was still cocooned within types of community Europe had been shedding centuries before, and finally broke loose during its epochal age of revolution from the 1780s until the 1840s. If the mid-nineteenth century, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, was the age of capital, it was also, institutionally speaking, the full dawn of the era of 'contract'.¹¹ It was much less so in the colonial setting however. Though modern bureaucracies and technologies quickly reached remote areas like the northern Cape colony, which were incorporated into a global market, they weakened familiar patterns of power and self-understanding only tenuously. Rather than a complete metamorphosis towards dispositions of 'contract', older sensibilities endured but were improvised. Although the power of 'contract' in Europe was never total, it helped to release its nobility from unspoken obligations of reciprocity, patronage and other intimate ties of distribution. In this colonial setting, such dissolution was considerably stymied by dispositions whose livelihoods and rhythm of life continued to depend on just such exchanges, even while the cash nexus widened. These countryside sensibilities shaped how Molemas and other notables were hindered from accumulating wealth through profitable farming. Instead they established themselves rent-extracting elites.

If Chapter 1 captures the imagination of nationhood, Chapter 2 explores the actual materiality of the nation. British rule presented literate notables with a new route to accumulate wealth through land with minimum political consequence. As soon as Britain established

¹¹ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (London, 1995), 43-62.

secure boundaries Molema and other notables emerged as a class of African landlords with a diverse tenantry, including black and white tenants. The earliest record of a lease agreement between Molema and European tenants was generated in the late 1880s. These written contracts with Europeans were grafted onto traditional patterns of tenancy in the political economy. Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 argues, Africans were the main body of tenants. Their payments were extracted in culturally appropriate ways that legitimated and stabilised chiefly rule, but constrained landlords' private accumulation. Although imagined as self-reliant, the nation increasingly depended on various categories of 'natives' and 'foreigners' to participate in the agrarian economy. Belonging to the nation meant fitting into overlapping hierarchies of patriarchy and economic relationships as a landlord, tenant, sharecropper, servant or wage labourer. The wide range of skin colour, ethnicity and language in the polity encouraged cultural osmosis, but also enabled various categories of 'foreignness' through which exploitation was possible. European tenants for example, paid the heftiest rents through extensive infrastructural developments and incurred the most risk. Other arrangements were more consistent along a broad spectrum of skin-colour and ethnicity. The construction of nationhood in this case did not facilitate modern capitalist enterprise, contrary to Hobsbawm's conceptualisation elsewhere, but preserved traditional institutions in an agrarian economy.¹²

Self-determination was meaningless without this web of economic relationships. Such a nation, where African landlords exploited European tenants, however blighted claims of white supremacy, which was the consensus that ended the South African War (1899-1902). The consequence was that the tide which Mafikeng's nobility had perceived as opportunity in the 1880s, started to engulf them as soon as hostilities ended in that portion of the cross-border polity that lay in the Cape Colony. This was something neither they nor some of the agents of

¹² E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1992).

Empire could have anticipated. Molema, his son Sebopioa and their kinsman Solomon Plaatje were central protagonists in this story of protracted resistance against attempts by European settlers and the Native Administration Department to establish the reserve as an Africans-only domain. The resistance was waged through the colonial courts and the platform of the South African Native National Congress. Chapter 2 is limited to the legal battle, and its profound but unintended consequences. It argues that when the chieftaincy's resistance reached the Supreme Court of Appeal in 1912, and its details were circulated in the European press, it precipitated a tilt in the complex balance of political forces in the new Union government towards a bill of territorial segregation – the Natives Land Act of 1913. Amongst other implications, the Act restricted Africans' ownership of land to little more than the reserves they already occupied. They could occupy land in areas designated European only if under white employ.

The Act certainly grew out of the long and continuous history of racial separation in the nineteenth century. This included the reconstitution of African societies under various economic impulses and how discourses about race and cultural difference found legitimation in popular ideas about life and community.¹³ Territorial segregation also presented some autonomy to conquered colonial subjects. Nevertheless there were peculiarities about this land bill. It was proposed not by the radical conservatives, but by moderate 'friends of the Natives'. It was passed in an extremely hasty manner, even bypassing normal parliamentary procedure. This chapter points to how the timing of the Supreme Court of Appeal hearing coincided with a moment of deep fracture in the Union government. This was when General Barry Hertzog was ousted from the government at the end of 1912, and intensified his efforts to mobilise a conservative and republican constituency. The uncertainty surrounding the judgment, at least

¹³ W. Beinart and S. Dubow, 'The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid', in W. Beinart and S. Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London, 1995), 1-24.

as the Native Affairs Department perceived circumstances, could cost the Union government the confidence of European settlers, especially in the northern Cape, and strengthen the hand of the radical conservatives.

Despite the Act, African settlement on white-owned land actually increased up to the 1950s and persists to this day.¹⁴ For Lacey, this discrepancy is proof that the Act was not intended for the interests of European farming, but those of mining.¹⁵ Keegan, on the other hand, argues that the Act was designed only as ‘catharses’ to confirm white supremacy in the countryside, so that when the agrarian economy was ready for capitalist production in the mid-twentieth century, black-sharecroppers could be readily exploited as waged labour.¹⁶ However, the unfolding of events in Mafikeng on the eve of the Act suggests that far from being ‘symbolic’, the act sought to solve practical and urgent problems. For the northern Cape, this included the Department of Native Affairs’ (NAD) attempts to resolve the problem of African landlordism over Europeans. As Dubow has argued, the NAD saw itself as responsible for ‘holding a just balance between white and black’.¹⁷ This chapter argues that in this case, the NAD wished to ‘buy in’ African notables into segregation, using its officials’ ‘personalised relations of authority’ on the ground. It illuminates how the NAD wished to cast segregation across the Union as a wide but differentiated net, drawing Africans into some parts, spewing them or even Europeans out in other contexts.

¹⁴ T. Matsetela, ‘The Life Story of Nkgono Mma-Pooe: Aspects of Sharecropping and Proletarianisation in the Northern Orange Free State, 1890 – 1930’, in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (Harlow, 1982), 212– 237.; C. Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁵ M. Lacey, *Working for Boroko: The Origins of a Coercive Labour System in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1981).

¹⁶ T. Keegan, ‘Crisis and Catharsis in the Development of Capitalism in South Africa,’ *African Affairs*, 84, 336. (1985), 371-398.

¹⁷ S. Dubow, ‘Holding ‘a just balance between white and black’: The Native Affairs Department in South Africa c. 1920-33’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2 (1986), 217-239.

Through segregationist measures, the NAD tried to hammer the diversity of the reserve's population into a single ethnic and racial category under one paramount chief. Put differently, it was actively constructing a 'tribe'. These measures had significant consequences in the reserve, and not all of them were intended. Firstly, the NAD's interpretation of 'customary law' undermined notables' judicial roles, and limited the jurisdiction of the chieftaincy to try cases. Secondly, the hemorrhage of European rents from the reserve lent a severe blow to notables' livelihoods. Thirdly, notables' increased vulnerability imposed greater pressure on rural livelihoods, and encouraged some Africans within the polity towards narrower ethnic identities. This subsequently curtailed the jurisdiction of chiefs over a significant proportion of the reserve's population. Molemas spearheaded the chieftaincy's largely unsuccessful resistance to these challenges to power. As a combination of these factors and other economic transformations in the countryside, Molema and other notables' positions as landlords and sub-chiefs in the Cape reserve were undermined by the 1920s.

However, on the other side of the border, in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the frontier remained open. Chapter 3 explores everyday life on these farmlands. The coexistence of a handful of African absentee landlords, communities of African peasant households and European tenants may have been unusual in southern Africa at this time. An exploration of these relationships reveals ambivalent nodes of acculturation and mutual cooperation in the social landscape, and the affective language through which they were constructed. The obligations of 'contract', which lease agreements stipulated, were taken very seriously, yet landlords and tenants claimed to live as 'brothers' and members of one Christian family. European tenants, traders, artisans and even professionals hired Africans as herders, farmworkers, domestic servants, shop assistants and so on. But, especially lower down the rungs of European socio-economic status, some Europeans were also trading partners, spouses

and the intimate friends of Africans. Whilst some Europeans were detested by their African neighbours, others were loved. Prevailing discourses of white supremacy and racial segregation were reflected in actual lives but not always consistently, as people tried to make ends meet in a difficult terrain. European tenants relied upon the tenets of private property to accumulate profits. They tried to enforce trespassing laws, which were contrary to the practices of African peasants. Isolated incidents of popular resistance were the outcome. Over time, African subjects were required by ‘law’ to pay stipulated rent monies to notables in cash annually, but ultimately chiefs had to navigate a fine balance between political obligation and private accumulation. As the tide of European settlers streaming into these northern hinterlands receded in the 1920s, so too the opportunities for African landlords to exploit them diminished.

Molema invested in professional education, especially sons’ university studies abroad. But education was not, as Bundy has argued, a last resort for aspirant Africans whose prosperity on the land was cut short by colonial disenfranchisement.¹⁸ Rather like exactions of cash and infrastructural rents on ‘foreigners’, schooling gave notables yet another path out of the quagmire of communal ties that limited profitability on land. Salaries in an open and competitive professional market did not have to be redistributed. How education structured the lives of Molema’s three children is the subject of Chapter 4. It argues that both private impulses and ideals of nationhood shaped children’s decisions about work and intimate relationships at critical stages of their lives. The coalface of material survival was family life, where in the first place, resources were unevenly distributed. Family dynamics shaped children’s aspirations and achievements. These dynamics splintered dynastic families like Molema along different but overlapping trajectories of class and status during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The transfer of inherited privilege was far more variegated than the trajectory of

¹⁸ C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, (London, 1988), 138, 140 and 160.

decline and fall, which Cannadine suggests of the British aristocracy.¹⁹ Spectacular success coexisted with heart wrenching deprivation. The intensified piousness of noblewomen as new converts of Seventh Day Adventism in the 1930s was in part their way of responding to the scourge of alcoholism that ravaged educated notables' sons in Mafikeng in the 1910s and 1920s.

The chapter argues further that children's understanding of the nation and their roles in it were steeped in the imaginations of plural ethnic nationalisms that characterised their times. Hughes has described the South African Native National Congress as articulating a 'broad based *African* nationalism'. Her biography of its first president, John Dube, attempts to explain why he was side-lined from Congress in 1918, and forced to mobilise a 'narrowly based Zulu nationalism' in the countryside.²⁰ This chapter draws from two generations of Molema's involvement in the organisation and argues that Congress was, from its founding in 1912 until well into the 1920s, less a 'broad' nationalist organisation and more a platform of mutual cooperation towards multiple and highly ambiguous and plural ethnic nationalisms. The word 'national' as it stood in the name of Congress was, to borrow Ranger's conceptual metaphor, one of 'a series of empty boxes with bounded walls but without contents.'²¹ Hughes' notion of a 'broad based African nationalism', to the extent that it existed, was on the margins of Congress politics at the time. This is not to suggest that Congressmen never thought of or held such ideals, but rather that the Congress platform was not a natural home for pursuing such objectives. Moreover, though Molema was a founding member of the SANNC, he did not consider himself a 'nationalist'. Neither did Plaatje. On the contrary, they abhorred 'the

¹⁹ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*.

²⁰ H. Hughes, 'Dialectical Dance: Exploring John Dube's Public Life', *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 3 (2012) 418-433.; *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Johannesburg, 2011).

²¹ T. Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case for Colonial Africa', in T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa, Essays in Honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene*, (1993, New York), 84.

Nationalists', whom they understood to be those European settlers mobilising to dissolve the very imperial connection the chieftaincy wished to maintain. However, although they strongly identified with their particular nation, both men recognised that they belonged to a world wider than their own. Molema wished to send his children to the United States of America and Britain to earn professional qualifications. But crossing national frontiers was not limited to travelling across internationally accepted boundaries. These Bechuana, like many of their educated African counterparts in the Union, considered themselves to be crossing actual national boundaries each time they set foot in another African reserve.

Contrary to Bonner's argument, this chapter also argues that the Molemas, alongside some influential Congressmen, were not a so-called 'petty-bourgeoisie' that was 'articulat[ing] with conviction its metropolitan values.'²² Firstly, it highlights heterogeneity in the class composition of educated Africans and how increasingly vulnerable livelihoods shaped their understanding of segregation and their politics. Secondly, it reconsiders the urban roots and 'metropolitan values' that Bonner ascribes to members of the SANNC and also the 'radicalisation' that he detects in the Transvaal wing of the SANNC during the Rand strikes of 1918-9. The chapter also shows how some educated Africans had come to think of the reserves as their national domains. Reserves were considered hubs of respectability and culture. The pride in local language and culture expressed primarily through 'national' newspapers like *Koranta* and vernacular literatures, accompanied political efforts by these Congressmen to steer their reserves towards progress and national cohesion. These imaginations of self, and the nationalist politics they informed, were situated in anxieties about the relative loss of respectability and status amongst educated classes. The narratives of ethnic nationalisms

²² P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917-1920: The Radicalisation of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, 272.

claimed to embrace all and sundry but too close proximity to lower classes tended to present a stumbling block to more effective collaboration.

The context of Empire was not only important in the circulation of competing ideas about nationhood, but more critically in how it enabled the ‘reconceptualisation of sovereignty’. Indeed Molemas insisted that theirs was an independent nation *within* the British Empire. It was a cross-border polity, straddling boundaries of the colonial state. They were also claiming political rights from the Cape and Union governments as full citizens whose right to vote remained very important. In ways analogous to the ideas of late nineteenth century ‘internationalists’, these educated Africans’ views about self and nation

... challenged any natural unity between nation and state. Instead of being commensurate, nation and state were reconceived as fundamentally different principles connected to different types of community and identity: social and ethnic identity (the nation) versus political rights and allegiance (the state).²³

In addition to the movement of people between colonies, and between metropole and colony, the Empire enabled colonial subjects to imagine and attempt to manufacture numerous other territorial domains. Colonial subjects charted many more national frontiers to the imperial map than existing governments. Empire presented paradoxical opportunities for novel self-imagination, some of which helped Africans to navigate the many humiliations of subjugation and the trauma of vastly accelerated social change. The emergence of a nation anchored in the hierarchies of chiefly power in present day Botswana is very close to the mark of a society that *Koranta* envisioned (though Botswana includes democratic elections). This eventuality is beyond the scope of this thesis, but emerged in part from responses by educated Africans,

²³ K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann, ‘Introduction’ in K. Grant, P. Levine and F. Trentmann (eds.), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c. 1880 – 1950* (Hampshire, 2007), 6, 10.

including Molemas, to Empire and the possibilities of nationhood in the late nineteenth century. It is discussed in broad strokes in Chapter 4.

Nationhood was not only a political ideology. Especially for educated notables it was intertwined with tradition (*sechuana*) as a discourse of everyday life. Various practices were modified overtime, and customs could be disparaged or gain respectability. Molemas rejected western alcohol and discouraged marriages based on individual choice for example, but voiced trenchant views against traditional norms like polygamy, while continuing with levirate and arranged marriage. The conclusion is in part a conceptual exploration of the process of selection and the improvisation of everyday practice along the colonial frontier. It argues that the challenge to transfer inherited privilege was an important variable in this process. It was not always possible however to live according to one's cherished ideals. As such, straddling different cultural spheres did not always indicate successful cultural syncretism. For example, Molema men worked intermittently in the thriving industries of traditional medicine and patent medicaments though educated Bechuanas' disdain for such practices was trenchant. These industries were nevertheless a critical survival strategy for some Molemas in the 1910s. Families had to balance immediate concerns with long term gain. Family members could remain loyal to certain ideals in principle but make incongruous choices in practice. In these and other contexts, family history reveals 'how private entanglements inevitably corrugate the surface of smooth public ideals'.²⁴

Molemas were forward-looking men and women, with enormous drive and a gruelling work ethic. They readily utilised diverse institutional platforms to spread and defend the message of nationhood – from schools to newspapers, from Congress to independent churches, from

²⁴ R .Roberts, *No Cold Kitchen: A Biography of Nadine Gordimer*, (Johannesburg, 2005), 195.

student organisations in Britain to representative councils in the colonial government. They considered leading the nation their divine vocation, but the family's imperatives for survival stoked their nationalist fervour. As the conclusion argues, although the shift to contractual relationships on the land was an improvisation of older strategies of living, it also evinces the dawn of a modernising sensibility. Times were changing, and Bechuanas' world did not necessarily have to be premised on a chiefly hierarchy. If noble families like Molemas wanted deference and privilege, they needed to justify their claim. Thus sacrificial devotion to the nation was Molemas' legitimation to preserve chiefly rule, and a critical investment into their future fortunes. Their efforts were mediated by the emotive sphere of family, as an incubator of these sentiments and the personalities that carried them. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, their strategies to maintain and transfer inherited privilege impinged upon social transformation in southern Africa in a manner detailed in the chapters that follow.

i. Sources: their interpretation and selection

The main archival depository for Silas Molema and his family is the Silas Molema/Solomon Plaatje papers at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. This large collection of Molema papers is at its densest and most detailed in connection with the themes of landholding, education and political office, although these practices were negotiated alongside marriage, and other social networks. The archive is unusual as a depository of a large number of documents produced by Africans in their own hand at this time. The documents are in English and Sechuana, although there are a few records in Dutch. It contains hundreds of letters, but also photographs, private journals, scrap books, lease agreements and hundreds of receipts, invoices and promissory notes that span a period well over fifty years from the late 1880s. There are also drafts of various historical and theological works. Attracted by its density,

scholars have used the archive extensively. Amongst the published works is Brian Willan's biography of Solomon Plaatje.²⁵ Jean and John Comaroff also drew from this archive for their two volumes *Of Revelation and Revolution*.²⁶ More recently Jane Starfield has produced a doctoral thesis on the life of Modiri Molema and has published a number of papers on him and his book, *The Bantu Past and Present*.²⁷ These various authors however largely use epistolary records. Although this thesis did make extensive use of letters, its interpretation of their contents was informed by various portions of the archive which other authors seem not to have incorporated in their analysis.

Firstly, the records of consumption and expenditure – receipts and invoices – make it possible to reconstruct the family's pattern of material life. When this financial trajectory was mapped over a period of fifty years, it was possible to chart how income enabled or constrained the family's negotiation of political power and the status borne of education and chiefly birth. Thus, where other scholars have recognised mainly affluence, prestige and power as far as the Molemas are concerned, this thesis could identify periods of the most gruelling and embarrassing financial ruin. I explore the relationship of their financial position to family and political decisions. Secondly, the records reflected the pattern of everyday life on the land. The humdrum of everyday life, expressed in the mending of fences, the digging of wells, and payments of rent, did not make for riveting reading but these mundane routines were the basis of landownership, African peasant life and settler colonialism in this fertile part of Bechuanaland Protectorate. These records make it possible to show the extent of white tenants

²⁵ B. Willan, *Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist, 1876-1932* (London, 1984).

²⁶ J. and J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol 1* (Chicago, 1991); *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, Vol 2* (Chicago, 1997).

²⁷ J. Starfield, 'A Dance with the Empire: Modiri Molema's Glasgow Years, 1914-1921', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, 3 (2001) 479-503.; Dr S. Modiri Molema (1891-1965), PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand (2008); 'A member of the Race': Dr Modiri Molema's Intellectual Engagement with the Popular History of South Africa, 1912 – 1921', *South African Historical Journal*, 46, 3 (2012), 434-449.

on African land and also the intricacies of relationships on these farmlands. The collection of Modiri Molema's papers deposited at the School for Oriental and African Studies in London holds further invaluable records on landholding. These illuminate the tensions between what Molema and his contemporaries say about land and what they actually did or are reported to have done. This depository has not previously been used by historians. It contains largely the working drafts of Modiri Molema's writings which have been published as books. There is however what appears to have been a pupil's history notebook, on whose unused pages Modiri Molema took very detailed minutes in Sechuana of cases that were being heard in the paramount chief's court in the 1930s. The cases are partly related to events that took place in the late 1910s, some of which were orchestrated by Silas Molema.

The scholars mentioned above were writing largely during a time when the historiography focused on the broad theme of 'class formation'. Given that these are written records, the archive was considered to have been that of members of the African 'elite' or 'petty bourgeoisie'. This thesis approached the archive as being that of a literate family, some of whom struggled to stay in the elite. It also includes material which was not generated by the family. There is for example, an 'x' on a promissory note made by an African lending a small amount of money to a notable. He could not write, but was navigating the institutions of a modern cash economy. There were also minimally literate others. Writing only in Sechuana, they did not use the orthographies of the formally schooled, and wrote only about urgent matters – notices about deaths, evictions and matters concerning money. Paramount chiefs in Mafikeng could express themselves in Sechuana, but had little confidence in their ability to write in English, leaving that to their scribes. During the half-century in which this archive was produced, literacy was spreading across a class that had already been stratified. Rather than taking the category of 'elite' for granted, the thesis's reading of documents, and their selection,

prioritised the search for heterogeneity and the qualitative variables of deference. Moreover the archive preserves documents produced by Africans across multiple class locations.

Koranta ea Bechuana (1901-1904) is available on microfilm at the National Library of South Africa, in Pretoria. *Tsala ea Bechuana* (1910-1912) and *Tsala ea Batho* (1912-1915) are similarly available at the African Studies Library at the University of Cape Town. Both of these newspapers have been extensively used by Willan, as Solomon Plaatje was editor of both newspapers. Some of the editorials this thesis utilised are reproduced in Willan's edited collection of Plaatje's writings.²⁸ This thesis situates these overlapping selections within a larger body of editorials Plaatje produced, including those in Sechuana, as well as the letters readers wrote to the newspapers. Readers wrote in their own language, precisely because the newspapers were intended to celebrate their national identity. Many of the letters that appeared in *Koranta* especially were not only a conversation between members of a political community but, following the Comaroffs, were 'narratives'. By this the Comaroffs mean 'a genre of storytelling and history-making; one in which past and present are condensed into linear, realist accounts that make claims to authority and public currency, impute cause and agency, and so assent their own truth value.'²⁹ These narratives in *Koranta* were essentially educated Bechuana's reconstruction of the origins of their nation. They enabled an exploration of their own understandings of themselves and their aspirations and also shed important light on questions of cultural synchronism along a colonial frontier, and the meanings Africans ascribed to their way of life. None of the other authors who have focused on the Molemas and their regional history have used the contents of these newspapers fully.

²⁸ *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings*, ed B. Willan (London, 1996).

²⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol 2, 43 and 45.

In his correspondence, Silas Molema produced various narratives about the nation, but also reflections on his experiences of race and servitude in a colonial context – all in Sechuana. That these reflections have survived is remarkable. Unlike his contemporary Chief Khama of the Bamongoato, Molema did not use a letter-writing book to keep a carbon copy of all his letters. These letters survive because Molema copied them himself, and titled them ‘copy’. They survive because Molema was consciously aware of those moments during which letter-writing was an instance of self-narration or otherwise self-reflection. Whilst awareness of self is an attribute of everyday living, not all members of the family articulated it in such a textual manner. For example, while Molema’s eldest son was prolific in reproducing the narratives about the nation found in *Koranta*, the younger son was more apt in documenting the course of his own inner transformation and his personal evolution, especially in letters to his sister and mother.

Whilst this thesis has been conceptualised as a family biography, the Silas Molema/Solomon Plaatje archive is by no means simply a depository of family papers. In Molema’s keeping were also the records produced by the bureaucracy of the paramount chief from the 1880s until the 1920s. The bulk of these records, preserved under the name of the paramount chief in whose tenure they were produced, consist of various court cases, including the chieftaincy’s tenacious resistance against territorial segregation. These records were supplemented by the personal archive of Sebopioa Molema generated at his residence, Signal Hill, in Mafikeng and deposited by his great-grandson Galefele Molema. Amongst Sebopioa Molema’s own personal papers and ephemera, are documents relating to the everyday administration of the chieftaincy, which he produced in his role as its ‘National Secretary.’ The very few documents preserved from the resistance to territorial segregation in Mafikeng are fragile, having survived the damage of damp and moths. Read by themselves the documents

in this archive make very little sense and need to be contextualised not only as part of the records of chiefly bureaucracy but within the wider concerns of European settlers in the period following the South African War. The latter were expressed in the *Mafikeng Mail and Protectorate Guardian*, at the National Library of South Africa, in Pretoria. Though little used by historians, this newspaper's detail and style of reporting allows for a reconstruction of Europeans' everyday life across the northern districts.

Sebopioa Molema's archive has also to be read alongside the records of the Native Affairs Department stored at the depository of the National Archives of South Africa in Cape Town. These are in two categories, namely (1) the records of the court cases heard in Mafikeng and other colonial courts, and (2) the correspondence between the Native Affairs Department and the Department of Justice in the new Union government. These records were discovered whilst trawling through every available file produced by the colonial government under the names of any of the paramount chiefs, any of the Molemas, or under the general heading of 'native administration' in Mafikeng. The NAD's filing system was often arbitrary, as officials filed and clumped together whatever they considered to fit into 'native administration'. This very arbitrariness indicates the contingent and sometimes desultory nature of colonial administration. 'Policy' was often elusive, and was in fact being threshed out in the very production of these records. Whilst often discussing Molemas and others as faceless 'native chiefs' these records show how colonial officials understood the status quo on the ground. However, chiefs' own views, adequately captured in the Silas Molema/Solomon Plaatje archive and Sechuana newspapers, could be very different. Likewise, chiefs sometimes misread the intentions of the colonial government or the loyalties of its officials.

Despite the density of Molemas' archive, there were nevertheless gaps. At least one very sensitive letter regarding Modiri Molema's marriage is missing. There is no evidence however that this archive has been censored. Most likely, Molema destroyed the letter himself upon receipt. On the other hand there is clear censorship in the large collection of Khama's family papers at the University of Botswana, in Gaborone. Ties of marriage between Molemas and the Khamas from the 1930s made it necessary to explore this archive. During our long and wide ranging conversations at her residence in Gaborone, Silas Molema's granddaughter, Dr Leloba Molema, described the contents of her own contribution to this archive – a hatbox full of letters between her mother, Helen Molema, and her sisters, sisters-in-law and cousins. These women were tied to one another through bonds of intermarriage between Moshoelas, Molemas and Khamas, but also as very active members of the Seventh Day Adventists church. Some of the important letters whose content she described are no longer in the archive. Whatsoever was considered 'private', as explicitly explained in the inventory, was selected by the archivists and given to the Khama family. Such practice by university archivists may demonstrate the endurance of a chiefly hierarchy, and the deference or control chiefs command in this postcolonial democracy, but this may not necessarily be the case. Yet, working through the archives of the Native Advisory Council of the Bechuanaland Protectorate (NAC), at the Botswana National Archives in Gaborone, it was possible to trace how this kind of democracy, so steeply entrenched in chiefly and patriarchal power emerged. Conversations with various people, and the general experience of many aspects of institutional life in Botswana, served to confirm the remarkable success of nationalism as a chiefly and patriarchal project, whose evolution is recorded in the minutes of the NAC.

But both the records of the NAC and the relevant correspondence in the Khama papers were consulted for the purpose of looking forward beyond the thesis's cut-off point. This was

necessary because the death of Silas Molema in 1927, where the thesis ends, did not mark the closure of some key processes discussed in the chapters that follow. Although the relevant NAC's records and the family correspondence in the Khama papers were thoroughly analysed, they find expression in this thesis in broad strokes. They are used to sketch how the boundary between the Cape and the Bechuanaland Protectorate had real consequences on the relationship between chiefly rule and nationalism. These developments became more apparent in the 1930s, when the Protectorate government introduced its own policy of 'native administration' through the NAC. A more appropriate periodisation would have concluded the thesis in 1957. This would have captured the entire span of the political economy of Molemas' inherited privilege from its inception in British formal annexation in the 1880s until its demise in the 1950s. There are rich records produced by the colonial administration in the Bechuanaland Protectorate that enables a detailed analysis of the 30 years after Molema's death. There were however limitations of space, but more critically, beyond Molema's death the archive no longer has an intergenerational dynamic.

Detailed oral interviews recorded mainly with Silas Molema's grand-children reflected the dearth of historical memory around the questions of self and rule that motivated their forebears, and even led to rifts between generations. There is no memory whatsoever of the passionate and committed struggle for self-determination waged in Mafikeng for almost two decades. His grandchildren constructed fond memories of cherished and intimate times with parents as well as the sense of prestige and social responsibility which the family name is still understood to represent. Notwithstanding, evidence of decline and fragmentation is apparent. 'The Molemas are', in Batho Molema's words, 'a great river, whose tributaries have run dry.'³⁰ His anguished recollection of the many historical documents and heirlooms that parents

³⁰ Interview, Batho Molema, August 2012

allowed children to play with and destroy reflect experiences of alienation. However, despite his lament, his family's story is also about the reconstitution of status and power with changing times. It is to these complex dynamics that we now turn.

Chapter 1

A family awakens a nation

This chapter considers the deeply religious interpretation Silas Molema and other Christianised and educated notables applied to historical transformations that shaped their territories' annexation in the mid-1880s. For at least another half century they read their opportunities of political power in the British empire by plotting their position on a cartography of Christian faith. The quest for the polity's self-determination in particular was undergirded by a feeling that the negotiated settlement of 1884, which ended the conflict with expanding imperial and colonial forces and formally incorporated their polity into the empire's ambit, was an act of Divine providence. The full bearing of this inner world of piety and devotion is only partially penetrable to historical analysis, but that religious inclinations are after all 'orientated to *this* world' is a useful starting point.¹ Christianity also shaped the pivotal moments of decision-making in Silas Molema's family, whilst it influenced his conviction that his Barolong were a 'nation claiming special privileges in the British Empire.'² In the 1880s this conviction was heightened by Molemas' growing influence in political affairs, deep-seated transformations in rural livelihoods and palpable shifts in aspiration in the countryside.

The coincidence that the first Bechuana converts and evangelists, such as Silas Molema's father, were 'influential young men' who were prominent members of ruling families, and not European missionaries, meant religion was enmeshed in intensely self-conscious attempts at state building in ways European missionaries could not control. Given the dispersal and wars of the 1820s, re-establishing political order was an urgent imperative in

¹ M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, ed.. Ann Swidler, (Boston, 1993), 1.

² Petition to Louis Botha, 1916 July 5, A979Be1, The Silas T Molema and Solomon T Plaatje Papers [Referred to as A979 henceforth.]

the 1820s and 1830s in southern Africa. The economic context of a trade boom in the mid-nineteenth century, especially profitable trade in ivory, created a throughway for Christianity into the hinterlands well beyond the Molopo River. At the same time guns, ox-wagons and other commodities like cloth became more readily available. This was in fact the genesis of Rhodes 'road to the north'.³ Chirenje's illuminating sketch of 'educational endeavours' in Bechuanaland in the nineteenth century is the earliest scholarly synthesis of the interconnectedness (however ambivalent) between church, chiefly power, and schooling amongst Bechuana polities on both sides of the Molopo River.⁴ Volz's more recent analysis on the early Bechuana evangelists emphasises the role of Christianity in cementing chiefly power in this region during the same period.⁵ However whilst emphasising the central role Christianity played in the 'politico-religious authority' of Bechuana chiefdoms in the nineteenth century, neither Volz nor Chirenje recognise that these various Bechuana polities had brought a regional political geography to flourish.

This chapter argues that Protestantism and its 'world images' encouraged the imagination of more cohesive institutional linkages between Bechuana polities by the turn of the twentieth century, and that formal schooling had emerged as a cornerstone of educated Bechuanas' self-imagination. It also highlights the regional linkages between different Bechuana polities, as well as their ambiguity and nodes of tension, as they existed at this time. The chapter argues that these connections were what Bechuana considered to make of them not only one people but a 'nation' – with all the complex (and still debated) analytical prescriptions such a concept entails: autonomy, independent statehood, a shared cultural and

³ S. Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and their Communities during the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2011), 3, 134, and 219.

⁴ J. Chirenje, 'Church, State and Education in Bechuanaland in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9, 3, 1976, 401-418

⁵ Volz, *African Teachers*.

political vision, and the deep emotive feelings of nationalism. Whilst Anderson and Hobsbawm among others have conceptualised nationalism as a quintessentially modern sentiment, Hastings argues that it is only as a formal political theory that nationalism is a modern phenomenon.⁶ Otherwise from sixteenth century England to pre-colonial Buganda it has been present as a local and deeply affective feeling, rousing those who share an ethnic heritage to guard it 'at almost any cost' by claiming (or expanding) a state. Ideals of sacrifice and revival are common cause in this exercise. In Bechuanaland too, as was the case in disparate parts of the world, when the Old Testament model of a 'peculiar nation' was made available in local languages, and ruling elites could read sacred texts produced in their indigenous tongues, a sense of loose regional connectedness grew into more solid national consciousness. If not always a modern phenomenon, then neither was nationalism in this colonial world simply a reaction to modern imperial expansion, typically in the form of anti-colonial struggles.

Koranta ea Bechuana (1901-1904) is an invaluable source that offers insight into the Bechuana public sphere. It was owned by Silas Molema and edited by the prodigious and energetic Solomon Plaatje. Its editorials and readers' letters articulate educated Bechuanas' collective imagination at the turn of the twentieth century. Education was understood as a divinely inspired and natural evolution of a nation re-awakening to its legacy of civilisation and achievement. Although the newspaper's enthusiastic contributors maintained late Victorian lifestyles and tastes not dissimilar to those of European middle-classes both in the Cape and in Britain, they disparaged *sekgoa* – all that was considered as westernisation and hence cultural contamination. Jean and John Comaroff have noted that *sekgoa* and *sechuana* had become two competing reifications of a fluid and mutable cultural matrix since Bechuanas'

⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, 1991); Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*. (see Introduction)

contact with Nonconformist Protestant missionaries early in the nineteenth century. They also argue that Silas Molema's family aimed to institutionalise the 'power and knowledge' of *sekgoa*, as an alternative to *sechuana*.⁷ Through 'thick' descriptions of everyday life, including styles of architecture, modes of dress and systems of healing, the Comaroffs highlight the complexity of the cultural syncretism that results where the 'old' meets the 'new'. But the meaning of both of course was consistently under contestation – a point that does not come across fully in their rich analysis. My reading of family history and *Koranta* suggests that the Molemas largely rejected *sekgoa* in favour of their version of *sechuana*. Moreover, in the Comaroffs' work cultural practice tends to be read as equivalent to 'consciousness'. The two are related, but not the same.

Peel and Ranger have raised other questions as to the circumstances under which a historian superimposes his or her meaning on the practices of colonial subjects that are not easily intelligible to those outside their milieu. Peel argues for the interpretation of narrative alongside that of non-verbal practices.⁸ Yet what if, as the Comaroffs argue, the only trace from which we can read the various fragments of people's understanding of themselves are these multifarious collages of cultural practice? They interpret the non-verbal cultural practices of the southern Bechuana, and by so doing, understand how power operates by 'recasting mundane, routine practices'.⁹ Gupta commends the Comaroffs for an innovative approach; an 'insistence that "voice" should not be read literally in the colonial records, but interpreted as the whole range of bodily and social practices ... a wider register for the recording of "voice"'.¹⁰ However, how do we introduce temporality and relationality when linking 'bodily

⁷ J. Comaroff and J.L Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol 1*, 240 and 261.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ A. Gupta, 'History, Rule, Representation: Scattered Speculations on *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume II*', *Intervention: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 3, 1, (2001), 40-6.

and social practices' to the 'reified binary forms' that describe them? For example, do *sekgoa* and *setswana* describe always the same practices across the spectrum of class, lineage or even generation? Also, these are 'lay terms' or reified categories used by people every day; and historians have to find a conceptual language to grapple with them. *Sekgoa* cannot be substituted for the lived experience of African elites, or Molemas in particular. The Comaroffs, their critics and followers tend not to make the distinction.

Whilst *Koranta* does reflect these enduring reifications, Silas Molema and his educated community were certainly not adherents of *sekgoa*. Nor did they have any wish to make normative its institutions or state of being. At least this is not what they understood themselves to be doing. They were instead forward-looking traditionalists, fashioning the present as custodians of a past whose essence was progress (*coelo-pele*). Hence their politics were impressively dynamic but at the same time strikingly conservative. Bechuanas' vision of nationhood was entangled in a paradox because it was an autonomy sought *within* the British Empire. The educated were at once enlarging their margin of control to institutionalise their own vision but also expressing a desire to bring the empire closer into a more intimate embrace. It is true that at the time a more complete autonomy and total independence was not possible. Yet the scope and ambition of this 'imagined community' would have been impossible without the security and confidence that stems from an association with a powerful empire. Indeed what emerges are the ways in which British protection offered far more than political stability and security on land. By holding the more sinister forces, like European speculators and mercenaries at bay, British colonisation created room for ruling elites to chart their own political projects onto the political landscape. This is only partial explanation however for a majority of educated Bechuana's vociferous British patriotism during the South African war, and their enduring affective ties to Britain. This patriotism was also expressed in their patterns

of consumption and their pursuit of respectability, demonstrated in following some of the tastes and fashions of the metropolis in the way the Comaroffs have discussed.

Parsons has observed that late Victorian society ‘could be interpreted (and experienced) through traditional African values’ by Nguni Chiefs or their emissaries who visited England in the 1890s, despite their having acquired a Western education.¹¹ Nasson’s work grapples with educated Africans’ patriotism during the imperial wars, highlighting their own calculations of interests as far as livelihoods, or even the forging of new and cohesive communities was concerned. As he argues, Africans’ deeply emotive ties to Britain ‘should not be interpreted as the product of a simple, unmediated absorption of an imperial creed’.¹² Unfortunately this assertion seldom finds adequate resolution in empirical studies. On the contrary, the understanding that Silas Molema, Solomon Plaatje and others were ‘black Victorians’ persists under various guises. Notwithstanding the criticism levelled against the Comaroffs’ readings of ‘consciousness’, other scholars apply this same methodology elsewhere.

Willan portrays how practices such as cricket and debating clubs orchestrated educated Africans’ cultural life in Kimberley in the late nineteenth century, including Solomon Plaatje. He stresses a late-Victorian ethic as the primary moulding influence of their identities. Marks and Rathbone raise questions about the political implications of these practices, and suggest that educated Africans’ acceptance of the rule of the ‘Great White Queen’, should not be construed as the ‘colonisation of consciousness’: whilst this community ‘modelled [itself] quite self-consciously on the precepts of a mid-Victorian vision’ it ‘never accepted the white man’s ways without question’ but rather with ‘a sense of irony and made use of the space this

¹¹ N. Parsons, “‘No Longer Rare Birds in London’: Zulu, Ndebele, Gaza & Swazi Envoys to England, 1882-1894”, in Gerzina, G. (ed.), *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana* (London, 2003) 133 and 135.

¹² B. Nasson, *Abraham Esau’s War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902*, (Cambridge, 1991), 110-4.

allowed to manoeuvre status, income and security.’¹³ However they neither fully unpack the details of this ‘irony’ nor show how Africans’ own agency can be reconciled with practices foreign to their own indigenous institutions. Ranger argues that this Kimberley elite ‘invented traditions of the late nineteenth century British middle-class’ to secure belonging to its liberal promise of equal opportunity and secure property rights.¹⁴ However Ranger does not delineate the boundary beyond which such ‘inventions’ express more than just strategies of aspiration, and they indicate changing conceptions of self. By accepting Willan’s view that this Kimberley was ‘a supremely British place’, Ranger disregards his earlier caution to the Comaroffs where they too attempted to read ‘consciousness’ only from everyday practice.¹⁵

Moreover these interpretations contradict well-documented observation that educated Africans had fashioned a patchwork of cultural practices drawing from both African and European influences. Despite his rich and nuanced analysis of this fact, Cobley maintains that within the upper stratum of this class, especially dynastic families like Molemas, success was ‘attributed with all the force that nineteenth century Christian, Western and imperial valued could muster.’¹⁶ These families’ aspiration towards progress informs Cobley’s interpretation. Yet as Cooper argues, though progress is an enlightenment ideal, its co-option into the modernising projects of colonial elites takes various shapes whose evolution ought to be traced.¹⁷ Elsewhere Cooper argues further that African elites bridged a range of contradictory and incongruous ideological influences. All of these shaped their political thought, making

¹³ Marks and Rathbone, (eds.), *Introduction: Industrialisation and Social Change*, x. referring to B. Willan, ‘An African in Kimberley: Sol T Plaatje, 1894-1898’ in same volume, 238-58.

¹⁴ T. Ranger, ‘The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa’, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, 2002), 238.

¹⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, 42.

¹⁶ A. Cobley, *Class and Consciousness: the Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* (New York, 1990), 225-6.

¹⁷ F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2001), 133-49.

nationalism for example, ‘less [a] linear progression than [a] conjuncture.’ African elites were situated, in his words, ‘in between.’ He continues that

[L]iving these complexities entailed pain and difficulty, but there is no indication that [they] ... experienced them as personally destabilising, as intellectually contradictory, or as threatening to [their] sense of cultural integrity: *in between* is as much a place to be at *home* as any other.¹⁸

Indeed *Koranta*’s narratives’ confirm that educated Africans’ saw themselves as ‘in between’ which is arguably where we all are.

This, and the chapters that follow, will reconstruct how various discourses were appropriated, adapted and lived as practices and understandings of self and nation. Molema and others drew inspiration from local villages, surrounding communities or even transatlantic connections. In tracing that ‘pain and difficulty’ entailed by this ‘in between’ living, this chapter also contributes towards the debates around the ‘invention’ of tradition and the ideological content of cultural practice in a colonial setting. One amongst the many traumas of a colonial existence in Bechuanaland was the strange necessity for educated Africans to nourish the imperial connection consistently, while maintaining an imagination of themselves as progressive but quintessentially African – and *not* British. The myth of reawakening, of thrusting forward from the slumber of the present by remembering a golden past, is not untypical of modern nationalism. Whether or not this made of Silas Molema’s educated community modern subjects however is a question that ought to be debated. (This is discussed in the concluding chapter) The multiple paradoxes in the nobilities’ self-imagination was part

¹⁸ F. Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History’, *The American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), 1539

consequence of the routes Christianity traversed in the northern hinterlands from the early nineteenth century.

Bechuanaland was not a setting where, as Marks describes of colonial Natal, ‘the initial converts were largely the despised, the disparaged, and the disaffected, drawn to the mission stations by the prospects of land and security’.¹⁹ Neither was it a setting where commoners, as early converts, thought of chiefs as obstacles to their aspirations, as Bundy has noted elsewhere in the Cape.²⁰ Rather Protestantism, and its impetus towards vigorous introspection and self-making through the ‘mirror of the Word’ had been carried on the wings of merchant capitalism into the highest chiefly offices in the region. Its ‘world images’ encouraged robust and bureaucratized ecclesiastical states but at the same time, as this chapter argues, sowed the seeds of their demise. Formal education, the new commodities circulating in an expanding cash nexus, and involvement in the new white-collar professions like teaching for example, were incorporated into chiefs’ sense of themselves as progressive African rulers. It was an innovation that maintained the cohesiveness of their polities, and even enabled them to integrate European subjects into them. As far as questions of creating wealth from landholdings were concerned, for example, even an unconverted and uneducated notable could never fail to notice how progress (*coelo-pele*) solved some of the age-old contradictions in his moral economy (see Chapter 2).

On the other hand, such innovation set the barometer of African subjects’ aspirations far beyond their chiefs’ capacity to fulfil them. Hardening racial barriers against Africans’ upward mobility only increased chiefs’ institutional constraints. As the density of educated

¹⁹ S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth Century Natal* (Baltimore, 1986), 44.

²⁰ Bundy, *Rise and Fall*, 97, 149, 210.

African classes in the countryside failed to be absorbed into limited white-collar occupations, chiefs' failure to sponsor aspiration made it more difficult to promote compliance. Such pressure on chiefly hegemony could bring its hierarchy to collapse. Lonsdale has argued of colonial Kenya that ethnic politics are a possibility where the tension between 'property and virtue' becomes unmanageable.²¹ Amongst the Kikuyu, it was the impossibility of 'self-mastery through land' that made the Mau Mau's violent ethnic nationalism the only recourse. In Bechuanaland it was the educated Africans' anxieties around respectable livelihoods that stirred ethnic nationalism, but pushed the 'nation' deeper into the imperial frame.

i. Making new words and imagining new worlds

The violent upheavals of the 1820s had caused Chief Tawana to flee south-east to Thaba Nchu, where his son Molema was converted through the Wesleyan Missionary Society. After Tawana's death, his eldest son through his principal wife, Montsioa, took over the reins of rule at their old post at Lotlhakane. Isaac Molema concentrated his evangelical efforts in the same village as 'a pattern of sobriety and piety to his fellow countrymen' throughout the 1840s. However it was the unconverted Montsioa that travelled to Thaba Nchu in 1851 to request a European missionary from the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Shortly thereafter Joseph Ludorf was sent to Lotlhokane. Upon arrival he was keenly aware that his envisioned role at Lotlhakane was not to act as a spiritual guardian, but as 'shield and sword' against the encroachment of Boer settlers. He found twenty-two baptised members in Isaac Molema's congregation. During this time, the WMS saw great advantage in Isaac's chiefly origins because 'he has a measure of political influence which he employs in furtherance of the cause

²¹ B. Berman and J. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*, (London, 1992), 326.

of Christ.’²² In 1853 Isaac’s followers refused to participate in traditional initiation rites. Following a hearing at the *kgotla* and mediation by Ludorf an amicable compromise was reached. Isaac would establish his village a little further from Montsioa’s capital.

About a decade later ‘hundreds’ were flocking to Molema’s nearby village to attend church and acquire literacy. Anxious that Boers on their Great Trek would take over their old lands along the Molopo River, Montsioa instructed Isaac to move his village further north. Thus Mafikeng was established. In 1862 ‘an unusually large number of young people’ were attending classes and establishing themselves in Mafikeng, merely asserting to Montsioa that ‘you are still our father and in all things belonging to your kingdom we are still your most willing subjects.’²³ The irate paramount wrote to the WMS that

Molema stood as teacher of the tribe in my place ... [Then] he left, [and] set up a chieftaincy of his own ... These Christians are obeying the Book more than the King, ultimately the tribe will split and perish.²⁴

Isaac was leading a congregation in Mafikeng without missionary supervision. When the WMS’s Jonathan Webb arrived in Mafikeng in 1873, he too immediately acknowledged Molema as ‘Father of the work here’ and ‘soundly converted to God’. When Molema resisted Webb’s attempts to impose stricter control on the church however, they soon came to blows. Webb thought that Molema ‘has tried to unite with the faith of Christ, their corrupt heathen customs; and in addition to this, being a Chief, he has often compromised himself.’ Two years later a frustrated Webb abandoned ship and settled in the nearby European town of Zeerust,

²² Volz, *African Teachers*, 103.

²³ *Ibid.*,

²⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Revelation and Revolution Vol 1*, 263.

leaving Isaac to his own devices. Montsioa moved to Mafikeng in 1877 but Molema and his educated sons emerged as *de facto* rulers of the town, as it grew into a bustling centre of Methodism and education. The rivalry between Montsioas and Molemas is a well-documented part of this story.²⁵ Despite its usefulness to rulers, Christianity often stirred such rifts and tensions within ruling families, but like many astute Bechuana rulers who were not educated, Montsioa preferred prudent management of this instability than the outright rejection of Christianity. When Isaac died in 1882, his youngest son Silas took over the running of his father's school and chapel. By the close of the decade this Methodist church had grown from 279 to 1200 congregants.²⁶

By the early 1880s Bechuana kingdoms, especially those south of the Molopo River, were vulnerable to collapse due to European penetration northwards from the Cape Colony. Shillington describes the southern kingdoms at the time as a turbulent frontier of war and mass migration. In Mafikeng, Chief Montsioa's resistance was broken in 1881, leaving him considerably weakened after the loss of men and sizeable landholdings.²⁷ At this time Montsioa's kingdom was thriving and self-sustaining on the land. Peasant households traded grain in the Diamond Fields further south in Kimberley, and hence disturbances on the trade route made Montsioa all the more anxious for peace. 'What am I to do with my corn if I cannot take it to sell,' he wrote to the British Captain Henry Nourse in 1881, 'I grow corn for the markets for money'.²⁸ Silas Molema's brother, whose name was Israel, signed the letter as a witness, as did Montsioa's son-in-law, Stephen Lefenya. Most likely the two younger men authored the letter on behalf of their illiterate uncle. Through the London Convention of 1884, the British government formally annexed the territory and imposed a more secure peace. Like

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Ibid.,

²⁷ Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana*, 133-43.

²⁸ Montsioa to Capt. H. Nourse, 2 November 1881, A979Ba7.

Isaac Molema, Lefenya was amongst the many Bechuana evangelists who took Protestantism into the northern hinterlands in the early nineteenth century and welded it to chiefly rule amongst various Bechuana kingdoms. Formal annexation was considered by Lefenya and others as a divinely orchestrated victory for their polity. As Lefenya unequivocally stated to a European missionary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society

The Barolongs love God. He fought with them against their enemies and they have seen that all power is with God, so they love Him and want to serve Him.²⁹

The British government formally annexed the region as British Bechuanaland and Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1884. By then European goods and styles had already made inroads across the countryside – including ploughs, square-houses, home furnishings, money, clothing, liquor and books. Bechuana children, many from chiefly families, were sent to missionary schools, especially Healdtown and Lovedale in the eastern Cape. Change and how to manage it was a burning issue. Between 1883 and 1896 Bechuana forwarded written opinions to a newspaper owned by the London Missionary Society, *Mahoko a Bechuana*, on a wide range of topics, most notably bridewealth, polygamy, liquor and especially orthography.³⁰ As Mokoena notes of the contributors to *Ilanga*, a newspaper in Natal published in 1903, in these early newspapers Africans ‘wrote about themselves and their reading habits as if addressing a public assembly’.³¹ Bechuana chiefs’ contributions to this paper reflect how seriously they too took participating in such textual assemblies. In the event that chiefs were not converted and not literate they participated through their scribes, as did Montsioa in 1891.

²⁹ Volz, *African Teachers*, 182.

³⁰ S. Volz and K. College, ‘Words of Batswana: Letters to the Editor of *Mahoko a Becwana*, 1883-1896’, *History in Africa*, 34 (2007), 349-366. ; S. Volz and T. Mgadla (eds.), *Words of Batswana: Letters to Mahoko a Becwana, 1883-1896* (Cape Town, 2006).

³¹ H. Mokoena, ‘An Assembly of Readers: Magera Fuze and His Ilanga Lase Natal Readers’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 3 (2009), 595-607.

At this time readers were conscious of the anxiety of living between two worlds. As one reader commented, ‘You should know that you are not following either Tswana or European culture; you are just in the middle ... For how long are you going to be undecided?’³²

Education was generally encouraged and associated often positively with Europeanism. A young nobleman wrote from Lovedale in 1886 that an educated African’s ‘only work with Europeans will be to hold a pen really’, whilst experiencing ‘a life other than holding a spade, or holding horses for a wagon, or herding.’³³ As readers debated which of their various local dialects, if any, should find expression as written Sechuana, these politics of language were in effect touching on how various Bechuana polities related to one another. The letters and editorials in *Koranta ea Bechuana* from 1901 were another moment in this continuing conversation. There was however a distinctive ideological coherence in *Koranta*’s discourse. The anxieties articulated in the missionary owned paper just a few years before had been smoothed out. The unsettling unease about living ‘in the middle’ of two worlds, and the uncertainties around whether a single dialect can represent all Bechuana were absent. In their stead was an ambiguous but relatively consistent narrative of a nation’s reawakening that represented no local polity in particular. Reporting on one polity’s success was to celebrate the achievement of the whole, and castigating any one chief’s apathy sounded an alarm, a warning against national degeneration. The contributors no longer represented themselves swaying uneasily between the ‘European culture’ and their own, but as surefooted traditionalists, both opposed to ‘westernisation’ and geared for progress (*coelo-pele*).

³² Volz and Mgadla, *Words of Batswana*, 203.

³³ *Ibid.*, 51.

The London Convention of 1884 prepared the way for British annexation of the region as two separate domains. The first was Bechuanaland Protectorate, now present-day Botswana. The Molopo River marked its southern boundary, and separated it from the second possession, British Bechuanaland. The latter domain was thoroughly penetrated by colonial interests, and ruled directly by the imperial government. It stretched south from the Molopo River almost reaching Kimberley's diamond fields. In 1895 British Bechuanaland was incorporated into the Cape Colony. The annexation of Montsioa's polity both in 1884 and its incorporation into the Cape Colony a decade later were negotiated settlements. Both times the imperial government found itself negotiating on its back foot. In 1884 it was overstretched following involvement in Egypt, and perceived that Bismark's occupation of present-day Namibia could mean a loss of dominion in southern Africa.³⁴ The imperial government wished to defuse the protracted wars in the southern kingdoms without recourse to military intervention. Pressed for time, it brokered a generous compromise with Mafikeng. It agreed to recognise 432 square miles of fertile lands just north of the border as belonging to Montsioa. These farmlands, named 'Barolong Farms', were not to be regarded as a reserve. They were distributed to the nobility, including Silas Molema, as legal 'occupants'. Montsioa could rule Barolong Farms from the other side of the border in the Molopo Native Reserve, which was roughly 660 square miles, where Mafikeng was his political capital. Though Montsioa lost sizeable lands to the west of Mafikeng, around Mareetsane and Setlagodi (Map 1), the granting of Barolong Farms was compensation.³⁵

Montsioa had insisted his territory in the Bechuanaland Protectorate not be declared a location. In a location, as Shillington describes, 'the land belonged to the government and

³⁴ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, Chapters VI-XIV.

³⁵ Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana*, 203.

Africans were on it by [the] government [‘s] good favour. A reserve on the other hand was recognised as land that had never officially been declared Crown land and therefore, by implication, officially ‘belonged’ to the African occupants.’³⁶ A decade later, when Britain was keen to dispose of British Bechuanaland to the Cape government, Montsioa insisted that his cross-border polity remain united. He also insisted that the British South Africa Company, which was to take over the Bechuanaland Protectorate, should have no jurisdiction over his lands. He sent Queen Victoria a letter of distress, that ‘my people are increasing very fast and filling the land ...we build houses, we plough many gardens, we sow lots of mielies, kaffir corn, wheat and forage ... Why do you want to throw us away! Our word is No! No!’³⁷ Though the Company had no jurisdiction over any of the African reserves in the Protectorate, Barolong Farms were still not classified as a reserve. Sir Sidney Shippard, appointed as President of the Land Commission in August 1885, to settle all land questions in the new territory of British Bechuanaland and administrator of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, was unyielding in his efforts to turn reserves in the Cape into ‘locations’.³⁸ Yet, in Montsioa’s case, he appears to have been considerably obliging.

He excluded Montsioa’s reserve from the Locations Act which applied to all other Bechuana chiefdoms in the Cape Colony. Montsioa’s reserve was also excluded from the infamous Glen Grey Act.³⁹ (It must be noted however that the Act was suspended in other parts of the Cape as well. It was only introduced in seven of the twenty-six districts of the Transkei.) This meant communal land ownership could be upheld, without compromising the voting rights of those Africans who met the property qualification in this way. This provision

³⁶ Ibid., 93 and 177.

³⁷ Montsioa to Victoria, undated c. 1895, A979Ba16.

³⁸ Shillington, *Luka Jantjie*, 78 and 83.

³⁹ S. Shippard to Montsioa, 1895 August, A979Ba29; Notice to the Supreme Court of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, henceforth *Rex vs Montsioa*, CSC 2/67/254.

was critical if chiefly power was to be upheld because the ‘placement’ of commoners on notables’ lands was an important mechanism of rule. (Chapter 2) Moreover, the Cape government agreed not to interfere with the succession of chiefs, who would continue to try cases and manage land. To place a cherry on the cake, Montsioa would receive an annual pension from the Cape government far larger than any reported by any other Bechuana chief at £300 a year. Not only that, but upon his death, a pension of £150 would be paid to his heirs.⁴⁰ Given the weight of the concessions, it is no surprise that the nobility in Mafikeng came to think of themselves as rulers of a ‘nation claiming special privileges under the British Empire’.⁴¹

For the devout and educated amongst them, especially given their critical role in negotiating the settlement with the help of some European missionaries, the ‘sacredness’ of chiefly rule was now written up in the official language of political autonomy and self-determination. Molemas saw themselves as leaders of this unique nation. From the nobility’s point of view, there was a world of difference between conquest and the negotiated settlements of 1884 and 1895. Hence when the Divisional Council of Mafeking imposed Dog Tax on Africans in the reserve in 1904, the nobility’s resistance was forceful and immediate.⁴² The heart of the matter was not so much resistance to tax but a rejection of the Divisional Council of Mafeking’s jurisdiction over the reserve. Such jurisdiction would make null and void any claim to ‘special privileges’. (Chapter 2) Chiefs had far less leverage in this context to pursue their own visions, and design their own rules. By then, Chief Montsioa was dead but Stephen Lefenya, whose signature appears in the letter to Henry Nourse above, was still alive – then

⁴⁰ Shippard to Montsioa, 1895 August, A979Ba29.

⁴¹ Petition to NAD, 1916 July 5, A979Be1.

⁴² Records of Lekoko Montsioa vs The Minister of the Interior and the Divisional Council of Mafeking, henceforth Rex vs Lekoko Montsioa CSC 1/1/717/245

eighty years old. According to his testimony before a commission of the Supreme Court with regard to the matter in 1913:

I say that the Barolongs are a free, as distinguished from conquered people because they voluntarily incorporated themselves in the Empire of Queen Victoria ... They were entitled to and did make certain conditions upon which they so entered that agreement ... When beyond the reserve we quite recognise that we abandon the privileges we claim, and as a consequence whilst in the Reserve we are exempt from all Divisional Council taxation in any form. From the time we first concluded the Treaty we were only taxed in respect of huts by the Government, but further than this we cannot be taxed unless with the consent of the tribe.⁴³

The entity of 'tribe' in this testimony must be read to mean deeper claims of nationhood and independent statehood. Throughout at least the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, indeed even today, Bechauna had been referring to each of their polities as '*morafe*'. The term has been translated by early educated Africans, European settlers, colonial officials, and also present-day historians interchangeably as 'tribe', 'kingdom', 'state' and 'nation'. The array of its translations reflects that *morafe* held multiple and overlapping meanings according to the contexts that native Sechuana speakers navigated. At the turn of the twentieth century the term presented the full morphology of an independent nation. Mafikeng enjoyed a degree of political autonomy that neighbouring chiefs did not share. Its northern lands across the Molopo River were not a reserve. Their southern lands in the Cape were exempted from the status of a location, which effectively granted the chieftaincy limited self-rule, akin to some of the Transkeian territories. This was no small feat, but a triumph that aroused deeper and proud sentiments towards self-determination. However educated Bechuana, even those from polities that could not claim such degree of independence, shared ideas about the place of education and Christianity in the texture of chiefly rule.

⁴³Rex vs Montsioa, CSC 2/671/254.

Landau has written an illuminating account of the Bamongoato chiefdom north of the Bechuanaland Protectorate under Chief Khama's rule as 'a realm of the Word'.⁴⁴ (Map 2) This paramount merged literacy and ideas of 'civilisation' into a powerful 'ecclesiastical statehood'. Landau expands 'the Word' beyond Christian doctrine and LMS missionaries' pronouncements to refer to 'a way people had of beholding the particular, integrative mode of power in the kingdom, which carried Christianity along with it.' It gave birth to the complex ideological matrix – 'thuto' or learning – that governed the polity and the order of everyday living. In his chapter on 'thuto', Landau touches very briefly on a nascent nationalism, which thought of commitment to formal education as an 'index on national identity.'⁴⁵ In 1923 for example, Khama wrote to the daughter of Chief Mfhafshe that 'My word is, you know if you are a MoNngoato when you do the work of God [i.e. pay your teachers' salaries], you know yourself as a MoNngoato then.'⁴⁶ This self-understanding is strikingly similar to how educated Bechuana thought about themselves and schooling in *Koranta* two decades earlier. As shall become apparent below, at least twenty years prior, *Koranta* was launching the language of nationhood in strikingly similar terms 250 miles south of Khama's kingdom, and circulating it across even larger distances, including the University of Wilberforce, in America. A man of Bakhurutse origin born in Linokang, Mika Segaloe, left South Africa 1896 to 'look for education', and was reading the newspaper in Ohio in 1902.⁴⁷

Could Khama not have been importing, and selectively borrowing from *Koranta's* earlier, and arguably denser, and more rationalised discourse on God, education, chiefly power and nation building? To be sure, it is impossible to say who borrowed from whom. For this

⁴⁴ P. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (London, 1995).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴⁷ *Koranta ea Bechuana*, [Henceforth *Koranta*] 10 January 1903, Sechuana.

reason although Landau's penetrating analysis of Bamongoato breaks new ground, his argument that Khama's kingdom was 'a special case' does not stand up to scrutiny. He sees this polity as the only plausible Bechuana kingdom that had any hope to survive in a postcolonial world 'as a desert version of Lesotho.'⁴⁸ Though he cites a number of reasons why other Bechuana kingdoms, especially those south of the Molopo, could never have achieved this independent end, he stresses the view that it was only in the Bangoato kingdom where the church's purpose had 'been woven into the roots of the king's power'.⁴⁹ In his view, unlike other Bechuana polities, Bangoato chiefs used Christianity and more specifically the presence and influence of missionaries to build and sustain the 'realm of the Word'. Yet Landau's own analysis of Bangoato suggests a highly complex and malleable relationship between Christianity and what Bechuana understood as their own way of life. Why could there not have been more than one recipe for success?

If chiefs could manipulate the institutions of the colonial church to rule their subjects, then the church's flock, ordinary people themselves, could imagine chiefly power through the mirror of the Bible and many routines of religious life, and thus wish to be led by educated and Christianised stately 'shepherds'. Devout and educated men like Solomon Plaatje wished to be ruled by equally devout and educated chiefs. In Mafikeng they considered the incumbent Montsioas, who drank and did not take education too seriously, as undermining every sense of what it meant to belong to Bechuana as a nation. By the 1904 Cape census, the first to fully enumerate Africans within the colony, about seventeen per cent (17,040) of Africans in the towns could read and write, but so could sixteen per cent of the rural Africans (36, 193) in the far more greatly populated reserves.⁵⁰ They had access to a range of literature and ideas, but

⁴⁸ Landau, *Realm of the Word*, 215.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 211-2.

⁵⁰ Cape of Good Hope Census, 1905.

narrowing opportunity to turn their aspirations to reality in a colonial society increasingly ordered by race.

In summary, Protestantism inspired these Bechuana and their educated chiefs towards a particular vision of themselves as a peculiar ‘nation’. Education was laid into the very bedrock of a quintessentially African respectability, which aspired towards ‘progress’ (*coelo-pele*) in a colonial setting. The imagination of nationhood coloured educated Africans’ own views, especially in Mafikeng, about what formal annexation into the British Empire meant. The context of Britain’s own constraints in 1884 and 1895 shaped a negotiated settlement for annexation and the incorporation of the territory south of the Molopo River into the Cape colony respectively. This confirmed the sentiments of autonomy that accompanied nationhood. Silas Molema came into his own as an entrepreneur and a family man in the mid-1880s, after Britain quelled the instability of protracted wars against conquest, and made routes of wagon riding throughout the northern districts safe and open. Molema could build a western-style residence, expand his transport enterprise, and settle down to the business of educating his children and strengthening the institutions of chiefly rule. It is to his flourishing and growing household that we now turn.

ii. A flourishing and growing household

The best years of Silas Molema’s life were undoubtedly his thirties and forties (1880s-1890s). He was a prosperous African in the transport business in the region, owning probably the largest fleet of wagons and carts.⁵¹ He was married to Molalayane who like her husband could read and write. Her home was a grand residence of late-Victorian architecture which her

⁵¹ Musson Bros invoice, 18 September 1890; and others, 10 August 1891, A 979 Aa3.3.

husband affectionately named *Baratiwa* (Beloveds). Little is known about her, but her detailed invoices for food and clothing bought from survive. The European town (Mafeking) was adjacent to and west of the reserve. The shopping lists from the late 1880s were lengthy, including tea, coffee and chicory as regular purchases.⁵² She could afford luxuries well beyond the reach of her neighbours, especially during the next decade. Molalayane revered her husband, and according to custom, she considered herself to be his ‘child’.⁵³ Her willing subservience drew also from devoutness as a Wesleyan, as did her family’s strong work ethic and strict temperance. Many amongst chiefly and educated Bechuana families, extending north-easterly into Khama’s household in Serowe (Map 2), abstained from all liquor, not merely as a form of piety but also as a distinguishing feature of their political authority. They fervently resisted the trade of distilled liquor, especially brandy, within their towns and frustrated the ambitions of many white merchants in the business.⁵⁴ In Khama’s court, Bamongoato pledged to have their cattle or huts, sometimes all their possessions confiscated, should they be found drinking liquor. Molema’s family adhered to the Wesleyan pledge to temperance known as the ‘Band of Hope’, and lived it out as testament of their role in the nation.⁵⁵

Molema men wished to turn their *de facto* control of the chieftaincy into legitimate rule. This was more than just a quest for political power. Silas had been present in 1895 when Sir Sidney Shippard announced the special clauses under which Montsioa’s reserve was to be incorporated into the Cape Colony. Over two decades later, Silas could still remember Shippard handing over the document detailing these unusual annexation conditions at Montsioa’s *kgotla*, and saying ‘this is your Charter.’ These words remained deeply engraved in Silas’ memory,

⁵² N. Howse & Co invoice 1888 January 14, A 979 Aa3.2.

⁵³ M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 20 March 1911, A979Aa1.

⁵⁴ Landau, *Realm of the Word*, Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Pledge statement of Band of Hope, undated, A979Cc11.3.

probably throughout his political life.⁵⁶ But they were already a confirmation of a conviction he held long before that the nation was destined to survive by God's design. In Silas' own thinking, the 'Charter' was God's providence to which the nation should respond with fitting conduct, that is temperance and education in the fear of God and the paramount chief. The 'Band of Hope', took these ideals as a given.⁵⁷ Molema women of Molalayana's generation aimed to rear children into this model of respectability.

Molalayane had her first child, a daughter, in 1888. By the time Seleje was born, her father was about thirty-one years old. It was quite late in his life considering how early young people started their own families at that time. The reasons why are unclear, but by then Silas and Molalayane had already accepted Sebopioa Molema as a son in their household. He was the eldest son of Silas's older brother, Joshua. Sebopioa was eight years old when Seleje was born. Often, married women without children would 'borrow' a relative's child to rear, in order to liven up the household and have an energetic little person to send on errands and help with running the household. This was not what is understood today as adoption, although the child's natural parents tended to relinquish parental control over the child, entrusting that to the discretion of the 'foster' family. Though a number of Silas' nephews and nieces were under his care, he directed fatherly affection and a princely upbringing to Sebopioa. Silas also sponsored his late brother Israel's son, Officer, through his studies at Lovedale Missionary Institute in the eastern Cape, but the two were never tied by an intimate filial bond.⁵⁸ Of the young men in his generation, it was Sebopioa who would inherit rule should the Montsioa family find themselves ousted. None of the three men that were Montsioa's known sons had direct heirs themselves, and Joshua Molema was amongst the likeliest candidates to act as

⁵⁶ Rex vs Montsioa, CSC 2/671/254.

⁵⁷ Pledge statement of Band of Hope, undated, A979Cc11.3.

⁵⁸ Lovedale Missionary Institution to S.T. Molema, 21 September 1896, 9 February 1898, 16 September 1898, 4 February 1899, 6 March 1899, 18 July 1900, 4 October 1900, 17 November 1900, A979Aa3.

regent should any of them be too young to rule, or be overthrown. Genealogy itself was mutable as polygamy, the levirate and intermarriage made paternity susceptible to manipulation as notables competed for power.⁵⁹

Sebopioa was born with a disability on his left foot and walked, for the whole of his life, with a limp.⁶⁰ He developed an early awareness of his expected future role. He was closely attached to Silas as his father and model of success, whilst he remained Joshua's son too. Although Joshua was also schooled, he generally followed his younger brother's lead in matters of business.⁶¹ He considered himself a 'grey-beard' out of step with his son's generation, which wished to travel overseas, go to university and hold professional jobs.⁶² Though politically astute and very ambitious, Joshua was neither as enterprising as Silas, nor as successful in business or wealth, nor did he have his younger brother's ability to build multiple connections with European professionals, farmers, and traders in Mafikeng. Also parenting in practice did not encourage the exclusive grounding of children in their nuclear families. The Molemas lived together as an extended family in a semi-circle of late Victorian architecture overlooking the banks of the Molopo River. Joshua's house stood only a short distance from *Baratuwa*. In a setting where children were not encouraged to remain in adult company, and directed instead to socialise with their age mates, cousins created a shared world of their own, which also made parental bonds more fluid.

In 1891 Silas' son, Modiri, was born at a time when his father's transport business was expanding. The year before Silas had spent £125 on a brand new wagon. In 1891 he exchanged

⁵⁹ J. Comaroff, 'Rules and Rulers: Political Processes in a Tswana Chiefdom', *Man*, 13, 1, (1978) 1-20.

⁶⁰ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 9 August 1915, A979Ac1.

⁶¹ See for example, 14 March 1912 to 22 December 1916, Gordon and Sons, Butchers and General Cattle Dealers vs S.T. Molema and J. Molema, henceforth Gordon vs Molema, CSC 2/1/1/801 84.

⁶² S.T. Molema to L.J. Coppin, undated, A979Cc11.

fourteen oxen for two new carts.⁶³ Purchases of new blankets, shawls and clothing, including jackets, hats, shirts and trousers indicated that the household flourished. In addition to coffee, tea, milk and sugar, they bought cordial and golden syrup.⁶⁴ The transport business was susceptible to unexpected lulls however. Concentrated investment in wagons and carts in times of boom could easily prove a punishing over-investment a few months down the line. 1893 and 1894 were tough years, likely due to poor yields. Even a large landowner like Silas had to purchase mealies.⁶⁵ Though amongst the largest landowners, Silas did not create much wealth from stock-farming and agriculture. For reasons outlined in the next chapter Molemas and other notables lived on rents, a portion of which was paid in cash. During these lean years Silas' household tightened spending considerably. Credit from traders and small loans were necessary to make it through the harshest patches when the transport business was slow.⁶⁶

In the spring of 1894 grain was again being circulated as a currency of exchange.⁶⁷ In fact the autumn of 1894 (May-June in this winter rainfall area) brought a bumper harvest.⁶⁸ Business soon picked up. The following year Silas' wagons and carts were commissioned by agents like Musson Bros to transport bags of grain as far as Vryburg, and to Palapje and Molepolole in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. To transport a single load of about 1600lb from Mafikeng to Palapje cost as much as £48.⁶⁹ Silas was only one amongst many wagon owners in Mafikeng but unlike many he was not himself a rider. He hired men to drive oxen for as many as nine wagons at a time.⁷⁰ Ordinarily, men in the transport business rode their own

⁶³ Musson Bros invoice 1890 September 18, A979Aa3.3; Receipt 1891 August 10, A979Aa3.3.

⁶⁴ Invoice Whiteley, Walker & Co, 3 January 1891; 17 September 1891; 4 January 1892, A979Aa3.3; Invoice N. House & Co, 27 September 1892, A979Aa3.3.

⁶⁵ Whiteley, Walker & Co receipt, 27 October 1892, A979Aa3.3.

⁶⁶ Credit statement, WWC, 24 March 1893, A979Aa3.3; Unspecified credit 15 March 1893, 8 November 1893 and 28 May 1894 A979Aa3.3; Promissory Note, WWC 15 June 1894, A979Aa3.4.

⁶⁷ Cassim Wade Brothers receipt, 12 September 1894, A979Aa3.2.

⁶⁸ Shillington, *Luka Jantjie*, 180.

⁶⁹ WWC, 21 September 1895, A979Aa3.2.

⁷⁰ Musson Bros to S.T. Molema, 5 August 1895, A979Aa3.

wagons, and takings of £50 a year were enough to ‘purchase’ land and pay quitrent.⁷¹ The diamond fields in Kimberley continued to be a favourable market for mielies, kaffir corn, wheat and forage.⁷² But the cycle of good fortune did not last long. In April of 1896 rinderpest – a contagious and deadly cattle disease – crossed the Molopo River from the north, and killed tens of thousands of cattle as it spread southwards. Riders had to abandon their wagons along the roads as their oxen died.⁷³ In the same year old Chief Montsioa died, and Silas’ second daughter, Harriet, was born.

Very quickly donkeys replaced oxen in front of carts and wagons. Silas’ advantage was his longstanding relationships with big general dealers. Whitely, Walker & Co was a ready creditor and advanced him £190 in December of 1896.⁷⁴ This seems to have gone towards the purchase of 38 donkeys.⁷⁵ He also borrowed another £190 from C. de Clarke in February of the following year.⁷⁶ It may have been in this context that Silas accepted £300 from Cecil Rhodes and granted him permission to launch the infamous Jameson Raid from his farm, Mabete, in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.⁷⁷ So soon after the incorporation of the reserve into the Cape Colony, this may also have been a way for Mafikeng’s nobility to cement relationships with powerful white politicians who were now in direct control of their territory. What is certain is that the scarcity of oxen and Silas’ quick ability to convert to donkeys made him one of the few functioning wagon transporters at the time so that he was able to expand his business. By the end of 1897 Whiteley, Walker & Co owed him £900 for transport services.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Testimony, Paul Sebaetse, Case 34, *Kgotla*, 1901 April 9, A979Cb2.2.

⁷² Montsioa to Victoria, undated c. 1895, A979 Ba16.

⁷³ Shillington, *Luka Jantjie*, 194 ; C. van Onselen, ‘Reactions to Rinderpest in South Africa, 1896-97’, *Journal of African History*, 13, 3 (1972), 473-488.

⁷⁴ Credit note, WWC, 19 December 1896, 28 December 1896, A979Aa3.

⁷⁵ Account statement, WWC, 31 July 1897, A979Aa3.2.

⁷⁶ Promissory note, C. de Clarke, 18 February 1897, A979Aa3.

⁷⁷ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 63.

⁷⁸ Account statement, WWC, 16 November 1897 A979Aa3.2.

In the meantime however, Silas had accumulated a debt of over £520 across Whiteley, Walker & Co's counter. Although the advances of cash following the rinderpest, and the subsequent expansion of the business through donkeys had been costly, Mrs Molema's household expenditure had also bulked up considerably. All shopping at Whiteley, Walker & Co was purchased on credit mortgaged against the wagons' potential earnings for the wholesaler that year. Between May and November of 1897 the household enjoyed luxuries like a tin of 'french coffee' when many were still reeling from the cattle plague. In addition they purchased jam, milk, fruit salts, coffee, chicory, tea, sugar, as well as blankets, aprons, a tablecloth and a sunshade. There was also a range of new clothing, including a suit, ties, a jacket and a cap, probably for Sebopioa as he proceeded to Lovedale Missionary Institute. In comparison, Joshua Molema's account at Whiteley, Walker & Co, only amounted to £3-17-6 over the same period.⁷⁹

Silas' efforts were still on expanding his business, and he continued to take every opportunity to purchase cheap donkeys.⁸⁰ Unfortunately the days of successful wagon transporters were already numbered. In 1890 the Cape government had started to construct a railway line from the north of Griqualand West to Mafikeng, intending that it would extend all the way north towards Rhodesia. African farmers could send their grain directly to Kimberley by rail, although it was still necessary to hire wagons to transport goods from the *stadt* and surrounding villages to town.⁸¹ Large wholesalers like Whiteley, Walker & Co would have been the first to take advantage of such a service. At the same time many in the Cape's growing number of 'poor whites' were taking up cart-driving, likely pushing transport prices down to

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Receipt 1897 September (undated) A979Aa3.3

⁸¹ Shillington, *Luka Jantjie*, 174 and 177.

compete with more established African businesses.⁸² The government also made a concerted effort to curtail ox-wagons whose affordability made the railway less profitable. What gave ox-wagons an advantage was how ‘transporter and merchant fed off one another’ through the very credit cycle Molema’s accounts reflected. White traders were offered competitive incentives by the government in order to dissolve such arrangements.⁸³ These are possibly some of the reasons why Whiteley, Walker & Co did not hire Silas’s transport services in 1898. Instead, Silas transported goods for Loosely & McLaren General Merchants, a smaller wholesaler than his previous patron.⁸⁴

At the beginning of 1898, there were at least four young Molemas at Lovedale, including Sebopioa, Seleje, Officer and one other relation, for whose fees Silas was solely responsible.⁸⁵ Until Loosley & McLaren paid him for transport services rendered at the end of the year, Silas had very little money in hand and relied on rents.⁸⁶ By September of that year Sebopioa and Officer’s fees were in arrears, and the college warned that ‘all boys whose fees are not paid by the end of this month cannot be allowed to attend classes beyond this date.’⁸⁷ Silas had to ask for an advance of cash from Loosley & McLaren.⁸⁸ His savings at Standard Bank were completely spent. In fact, so little remained, that his attorney and lifelong friend, Spencer Minchin, had to notify him that a small bill of £1-1-10 was not provided for.⁸⁹ At the end of 1898 his earnings from Loosley & McLaren were just under £320, but due to credit he

⁸² C. Bundy, ‘Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism’, in W. Beinart et al. (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, (Braamfontein, 1986), 101-28.

⁸³ G. Pirie, ‘Slaughter by Steam: Railway Subjugation of Ox-Wagon Transport in the Eastern Cape and Transkei, 1886-1910’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26, 2 (1993), 319-343.

⁸⁴ Account Statement, Loosely & McLaren, A979Aa3.2.

⁸⁵ Fee statements: 9 February 1898, A979Aa3.3; 2 April 1898, A979Aa3; 1898 June 18 A979Aa3.3: 12 September 1898, A979Aa3.

⁸⁶ For example, receipt for A. Transfeldt, 9 November 1898, A979Ca4.

⁸⁷ Lovedale to S.T.Molema, 16 September 1898, A979Aa3.

⁸⁸ Account statement, Loosely & McLaren, 19 December 1898, A979Aa3.2; note entries for 2 May 1898, and 4 October 1898.

⁸⁹ S. Minchin to S.T. Molema, 9 November 1898, A979Aa3.2.

had taken earlier in the year he took home a little under £130. Spending in the household appears to have spiralled out of control considering the bill accrued at Whiteley, Walker & Co for over £400. In comparison, Joshua's spending at the same store over the same period was just under £35.⁹⁰ Amongst Silas' first business transactions early in January, 1899 was a loan from attorney J.W de Kock for £97.⁹¹ Much of this would have paid school fees as children returned to Lovedale.⁹² When de Kock called in his loan in April, Silas had nothing to offer.⁹³ Returns from wagon services rendered to Loosley & McLaren amounted only to about £18.⁹⁴ Despite his unusual success in the transport trade, all indicators suggest that Silas had overstretched himself and the family was spending too much. Silas' prospects were looking decisively bleak, and he teetered on the edge of bankruptcy.

To conclude, wagon riding was a form of service-capitalism through which Molema amassed wealth (and debts) during the 1880s and 1890s. It set him head and shoulders above the rest of the educated nobility, certainly African commoners, as well as some Europeans in the trade. But his investment was undermined by various lulls in commerce, rinderpest and railways, whilst his family's expenditure typically continued uncurbed. In these two decades however, as discussed in the next section, Molema was scoring considerable success in local politics. He established his newspaper, *Koranta ea Bechuana*, even whilst his quality of life rapidly fell into decline.

⁹⁰ Account statement, WWC, 19 December 1898, A979Aa3.2.

⁹¹ J.W.de Kock to S.T.Molema, 05 January 1899, A979Aa3.

⁹² Lovedale fee statements: 4 February 1899; 13 February 1899; 6 March 1899; 5 April 1899; A979Aa3.3.

⁹³ De Kock to S.T. Molema, 7 April 1899, A979Aa3.

⁹⁴ Account statement, Loosely & McLaren, 31 May 1899, A979Aa3.

iii. Balancing debt and power

Chief Montsioa died in 1896. The Cape's colonial administrators were hesitant to leave Bechuana to appoint their own paramount rulers, especially if these were recognised as hereditary chiefs by the local populace. The colonial government preferred to rule through salaried headmen instead. However, the Civil Commissioner of Mafikeng, George Boyes, convinced Rose Innes, as Undersecretary for Native Affairs, that 'there are many strong reasons I could place before you showing the advisability of appointing a Chief as a successor to the late Montsioa but think that Sir Sidney Shippard's pledge is conclusive and any deviation from that promise would be a breach of faith.'⁹⁵ Chief Wessels Montsioa was duly appointed with a payment of £150 from the Cape government.

It did not take very long for Wessel's alcoholism and irresponsibility to become a ready opportunity for Molemas to swing public opinion to their advantage. By the time the South African War broke out in 1899, divisions in the chieftaincy were rife, and the paramount's imprudence all the more apparent. According to educated paramount chiefs in the Bechuanaland Protectorate who supported Molema, Wessels was certainly not the right man. Silas on the other hand was their friend and confidant. They regarded him as an equal in matters of rule, exchanged news about their personal struggles with him, and even anxiety over the imposition of tax on their people.⁹⁶ Chief Bathoen in Kanye (Map 2) thought of Wessels as a man of little discretion and a snare to his people's progress. Wessels had very limited education but also none of his father's political tact. He could make no allies amongst the educated and forward-looking chiefs in the north. 'Even in the midst of wars', Chief Bathoen wrote to Silas

⁹⁵ G.B. Boyles to R. Innes, 19 October 1896, A979Bb1.

⁹⁶ Sechele to S.T Molema, 20 July 1904, A979Aa2.21.

about Wessels, 'he is yet to perceive, yet to know himself as a man in great trouble, but [he is] without understanding or even any small feat. Is he ever to rouse himself into good sense?'⁹⁷

Mafikeng came under siege in October of 1899 at the beginning of the South African War. The town's European community had its residences and business district sheltered from Boer commandos by the main *stadt* - as a town of residence was generally referred to by Africans. About 5000 Africans who lived in the *stadt* fiercely defended it, and thus guarded the safety of the European community. Silas's clout in the arena of politics was strengthened further in the early months of 1900 when he became chief of Polhfontein. This was a small *stadt* on the border of the Transvaal.⁹⁸ The people of Polhfontein were the Rapulana Barolong, who had sided with Afrikaner settlers against Montsioa in the wars of the 1880s. This time they were supporting their allies against Britain. The British gave Silas and his men permission to raid Polhfontein. Some of the Rapulana in the *stadt* were forced to remove to Lotlhokana (Rietfontein), which was Montsioa's old capital before he joined Isaac Molema in Mafikeng. (Map 1) This was intended as partial compensation for Boer attacks in Montsioa's *stadt*. The arrangement to raid Polhfontein was a gentleman's agreement made between General Baden Powell (as well as other representatives of the colonial government, including the Civil Commissioner of Mafikeng) and the Mafikeng nobility. It left no paper trail. There are no records of damages and no formal application for compensation, save petitions of grave anguish to the government when Silas was swiftly deposed as chief of Polhfontein soon after the war.⁹⁹ Before his unseating, Silas had worked tirelessly and enthusiastically with British

⁹⁷ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 30 December 1899, A979Aa2.13. Sechuana

⁹⁸ For history of various Barolong polities see, S.M. Molema, *Montshiwa, 1815-1896: Barolong Chief and Patriot* (Botswana, 1966).

⁹⁹ *Koranta*, 31 January 1903.

officials. He disposed of imprisoned Africans' lands, and returned to the British any of their stock that had been looted.¹⁰⁰

On Silas's home front however, things remained difficult, especially the pressure to pay school fees.¹⁰¹ Rents and the sale of excess donkeys were not enough to settle Lovedale's bills, or even to chip away at the debt accumulated the previous year.¹⁰² By July of 1900 his family had suffered considerable damage to crops and property due to war. Damage on his lands outside the *stadt* was extensive. While Africans could protect Mafikeng and other smaller *stadts* in the reserve, they could not protect the surrounding countryside. Two large houses, each of three rooms were burnt down at Kromdraai, whilst a stable for six horses was destroyed. Building material, including almost 80 large sheets of iron 9 to 10 ft long, half of which were new, 18 rolls of barbed wire, and thirty bags of lime were all taken as loot, as well as one donkey and 36 fowl. The iron house, formerly the Mafeking Market House, which Silas bought in 1898 was also destroyed. He lost also eight ploughs, five of them brand new, as well as a 'good' wagon, three wheel barrows and a new saddle. Two fields of kaffir corn and fruit trees were razed. The Boers took away also 8 bags of wheat and 4 of oats.¹⁰³

It helped that the British needed wagons to transport supplies. At one time, about 30 wagons were needed to carry goods between various camps although the rate of hire was low, at £1 a day per wagon.¹⁰⁴ Again Silas invested in more wagons and carts but this time bidding for them at auctions at a low price.¹⁰⁵ Auctioneers, especially Dennison & Cranswick, soon

¹⁰⁰ Civil Commissioner to S.T. Molema, 5 July 1900, A979Aa4.

¹⁰¹ Lovedale to S.T. Molema, 18 July 1900; 4 October 1900: A979Aa3.3.

¹⁰² Receipt, 27 February 1900, A 979 Ca4; Rent J. Dall 9 May 1900, A979Aa3.2 and J. Kay, 1 September 1900, A979Ca4; Payment, WWC, 1 September 1900, A979Aa3.3.

¹⁰³ G.H. Bell to S.T. Molema & Molema's copy of response; 29 July 1900, A979Cc2.

¹⁰⁴ J.M. Moffat to S.T. Molema or W. Montsioa, undated, A979Bb2.

¹⁰⁵ Receipt E. Platnauer Auctioneers, 20 October 1900 and 27 October 1900, A979Aa3.2; Receipt Dennison & Cranswick Auctioneers, 27 October 1900, A979Aa3.2.

replaced wholesalers like Whiteley, Walker & Co as a place for domestic purchases.¹⁰⁶ The elaborate purchases at Whiteley, Walker & Co at the end of October, including a suit, ribbon, lace, camphor and scent are difficult to explain. These all added to over £72, bringing the outstanding balance to over £550.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the reason, it was an indulgent slip from thrift the family could not afford considering children's school fees at Lovedale were in arrears.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that Mrs Molema was not fully aware of her husband's growing financial crisis, and was anxious to maintain standards. By the end of 1900, Silas' account at Standard Bank was withdrawn by over £210.¹⁰⁹

In the meantime, school fees were in fact rising. According to Lovedale's principal, the increase in fees at the end of 1900 was 'absolutely necessary' due not only to a steep rise in food costs, but also a 'greatly increased requirement of Native Education'.¹¹⁰ In the new year, whatever amount was being made in Silas's transport business and on rents was being reinvested in cows and calves bought at Dennison & Cranswick auctioneers.¹¹¹ Silas was also borrowing money from European friends in town. Minchin, for example, paid £100 into Silas' account at Whiteley, Walker & Co, but even then, almost £400 was outstanding.¹¹² Two months into 1901 the general dealer lost patience with Silas, who had 'made not the slightest attempt to reduce the account' for many months.¹¹³ A month later, Lovedale's headmaster was similarly anxious over Silas's children's unpaid fees, especially because many African families found it difficult to keep up with payments, putting Lovedale 'under very great expense' to run a

¹⁰⁶ Receipt E. Platnauer Auctioneers, 20 October 1900, A979Aa3.2; Receipt Dennison & Cranswick, 15 September 1900, 1 December 1900, 22 December 1900, 29 December 1900, A979Aa3.2.

¹⁰⁷ Account statement, WWC, 31 October 1900, A979Aa3.2.

¹⁰⁸ Lovedale to S.T. Molema, 4 October 1900, A979Aa3; 17 November 1900, A979Aa3.3.

¹⁰⁹ Standard Bank to S.T. Molema, 31 December 1900, A979Aa3.2.

¹¹⁰ Lovedale memo, 1900 November undated, A979Aa3.

¹¹¹ Receipt, Dennison & Cranswick, 9 January 1901 and 15 January 1901, A979Aa3.2.

¹¹² Account statement, 26 January 1901, A979Aa3.3.

¹¹³ WWC 28 February 1901, A979Aa3.

boarding school with ‘a large amount of fees still unpaid.’¹¹⁴ At about this time, Silas received £617 as war compensation.¹¹⁵ He paid school fees and parts of his major debts, including at Whiteley, Walker & Co.¹¹⁶ Auctions remained the place to purchase clothing and other items although now and again the family still rang up debt for jam, lemon squash, tobacco, new trousers and shawls at stores in the town.¹¹⁷

Outwardly little would have suggested these pressures on the family, not least the fact that Silas started on a new business venture. In 1901 he became the owner of *Koranta ea Bechuana*, published in English and Sechuana. There was a market for bilingual regional newspapers in the Cape. *Imvo Zabantsundu* edited by Tengo Jabavu was flourishing, as did its competitor *Izwi la Bantu* edited by Allan Soga (though the latter had a relatively short life). Mark Radebe edited *Ipepa lo Hlanga* as an organ for the African Political Organisation.¹¹⁸ These editors were influential amongst their fellow Xhosa speakers, but also critical for white politicians who canvassed support amongst African voters. It was arranged that the proprietor of the English daily, the *Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian*, George Whales would print the first 12 numbers of *Koranta*. In exchange, he retained 20 per cent of the advertising commission, and Silas purchased full copyright. These arrangements were facilitated very ably through Silas’ attorney and friend Spencer Minchin. The energy and creative spirit behind the initiative however was Solomon Plaatje, who became the newspaper’s editor. Each week, as of April 1901, 500 copies of *Koranta* were printed.¹¹⁹ Silas could pay nothing towards Whales’ expenses in printing the first runs of the paper, as per the arrangement described above. He

¹¹⁴ Lovedale to S.T.Molema, 21 March 1901, A979Aa3.

¹¹⁵ *Mafeking Mai*, 8 December 1900.

¹¹⁶ Lovedale receipt, 13 May 1901; A979Aa3.2; Account statement Whiteley, Walker & Co, 3 August 1901, A979Aa3.

¹¹⁷ Receipt Dennison & Cranswick, 28 September 1901, 26 October 1901, A979Aa3.2; Account statement Dr W.S. Keurs, 31 December 1901, A979Aa3.2.

¹¹⁸ L. Switzer and D. Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Description Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines, 1836-1976* (Boston, 1979), 4-5.

¹¹⁹ G. Whales to S.T. Molema, 31 August 1901, A979Aa3.6.2; and 5 September 1901, A979Aa3.6.1.2.

asked Whales to ‘think of a sum which may defray your expenses so far, with advantage.’ Silas would then take over the paper, but still rely on Whales to print it for him.¹²⁰ At the end of August 1901, Silas took over fully from Whales as proprietor of *Koranta*, writing to Whales that ‘at the present there is only hard work to get Bechuanaland to know the paper.’ He added that ‘this he was preparing to do’ as soon as the remaining technicalities were handled.¹²¹

If managed profitably a newspaper could help its owner diversify his business dealings following the devastation of rinderpest and war, but it also held obvious political gains for a chiefly notable whose scope of influence was widening. Indeed *Koranta*’s start-up capital was not so much money Silas held in hand, but rather his strengthened political clout in the region. To appreciate this, one has to cast the eye a few years down the line, well after Britain’s victory in the war. In 1904 when the paper prematurely started to fold, Chief Bathoen of Bangoaketse in Kanye described *Koranta* as work laboured upon by ‘all the nations of Sechuana’.¹²² Bathoen and Silas had come a long way as affectionate friends. Silas kept some of Bathoen’s stock on his grazing lands, and in the winter of 1900 sent a pair of warm socks to him.¹²³ Hence Bathoen nursed a deep disappointment that Silas has not let him into his confidence when the preparations for launching *Koranta* were afoot. He felt a confidant had painfully excluded him from a project other Bechuana chiefs were invited to participate in. When *Koranta*’s financial ruin was about to cost Silas one of two properties in the reserve that he could mortgage (Chapter 2) he sent a letter to other Bechuana chiefs to ask for donations. Bathoen’s pained feelings immediately surfaced. The content of his outburst suggests how, even in Bathoen’s perception, Silas had emerged as an influential leader, able to rally other Bechuana chiefs. It also suggests

¹²⁰ S. T. Molema to Whales, undated 1901, A979Aa3.6.2.

¹²¹ S. T. Molema to Whales, 1901 undated, A979Aa3.6. Emphasis in original.

¹²² Bathoen to S. T. Molema, 14 July 1904, A979Aa2.20. Sechuana

¹²³ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 16 June 1900, A979Aa2.14. Sechuana

how *Koranta* reinforced the connections between various Bechuana polities and how it drew both materially and otherwise from their real or imagined existence.

Your words about Koranta have arrived. Gaboutlelwe and Chief Lengkwane have spoken what you have sent them to say. Even the letter has said everything. We, as Bangoaketse are very saddened, very much, about the deed you have done to us. Do Barolong of Tawana [Silas's clan name] have work that they wish to do with all the nations of Setswana? And you told all of your nations (*merafe*), Bahuruthsi, Barolong of Seleka and Batlhaping and all the nations after you all came together per your agreement. You heard when someone said that he knows others, Bangoaketse there, do not forget them. Do not speak and do such a thing Barolong of Tawana and Makaba. Ah what great pain! Now that we have heard Morolong what can we say, do as usual according to your seats of position and status! Had you not sat on them, this would be my work, I would be alone in it.¹²⁴

Silas had acquired such 'position and status' as to be the central figure around whom a regional project was orchestrated. In Bathoen's mind the nation was both the smaller enclaves of chiefly domains (Map 5a), and their collective imagination as one nation from which he felt he had been excluded. In fact there is no evidence that any other chief received special invitation to participate. Rather, as soon as it was published, readers and their chiefs immediately recognised *Koranta* as another opportunity for a public assembly and duly attended. The blame for Bathoen's feelings lay with Silas' incapacity to nourish intimate relationships through consistent correspondence when pressures of work weighed down on him. Four months later in November 1904 peace had been restored, and Bathoen wrote to Silas, that 'I am grateful my kinsman for such excellent work'.¹²⁵ He sent £100 towards *Koranta* in the spirit of a 'loan' but one whose payment period was indefinite.¹²⁶ 'A river' Bathoen said 'is filled by rivulets'.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Bathoen to S.T. Molema 14 July 1904 A970Aa2.20. Sechuana

¹²⁵ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 23 November 1904, A979Aa2.23. Sechuana

¹²⁶ Compare Bathoen to S. T Molema 18 March 1909, A979Aa2.87 to De Kock to S.T.Molema 6 November 1914 A979Aa3.

¹²⁷ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 23 November 1904, A979Aa2.23.

This section has detailed how from its very genesis, *Koranta* was established against financial odds. A reading public however was available, ready to read and circulate the newspaper across wide distances. *Koranta* was proof that the nation existed and was founded on the ideals of progress. The section below reveals that although *Koranta* was the nation's proudest moment of reawakening, it was a forum that made public its deep anxieties about meritocracy, the durability of chiefly rule, and the future. It also reflected educated Africans' own understandings of *sechuana* and *sekgoa* not as practices of everyday life, but as contested ways of being and orientations to the world.

iv. Fashioning the past in the present

Koranta quickly became a household name amongst those Bechuana that considered themselves enlightened. In Mafikeng, it was a mouthpiece for those Barolong who saw themselves as a progressive voice in the politics of the times, not only in the chieftaincy, but also in South Africa. It was essentially a Sechuana paper, with some English editorials and other content. It was described by one reader as a 'risen light', a 'rising star' that made known 'the fortunes of the wise man' to the nation.¹²⁸ The newspaper connected Bechuana who had been dispersed by forces of dispossession early in the nineteenth century. Many Bechuana south of the Molopo River no longer shared an agrarian base. In Thaba 'Nchu there existed a class of Barolong notables who held land on private tenure. Others held land in communal tenure in a number of areas emerging as locations. Many educated families had migrated to mission stations and small towns, and others had been displaced by war. *Koranta* was printed and circulated in Mafikeng, and distributed also in and around Kimberley, Johannesburg, Winburg, Kroonstad, Thaba 'Nchu, Bloemfonten and Vryburg. Agents also sold *Koranta*

¹²⁸ *Koranta*, 27 April 1901. Sechuana

amongst farming communities in Kraaipan, Modder River and Matloasane.¹²⁹ *Koranta's* circulation peaked at close to 4000 – a comparatively large figure at the time.¹³⁰

The people of Montsioa's reserve were still largely self-sustaining on the land at this time. As soon as gold was discovered in the Rand, Chief Montsioa had started dispatching men to the mines as a way to prove loyalty to the British Crown.¹³¹ At this stage this was not so much an obligation to the British but a tactful defence of political autonomy by throwing something at the predators before they helped themselves. Wages could also be converted into technologies useful for agriculture, like ploughs and tools to dig wells and boreholes. The widening cash nexus in the countryside and the increasing pressure on land made intermittent spells in the mines (where wages were higher than on white-owned farms) attractive to maintain peasant livelihoods.¹³² But agrarian production was the primary survival strategy. This is evident in the difficulty British officials found 'to meet demand for Transport natives from [the] Cape Colony' during and after the war.¹³³ The war presented opportunity also for peasant suppliers and contractors.¹³⁴

The increase in the levels of literacy and formal education amongst Africans at this time coincided with heightened insecurity around the social position they would occupy in the years after the South African War. As the war ended the mood was optimistic, especially in Mafikeng, that Britain would reward Africans' patriotism and contribution during hostilities. The vision of reconstruction spearheaded by Sir Alfred Milner however was a reconfiguration

¹²⁹ See for example *Koranta*, 1 November 1902.

¹³⁰ S. Les, The African Christian Community and its Press in Victoria South Africa, *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 24, 96 (1984), 455-76.

¹³¹ Montsioa to Victoria, undated 1884, A979Ba16.

¹³² Beinart and Delius (eds.), Introduction, *Putting a Plough to the Ground*, 14.

¹³³ Memo, W. Wickham, A.A.G. Transport, 1902 February 6, A979Cc7.

¹³⁴ B. Nasson, 'Moving Lord Kitchener: Black Military Transport and Supply Work in the South African War, 1899-1902, with particular reference to the Cape Colony', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1, (1984) 21-55.

of the South African political economy that would make gold mining in the Rand profitable. Expensive white labour was to be systematically replaced with cheap African migrants. The Transvaal's agrarian sector was to be encouraged towards modernisation and cash crops, especially maize, and there too African labour was indispensable.¹³⁵ Many African people, however, held a very different idea about their future. Over 93 per cent of Africans in the Cape were illiterate but many were taking strident action to access some level of education.¹³⁶ African educational institutions were struggling to keep up with the demand for education, and many had to turn pupils away, as happened at Lovedale in January of 1902.¹³⁷

Educated Bechuana, more so Barolong who were doubly proud of *Koranta* because the newspaper originated within their smaller nation, aspired to chart their way to greater 'progress' (*coelo-pele*) on the pages of the newspaper. In this view, progress was certainly not the arrival of missionaries and their schools. Rather, it was the essence of the nation from long ago. In contemplating their great past, and continuing its worthy traditions, the nation could re-awaken fully into its heritage of progress. Interaction between the literate Bechuana public and the newspaper was largely mediated by a powerful symbolism of *Koranta* as a 'big school', and as such an open forum for vibrant debate.¹³⁸ It was for many a continuation of the Molema family's sacrificial efforts to educate and build up Tshidi towards greater achievements. Men like Patrick Lenkoane associated the birth of the Barolong nation not with Chief Montsioa, but his half-brother, Isaac Molema, as a progressive pioneer.

¹³⁵ S. Marks and S. Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South African State', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1 (1979), 50-81.; S. Trapido, Imperialism, Settler Identities, and Colonial Capitalism: The Hundred Year Origins of the South African War, in Hamilton et al, (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol 2, 1888-1994*, (Cambridge, 2012) 66-101

¹³⁶ See Cape of Good Hope Census, 1905.

¹³⁷ *Koranta*, 31 January 1902. Sechuana

¹³⁸ See *Koranta*, 31 August 1901. Sechuana

As a 'big school', *Koranta* was directing the nation towards its roots. Amongst the most articulate proponents of this view was Rev Joel D Goronyane. He was a landed notable amongst the Seleka Barolong in Thaba 'Nchu, and a very committed and spirited educationalist and teacher. He worked as an agent for the newspaper in Thaba 'Nchu, encouraging more readers to subscribe. In his thinking, *Koranta* was an unprecedented achievement amongst Barolong, and a conduit of education. It taught them today about the greatness of their origins. If the nation was, given present day circumstances, uncertain about where it came from, *Koranta* was testimony of its honourable foundations:

You also today have the *Koranta*, in your own language of Serolong. By taking it, you would be honouring your origin (root), as all other people honour theirs; by not taking it, you are weakening it, and hence weakening yourself. If you honour it you honour yourself ... That is the ambition of nationhood, that each and every one does according to his origin, and if it is not there to make it, to make it so that it can become, because if people do not have their origin, they would not be people but rats.¹³⁹

Public criticism of Wessel's leadership was rife in Plaatje's bold editorials. He appeared as the misguided leader, from a household of 'white youth'. Whiteness (*sekgoa*) was by no means a complimentary term, but one of disparagement, in this case to indicate idle although literate youth. Wessels should take heed, *Koranta* advised, to follow in the footsteps of the past. His father relied on the younger generation, including Silas and Joshua Molema, as workers in the chieftaincy. Of what use were Wessel's younger siblings, including heir to the throne Balirile Montsioa?¹⁴⁰ Were Silas Molema's children, Seleje and Sebopioa, who were already acting as scribes for their father, not better models of what the nation's future leaders should be?¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *Koranta*, 4 October 1902. Sechuana

¹⁴⁰ *Koranta*, 2 May 1903; *Koranta*, 1903 May 8. Sechuana

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,.

Images of the past are contested of course, and there were many amongst Barolong who refused to send their children to school, precisely because education ‘spoilt’ children.¹⁴² They thought schooling could potentially deracialise children, as they could learn to become white (*makgoa*). That is to say they could unlearn their sense of being (*botho*) as Bechuana, and so lose their rootedness in *sechuana* as a continuing cultural matrix in which a proper self developed. *Sekgoa* was contamination by Westernisation, and these were families that did not want to raise men who would ‘fear cattle’ or not know how to steer the plough. Others were not convinced that the investment in formal schooling would pay off for Africans, and preferred to teach their children how to eke an independent livelihood on the land.¹⁴³ Also fears were rampant that unless families ploughed their fields, these could be taken over by ‘envious’ whites.¹⁴⁴ These families, much to *Koranta*’s chagrin, rejected schooling. They continued to practice polygamy, sent their children off to initiation school, and smeared their skins with red ochre. In challenging the version of origins put forward by men like Goronyane, these families were pursuing strategies that they deemed critical for their survival.

Yet, *sekgoa* was undesirable even amongst those, like Molemas, that lived in many ways like middle-class Europeans. *Sechuana* meant looking at and living in the world in particular ways, which applied to work too. This latter question, concerning the meaning of labour and how it was organised, became a central bone of contention in the fierce political debate around the ‘native question.’ These matters became even more contentious as the Transvaal required more African labour. Especially in Plaatje’s thinking, formal schooling should be aligned towards ‘labour through dignity and contentment’, something he considered a natural disposition of Africans, and not Europeans. That is why schools had something of an

¹⁴² *Koranta*, 31 August 1901. Sechuana

¹⁴³ *Koranta*, 28 February 1903. Sechuana

¹⁴⁴ *Koranta*, 30 May 1903. Sechuana

obligation to encourage racial segregation along appropriate lines. Under no circumstances, he argued, should education encourage *sekgoa*, meaning those undesirable elements of cultural transformation. Schooling Africans should produce ‘good black men and not attempt to make impossible white men out of good black men, and thereby waste excellent new material.’¹⁴⁵ In a set of passionate editorials, many of which he wrote in Sechuana exclusively for his own people, Plaatje argued that Africans were British subjects holding the same legal and political status in the Empire as Europeans. But ‘social equality’ between Africans and Europeans was an idea as outrageous as marriage across the colour bar. Socalled miscegenation, according to *Koranta*, would result in the ‘inauguration of a generation of half-castes, and the total obliteration of our race and colour, both of which are very dear to us.’¹⁴⁶

Therefore, whatever Bechuana wished to accomplish through the classroom should be suited to their unique make-up. Every child should of necessity be sent to school, but not to pursue whichever dream they had of their future. On the contrary, unbounded aspiration was a peril that jeopardised the nation’s prosperity. Not only that, such uncontrolled ambition choked the nation’s articulation of its fullest self in its infancy. To realise it, children had to be trained according to their family’s rank and status. Making every effort to ‘reach for the stars’ was not for all and sundry.

It is of great sadness that Bechuana say they are teaching children, hence they have stopped teaching them the important work of Sechuana, saying now they are educated, they must reach for stars. These stars are that which have killed the nation. Try to help your children to ready themselves with the things they can achieve in their mother’s households ... If you skill yourselves well to work with your hands, you will find yourself doing well. Then whilst whites are becoming magistrates and judges, you eat the land and of its fat.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ *Koranta*, 25 October 1902.

¹⁴⁶ *Koranta*, 13 September 1902.

¹⁴⁷ *Koranta*, 7 March 1903, Sechuana.

Rather than a 'proletariat of professors' what was needed was 'a labouring class thoroughly and well educated', although it was accepted that 'some ... will naturally occupy positions as clerks and professional men.'¹⁴⁸ A sheep farmer in Mafikeng would, for example, learn how to read the fluctuations in wool prices as reported in *Koranta*, and negotiate his trade accordingly.¹⁴⁹ Others could, for example run dairies, producing milk, cheese and butter. One could also be a wagon rider, or own a small but profitable enterprise weaving baskets or sowing blankets.

This was a vision comparable to that of educated peasant farmers and independent craftsman, selling their goods and producing profit.¹⁵⁰ The missionaries that first converted the Barolong were themselves 'self-made men', who encouraged 'mechanical arts'.¹⁵¹ Hence, for Plaatje, the carpenter was the 'greatest figure in history'.¹⁵² This view was later also influenced by Booker T Washington's notion of self-improvement through industrial training, including carpentry, weaving baskets, sowing shoes and blankets, gardening, cookery and so on. Washington's speeches and activities at his Tuskegee Negro Conference were familiar inserts in *Koranta*. The pursuit of profit separated *Koranta*'s vision from European missionaries' ideal of a self-sufficient yeomanry. By contrast Thomas Jefferson's model of agrarian life, if known, would have been found all the more wanting. Jefferson wanted a society of freemen under a democratically elected government and complete private property. Educated Bechauna wanted to be ruled by chiefs and within this context, as the next chapter outlines, such private landholding was not politically viable. Moreover Jefferson's idealism was always calibrated to pragmatic incentive. The inability for Europe to provide its growing population with

¹⁴⁸ *Koranta*, 10 November 1903

¹⁴⁹ *Koranta*, 7 March 1903 Sechuana.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol 1*, 81

¹⁵² *Koranta*, 10 November 1903.

foodstuffs created new market opportunities for wheat and corn growers in America. The market was so lucrative that a man with a moderately sized farm and his family's labour could make considerable gains.¹⁵³ Whilst the mining industry in South Africa demanded more grain, the colonial government aggressively sought to reverse earlier trends of African's access to the market.¹⁵⁴

Besides the various schools which Bechuana evangelists had set up in the previous century, Bechuana did not have their own centre of learning within their territory. Children had to be sent largely to the eastern Cape's missionary institutions. The LMS's Moffat Institute, which had been established in Kuruman in the mid nineteenth century, proved unpopular with Bechuana (including Batlhaping for whom it was initially intended) because it offered only an industrial education. By 1895, 'it had all but closed for lack of interest', whilst institutions like Healdtown, Morija and especially Lovedale which had more intensive English- medium instruction 'were producing more graduates than ever'.¹⁵⁵ At the end of 1903 *Koranta* was anticipating the opening of another missionary school, Tigerkloof, intended especially for Bechuana children. This initiative was being led by the LMS's Rev J. Willoughby. The curriculum was broad enough to produce teachers and church ministers whilst training children in brick-making, brick-laying and dress-making. *Koranta's* 'advice' was that the college should also train young people to make shoes and wagons, and focus on agriculture, 'for otherwise of what benefit would adding water to the river of Tigerkloof do?'¹⁵⁶ The tide towards a curriculum tailored only towards industrial training for Africans was rising. Already in 1891, some officials in the Cape Education Department were critical that Lovedale was

¹⁵³ J. Appley, 'Commercial Farming and the Agrarian Myth in the Early Republic', *The Journal of American History*, 68, 4, (1982), 833-49.

¹⁵⁴ C. Bundy, 'The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry', *Africa Affairs*, 71 (1972). 369-88.

¹⁵⁵ Volz, *African Teachers*, 227.

¹⁵⁶ *Koranta*, 14 October 1903. Sechuana

teaching subjects like Latin to ‘idle natives.’

Koranta rejected outright the idea that Africans were not good enough for a ‘general education’. Industrial training could not, in Plaatje’s view, replace a sophisticated mastery of the English language, which was considered the first requirement for any African’s education. A well-rounded, general education would help Bechuana to participate fully in South Africa’s political future. It would, however, be foolishness on Bechuana’s part if they were all to become teachers and clerks, even more lawyers and doctors. As one editorial argued, young Bechuanas’ schooling should ‘encourage and increase the work of their forefathers, with knowledge much greater than that of their parents, especially farming.’¹⁵⁷

It is not proper that a person takes a child to learning and hopes that the child will forsake his origins and become white ... Do you have enough litigation to sustain the livelihood of African lawyers? ... If all people, whites and Bechuana, become lawyers, and the sorghum lacks a ploughman, can the nation survive?¹⁵⁸

Yet, if *sekgoa* was so disparaged, what of educated Bechuana’s westernised lifestyles? It is true, especially in Silas’s family, that they retained customs like the levirate and marriage to first-cousins. They did however stand out in their late Victorian and Edwardian costume and home furnishings, and their command of English, and even Dutch. *Koranta* too advertised books, furniture and other goods calibrated to western tastes. Music concerts received wonderful coverage in the newspaper. Silas’s son, Modiri received numerous certificates from the London Tonic Sol-Fa college, the first of which was awarded in 1901.¹⁵⁹ But none of these were considered by the educated elite to compromise the ways of the past. Neither did they indicate unacceptable acculturation, that is to say becoming white or adopting *sekgoa*. On the

¹⁵⁷ *Koranta*, 28 February 1903. Sechuana

¹⁵⁸ *Koranta*, 7 March 1903. Sechuana

¹⁵⁹ S.M Molema, personal documents, A979Ad5.

contrary, other than as obvious refinements of education, these were inconsequential to the extent that their being (*botho*) remained uncorrupted. In other words, educated Bechuana did not consider commodities to be instilled with culture. The same can be said of their unschooled counterparts. With political astuteness, Chief Montsioa had left intact Isaac Molema's influence on his subjects. He secured their loyalty whilst urging them on towards his rival's teachings of industriousness and profitable work. What counted as tradition, and what did not, had little to do with how much of western ways of doing things people incorporated into their lives. If square houses, western dress and literacy did not disqualify individuals from their 'traditionalist' base, neither could ploughs and wagons threaten a chief's right to traditional power.

The divisions in the chieftaincy had as much to do with competing legacies of tradition, as with political power and guarding chiefly privilege. *Koranta* presented a view of the nation, but it was in reality a contested vision. Indeed arguments proposed by its readers suggested an opposition against whom they were taking their position. Molemas and other educated notables held trenchant views against polygamy, and the smearing of children's bodies with red ochre, arguing that these were not what *sechuana* was about, whilst in fact bride-wealth and the levirate continued to be common amongst them. Silas' educated nephew, Rev Molema Moshoele, a Wesleyan minister, was biting critical of the regulations of the Methodist church in the Transvaal, which disallowed men and women who were married by Sechuana custom alone to become members of the church. Their marriages had to be made to 'stand in the church', for which £3 would first have to be paid at the Magistrate's court. 'Will you stomach such attitudes?' he asked *Koranta* readers.¹⁶⁰ All this made of *sekgoa* not so much an easy alternative to tradition, but a label of dishonour to mark those unfaithful to any one imagination

¹⁶⁰ *Koranta*, 31 December 1902. Sechuana

of the nation. Badirile Montsioa, heir to the paramount seat, had his own vision too. He wrote a rejoinder to *Koranta*'s slur that he and his siblings were 'white youth' – idle and leaving the running of the chieftaincy to Silas and older men.¹⁶¹ The undesirability of *sekgoa*, Badirile said, was how chiefly advisors, like Molemas, clung to their positions as a way to accumulate money as salaried headmen.¹⁶² In other words, *sekgoa* connoted not just everyday practices, but more importantly an attitude about the future.

Moreover, as far as the educated were concerned, formal schooling, if handled appropriately, could help Bechuana rebuild traditions that had been eroded by change. 'Knowledge' was described by Rev J Manyatsi, as the 'old ways of wisdom' and the 'old ways of prosperity'.¹⁶³ This educated Wesleyan minister was renowned as a depository of the past, and an 'interpreter of custom'. As far as *Koranta* was concerned, Manyatsi was 'the greatest Mochuana amongst all Bechuana, both dead and alive'.¹⁶⁴ Bechuana school teachers were themselves fervent supporters of education's role to control young people, lest they grow unruly and abandon traditional values. A new teacher, Mr A Moletsane, arrived in Thaba Nchu from Kimberley to take up a post at Moroka Institute in 1902. He delivered a passionate address at his welcome reception focusing on the importance of girls' education. He spoke about how communities die unless women are educated as changing times demand. Hence he reprimanded parents that did not school their girls, 'letting them do as they wished – to run rampantly wild, and to act according to their wills.'¹⁶⁵

The year before, in 1901, a visiting son of one Bechuana chief preached a sermon at

¹⁶¹ *Koranta*, 2 May 1903. Sechuana

¹⁶² *Koranta*, 9 May 1903. Sechuana

¹⁶³ *Koranta*, 31 August 1901. Sechuana

¹⁶⁴ *Koranta*, 8 October 1903. Sechuana

¹⁶⁵ *Koranta*, uncertain, 1902. Sechuana

Wesleyan Church in Mafikeng. The sermon appeared in *Koranta* the following week. His message was directed to women, to urge them to educate their daughters. He read from Amos 4: 1, 'Hear this word you women of Bashan ... who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, Bring and let us drink!'. The lay preacher presented himself as something of a present-day prophet. He described how uneducated women brought the nation into disrepute. Older women 'of days gone by and now aged' had raised men 'whose names were respectable amongst whites'. These men had taken uneducated women as wives, and now these women lured their husbands to drink. 'As for enlightenment', he said, 'it is easily accepted by men; but it becomes too heavy for them to carry, because those helpers, to whom they are yoked to bear life's trials together, draw them back.' He spoke particularly to chiefly wives, and the 'wives of wealthy men', who lived in western houses, wore western dress, but failed to build strong homes. In this regard, he made special mention of the paramount's family, amongst a few others. Aged mothers of old, he explained, were never 'exposed to the light' of schooling, but nonetheless their ways of the past (*bogolo-golo*) were conducive to virtue and good hygiene. Present-day younger women were shameful. Amongst other things they simply were 'wiping their nails' rather than bathing. The aged mothers had valued cleanliness, washed dishes, and managed their households well. Did Bechuana 'princes' not know that prudent women, as virtuous as the mothers of old, were those who 'left their villages for Morija, Lovedale, and Lesseyton to attend school?'¹⁶⁶

One *Koranta* editorial in 1903 said of Bechuana boys and girls attending schools in the Cape, that 'they show that our nation like other nations is beginning to awaken from sleep.' This was after Lovedale turned back about 200 African children, citing a severe shortage of space. The editorial spoke strongly to Bechuana chiefs and sub-chiefs still reluctant to

¹⁶⁶ *Koranta*, 31 August 1901. Sechuana

encourage education:

Boys and girls of Bechuana in the Cape schools show that our nation, like other nations, is beginning to awaken from sleep ... It is proper that Bechuana educate their children. We have some chiefs, that when the nation sends children to school, surround themselves with their children, and they remain behind ... They must understand that children that are educated today shall have great mysteries revealed to them ... After they are educated, when we die and leave them behind, and instruct them to honour their chiefs (just like we honour our chiefs), they will refuse, saying how can they, being educated, honour woolly heads. Shall anybody disagree? Blame would rest with the Chiefs ... Owing to them, today's princes will grow up knowing nothing.¹⁶⁷

On the surface, this was *Koranta's* rather unsubtle swipe at the paramount's household. The Montsioa brothers could certainly read and write, but their reliance on scribes and interpreters showed their limitations. The editorial was however touching on something deeper, and trying to re-entrench ideas that were becoming increasingly questionable as fundamental truths. As another editorial column lamented, when Barolong customs of 'long ago' had been forgotten, it was no longer possible to distinguish between 'age and youth, man and woman, master and servant, king and nation.'¹⁶⁸ When Chief Moroka of Thaba 'Nchu visited Bloemfontein in 1901, he was reportedly greeted by a large crowd of Bechuana in the town. Though 'pleased at their love', he cautioned that they should all have asked their employers for leave to meet him because 'as the Book says a servant is not greater than his master.'¹⁶⁹ In one editorial Plaatje expressed regret that if schools taught principles of social equality parents should 'think twice' before sending children there, because 'even amongst ourselves not every black man is his countryman's equal.' Plaatje saw it as perfectly logical that not all Africans could vote.¹⁷⁰

For this educated elite, a respect for hierarchy embodied *sechuana*. As one's sense of

¹⁶⁷ *Koranta*, 1903 February 28. Sechuana

¹⁶⁸ *Koranta*, 20 September 1903. Sechuana

¹⁶⁹ *Koranta*, 1902 October 1902. Sechuana

¹⁷⁰ *Koranta*, 20 November 1902.

being (*botho*), hierarchy was to be respected. This meant especially to live and work with careful regard for the chiefly order, and this not as Law, but as the essence of who one was. It is not surprising that the Christian gospel, which spoke of exactly such a transformation in the realm of God and religious life, became so intricately tied with this way of seeing the world. Another of *Koranta*'s correspondents in Kanye, in the Protectorate, wrote about hierarchy in glowing terms. The northern Bechuana nation of Bangoaketse had in Chief Bathoen, 'a chief of yesterday's heart', so 'praiseworthy' that rain fell continually on his nation. 'At church', the reporter said, 'he enters first along with his wife and children, followed by his subchiefs also there to praise Jehovah of War and their homes, in the temple.' He continued that 'the church is beautiful, built in the English style', with Bangoaketse crammed full in it. As impressive, in the writers view, was also Bathoen's innovative use of educated men. Such wisdom made of the paramount a 'true Judge'. Bathoen was also reported to have 'an Office in the centre, one with clerks and secretaries all schooled at Lovedale; how the nation respects the judgements of the government of its Master.'¹⁷¹ In fact, so intricately bound was the Bible to educated elites' understandings of *sechuana* that it is difficult to map Christianity's entry point into this view of self and of the world. It provided seeds that, in time, germinated alongside other ideas into a more or less coherent discourse that framed a changing world.

The idea that proper 'native education' differed quintessentially from that of Europeans was not necessarily exclusive to educated Bechuana. Peter Kawa, a resident of the eastern Cape (and possibly a relation to Richard Kawa, who authored *A History of the Mfengu*) wrote in the *Alice Times* that 'those Native lads who are able, should be taught the higher branches of study; for minds are not all alike', and that 'giant intellects' must 'have by any means what is generally termed Higher Education'. But he recommended that the 'masses be taught to

¹⁷¹ *Koranta*, 29 November 1902. Sechuana

make bricks, tables, dishes, wagons, shoes; and above all let them be thoroughly acquainted with their spades and ploughs.’¹⁷² For *Koranta*, however, the point was not aptitude, but inherited status. ‘Higher Education’ was to be the domain of chiefly families, and not an aspiration that could be accomplished through merit alone. What was at stake was chiefly privilege.

Hence, it is not surprising that by the time Sebopioa Molema had completed his studies at Lovedale in 1903, he had received at least four mentions in *Koranta*. One article appeared in his own hand, describing a countryside excursion he had initiated with other educated Bechuana youths from various chiefdoms.¹⁷³ He also appeared in print under heaps of praise as the antithesis of the paramount in waiting, Badirile Montsioa. When Sebopioa graduated from Lovedale, *Koranta* saw in him ‘great promise of a learned man much needed by many black nations across the world, especially Bechuana.’ The paper described his interest in mathematics and Sol-fa music. But it was his conduct that *Koranta* stressed more emphatically – his sense of being (*botho*) would be greatly enhanced by further study. A higher education, *Koranta* continued, would ‘give to him a deeper sense of being (*botho yo bo golo*) that would cover his own nation like the cloud that leads other nations of renown.’¹⁷⁴ This powerful image of the cloud drew from the Old Testament story of the Exodus where God was a cloud over the Israelites by day and led them out of their bondage in Egypt. On 7th July, 1904 Sebopioa sailed on the Gascon Castle to what he called ‘this great negro University where young men from different parts of the globe gather for the cause of higher and sound education.’¹⁷⁵ This was Wilberforce University in the United States of America, where he became one of the first

¹⁷² *Koranta*, 13 November 1902.

¹⁷³ *Koranta*, 15 August 1903, Sechuana.

¹⁷⁴ *Koranta*, 31 December 1902, Sechuana.

¹⁷⁵ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 18 December 1904, A979Ac1.

Africans to read law.¹⁷⁶

That so many of the educated classes supported *Koranta*'s chiefly ideals is remarkable. Yet, the reports, editorials and letters published in *Koranta* suggest that this worldview, of an educated nobility and its supporters, did not stick very successfully. *Koranta* tried to promote a 'new birth', both a profound reawakening to the greatness of the past, and Christianity. But for Platje and his associates the contours of an alternative and challenging reality were emerging, else why all the dialogue in *Koranta*? Readers of *Koranta* were in effect debating the longevity of chiefly rule, what it meant for their own families and what kind of chiefs they wanted to have (if any). Was chieftaincy a true reflection of the Bechuana or were chiefs simply flogging a dead horse in a last bid attempt to save their interests and maintain power? For commoners like reader Frank Tebogo, men like Silas Molema bore the yoke of rule, and had therefore to be rewarded with respect. Chiefly rule meant consistent selflessness and sacrifice. Regarding Silas Molema's role as *Koranta*'s proprietor, he asked 'is there a Mochuana that can give birth to such a heavy yoke, and that amidst hunger and drought, working for the nation and people though his own children have lack. Oh readers!'¹⁷⁷ In Mafikeng, the educated nobility 'performed' their obligations to the public. For example, they hosted public feasts. At the end of 1902, when his family's debt crisis was deepening, Silas held a big Christmas celebration on his farm, Madibe, in the Protectorate. He was not the only chief 'who wished to honour the coming of our Saviour', but according to *Koranta* his feast was the grandest, and lasted for three days during which 'food was everywhere'. His brother Joshua was expected to host a similar feast, and there was to be so much food that people would eat 'on two stomachs'.¹⁷⁸ *Koranta* then, was sending a nod of public approval as its chosen

¹⁷⁶ J. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York, 1995), 255 and 268.

¹⁷⁷ *Koranta*, 8 October 1903, Sechuana.

¹⁷⁸ *Koranta*, 31 December 1902, Sechuana.

chiefs went about their appropriate roles.

This does not mean that chiefly rule was necessarily popular. Views were shaped by the multiple, fragmented and contradictory strategies of everyday living that people pursued, and how these both challenged and confirmed their sense of themselves. The chapters that follow are a fuller exploration of chiefly rule in this terrain, gleaning clues from people's lives on the land, family life and children's upbringing, perceptions on schooling, the functions of political office, experiences of rule and politics, and the ways in which people looked back and added to their memories of the connections that linked them to others. Whatever the divisions within Mafikeng's nobility about the future, they all sought to defend the nation's autonomy as a chiefly state within the British Empire. What that meant in practice was not altogether clear, especially whether *the* 'nation' were the Tshidi in Montsioa's cross-border domain, or the larger population of Bechuana in southern Africa. For Silas Molema and Solomon Plaatje, the idealism of *Koranta* endured beyond the newspaper's demise. Its enthusiastic reception by educated Bechuana of different ranks demonstrated that nodes of connectedness between Bechuana in the countryside north of the Cape Colony, and in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, as well as those that had migrated to the Rand and other mining centres or farms were still alive. There was therefore a promise for a solid political community - the nation of Bechuana. For as long as this hope remained, these two men reached towards it, together navigating many personal challenges and regional political transformations that were not only unfavourable, but which corroded further the linkages they imagined and sought to maintain.

In sum, *Koranta's* imagination of nationhood reflects how educated Bechuana embodied paradoxical ideals and recast tradition. Its views however were significantly gendered. Educated women's voices were marginal in *Koranta*, limited to mobilising

fundraising activities in churches, and announcements of concerts and recitals. Whilst educated women imbibed Christian teachings, they too attempted to mould institutions in their interests, and in ways men could not anticipate. Women with limited means also aspired to commodities and lifestyles that set *sechuana*'s respectability. Some of the crude, corporeal punishments dealt to women for transgressing acceptable norms underscore educated men's inability to sponsor or control women's aspirations. The next section explores what women's lives can reveal of emerging challenges to patriarchy and chiefly power, illuminating the connectedness of imaginations of home and nation.

v. A view through women's lives

The earliest success of an ecclesiastical statehood in this region was probably that of Bakoena north of the Molopo River in the *stadt* of Molepolole. (Map 2) In 1872 LMS missionary Roger Price commented that Chief Sechele was 'prophet, king and priest' of his people. He added that the church there was 'in a very important sense a state church' and that it was a 'constant struggle' to wrestle the control of the church from the paramount's hand.¹⁷⁹ Sechele endeavoured to widen his circle of Christian elites through marrying his educated children, including Sebele, to those of educated Bechuana chiefs and, in one instance, even to a European trader. To the LMS disappointment however, he retained some of the traditional functions of paramount chief, such as rainmaking.¹⁸⁰ During *Koranta*'s lifetime, it was this son, Sebele, who was in power. Like Bathoen, Sebele was Silas' friend and confidant. Though Bechuana chiefs' 'right' to sexual relationships with their subjects' wives through their husbands' 'consent' has not been historiographically documented, it still emerges in present

¹⁷⁹ Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 238-9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 143 & 147

day conversations about the past. In 1877 Sebele embarked on such a relationship with the uneducated wife of a family of immigrants that belonged to his polity. In his words he had the consent of ‘Mhiko [the woman’s husband], and my wife Macholohelo, and Bakoena knowing the work, as it is our custom [to] work like this and my wife was quite happy.’ This relationship continued for over two decades, even after Sebele took a second wife from whom he later separated.

Probably in the late 1890s, his educated councillors urged him to ‘stand with his wife’, Macholohelo. They meant he should marry her in the church ‘so that your children could eat of your youth’. The developments that stemmed from this counsel strongly suggest that it was in fact instigated by the educated Macholohelo. She sought to ensure that her children and not her husband’s other issue would inherit his rule and associated property. Sebele’s councillors, like so many of *Koranta*’s readers, also had no wish to be led by unschooled chiefs, and strongly urged a church wedding, decades after the actual marriage. The children of Sebele’s uneducated lovers, like those of the unnamed woman, did not have the benefit of an elite education. They presented a threat to educated subjects because, as Comaroff has insightfully argued, the rules of succession were fluid and paternity was by no means only biological.¹⁸¹ A marriage in the church would however strengthen the senior wife’s position. The other women, should their children dare claim to be rightful heirs, would be unable to produce evidence of their relationship to Sebele in the magistrate court. At first Sebele refused on the grounds that ‘it is of no use [because] I am *Mochuana* and have taken out bride price (*bogadi*)’. However, as he wrote to Silas after the deed, his councillors insisted that ‘bride price is nothing when it comes to white things (*mo makgooeng*)’. In a sardonic quip, he added, ‘remember now we are people of the whites.’ No sooner had the first couple ‘stood’ in the church than Macholohelo

¹⁸¹ J. Comaroff, ‘Rules and Rulers’.

insisted on his unwavering fidelity on the ground of their vows before God. On the same Christian grounds however Sechele refused. He maintained that the church confirmed righteousness to his 'work':

It was announced [in the church] for over three weeks that if anyone knows any obstacle he should speak and they said nothing [,] knowing I love this woman. That is why I ask if there is any sense for one to buy a horse with an eye gouged out eye and seeing it [,] and then return it because it has an eye gouged out. Is it right to buy a coat with a tear and seeing it [,] to [later] return it?¹⁸²

This appeal to Silas' sense of justice followed Sebele's public humiliation in 1900 at the hands of his wife and his councillors, who had enlisted the support of the colonial government. Given that a Christian marriage forbade a second polygamous marriage, Sebele attempted to set up a new home with this 'lover' in that year. But quick-witted Macholohelo claimed that the chieftaincy remained in her residence where the paramount chief's court and his legal heirs were established. His educated councillors supported her claim. Sebele could leave if he so wished, they advised, but warned that he would be leaving the office of paramount chief behind. They had already sought the colonial government's assistance to replace him if he did so. A new successor would have to be appointed. In a public *kgotla* attended by a number of Protectorate chiefs, Sechele was ordered to go back to his wife failing which 'the government will send people to remove him from his work.' Sechele was thus ordered to go back home, feeling a defeated victim of *segoa*. Chief Bathoen was disturbed by the animated public discussion in Molopolole about whether or not chiefs ought to possess such lovers. Most distressing was how those that supported the practice publicly recalled the names of previous chiefs' lovers, and thus hung up the intimate details of chiefs' lives as public laundry, whereas before such knowledge would have been the content of private (thus respectful) gossip. He

¹⁸² S. Sechele to S. T. Molema, 20 July 1904, A979Aa2.21. Sechuana.

lamented, to borrow from Weber, a growing ‘disenchantment of the world’.

Bakoena did not even come to greet me ... Then I saw a nation that does not love its Master. Bakoena speak as they wish to their Chief, as do the Bangoaketse and Barolong ... They insulted their chief ... ¹⁸³

Chiefs certainly continued to rule. Yet the office struggled to retain its erstwhile lustre amongst ordinary people.

Women’s attempts to safeguard their security and their own aspirations challenged men’s power in the home. Mine wages remained attractive for younger men who sought greater independence and wished to participate in the cash economy. Young men appeared in *Koranta* as a long list of miners sent to the compounds. Silas’s role as a labour broker was vital to his political and administrative duties. Enterprising white procurers competed for consignments of workers that Silas recruited in the reserve, and further north in the Protectorate. Many Bechuana men, and strictly not women, were sent to the mining compounds in this way, usually through a procurement firm run by A W Lackland. ‘The chieftaincy’, according to Silas, ‘prefers to work with him rather than with other recruiters’ as he assured good working conditions. Silas promised Lackland in turn to ‘use my influence with the natives and also to write or go personally to the Protectorate Chiefs to get them to use their influence with their people.’¹⁸⁴ Chief Sebele found the exercise of coercing his men to work emotionally burdensome. In the winter of 1904 Silas requested men to work as construction workers. Sechele obliged, but wrote to Silas that though Bakoena ‘have tried to understand’ he was sending the names of 25 men being ‘troubled in spirit and in heart’.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 1900 December 11, A979Aa2.19, Sechuana.

¹⁸⁴ Letter of Commendation for W. C. MaLacklan from S.T. Molema, 6 February 1902, A979Cc7.

¹⁸⁵ Sechele to S.T. Molema, 20 July 1904, A979Aa2.2, Sechuana

Bechuana men were sent to the mining compounds in this way, and could not obtain passes through the headmen if they were to go on their own accord. Women's mobility on the other hand was very strictly controlled, as was that of young and unmarried men. When Badirile Montsioa became chief in 1903 he was especially concerned about 'the bad girls & small boys who acquainted themselves to go up to town without any work at all'. He promised the Cape police that such a 'bad girl or rascal boy' would be 'severely punished' because his chiefs and headmen watched such movement 'during the day & the whole evening'.¹⁸⁶ This control was essential if men were to leave their homes for work elsewhere, as Schmidt has described of colonial Zimbabwe.¹⁸⁷ Posting names in *Koranta* provided for a means of social surveillance. Everyone could know which men were rightfully away, and more importantly keep a controlling gaze on the women they left at home. The educated held 'idle' unmarried women with contempt. Young women were to be schooled and trained to occupy themselves as wives.

Although the incident occurred a number of years after *Koranta's* demise, a harrowing episode brings educated men's anguish over their positions of power into sharp relief. In January 1914, Chief Tantinyane Motshegare's young niece, Puleng, was lashed by her uncle for allegedly stealing £2 from him to buy new shoes and a head-shawl. As was customary, the 'strong and robust' nineteen year old prostrated herself out in the yard, with the upper part of her body bare'. Being almost a quarter of her uncle's age, she tried to escape her uncle's reach after the first lashing, but guests and other members of the family caught her and held her down for further thrashing. She allegedly disappeared on the same day but was found some distance away a week later with 'a broken rib, a severe wound on the lower part of the body, which might have been caused by a kick, and weals on the upper part of the body and neck.' Soon

¹⁸⁶ B. Montsioa to W. Major, 14 January 1904, A979Bc1.

¹⁸⁷ E. Schmidt, 'Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 4 (1990), 622-48.

thereafter she was dead. Motshegare maintained that he only administered a moderate thrashing. He said he ‘punished the girl as he would punish his own child’ and that ‘I loved deceased as my daughter.’ He and some witnesses alleged that the severe beating was administered by a younger man, to whose hut Puleng had escaped. The court held that the testimony of the witnesses proved inconsistent, more so because the younger man was not in Mafikeng but in prison at the time. The shame caused by the public arrest and sentencing of a grey-bearded old chief, probably amongst the few surviving chiefs of Chief Montsioa’s generation, was matched only by the dismaying possibility that patriarchs could lose the right to discipline women and younger men in the home.

Being cautious to avert the latter repercussion, Silas’ careful testimony concerning ‘tribal custom’ further compromised his aged uncle’s case. He presented that Motshegare had a right to discipline his young niece but added ‘it would [have] be[en] necessary to bring her before the Paramount.’ This ambiguity implied some neglect on Motshegare’s fatherly role, and was read as such by the magistrate. Silas defence of ‘tribal custom’ was that even amongst senior chiefs, men’s own power in the domestic sphere was limited by the paramount’s own.¹⁸⁸ As the eighty year old Motshegare was on the way to Cape Town’s prison for nine months, being found guilty of culpable homicide, Silas requested a man who had recently become an important support for his financially vulnerable family, James Molebaloa, to keep an eye on the old man. (Chapter 4) Silas’ penetrating insight into the context of Motshegare’s misfortune reveals his shrewd acceptance that making a success of colonial life was not for the naïve. For Silas, *sekgoa*’s undisputed undesirability did not mean disposing of it without a thorough knowledge of its canons, lest unaware, one is caught naively in its snare. Of Motshegare’s imprisonment, Silas wrote:

¹⁸⁸ *Tsala*, 9 May 1914.

I know he was as a chiefly Morolong son ought to be, but he understood nothing of the whites (*makgoa*) as we their workers and messengers [,] that know whiteness (*sekgoa*) and [its] servitude [,] do.¹⁸⁹

Indeed scandal and public humiliation surrounding both Chief Sebele's marriage, and Chief Tantinyana's imprisonment, evince this reality. As this section had relayed, both incidents also demonstrate how women lived at the uncomfortable intersection of the sort of tensions that could bring educated notables to ruin. Migration, severely limited white-collar occupations and especially women's attempts to enhance their position in various ways (including greater respect and status in their homes) destabilised the bedrock of chiefly power. Educated men's insistence in *Koranta* that schooling could reinstate the 'ways of the past' had resonance in the face of these new tensions. Being a keen observer of social dynamics, Plaatje had probably taken note of how a paper like *Koranta* could etch new methods of maintaining social order. A newspaper could be both a public register of legitimate migration and a positive moulding influence towards respectability. *Koranta* attempted to manage these tensions but as the next section shows, it was itself overwhelmed by the inability of educated chiefs' households to thrive. The threat of genteel poverty hung about educated notables' doors. It caused the paper to fold, and haunted Silas's family even in the next generation.

vi. Disappointed household and nation

In January 1902 large parts of the reserve 'fell to plunder' when raided by Boer commandos.¹⁹⁰ It was reported to the British government that the Boers 'took away everything, livestock, moveable property, farm implements and other effects in every post and homestead

¹⁸⁹ S.T. Molema to J. Molebaloa, 1914 undated, A979Aa2.9. Sechuana

¹⁹⁰ Undated petition to British government, A979Cc2.

between Kraaiport and Mafeking'. The nobility was prepared to accept Polhfontein, which Silas and his men raided in 1900, as adequate compensation for the pillage of 1902, but Britain later deposed him as chief of Polhfontein. Furthermore, the British cut down claims of compensation at least by half. Molema's compensation for this particular raid only amounted to £67 and that only came five years later.¹⁹¹ Mid-1902 *Koranta* was publishing gentle rebukes to its readers: 'the staff is not paid by your loud words of praise and gratitude', one column said, 'but money'.¹⁹²

By mid-1902 the newspaper had become so irregular that Molemas' opponents started to mock their rivals. Joshua Molema vowed that God would put *Koranta*'s enemies to shame. He told them to repent like 'Nicodemus of old', and reminded them of the Old Testament (Judges 8: 4-8) where Gideon's kinsmen refused to give bread to his tired army but rather mocked him. God later gave Gideon victory over his enemies, and Gideon returned to kill his kinsmen by the sword. Joshua's conviction was that Providence had ordained Molemas as the nation's educators, and would thus provide for *Koranta*'s future:

Lately you say who will print *Koranta*? [You] are one with no understanding ... when God destroys the earth, with whom shall He begin, and who shall He save, and who shall He leave to keep educating others? That is how I see your question. Repent, and live in the ways of God, learn righteousness, lest He strikes you with a curse.¹⁹³

Undoubtedly, making sense of *Koranta*'s financial history requires sensitivity to the profound capacity of faith to transform the drudgery of work under a most disabling environment into a rewarding experience of service and vocation. Committed service to a nation has similar emotive associations. Not only its owner and editor but also its printing staff thought of

¹⁹¹ S. Minchin to S.T. Molema, 29 August 1907, A979Aa3.

¹⁹² See for example, *Koranta*, 20 December 1902. Sechuana.

¹⁹³ *Koranta*, 15 November 1902, Sechuana

Koranta as a vocation to which they were called, despite the lean, and often absent, remuneration.

Silas was finding it impossible to finance the paper, and it was difficult to keep the family's daily needs taken care of without credit in the town. Thus began a trail of cash loans and favours from European friends and associates. If it were not for them, especially his friend and attorney Spencer Minchin, his financial ruin would have been quick, total and irreversible. Sizeable sums of money were loaned to Silas across the colour bar. The enabling dynamic behind these transactions was the fluidity of racial identity, and a moral economy of sympathy and cooperation along this frontier, as discussed in the next two chapters. Ordinarily negotiations over hefty debt predicate private property as surety. Hence African landowners, including Molema's kinsmen in Thaba 'Nchu, rarely looked far for willing European creditors, more so because the risk of defaulting on payments was so high.¹⁹⁴ Not so in Mafikeng where private tenure was more ambiguous, and not confirmed through a title deed. (Chapter 2) Pound after pound, Silas' extensive loans and mortgages operated in an economy of trust between frontier families. Together they had lived through wars and a number of Europeans, including the Rowlands and others, had carried arms on Montsioa's side. The greater interdependence was shaped by the landscape, whose aridity and vicissitudes none dared survive alone. (Chapter 3)

Silas again tried to expand his transport business, and had added at least two more carts by the end of 1902, seemingly from riders who were disposing of them.¹⁹⁵ He continued to rely

¹⁹⁴ C. Murray, *Black Mountain: Land, Class and Power in the Eastern Orange Free State, 1880s to 1980s* (Edinburgh, 1996); 'Land, Power and Class in the Thaba Nchu District Orange Free State, 1884 -1983', *Review of African Political Economy*, 11, 29 (1984), 30-48.

¹⁹⁵ Receipt, Joseph Whiffer 27 November 1902, A979Aa3.3.

extensively on rents and cash loans, and this was a trend that continued for many years.¹⁹⁶ In 1903 Silas again borrowed money from J W de Kock, the owner of an attorney's firm, apparently an amount well over £180.¹⁹⁷ De Kock and de Kock also processed an additional loan from the wholesaler Kemp & Co.¹⁹⁸ All these amounted to well over £250. There were also much smaller loans, indicative of Silas's desperation and his ruin, like the £8 borrowed from farmer and trader E. Fincham in September, and £5 borrowed from Grant & Pennycook General Merchants.¹⁹⁹ In July 1904, when Silas was fully immersed in a desperate effort to liquidate his newspaper, Spencer Minchin devised a plan through which *Koranta* could kick-start a cash flow. The newspaper was registered as Limited Liability Company, and readers could subscribe for one share at a value of £1.²⁰⁰ At the same time, Silas sent letters of distress to Protectorate chiefs urging them to buy shares. He appealed to them to save *Koranta* not as a private enterprise, but as Bechuana's newspaper.²⁰¹

But seasons were unfavourable for Protectorate chiefs to lend a helping hand. Even as he sent his £100 as described above, Bathoen complained that 'Here we see great illnesses, Bangoaketse are dying of many diseases, flu and stomach sickness.'²⁰² Chief Sekhoma had suffered great misfortune. In 1898 he was, according to his secretary, 'very very sick, so sick he almost died.' On behalf of Sekhoma, the scribe also described 'much distress as many people are very sick ... many are dying in these parts.' He added also that 'we see poverty, we have no sorghum, only locusts and the sun, not even enough to feed a bird, please continue to

¹⁹⁶ Rent receipts: John Kay, 17 March 1902, 16 June 1902; J. Robinson 16 September 1902, A979Ca4; Promissory Notes: M. Heffler 26 January 1902, Unknown 5 May 1902, A979Aa3.4; De Kock 1 February 1902, A979Aa3.3.

¹⁹⁷ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 14 November 1903, A979Aa3 and 10 December 1903, A979Aa2.3.

¹⁹⁸ De Kock & De Kock statements to S.T. Molema 14 September 1903, 16 October 1903, A979Aa3.3.

¹⁹⁹ Receipt E. Fincham to S.T. Molema, 18 September 1903, A979Aa3.3; Grant & Pennycook, 1 December 1903, A979Aa2.3.

²⁰⁰ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 15 July 1904, A979Aa3.3; Receipt Peter Lekgatla 6 July 1904, A979Aa3.3.

²⁰¹ Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 14 July 1904, A979Aa2.20, Sechuana.

²⁰² Bathoen to S.T. Molema, 23 November 1904, A979Aa2.23, Sechuana.

remember us.’ Sekhoma asked Silas to buy for him two head of cattle on credit.²⁰³ By the time Mafikeng fell under siege, Sekhoma’s fortunes had not turned. When Silas asked him for horses and cattle in aid of the war, Sekhoma could only respond that Silas send someone for a calf.²⁰⁴ It is not likely Sekhoma would have had much to contribute towards *Koranta*’s purse. No records survive of Bechuana chiefs’ involvement in financing *Koranta* as all subscriptions were to be sent directly to Minchin’s office and are not in Silas’ family records, but Minchin’s growing cynicism indicates that the effort was not that fruitful. Chief Israel Moilola of Bahurutse loaned Silas about £169.²⁰⁵

His networks amongst his own people having failed to deliver, Silas turned more urgently to the aid of Europeans in Mafikeng. Transport was turning some returns but not nearly enough to resolve the crisis. At the time a wagon trip of 6 days earned him £22.²⁰⁶ In July of 1904 he became indebted to Rev Charles Wenham for £650, binding thirty head of mixed cattle, and all of *Koranta*’s printing machinery.²⁰⁷ Wenham was no stranger to the affairs of the Tshidi, and was like Minchin, accepted as a member of the polity. He had loyally tipped off the chieftaincy to anticipate an alleged settlement of ‘Fingos’ on Barolong Farms by the Cape government a year before.²⁰⁸ In December 1903, Silas and Chief Badirile granted Wenham permission to take sand from the reserve for purposes of brick-making, an industry which steadily grew into the 1920s.²⁰⁹ In September of 1904 *Koranta* had only issued 60 shares.²¹⁰ Silas had to dispose of 30 head of oxen for £290 to meet Wenham’s bond premium

²⁰³ R. Sekhoma to S.T. Molema 20 April 1898, A979Aa2.10; 26 April 1898, A979Aa2.11; 16 August 1898, A979Aa2.12, Sechuana.

²⁰⁴ Sekhoma to S.T. Molema, 20 November 1900, A979Aa2.16. Sechuana.

²⁰⁵ S. Minchin to S. T. Molema, 30 June 1906, A979Aa3, and also 26 November 1906, A979Aa3.6.2.

²⁰⁶ Receipt for transport: B. May, 28 April 1904, A979Aa3.

²⁰⁷ Bond agreement, S.T Molema and C. Wenham, 15 July 1904, A979Aa3.3.6.1.4.

²⁰⁸ Petition to G. Green, 1903 July undated, A979Bc1.

²⁰⁹ S.T. Molema and B. Montsioa to C. Wenham, 17 July 1904, A979Bc1.

²¹⁰ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 12 September 1904, A979Aa3.3.

and pay school fees.²¹¹ Only two weeks later he again borrowed a further £300 from Wenham and secured payment with a hundred cattle and six mules.²¹² Throughout 1904, Chinese immigrants that rented Silas 'garden' in Mafikeng provided a much needed and consistent supply of cash rents.²¹³

Silas remained hopeful that the number of subscriptions would pick up. Minchin agreed to advance him about £250 at the end of October, 1904. For this Silas placed his only freehold land in the reserve under mortgage.²¹⁴ (Chapter 2) By February of the following year, Silas had not managed to make a single payment towards the loan, and Minchin made him sign a promissory note that the whole amount would be paid in three months. Minchin was still hopeful: 'by that time I trust a large number of the subscriptions will have been paid up.'²¹⁵ As the middle of April approached, Minchin had grown discouraged. They were making almost no progress as far as the subscriptions were concerned, and there was no way Silas could meet his obligation towards the promissory note. Seeing he, Minchin, handled *Koranta's* subscriptions and all the legal transactions related to the financing of the newspaper, he could not in good conscience sue Silas. So he tried to put pressure on him, saying he owed money for the purchase of two farms he had recently acquired in the district and thus needed 'all outstanding moneys' paid up. He suggested that Silas pass a second bond over his erf because 'as from what I can see the subscriptions due for paper will not be paid for an indefinite time.'²¹⁶ Silas did pass a second bond over his mortgage through Standard Bank.²¹⁷

²¹¹ Receipt, Z.Z. Nko, 14 September 1904, A 979 Ca4; Lovedale statement, 20 October 1904, A979Aa3.3.

²¹² Bond agreement, S.T. Molema and C. Wenham, 1 October 1904, A979Aa3.5.18.

²¹³ Rent receipts: Chaen Hong 30 April, 7 May, 1 July, 10 Oct 1904, Mr Leng 1 August 1904, Mr Ly Wing 10 October 1904, A979Ca4.

²¹⁴ Acknowledgement of debt, S.T. Molema to S. Minchin, 10 April 1905, A979Aa3.5.19.

²¹⁵ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 22 February 1905, A979Aa3.

²¹⁶ Minchin to S.T. Molema 10 April 1905, A979Aa3.

²¹⁷ Acknowledgement of debt, 10 April 1905, A979Aa3.5.19.

In August of 1905, staff at *Koranta*'s printing office was getting on sans pay. Whatever petty cash was coming in was used to keep the printing process going. Yet, the staff remained surprisingly hopeful even through the last days. 'The work is going on with great difficulty as it was very bad with me', one of them, Jacob Moses, reported to Silas, 'but even so God will help us'. Moses also reported that Edward Fincham had now sent summons for the £8 Silas had borrowed two years before, where more than £7 was still unpaid.²¹⁸ Summons had also been sent to Plaatje who nonetheless kept encouraging his patron to push through the immense difficulties, whilst he also tried to pitch in what he could towards the debt.²¹⁹ The emotive language of faith and triumph over difficult situations characterised Silas and Plaatje's working relationship. In the evenings, one is tempted to imagine Silas sitting at his study table reading and drawing encouragement from his Bible, considering especially the addition of two more sons to the family, both born during *Koranta*'s short lived existence. Some of his compositions of Sechuana hymns was added to the Methodist hymnal a decade later.²²⁰ One can also imagine fevered correspondence over debt.

In 1905, Silas's son Modiri started school at the Wesleyan missionary institute, Healdtown.²²¹ By the beginning of 1906, the cloud of financial difficulty had still not lifted though rents continued to trickle in.²²² Minchin began to act more aggressively and more independently. On the morning of January 8, 1906 Minchin tried to get Whales, the owner of the *Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian*, who had printed *Koranta*'s first 13 issues, to take over the newspaper again. According to Whales, Minchin's suggestion was only one of 'so many varied methods ... proposed by so many people' with regard to how he (Whales)

²¹⁸ J. Moses to S. Molema, 10 August 1905 A979Aa1. Sechuana

²¹⁹ Statement, Minchin to S.T. Molema, 15 July 1905, A979Aa3.2.

²²⁰ J. Moishumi to S. T. Molema, 14 February 1913 A979Aa2.40. Sechuana.

²²¹ Account statement, Healdtown, 7 June 1905, A979Aa3.3.

²²² Rent receipts, S. Abrams, 16 January 1906; C.F. Herber, 29 January 1906, A979Aa3.

might bail *Koranta* out. He insisted that ‘the only line’ on which he can consider any proposal was if Silas, as proprietor, tabled a proposal himself.²²³ On the same day Silas tabled his proposal, whose record has unfortunately not been preserved. All the same it is clear he would not yield to Whales’ terms, which vested ownership of the paper almost completely in European hands. Whales was willing to negotiate if Silas would transfer to him half the share of the title, and guarantee him against any legal suit to do with the content of the paper, and take only one third of the profits. Whales offered also that ‘the natives who intended forming a Limited Company’ could purchase £1000 in the form of shares in his Northern Newspapers Co. Silas could own shares worth £50 ‘for the goodwill.’²²⁴ Though the *Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian* was Whales’ only venture, he was a man of great ambition, and wished to build an empire as proprietor of a range of northern newspapers.

Silas had hopes to reinvent *Koranta* as something like a state newspaper, if only the new incumbent, Chief Badirile, could be convinced to lend the paper a financial boost. He thus turned down Whales’ offer, and five days later borrowed £200 from a Mrs Murray. He bound the printing site and all the machinery to guarantee payment.²²⁵ This seems to have gone towards paying for Wenham’s loan, which bound so much of Silas’ stock. *Koranta* was no longer being printed and as far as potential buyers were concerned its printing machinery was not worth much. In August 1906 Standard Bank issued demands through their attorneys after Silas failed to pay monthly instalments.²²⁶ Mrs Murray’s bond was called up two months later.²²⁷ Potential buyers, perhaps playing on the fear that the property would be auctioned for far less than outstanding debts, insisted on the ‘lowest price for house, land and plant’ to settle

²²³ Whales to Minchin, 8 January 1906, A979Aa3.6.2.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²²⁵ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 15 October 1906, A979Aa3.

²²⁶ Denwon, Duncan and Brown to S. T. Molema 21 August 1906, A979Aa3.

²²⁷ Minchin to S. T. Molema, 15 October 1906, A979Aa3.

both the bonds with Standard Bank and Mrs Murray. In one potential buyer's estimation, the 'large piece of machinery' was worth nothing, as 'it would take quite as much to put in order as it is worth.' He said even the property he did want would fetch 'very little' under the hammer.²²⁸

Silas still held back and did not sell. During the first week of October, Minchin, acting as Mrs Murray's attorney, threatened to take possession of the plant.²²⁹ A month later he demanded that Silas hand over the key to the printing plant.²³⁰ Instead, Silas begged Minchin to help him convince Chief Badirile to buy the site.²³¹ In December of 1906 the Sheriff, acting through Minchin, granted that the property be attached owing to the mortgage at Standard Bank.²³² Minchin managed to play for time with creditors pending negotiations with Chief Badirile. Negotiations with Chief Badirile seem to have been fruitful until sometime in January of 1907, when the deep rivalries in the chieftaincies once again reared their head. Silas and the paramount had a disagreement and the deal fell through. Minchin was furious that Silas let seemingly petty politics derail the efforts to save him from further ruin, and wanted to take possession of the printing plant immediately.²³³ Wenham was willing to accept four head of cattle for the outstanding £41-3-7 on his loan, but Mrs Murray and Standard Bank awaited the liquidation of Silas' land, and printing plant.²³⁴

Again, Minchin came to the rescue. He went back to Whales, this time to arrange a provisional sale of the land and printing plant to prevent 'the necessity of a sale by the court.'²³⁵

²²⁸ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 25 October 1906, A979Aa3.

²²⁹ Minchin to S.T.Molema, 15 October 1906, A979Aa3.

²³⁰ Minchin to S.T.Molema 26 November 1906, A979Aa3.6.2.

²³¹ Minchin to S.T. Molema 17 January 1906, A979Aae.6.2.

²³² Minchin to S.T. Molema, 4 December 1906, A979Aa3.

²³³ Minchin to S.T. Molema, 7 January 1907, A979Aa3.6.2.

²³⁴ E.W. Joyce to S.T.Molema 23 January 1907, A979Aa3.

²³⁵ Minchin to S.T.Molema 29 January 1907, A979Aa3.6.2.

Thus Silas went back to Whales with a tail between his legs. For the stated £1037-11-9 Whales wanted more than the printing plant, but signed a contract through which he took the newspaper completely off Silas' hands and full copyright. Whales would pay Silas monthly, with interest paid at £5-10-0 per month.²³⁶ *Koranta* would continue to be published. All that was required was an editor. Plaatje, it appears, was not willing to work for a European owned paper. By mid-February there was still no Sechuana-speaking editor available. 'Plaatje has not been near me again', Whales anxiously wrote to Silas, pressing that 'I left it to the Barolongs to decide. They must decide at once.'²³⁷ Rather than liquidity and profitability in the immediate term, Whales' consideration was to secure *Koranta's* as a step towards building his newspaper empire, Northern Newspaper Co., before another proprietor bought it. He soon ran into financial difficulties. By the end of 1907 his estate had been declared insolvent and his contract with Silas had to be abandoned.²³⁸

Minchin advised that Silas should not sue, as Wales' assets would not be sufficient to cover the bonds and other claims related to *Koranta*. The erf, plant and machinery were again marked for auction. Minchin refused to advance Silas any further money.²³⁹ The printing plant owed the municipality at least £42. Minchin then offered the newspaper's plant and Silas' erf to Chief Badirile for £1050, as a cash payment of £150 (which would settle another bond to a Mr Heath), and a bond of £900. In this way, 'paper, plant and erf' could all be the property of Barolong.²⁴⁰ The deal again did not go through. Local papers advertised that all this property would be auctioned on the 28 March, 1908. Minchin continued to go beyond the call of duty. He privately offered (probably on behalf of someone else) to purchase everything for £600 on

²³⁶ Minchin to S.T.Molema 28 February 1907, A979Aa3.

²³⁷ Whales to S.T.Molema 19 February 1907, A979Aa3.6.2.

²³⁸ R. de Beers to S.T.Molema 1907 December uncertain, A979Aa3.6.2.

²³⁹ Minchin to S.T. Molema 1907 December uncertain, A979Aa3.6.2.

²⁴⁰ Minchin to S.T. Molema 14 February 1908, A979Aa3.6.2.

the day of the auction, but warned that should it fetch less than the bonds he held, Silas would be responsible for the shortfall.²⁴¹ It seems Minchin had already negotiated that a certain amount of the debt accrued by *Koranta* be written off. The amount written off was £380-13-7. The newspaper's liabilities amounted to £105-12-6, which could be comfortably settled from the £600 which the newspaper's plant and premises fetched, but there were private bonds to be paid still. Silas' brother Joshua and his nephew Rev Molema Moshoele together contributed £15-18-11 as a token of support. Thus in September of 1908, Silas could finally close the chapter on *Koranta*.

The Reverend's contribution was one of the meaningful gestures that welded Moshoeles and Molemas together. This was not nobility whose stature derived from a disposable income, but rather education, control over land, and the prestige of chiefly family names. As a chiefly notable capable of generating wealth in the 1880s and 1890s in the north of the Cape Colony, Silas was an exception and not a rule. Already by the turn of the twentieth century, education could not guarantee white-collar employment, even amongst the nobility's children. Despite his early education and proficiency in English, Silas' nephew Joseph Molema remained poor and unemployed. In 1899 he begged his uncle to find him work in Mafikeng or in Kuruman. 'I have nothing to do', he wrote, 'so I think I shall have to starve when I got my hands and feet.'²⁴² If the inventories of deceased notables in the next generation are anything to go by, noble families had little means to furbish homes and enjoy trimmings of a middle-class lifestyle that commoners elsewhere in the Cape were accustomed to. At his death in 1938, Richard Lekoko, despite being a close relation of the paramount and married to a school teacher, left little behind but the land he controlled. He had only 19 mixed cattle, and some

²⁴¹ Minchin to S.T.Molema 13 March 1908, A979Aa3.6.2.

²⁴² J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 1899 December 22, A979Aa1.

small stock, although he did own 3 double ploughs, 1 planter, 24 yokes and 1 harrow. In his one-roomed house, he left a small sofa, a single bed with a mattress, 1 rug, 2 pillows, 1 sheet single, a table with 4 table chairs, 1 wicker chair, 1 table, 1 folding chair frame, 1 skin-mat, 5 tea cups, 1 teapot, 4 saucers, 2 table knives, 2 forks, 1 enamel plate, 2 table spoons and 7 teaspoons.²⁴³

Anticipating this fate, educated Bechuana clung to the hope that British rule after the South African war would make good the promise of Cape liberalism, and incorporate educated Africans into its expanding civil service and business centres. If, as Price argues, a ‘big thick line’ separated the British lower middle-classes from the upper echolons of the civil service, and stirred them to fanatical jingoism during the South African War, then in the colonial administration ‘the big thick line’ barely let Africans through the door.²⁴⁴ Educated commoners supported those devout and educated chiefs whose patronage could open the door to white-collar jobs, or at least create the kind of opportunity *Koranta* had provided for Plaatje. They also saw chiefs as allies for an adequately literate agrarian peasantry. Britain however did not deliver on any expectation, or at least not for Africans. After the war, the relationship between chiefly notables, the educated strata, an increasingly struggling peasantry, and the growing number of waged migrants had to be continuously recalibrated. The fluid computations of this relationship were shaped by the expediency of everyday life. They informed the boundaries and content of nationhood, and sometimes saw it abandoned in preference to other forms of ethnic mobilisation whilst people constantly reimagined their connectedness to one another. It is to this interwoven story of livelihoods on the land, competing nodes of power and the reconstruction of identities that we now turn.

²⁴³ See inventory in 1 MFK 15/N1/4/3 R. Lekoko.

²⁴⁴ R. Price, ‘Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism, 1870-1900’, in Crossick, G. (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (London, 1977), 89-112.

Chapter 2

Chiefs and landlords north of the Cape Colony

This chapter argues that by the 1880s chiefly and landed notables like Silas Molema were essentially rent-extracting elites. Rents were being extracted in culturally appropriate ways from Barolong through ‘placement’ (*peo*) and more overtly from European tenants, but also others whose skin colour or language excluded them from classification as indigenous. Tenancy agreements between European tenants and African landlords form a significant part of Molemas’ family papers. There is, however, a conspicuous dearth of references to crops, animal diseases and other typical anxieties of those who work as direct producers on the land. Until the 1920s there are very few direct references to the fact that Africans were in fact also living on the same farms Europeans rented. Their presence is revealed in European tenants’ complaints against African ‘trespassers’ who cut through fences to graze their stock, and watered their animals in wells Europeans built. (Chapter 3)

At times, Silas used ‘kaffir-corn’ (as it was called) and maize in the stead of money across European traders’ counters, but his trade in grain appears to have been limited to times of market opportunity, as was the case after the bumper harvest of 1913. This was essentially a livestock economy however. There is evidence in the archive that Silas, at times at least, possessed big herds. There are records detailing the purchase of cattle, but the records of selling stock are very sparse. The sale of cattle coincides with periods of insufficient money for essential household expenditure. Cattle were then used as a bank, exchanged for essential commodities or money. Silas used cattle extensively in his wagon business. They were also bound as surety for loans and bonds. There is little in the archive however to suggest that cattle were especially bred for trade, or even for the sale of meat and milk. As this chapter will show,

various sharecroppers, labour tenants, peasants and ‘servants’ of diverse racial and ethnic background were the direct producers on Silas’ farmlands. Though he controlled extensive landholdings, Silas was strictly speaking not a farmer.

As junior chiefs, notables allotted portions of their farmlands as wards to various ‘headmen’, as they were referred to in correspondence, indicating how deeply embedded the new vocabularies of Europeans had become in older and enduring forms of African life. Headmen in turn extended their patronage by distributing land by offering ‘placement’ (*peo*) to senior kinsmen, and heads of households. Fathers could also offer placement to sons. At many nodes where land was transferred, there was a set of cultural obligations and cases could also be tried, but the paramount chief was the highest authority. In this manner land was distributed at various rungs of the polity, whilst the overall interests of the junior chief, as the principal patron, were handled freely by ‘my people’ – as Silas put it. ‘Placement’ was a complex institution that decentralised, legitimated and dispensed the paramount chief’s power all the way down to the patriarchs of individual households. Through it, fathers could control not only their sons’ labour and increasingly cash earnings, but also encourage them to discipline themselves towards forms of acceptable masculinity at the time. Of course, the control of women was implicated in the design of this moral order and the making of these countryside dispositions. In this context both the practice and cultural meanings of land created and reinforced an underlying ambiguity of tenure as *both* ‘private’ and ‘public’. Too extreme a position on either side of the pendulum, whether real or perceived, spelt disaster for families like Molemas. The position was one of constant negotiation and manipulation.

The anthropologist Isaac Schapera has produced the only available scholarly discussion of ‘placement’. It was a report prepared for the colonial administration about Barolong Farms

in 1946. However Schapera does not make reference to the practice of settlement as ‘placement’. Rather he lambasts the nobility for institutionalising an exploitative system of tenancy.¹ His interpretation that African peasants lived on notables’ farms as tenants is, objectively speaking, accurate, but ‘rents’ were not always a part of spoken language, nor were they always in cash. The shillings paid to notables every year in the 1940s, which so ignited Schapera’s appeal for justice and were to him ‘contrary to custom’, were in fact recent history. Around the time of Schapera’s research, the voice of African peasants on Barolong Farms begins to appear in the archive, precisely because an erstwhile hegemony that previously facilitated various kinds of payments by Africans to notables was by then almost completely broken down. These records were produced during the final eclipse of the nobilities’ position as landlords. By then, the office of the paramount chief was securely in place, but he was flanked by an insecure, largely impoverished and frustrated nobility. The transformations that ultimately destabilised notables’ position as a ruling and landholding elite during the first three decades of the twentieth century are the subject of this chapter. Although literacy and the widening cash nexus introduced early fissures, this chapter points to colonial segregationist policies as the blow that crushed existing patterns of livelihoods and patriarchal control in the polity. If the paramount chief and especially ordinary people gleaned some ambivalent gains, families of notables like Silas were faced with an unprecedented loss of power.

The place of everyday language about land begs closer consideration. Before the public furore against ‘rents’ in the 1940s, African commoners’ narratives of land contained various sayings such as ‘land belongs to the people’ or similar sentiments that disavow private property. The Land Commission of the newly formed British Bechuanaland in 1886 took its cues from

¹ I. Schapera, ‘The System of Land Tenure on the Barolong Farms (Bechuanaland Protectorate): Report and Recommendations submitted to the B.P. Administration’, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 15 (1943), 15-37.

such sentiments, and drew its conclusion that public tenure was a ‘rule’ in these polities. Such ‘rules’ however, as the introductory chapter argued, are neat abstractions that people construct about messy and unpredictable realities. The practice of landholding was in reality riddled with inequality and provided some routes for private accumulation. Some Molemas today describe private land tenure as an ideal Silas Molema aimed for, but that his progressive suggestions fell onto deaf ears.² However the dynamics of chiefly rule in the countryside tell a different story. Partially private tenure helped notables’ accrue profits but their chiefly status was not conducive to purely contractual relations. Silas and other notables generated wealth and consolidated their power through a dense capillary of patronage. They also gained access to a pool of African labour. The ‘exchange of gifts’ is a conceptual metaphor Bourdieu uses to capture everyday negotiations in such settings.³ Commoners accepted ‘placement’ on notables’ farms as an extension of the paramount’s free ‘gift’ according to custom. Not to return a gift however would be to court disapproval. Commoners could not prevent the landlord’s cattle from drinking freely from their wells for example, and they were obliged by custom to ‘help’ him plough his fields (*pacha*).

There was in practice, if not necessarily in speech, a pattern of tenantry across the polity. Africans lived and spoke of it as *peo* or ‘placement’. Notables did in fact make a profit from their lands, but as sites on which commoners could live relatively ‘freely’. Who could dare make them pay? As the saying went, the land belonged only to the paramount, and he held it in order to ‘place’ his people. Though Silas spoke of ‘my people’, it was an expression both of power and its limits. Accumulation had to be sensitive to political legitimacy. There were significant limits to how much peasants could be made to work, how much of their produce

² Interview, Kopano Lekoma, August 1912, Mabete.

³ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 35.

could be appropriated, but they could not be pushed off the land. These relationships of ‘placement’ preserved chiefly status but they hindered private accumulation. Especially as the cash nexus expanded, this effectively could mean, for Silas and other chiefs, genteel poverty. Yet, it does not follow that African chiefs preferred a more unambiguous system of private tenure like that of their kinsmen in Thaba Nchu enjoyed. There too tenants were taken. It is instructive to note that unlike their British and Prussian counterparts, the Polish and Russian gentry in the early nineteenth century did not generally press for private property. They were less confident in their capacity to manage their large estates. Rents were a safer and more profitable option.⁴ Moreover, relationships to land were more than mere material expediency but fitted into Africans’ understandings of themselves.

Along this colonial frontier, the steep migration of landless Europeans into northern hinterlands, along with their new institutions and language of ‘contract’ presented opportunity for notables to increase their earnings from the land. By the turn of the twentieth century, there existed formal contracts existed between African landlords like Silas and ‘foreigners’, especially Europeans, as tenants. The institution of ‘contract’ became grafted onto the existing fibre of cultural life and economy in the reserve. Life on notables’ farmlands illustrates the interconnectedness between spheres that many colonial officials imagined to be distinct. Silas’ experience as an African landlord exemplifies one aspect of the everyday lives of ‘interstitial individuals’ – a concept used in the recent *Cambridge History of South Africa*.⁵ Like Cooper, it describes this ‘in between’ position as a ‘home’ without exploring the everyday practical

⁴ D. Thompson, *Europe Since Napoleon* (New York, 1967), 89

⁵ Hamilton et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Volume 1: From Early Times to 1885* (Cambridge, 2012), xviii.

dilemmas that informed these experiences.⁶ Enduring dilemmas in pre-colonial political economies, like how inherited privilege could be transferred across generations without compromising the legitimacy of chiefly rule, encouraged Africans to borrow practices and vocabularies across fluid cultural spheres on the colonial frontier. Not only a new cash economy, but also the inflow of diverse immigrant populations enabled fresh possibilities to commodify land more, whilst avoiding hefty political penalties. Various understandings of property, ownership and even work were knitted together. Relationships between chiefs, African commoners and ‘foreigners’ of various racial and ethnic backgrounds were often mutually advantageous, but were not always easy to navigate. (Chapter 3)

Some Europeans thought that the existence of a white tenantry on Africans’ lands blighted white prestige in the northern districts. English-speaking settlers there considered themselves pioneering ‘Northerners’. Many had been deeply suspicious of the Cape administration before the war. They hoped that Unification would be a chance to thrive, and actively courted the government to help them turn the dry northern plains into hubs of profitable agriculture and trade. They abhorred the pattern of landholding in the reserve and other notables’ farms in the north. Their resentment and political manouvres influenced developments in the reserve after the war, including the imposition of a Dog Tax in 1903. Silas and his eldest son Sebopioa played leading roles in the chieftaincy’s attempt to resist the tax. This chapter argues that although their legally sophisticated campaign against Dog Tax was certainly not the motivation behind those calling for what became the Native Land Act of 1913, the court case offered white radical conservatives a strong advantage during a most critical moment of disunity in the cabinet. This was when General Barry Hertzog was effectively

⁶ Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection’, 1539.

ousted from government in 1912. Feinberg argues that the Land Act was intended by moderates to bring cohesion to the government at this extremely fragile moment after Unification.⁷ This chapter suggests rather that as resistance to Dog Tax reached the highest courts of the land at exactly this moment of crisis, threatening further to spread details of African landlordism in the historic place of the siege in the European press, it forced the hands of moderate cabinet ministers towards the Natives Land Act of 1913. The chapter also explores the implications of segregation for chiefly rule.

In discussing these broader arguments, I focus mainly but not exclusively on four areas of farmland under the control of Silas Molema: Mabete, Vryhof, Kromdraai and Madibespruit. 'Mabete' was one of forty-one 'Barolong Farms', measuring 432 square miles. (Maps 4a and 4b) Its history has been presented in greater depth by John Comaroff. Though he notes European tenantry on Barolong farms until Botswana's independence, Comaroff concludes that the farms were of 'marginal status' and 'never fully integrated' into the polity.⁸ In contrast, this chapter argues that rents from Barolong farms were the means through which notables accumulated the bulk of fixed assets for later generations. For Silas, rents later became a central aorta of survival. (Chapter 3) Montsioa initially intended to distribute these lands amongst his nobility as private farms, as his counterpart Chief Moroka did in Thaba 'Nchu earlier in the nineteenth century. But the view of the Land Commission in 1886 was that Africans were 'not ready' for individual tenure. Rather grantees were given 'certificates of occupation' rather than title deeds. The forty-one farms were leased to men of Montsioa's choice at an annual rent of £1 10s 0d, payable to the chief but each farm was recognised as the personal property of the lessee, and could be inherited by his sons or at least remain as a family holding indefinitely.

⁷ H. Feinberg, 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa: Politics, Race and Segregation in the Early 20th Century', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26, 1 (1993), 65-109.

⁸ J. Comaroff, 'Class and Culture: The Transformation of Land Tenure in Barolong', *Journal of African Law*, 24, 1 (1980), 85-113.

The holder could not be absent from the farm for more than 12 consecutive months. The farms could only be alienated to another Morolong. As per Montsioa's agreement with Sidney Shippard the territory was not proclaimed a native reserve, despite Britain's shift towards this policy at this time. (Chapter 1)

In addition Silas held an individual title deed for the farm Vryhof. It was situated in the Cape Colony and seemingly adjoined the reserve's south eastern boundary. In 1886, after the Land Commission had set aside land for the African reserves and European settlement in the new territory of British Bechuanaland, the Land Commission also auctioned land 'subject to redeemable quitrent'. Some chiefs, including Silas, and other Africans (notably wagon riders) purchased farms.⁹ Vryhof was purchased in this manner, and measured 1003 morgen. It was registered at the Title Deeds Office as private property which could be sold or placed under mortgage. Silas also similarly held two properties measuring about 45 and 161 square miles in the reserve.¹⁰ Kromdraai, Tantinyane and Madibespruit were situated in the Molopo Reserve north of the Cape Colony. Although they were often referred to as such on lease agreements between Silas and tenants, strictly speaking they were not 'farms'. They were never surveyed, but existed as large stretches of land under Silas' chiefly control. Silas had no private title but had almost complete autonomy there. As the population in the reserve increased, more and more Africans settled on these lands. Whilst 'Vryhof' survives (albeit tenuously) in the memory of the Molema family today, the names 'Kromdraai' and 'Madibespruit' and 'Tantinyane' are unknown. No one know where the properties were situated.

⁹ B. Montsioa vs Union Government, JUS 190, File 23079/10.

¹⁰ Mortgage application S. M. Molema, 10 August 1942, SAB NTS 3097 1280/305.

i. African landlords and European tenants

The northern hinterlands of the Cape Colony, like the western Transvaal, remained for a long time a frontier along which a racially diverse group of immigrants could borrow various practices from one another and even marry. The ‘scandal’ in official circles of the marriage of Christopher Bethel, a British official, to one of Chief Montsioa’s nieces in the 1870s is a case in point.¹¹ Silas’ wife is reputed to have been of Griqua descent, and a photograph does reveal high cheek bones and pale skin.¹² The occurrence of blue eyes in Molemas’ fourth generation today is casually spoken of as evidence of their forefathers’ sexual relationships across the racial divide. European professionals, railway employees and white colonial officials lived across the railway station in the European town, west of the reserve. But some Europeans lived in the African *stadt* in the reserve. The former residence of Silas’ European attorney, Spencer Minchin, still stands there today. Another European built his house across the *stadt*’s Wesleyan church in front of the school house. Even immediately after the publication of the Land Act in 1913 when all ‘squatters’ were to leave the reserve, some resisted the government’s basis of racial categorisation and continued to live in the *stadt*. The fair-skinned H. Buchman was allowed to remain in the reserve by the Resident Magistrate ‘provided he is a genuine Griqua’. As the chieftaincy’s secretary, Sebopioa Molema indicated that he ‘was not prepared to certify his being a genuine Griqua’ because Buchman’s father had arrived in the reserve in 1863 as a mason ‘claiming to be a German’, and married a Morolong woman. He paid several cattle for her ‘to comply with the Sechuana custom’. According to Sebopioa

¹¹ A, Manson, ‘Christopher Bethell and the Securing of the Bechuanaland Frontier, 1878 to 1884’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 3 (1998), 485-508.

¹² Conversation with L. Molema, August 1912, Gaborone.

As to Mr H. Buchman's recognition of the Barolong Chief's authority there is no question about that. He is born and raised among us and he knows of no other custom than that of Barolong. I hope Sir, that although I am not prepared to his being a genuine Griqua still as a Government Representative you will find your way clear to grant him permission to live with us. We consider him to be a member of the Barolong Nation. The only power that can cut off his only and former identification and citizenship as a Morolong is vested in the Government.¹³

Buchman was allowed to remain in the reserve. The documented prevalence of acculturation south and west of the Transvaal applied also in neighbouring regions of the northern Cape.¹⁴ Incorporation into the polity however did not rest merely on cultural assimilation, but also on a bedrock of economic relationships that had been honed into the social landscape over time. Chaeng Hon, Ly Wing and 'Mr Yokehon' were Chinese immigrants who seemed to have reached Mafikeng after the South African War. From 1903 they each paid cash rents to Silas to 'hire a garden'.¹⁵ Another example was the destitute labourer, simply described on a contract as 'John Ludick Coloured Man'. A man of 'mixed-race', he was a labour tenant on Silas' plot in the reserve. In lieu of rent to live in a small house on the plot, Silas stipulated that

... he ploughs my garden and helped by my man, he takes care of it and in time of reaping he reaps it helped by my people and he must plant fruit trees in the garden and other tress. My oxen are to plough for him a piece of garden within the same enclosure. He pays no rent, and I pay him nothing. I can remove him from my house and garden if I am not satisfied with his conduct given a month's notice, on the other hand he is at liberty to give me a month's notice and leave me.¹⁶

¹³ Resident Magistrate to Lekoko, and response, 13 June 1913, SJ Molema, Personal Archive, Mafikeng, . henceforth, SAP.

¹⁴ C. van Onselen, 'Race and Class in the South African Countryside: Cultural Osmosis and Social Relations in the Sharecropping Economy of the South Western Transvaal, 1900-1950', *The American Historical Review*, 95, 1 (1990), 99-123; *The Seed is Mine*, (New York, 1996).

¹⁵ Receipts: S.T. Molema to Chaeng Hong, 27 March, 30 April, 7 May, 1 July, 10 October 1904; S.T. Molema To Yokehon, 12 November 1903; S.T. Molema to Ly Wing, 10 October 1904, A979Ca4.

¹⁶ Lease Agreement: S.T. Molema and J. Ludick, 1904 undated, A979Aa3.

Silas' advantage as a landlord over European landowners like his friend and attorney Spencer Minchin derived from his easier access to 'boys' or 'kaffertjies' as a pool of labour. In October of 1922, one such tenant J. Oosthuizen reminded Silas that 'the boys that you have promised me have not yet arrived', and requested that a man named 'Piet' be dispatched to the farm as quickly as possible.¹⁷ Others existed on the very margins of the polity and barely had right to access property. Exploited as slaves in Khama's lands far north of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the descendants of the San, Makgalagadi, were designated officially as 'servants' of chiefs in Mafikeng, typically tending to animals at the cattle posts on the outskirts of the residential *stadts* and responsible for trekking. They were largely labour tenants, paid in kind for food and upkeep.¹⁸

Many European tenants entered into leasing agreements with Silas and other notables, and in fact lived in the reserve amongst Africans and other groups. Some, like J.J. Paynter paid rents in cash. In 1898 he hired a 'portion of ground' in the reserve for about £17 per annum for a period of five years.¹⁹ O. Nell hired a 'small two roomed house and a piece of ground for ploughing for £20 per year in 1899.²⁰ John Kay paid first £30 per annum and then £35 for lodging and a field.²¹ Sharecropping was another option. J.J. van Rooyen ploughed Silas's field on Tantinyane in the reserve in 1898.²² 'Half of all produce' was to be passed on to Silas, who had supplied both seed and oxen. In 1912 P.F. Meintjies was another sharecropper in the reserve.²³ A man simply referred to as 'European' and 'Philip's son' leased 'an enclosed garden in which stands a house of four rooms' in 1908.²⁴ Probably a young and hence less experienced

¹⁷ J. Oosthuizen to S.T. Molema, 22 October 1922 A979Aa3.

¹⁸ S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 1918 September 15, A 979Ac1.

¹⁹ Lease Agreement: J.J. Panter and S.T.Molema, 1 January 1898 A979Aa3.5.3.

²⁰ Lease Agreement: O.Nell and S.T. Molema, 7 September 1899 A979Aa3.5.6.

²¹ Lease Agreement: J. Kay and S.T. Molema, 23 April 1900 A979Aa3.5.7.

²² Lease Agreement: J.J. van Roeyen and S.T. Molema, 1898 May, undated A979Aa3.5.4.

²³ Lease Agreement: P.F. Meintjes and S.T.Molema, undated May, 1912 A979Aa3.5.14.

²⁴ Lease Agreement: 'Philip's son' and S.T. Molema, undated 1908, A979Aa3.

man, he had amongst the most demanding contracts. He could use both house and garden ‘free of charge’ but was to plant at least thirty fruit trees every month, and ‘make a dam on the other garden of mine with his own expense and plough for me when helped by my man.’

Very often white tenants in the reserve paid rents through substantial infrastructural developments. In 1891 P. Crause built a three roomed house with ‘walls of brick and a roof of iron’ in the reserve.²⁵ Harry Roland Wright hired 1000 morgen on Kromdraai in 1901. He had to build a five roomed house and a kitchen to the value of £350 over five years. He also had to build a stable for four horses and a cart house together worth £100 during the same period. The repair of fences, the unclogging and extension of water furrows, and the cultivation of fruit trees were also a part of his obligation.²⁶ In lieu of rent the Wrights were to build ‘a dwelling house for four rooms ... the outside measurement to be 32ft by 30ft – hip roof and rooms to be sealed by calico’.²⁷ Another tenant, though ‘most heartily’ thankful that his contract was renewed, had to put up a new windmill.²⁸

In the years immediately preceding Unification and especially afterwards, many English-speaking European men’s lives and dispositions along the northern frontier were informed by a powerful imagery of the ‘Northerner’. They thought of themselves as brave, enterprising pioneers that tamed the Kalahari through agriculture. They disparaged Europeans from low-lying coastal parts of the colony as weak and lethargic, yet disproportionately favoured by politicians. In February 1910, Mafikeng’s European residents were addressed by J.W. de Kock, their representative in the Cape House of Assembly, who expressed such sentiments vociferously. He explained how the ‘Northern people’ were suffering under a

²⁵ Lease Agreement: P. Crause and S.T. Molema, 2 October 1801 A979Aa3.5.2.

²⁶ Lease Agreement: H.Wright and S.T. Molema, 1 May 1901 A979Aa3.5.8.

²⁷ Lease Agreement: E.Rowlands, R. Rowlands and S.T. Molema, 16 October 1905, A979Aa3.5.11.

²⁸ Anonymous tenant to S. T. Molema, undated A970Aa.

‘curse’ because the previous Cape government was interested only in developing coastal areas ‘whilst the rest of the country could go to the devil.’ According to de Kock, not only were Cape politicians at the beck and call of ‘farmers of the Western Province’, who were ‘looked upon as experts and possessed of boundless practical experience’, but farmers like themselves who ‘did the hard work’ were completely neglected. They were only ‘a doormat to serve the parts and the ambitions of Cape politicians.’ But he expressed hope that the installation of a new Union government would usher their own interests to the forefront of the political agenda:

From the 1st of June [1910] there would be a new order of things and greater issues ... the inland portions of the country would stand together. The Northern people would have a cricket innings such as had never been in the history of this Colony ... Coast legislation had milked them dry, but fortunately on the 1st of June a new order of things would come about. The day of reckoning is at hand.²⁹

At the same time, the ‘Northern people’ aimed to curb the import of British goods, and stimulate the local market. In Mafikeng, residents were encouraged to ‘practice what you preach and support local industries’. Women of the Mafikeng branch of the South African National Union in fact pledged to buy only ‘colonial made articles’ whenever ‘the price and quality warrant it’.³⁰ Local storekeepers stocked and exhibited local goods in order that Mafikeng’s own production of wares and furniture could be large enough to create an order to other regions. The push for these local industries was focused on cattle ranching. Many members of the SANU were livestock farmers and the dairy industry had just been kick-started, but it was felt that such industries were stymied by unaffordable railways rates that were applied inequitably to favour coastal areas.³¹ To them unification meant extension of the railways, and the support of white industry and agriculture in the hinterlands. In the words of SANU, ‘Union will, we are hoping, remove many of the drawbacks which at present hamper

²⁹ *Mafeking Mail*, 22 February 1910.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 2 March 1910.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22 February 1910.

the interior.’³² The ‘Northern men’, in de Kock’s words, aimed to turn the dry and arid Bechuanaland into a story of economic success, so that ‘they would make those noblemen down there at Cape Town, realise that there was something to be said for the pioneer and the developer, who had always been called upon to play the piper.’³³

Northerners lobbied the government to encourage economic growth by transforming the northern hinterlands through railways, as they busied themselves learning new techniques of cattle ranching and ‘dry farming’. This entailed improvising new techniques of cultivation in areas where rainfall was less than 20 inches a year, but a reliable crop could still be produced at low cost. The scientific ideas on ploughing and harrowing through which ‘deserts’ could be tamed into arable lands, especially for large scale production of wheat and maize, went hand in hand with attempts to ‘build up a mighty and prosperous nation’ of Europeans, and urged government intervention.³⁴ A few months before Unification, lands close to the railway were sought out. In the Cape a morgen of land close to the railway was sold for twelve times more than lands further away because farmers along a line could sell both beef and milk.³⁵ A railway line connected Mafikeng to Livingstone, in northern Rhodesia, and traversed the reserve (Map 2). Some Europeans clearly could purchase land, but many had to make do with renting land from either European or African landlords. In both instances, the terms of contracts were exacting. A landmark case heard before the Magistrate’s court in January of 1910, in which Spencer Minchin’s tenant, Nills Frederick Murman was released from carrying out the costs of a windmill on the farm, ‘Cloverly’, was sympathetically covered in Murman’s favour in the *Mafeking Mail*. Murman withheld his rent after paying £68 0s 9d to repair a damaged windmill. The case was won on appeal in the High Court of Griqualand. Before then, it was taken for

³² *Mafeking Mail*, 22 February 1910.

³³ *Mafeking Mail*, 2 May 1910.

³⁴ W. Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa* (Oxford, 2003) 236-256.

³⁵ *Mafeking Mail*, 17 March 1910.

granted that such costly repairs were always the responsibility of the tenant, whilst the landlord still claimed his rent in full.³⁶

The law was clearly one way for tenants to gain an upper hand, but was an expensive route. Also, in the event that the landlord was an African, the cost of a defeat before a public court was shameful. The same symbiotic relations of co-existence and intimate acculturation between black and white were also fertile ground for insecurities around race and status. Hence, Silas' launch of *Koranta* was considered by his European counterparts as culturally inappropriate. Owning, rather than merely working for a newspaper, was too audaciously (and therefore inappropriately) European. The *Bechuanaland News* announced that the paper was doomed to fail and told its owner to 'take the matter philosophically and reflect that after all they have but followed the example of many and many a white man in "this South Africa of ours" as the politicians call it.'³⁷ To build a white consensus across the often racialised categories of 'English' and 'Afrikaner' was all the more important in Mafikeng. For English-speaking whites, the town held the painful memory of the siege, but it was also the site of a huge concentration camp where many self-identifying 'Boers', especially women and children, died.

This section has described the northern hinterlands as landscapes of acculturation, including some intimate relationships across the colour line. Ethnic and racial diversity was facilitated by economic arrangements, notably African landlordism over a European tenantry. The latter subverted the norms of white supremacy, as did other other achievements not considered suitable for Africans. As 'Northerners' readied themselves to develop their districts

³⁶ *Mafikeng Mail*, 5, 10 January 1910.

³⁷ *The Bechuanaland News*, 23 August 1902.

into thriving agricultural and trading domains, many of them still roamed the countryside trying to secure leasing agreements. Being beholden to African landlords fuelled calls for the government to ease European settlers' plight in the northern hinterlands after the war. It is to European settlers' efforts and African notables' resistance to them that we now turn.

ii. Dog Tax and chiefly resistance

By the time Sebopioa Molema left to study in America in 1904, the Divisional Council of Mafeking had already attempted to impose a Dog Tax on the Molopo Reserve. There is no evidence to suggest that European settlers felt that Africans' dogs preyed on livestock. In fact there is no mention of the typical agrarian concerns that influenced the imposition of Dog Tax (or the absence thereof) in other reserves in the Cape. In East Griqualand for example, a Dog Tax was not introduced because Europeans felt dogs kept predators like jackals at bay.³⁸ Moreover, though the tax was also imposed in the neighbouring Setlagodi location, there is no evidence of attempts to collect there. That location's chiefs were not brought to trial, and neither do they appear in the government's correspondence on the matter. As was immediately understood by Mafikeng's nobility, the tax was a direct challenge to the 'special condition' of their territory as a 'reserve' under chiefly jurisdiction, and not a 'location'. Whilst in America, Sebopioa understood the matter as a 'boundary dispute'.³⁹ The tax was indeed a dispute over the nature and limits of chiefly jurisdiction, but certainly not comparable to any Molemas had waged on behalf of the chieftaincy before. It turned out to be an exercise that required enormous resources, both money and especially Sebopioa's energies to help coordinate the various nodes of a struggle for autonomy spanning more than a decade.

³⁸ W. Beinart, 'Settler Accumulation in East Griqualand from the Demise of the Griqua to the Natives Land Act', Beinart et al. (eds.) *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930* (Johannesburg, 1986), 259-310.

³⁹ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 18 October 1910, A979Ac1.

The Divisional Council of Mafeking attempted to impose a Dog Tax as a litmus test as to whether or not the reserve was governed by 'special conditions' as the nobility claimed or the Native Locations Act of 1884, which applied in other African reserves in the Cape, though not in Transkeian territories. The latter polities however were occupied by Africans only. Under the Natives Locations Act of 1884, only Africans could reside in reserves. As 'locations', reserves were legally 'crown lands', rather than as lands Africans owned and controlled themselves. In 1895, Sir Sidney Shippard and Chief Montsioa (Chapter 1) had negotiated the terms of the reserve's incorporation into the Cape. The imperial government wished to dispose of a costly possession as soon as possible, and unburden the British taxpayer. Shippard agreed that the reserve would be safeguarded from any legislation which did not already apply in British Bechuanaland, including the Natives Locations Act of 1884. (Chapter 1) Shippard excluded the reserve from districts under the jurisdiction of the Divisional Council of Mafeking because it was not 'crown lands.' If the DCM could prove its jurisdiction to impose a tax on the reserve, even if it were not eventually collected, whatever 'special conditions' the reserve claimed, could be proved also not to apply.

But the Native Affairs Department had an alternative strategy to end African landlordism over Europeans in the reserve. It had in mind that the chieftaincy could be brought into a process that fortified the reserve as a bastion of chiefly power in exchange for doing away with a system of tenancy that subverted norms of white supremacy. In the spirit of his department's *modus operandi* to design local solutions for diverse contexts in a manner that brought 'a just balance between white and black', the Secretary of the Native Affairs Department, Edward Dower, set himself to engage personally with Mafikeng's nobility.⁴⁰ As

⁴⁰ Dubow, 'Holding "a just balance between white and black"', 223-225.

a key case of the approach of the Native Affairs Department, it is necessary to turn to the nobility's long and arguably successful resistance to Dog Tax, from 1904 to 1913.

In December of 1903, Chief Badirile Montsioa succeeded his brother as the paramount chief of Mafikeng. The Resident Magistrate, Graham Green, supported his nomination and described him as about 30 years of age and as a 'fairly educated man of sober habits, and in my opinion a fit and proper person to be Chief.'⁴¹ Even then, the Cape administration was hesitant to install hereditary chiefs as paramount chiefs on the government's payroll. At least at the beginning of his rule, the young chief wished to make a good impression on his nation and undo some of the damage in reputation and administration done by his older brother Wessels, who had been addicted to alcohol. Early in January of 1904 he received a reminder from the Superintendent of Natives, W. J. Mahony, that Dog Tax was to have been collected on the 7 December the previous year, but that Wessels' death had prevented such collection in his and the neighbouring Setlagodi location. Barolong were to pay five shillings for every dog over three months old every year. The tax was being imposed not by the Native Affairs Department (NAD), but by the Divisional Council of Mafikeng. Badirile's refusal was unambiguous. As he put it, 'we do not agree with this matter' on the grounds that when British Bechuanaland was incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1895 'we were assured that the laws and regulations with which we have been governed will not be changed.' He added, 'so it is very hard for us to pay for our dogs.'⁴²

Green attempted unsuccessfully to sell the Divisional Council of Mafeking as a 'local government' to which Barolong were invited to nominate representatives. The Dog Tax would

⁴¹ G. Green to W. C. Cumming, 3 December, 1903 A979Bc3.1.

⁴² B. Montsioa to W. J. Mahony, 15 January 1904 A979Bc1.

be used, he said, to improve, amongst other things, the *stadt*'s poor roads. As far as the Badirile was concerned however:

... about having our Representative in the District Councils of Mafeking ... I saw (sic) that we do not need one ... we also have our own Council in the *stadt* which has nothing to do with the Divisional Council. We therefore strongly object to dog tax in our reserve.⁴³

Forceful as this refusal was, it was in actual fact Silas' watered down translation of Badirile's far more curt draft reply in Sechuana to Green that 'my people and I refuse this matter' and that they would accept the colonial government's rule 'only' directly through the NAD and the Resident Magistrate. He repeated even more forcefully that 'I refuse to pay'. Badirile appeared before the magistrate's court on 17 August, 1904 for failing to pay tax on one dog. He was defending not only the nation's right to self-determination, but the social relationships around which the nation had been imagined and consolidated. The implications of being classified as a location went beyond limiting non-African settlement in the reserve and retaining European rents for notables' pockets. It could also change the pattern of landholding. The Natives Location Act of 1884 disallowed private property in the reserves. In the stead of a negotiated ambiguity between 'private' and 'communal' tenure, the pendulum could be made to swing legally to the termination of private property. The total termination of private property undermined the capillary of patronage and patriarchal relationships that 'placement' facilitated, which were central in the shaping of acceptable gender roles and appropriate countryside sensibilities. Such eventuality was one more anxiety on the uncertainties around the longevity of chiefly rule as *Koranta*'s narratives suggested. (Chapter 1)

Badirile was found guilty and fined £1 or 14 days imprisonment with hard labour. On appeal the Supreme Court in Cape Town quashed the conviction of 14 November, 1904. His

⁴³ B. Montsioa to Graham Green, 03 February 1904 A979Bc1 (emphasis in original).

attorneys argued that the reserve did not fall within any of the Districts set forth and described in the Proclamation No 432 of 1896, as indeed had been negotiated with Sir Sidney Shippard. The chieftaincy's suit had been presented as against both the Divisional Council of Mafeking and the Prime Minister of the Colonial government.⁴⁴ On 9 March 1905, the *Mafeking Mail*, apt at leaking any information that may press the government to action against the reserve, reported that the Divisional Council of Mafeking had 'resolved that an application be made to the government to issue a new proclamation that would incorporate the reserve within the districts for local government purposes.' The following day the chieftaincy sent a letter of protest to the Resident Magistrate. According to Badirile the newspaper report 'greatly troubled me and my Councillors'. On internal matters, the Barolong wanted none other than their own authority:

Matters of 'local government' in the reserve have since the Annexation of our territory been under the jurisdiction of the paramount chief, and in the hands of his Chief and Headman, and I see no reason why any Council should encroach on these our rights and privileges ... As a nation we do not know this council, in the past we had no dealings with it and we do not wish to have any at the present or in the future ... We do not wish for any local authority or for any officials to come between the Government and us ...⁴⁵

The government sought the opinion of those who had been involved in the administration of British Bechuanaland. One such official proffered the opinion that by the time British Bechuanaland was annexed, the Native Locations Act of 1884 was already in force in the Cape Colony, and that 'from the outset' it was 'regarded as being in force in British Bechuanaland'. He acknowledged however that there was never a proclamation to this effect, and also that this omission meant that an attenuated version of the Act was put in place to enable the collection of Hut Tax in the reserve. Yet he argued that it was precisely because Hut

⁴⁴ Notice of Supreme Court, *Rex vs B. Montsioa*, CSC Motions 2/67/254

⁴⁵ Chief Badirile Montsioa to Graham Green, 1905 March undated, A979Bc1

Tax was being collected that the Native Locations Act applied to the reserve also, and not special laws and conditions of annexation as Badirile and his councillors claimed. This interpretation had direct implications, not with respect to the Dog Tax, which was not once mentioned in the document, but to the presence of Europeans in the reserve:

And upon the whole I think that, if the question should arise in a clearer form in the future proceedings the Supreme Court would (notwithstanding the appeal case of Montsioa) hold that the Locations Act of 1884 ... does apply to Native Reserves in British Bechuanaland, and that persons who are European and not Native cannot get lawful authority from a Chief to reside or remain within such a Reserve. It appears to me to be contemplated by the Act that authority to reside or be in Native Locations must be got from the Government or its representative, the Inspector, and it is for the benefit and protection of the Natives themselves that intruders, not approved of by the Government should not find a footing in the reserve. If such people are once established it may become difficult if not impossible to dislodge them.⁴⁶

Even traders would have to be granted special permission to remain in the reserve. On 21 May 1906, the Cape government passed Proclamations No 173 and 174 that declared the reserve as one of the districts under the Divisional Council of Mafeking. Dog Tax was again imposed on the reserve on 16 October 1908. Once more the chieftaincy resisted. In January 1909 the tax collector arrived in the *stadt* to find that not a single penny had been paid. On 29 August 1909, the Secretary of the Divisional Council, Thomas Alfred, wrote to Badirile warning him to pay five shillings for his own dog. Badirile refused and appeared before the magistrate's court on 8 March 1910. His plea was that the reserve belonged to him 'in trust for the people of the tribe who occupy and use it in subordination to him under tribal tenure'. In announcing the two new Proclamations therefore, the government was acting beyond its powers - in legal jargon, *ultra vires*. In other words, such Proclamations could not be passed without an Act of Parliament. In his testimony, the exasperated Alfred confirmed that 'no taxes have been paid from the Molopo Native Reserve.' He also described Badirile's insolence and

⁴⁶ Undated 'opinion' from anonymous official, copied to Badirile Montsioa, 1905. A979Bc1

defiance on at least three occasions. Once he had called on Badirile in his office in the *stadt* and asked him for his dog licence. He found that there was a ‘big red dog’ in the office, and asked Badirile ‘if he had a dog of his own’, to which Badirile ‘replied in the affirmative’, and then curtly ‘declined to pay the tax.’ The magistrate found Badirile guilty and fined him ten shillings with costs.⁴⁷ Although in 1904 and 1910 Badirile appeared and was fined for refusing to pay the tax, it was Silas and Plaatje that sought and worked alongside his legal counsel.

In summary, for well over six years the nobility resisted the imposition of a Dog Tax in the reserve. In refusing to recognise the Divisional Council of Mafeking’s authority over the Molopo Reserve, the chieftaincy wished to maintain that the territory was not Crown lands, and that Africans owned and were in full control of it. After Unification in June 1910, white ‘Northerners’ put pressure on the new government to alter the status of the Molopo Reserve. As outlined below, the chieftaincy resisted through the courts, but also sought sympathetic allies in the European community, including members of the colonial administration. They would also use the platform of the South African Native National Congress extensively. (Chapter 4) As argued below, the Native Affairs Department wished to avoid a court battle, and to focus rather on a political solution. It is to its concentrated efforts to achieve territorial segregation in the reserve that we now turn.

Land, chiefly authority and the Union government

⁴⁷Badirile Montsioa versus Union Government, 1913, Volume 1, CSC 1 1723: 2/1/1/717.

The chieftaincy responded quickly to Badirile's sentencing, adopting both wide-ranging political and legal strategies. The first and most obvious one was to file an appeal in the Supreme Court of Cape Town on 29 April, 1910.⁴⁸ In November of that year its legal counsel, Findlay & Tait, was unable to proceed further with the matter, citing being 'very busy at present'.⁴⁹ The reality was that the legal costs were becoming too hefty for the chieftaincy to pay. Not only that, Badirile had succumbed to drink. Aged only 35, Badirile capitulated, reportedly to alcohol related illness, and died on 4 April 1911.⁵⁰ Lekoko Marumoloa was appointed as regent.

At the time of Lekoko's installation, Sebopioa had been in Mafikeng for about three months, having returned from America. He was determined to be in the forefront of the resistance to the Dog Tax. Sebopioa married his cousin Emang (aka Emma) shortly after returning home. She was Lekoko's daughter, and her mother was Silas' sister. Emang held the full repertoire of skills and respectability demanded of noblewomen, being both educated and industrious. During Plaatje's stay in Silas' household during the siege of Mafikeng, the fourteen year old Emang once temporarily took over as his housekeeper. He described her in his diary as 'such an acquisition to our domestic circle that we wonder what we can do without her'.⁵¹ This spell of domestic service, according to Plaatje, 'made her unused to the ceremonious "squatting"', and the idleness of young uneducated women which *Koranta* considered an obstacle to the nation's progress. (Chapter 1) Plaatje noted also that she 'already knows not only how to cook, but also how to economise with the scanty groceries and preserves everything with skill and forethought.' Sebopioa saw himself essentially as a moderniser, intent

⁴⁸ Reid & Nephew to Department of Justice, 1910 May 30, JUS 109 File 23079/10.

⁴⁹ Findlay & Tait to Reit & Nephew, 22 November 1910.

⁵⁰ *Tsala*, 8 April 1911.

⁵¹ S. Plaatje, *The Mafikeng Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: A Black Man's View of a White Man's War*, John Comaroff and Brian Willan, eds., (Johannesburg, 1989), 126.

on bureaucratising the office of the paramount chief and projecting an image of efficiency, order and administrative sophistication – in a word, ‘progress’. He became the chieftaincy’s first National Secretary. All communication from the office of the paramount chief for example, was in typescript and carried his own initials above Lekoko’s signature.

Lack of money motivated the chieftaincy towards seeking political solutions. First, Silas and Plaatje became founding members of the South African Native Convention on 24 March 1910 in Bloemfontein.⁵² Silas accepted a nomination as vice-president, with John Dube as his counterpart. The president was the Rev. W. B. Rubusana. Though he was an educated man and founder of the Ohlange Training Institute, John Dube’s support for the chieftaincy in Natal was staunch, and in him Plaatje found a sympathetic ear.⁵³ On 8 January 1912, the Convention was reconstituted as the South African Native National Congress in Bloemfontein, where Plaatje was elected as the general secretary. Silas was elected as one of the vice-presidents in the Congress’s House of Chiefs. Sebopioa too, it appears, was a member of Congress but he attended meetings on behalf of the paramount chief. Discussion of Molemas’ attempt to utilise the platform of the SANNC in the struggle for an independent Barolong chiefly jurisdiction follows in Chapter 4. Although Africans who qualified continued to vote in the Cape, the founding of these bodies stemmed from educated Africans’ awareness that their general position was becoming more precarious, especially their security on land.⁵⁴ For Molemas, their continuing struggle for self-determination made involvement in such structures more critical.

⁵² Notice of meeting, 24 March 1924, A979Cc9

⁵³ On Seme, Plaatje and Dube’s cooperation in the SANNC see, H. Macmillan, ‘A Nation Divided? The Swazi in Swaziland and the Transvaal, 1865-1986’, in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in South Africa* (Oxford, 1989), 295.

⁵⁴ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 145.

Second, the chieftaincy sent a number of appeals and deputations to the Native Affairs Department. The department received a petition in January of 1911, where the chieftaincy's main complaint was that lawyers' charges were excessive, and hindered Africans from accessing the courts. To this, Dower responded simply that 'the fault lies with the Natives themselves who are so fond of litigation and often place themselves in the hands of legal practitioners' rather than relying on sympathetic colonial officials to resolve problems. There were numerous other concerns the chieftaincy had put forward, including pass laws, the fact that Africans could not purchase land in the Orange Free State, and the 'lack of attention and civility on the part of Railway officers'.⁵⁵ The costs of the chieftaincy's legal counsel, Findlay & Tait, again prohibited the speedy pursuit of a legal course, and the case was not set down for trial. In the meantime Green retired as Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner in Mafikeng. Dower appointed N.C. Welsh, a stern segregationist who had little patience with Africans whose lifestyle and aspiration threatened Europeans' success and prestige. His attitude was well known to the nobility. As Plaatje put it to Molema, Welsh 'looked down on Barolong'.⁵⁶

Dower took the previous petition that lawyers were too expensive as a tacit admission that the legal battle was not a route the chieftaincy could follow easily. However the NAD was set on a political solution, which needed time. But seeing no movement on the case, European settlers attempted to rouse the NAD into swift action. Early in May, 1911 Daniel Wessels, a parliamentary representative for Bechuanaland, raised a question in the House of Assembly whether the Minister of Native Affairs, Henry Burton, would 'abolish or restrain the jurisdiction of native chiefs in Bechuanaland, and to establish the reserve as part of a District

⁵⁵ E. Dower to Badirile Montsioa, 2 February 1911, A979Cc9.

⁵⁶ S. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, 2 April 1911, A979Da14.

Council.’ He pressed Burton also to discuss with the imperial government (during his official visit to England) ‘abolishing the conditions preventing the Union government exercising the right of alienating any portion of the Native Reserve in Bechuanaland.’⁵⁷ On 8 May 1911, the *Mafeking Mail*, intent on stoking the simmering political fire, reported that in response to Wessels the minister had implied ‘taking away the power of the Bechuana chiefs’ as an a option.⁵⁸ It was not so much the question, but the Minister’s response that plunged the chieftaincy into panic. It seems they had taken Burton’s support for granted, and thought the local European community was the enemy. It was then that the chieftaincy wrote to W.P. Schreiner, former Cape Prime Minister and well-known defender of the Cape’s liberal tradition, seeking his advice. They reminded Schreiner of his invitation to them that ‘if [there is ever] any question we did not understand re government action, that we were to communicate with you at once.’

Schreiner was asked whether it would be prudent to send a petition directly to the imperial government ‘so that the Union government would not put away the conditions, which exist between us re our land and the imperial government.’ The chief implored Schreiner to ‘write to us on this matter at once, because our hearts are very sore on it ... there is danger of our imperial Father being asked to break confidence with us.’⁵⁹ Schreiner advised that a petition should rather be sent to the Native Affairs Department. On 5 June, 1911 such a petition was prepared.⁶⁰ It was delivered by two European missionaries, Revs Amos Burnett and George Weavind. The petition had been largely prepared by Sebopioa and Plaatje, who was forced to ‘make a flying trip’ from Kimberley to Mafikeng to offer advice and add his own

⁵⁷ *Tsala*, 2 September 1912.

⁵⁸ Lekoko to W.P. Schreiner, 1911 May undated, copy. A979Bd1.

⁵⁹ Lekoko to W. P. Schreiner, 1911 May, undated A979Bd1.

⁶⁰ E. Dower to Lekoko, 14 June 1911, A979Bd1.

genius to the careful crafting of such documents.⁶¹ The educated elite was the hands, feet and brain behind the aged chief's signature. The regent could read and write but he had little or no proficiency in English. This time Dower's reply was in hand-written Sechuana, in contrast to the chieftaincy's own English type-script.⁶² This was a subtle, yet powerful symbolic representation of Dower's tactful negotiation with the regent in Mafikeng. He wished to bargain with Lekoko directly, without educated interlocutors and communicate to him an offer of greater chiefly powers. By eschewing typescript, he was delineating the boundaries of European bureaucracies.

In Sechuana, Dower outlined segregation as *the* solution to the chieftaincy's claim of an independent and chiefly jurisdiction. He described how even the powers of the magistrate's court in the reserve could be significantly scaled back, in order to make room for rule according to 'customs of Sechuana' (*mekhwa ea Bechuana*).⁶³ In other words, the paramount need not fear because rather than dislodging chiefly power from its base, the government sought to strengthen its foundations. There was however no place for Europeans in such a domain. He assured Lekoko that 'nothing would be done that can break the agreement between the government and Barolong', and that what was intended was to apply not only to Mafikeng but to other parts of Bechuanaland too. He admitted also that the relationship between the Divisional Councils and Africans had not been teased out, and so chiefs and their people had to agree that a 'law' that rectifies the confusion be established. Without such a law, he warned, 'there can only be a continuation of the difficulties of courts and legal expenses.' Dower then outlined what such 'law' might look like, while placing the status of Europeans in the reserves into the foreground:

⁶¹ See for example, SJ Molema to S.T. Plaatje, 9 May 1925 SPA.

⁶² E.Dower to Lekoko, 14 June 1911, A979Bd1.

⁶³ E. Dower to L.Montsioa, 14 June 1911, A979Bd1. Sechuana.

There are parts of Bechuanaland where land was allocated to Africans prior to Annexation. The status (*boemo*) of Africans in these areas has to be rectified by law, for which the government requires the cooperation of chiefs. The status of whites and traders that have been given a place in the reserve is not fully satisfactory and some of them want matters to be put right with regard to their houses and their [infrastructural] improvements (*go aga ga bone*). Their status must be properly discussed and settled, so that there are no people in the tribe that are disadvantaged, and also that the white clerics and traders can acquire suitable conditions [of residence].

The local magistrate, as Dower reminded Lekoko, had become the chiefs' enemy because people could appeal chiefs' decisions at colonial courts. Dower made it a point to pick at the thorns in the flesh of chiefly power – the multiple nodes of everyday life where chiefs felt they had to defend their turf against the penetration of European institutions: marriage and the settling of disputes. Certainly, women's marginalised lives and their growing aspirations were inviting the interference of colonial courts in ways patriarchy found threatening. (Chapter 1) As an example, Dower referred to frequent instances where the Resident General could not issue a certificate of divorce under circumstances where a chief had ordered a separation in the *kgotla*, if the couple had married either in Christian rite or before the magistrate. Given the growth of Christianity and education amongst Africans, settling marriage disputes was increasingly beyond the jurisdiction of chiefs. Dower also proposed a centralisation of chiefly powers, and suggested that the different rungs of sub-chiefs and locally appointed headmen, who were trying cases, bred confusion. 'Would Barolong', he asked, 'not be acting wisely if they found a way through which the Paramount's court can be formally recognised, [like the Magistrate's court] so that it can settle local disputes?' A more powerful and centralised paramount, and a chieftaincy quintessentially 'Sechuana' was, as far as the NAD was concerned, a stronger chieftaincy and an offer any paramount chief with foresight would find attractive. But such centralisation in effect, undermined the right of sub-chiefs like Silas to try

cases. During this same period, the power of chiefs in Natal and Pondoland were being reinvigorated, but in Mafikeng the primary motivation was racial segregation.⁶⁴

In the meantime, Dower was reluctant to press for the conclusion of the appeal, given especially that the NAD's legal counsel acknowledged that the matter being brought to trial came 'with the possibility of losing it.'⁶⁵ It was precisely due to the threat of such a defeat in Cape Town's Supreme Court that the radical conservative General Barry Hertzog, as the Union government's first Minister of Justice, pushed that it be heard. Hertzog's strategy was to put such pressure on Burton in order that the Native Affairs Department would be forced to consider legislation like the Land Act of 1913. His strategy was to use the court case to push the NAD to act. That the government could lose the case offered Hertzog great advantage. The NAD could not risk the appeal being brought to trial before the demise of African landlordship in the reserve was certain. An unfavourable ruling meant Burton's defeat by 'natives' in a public manner could only suggest that the moderates were not sufficiently aggressive to handle the reality on the ground.

Dower painstakingly communicated to Hertzog's department Burton's persistent view that the matter of the appeal be left alone and not be brought to trial. In October 1912, Burton was certain that Lekoko would be persuaded to compromise, and that he 'appears to be doing his best to carry out his duties in harmony with the Government', hence 'it does not appear desirable to stir up feeling in the Reserve'.⁶⁶ Moreover, Burton was of the opinion that 'the suit has apparently been abandoned by the Natives' and that the government carries its own costs. On 31 October 1911, Hertzog asked Burton to confirm whether or not the course to avoid court

⁶⁴ Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, 42-73; W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930* (London, 1987), 137.

⁶⁵ Reid & Nephew to Department of Native Affairs, 4 October, 1911, JUS 109 File, 23079/10 .

⁶⁶ Dower to Reid & Nephew, 4 October 1912, JUS 109/ File Number 23079/10.

action was being pursued by the Native Administration Department ‘as a matter of policy.’⁶⁷ Refusing to take the bite, Burton held the position that to let sleeping dogs lie was politically expedient because ‘the Natives in the Reserve are settling down under the new Chief Lekoko’, and hence ‘it is desirable to avoid as far as possible any action which may have the effect of reviving the dispute.’⁶⁸ ‘It is advisable’, Hertzog responded, ‘to have this case removed from the roll of pending cases as not to have it hanging over the Government’s head indefinitely’ and ‘absolution be asked for with costs’. Only thereafter would his department consider waiving its claim to costs against Chief Lekoko.⁶⁹ Following a verbal interview between the two ministers, Hertzog agreed to let the matter stand in abeyance, but only ‘until the end of the financial year, namely 31 March next’.⁷⁰ There was no time to lose, and the Native Affairs Department took more assertive steps towards its own political solution in Mafikeng, and any other reserve that might present similar challenges to landless European settlers.

On 24 January, 1912 Dower addressed a circular letter to all magistrates and commissioners, asking for comments on introducing a squatter’s bill in the reserves.⁷¹ He travelled to Mafikeng on 12 January to gather information on the extent of African-owned land.⁷² In fact it was only upon his return that he sent circulars to the Transvaal and Orange Free State districts. In Mafikeng Dower met with Chief Lekoko and instructed him to ‘furnish a list of all the squatters on the Molopo Reserve with full details and particulars of leases or other conditions or agreements under which they are residing thereon.’⁷³ Immediately the chief and his councillors saw the writing on the wall, and did not comply. Instead they tried to raise

⁶⁷ Roos (Secretary of Justice) to Dower, 31 October 1911, JUS 109/ File Number 23079/10.

⁶⁸ Dower to Roos, 3 November 1911, JUS 109/ File Number 23079/10

⁶⁹ Roos to Dower, 19 December 1911, JUS 109/ File Number 23079/10

⁷⁰ Dower to Roos, 19 January 1912, JUS 109 File Number 23079/10

⁷¹ Feinberg, ‘The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa’, 89.

⁷² Welsh to Lekoko, 12 June 1912, SPA.

⁷³ Welsh to Lekoko, 25 May 1912, SPA.

the money to bring the appeal to trial. In seeking the Resident Magistrate's permission in 1912 to levy livestock to pursue the case, the chieftaincy claimed that it was settling the 'large indebtedness' incurred by the nation during Badirile's term of office. In the words of the paramount chief, 'the nation unanimously agreed that each and every member of the Barolong Nation should willingly contribute an ox or cow'. In actual fact this permission, which was granted, had to be sought because a clan of Barolong settled in Rietfontein (Lotlhokana) (Map 1) would not give up any of their stock. They were Rapulana Barolong and resisted Tshidi rule from Mafikeng. Just how willing his people were cannot be ascertained, but Chief Lekoko applied for permission from the Resident Magistrate 'to use drastic measures according to our custom, that is to say, to make those who have not yet contributed anything to do so.' As such any 'delinquent' refusing to pay would have an ox or cow belonging to him seized.⁷⁴

Having observed the local context of tenancy in Mafikeng, and quite likely having met with the members of the Divisional Council of Mafeking, Dower introduced his policy on how disputes in the reserve would be settled according to 'native custom' early in March 1912.⁷⁵ In this policy, the relationship between the magistrate courts and so-called 'native courts' was redesigned and the jurisdiction of each more markedly outlined. Due process in the 'native courts' was systematised, including the imposition of fines, the appearance of lawyers, and the routes of appeal to the magistrate's courts. In Mafikeng the draft was received with expressed unease because although 'customary law' had earned a place as recognised jurisprudence, only the paramount chief could hear, but only civil cases and minor criminal ones. Serious offences like rape, culpable homicide and even witchcraft could only be heard by local magistrates in 'native courts'. Chiefs protested that such magistrates were not trained in customary law and

⁷⁴ Lekoko to Welsh, 07 February 1912, SPA.

⁷⁵ Lekoko to Welsh, 07 February 1912, SPA.

practice. It seemed to the nobility that the overall consequence of this standardisation was less, and not greater autonomy for chiefs especially because routes of appeal against the paramount chief's judgements were stipulated.

It was with these weighty anxieties that Plaatje travelled to Cape Town in April of 1912, as a member of the first deputation of the South African Native National Congress to meet with various ministers. Plaatje, according to the President of Congress, John Dube 'made a good stand on behalf of the maintenance of the Bechuanaland chieftainship' in Mafikeng and especially the 'combatting of location laws'.⁷⁶ The apparently anomalous position of the Molopo reserve had become an important issue for the SANNC as well as the Department of Native Affairs. As described in Chapter 4, Sebopioa acted as an important coordinating node between the chieftaincy, and the various strategies Plaatje pursued on its behalf through the Congress. Plaatje was at that point the editor of another Sechuana newspaper, *Tsala ea Bechuana*. (Chapter 4)

In April 1912 the chieftaincy sent another petition to the Resident Magistrate following yet another attempt by the Divisional Council of Mafeking to impose Dog Tax on the reserve. A tax collector 'had already entered upon his duties.'⁷⁷ Welsh forwarded the petition to the Native Affairs Department. A few days later, on 1 May, policemen arrived in the reserve visiting cattle-posts and numbering stock. Sebopioa complained to Welsh that the colonial government ought to relay information about such visits by colonial officials to the chief. 'This new way of doing things', Sebopioa warned, 'will make them [the people] I am afraid to disobey the law through ignorance.'⁷⁸ A week after this incident Molema and Sebopioa, as

⁷⁶ Dube to Lekoko, 13 April 1912, A979Cc9.

⁷⁷ Welsh to Lekoko, 26 April 1912, SPA.

⁷⁸ S. Molema to Welsh, 1 May 1912, SPA.

well as the regent's brother Paul Montsioa and Plaatje, were en route to Cape Town to meet with the Native Affairs Department.⁷⁹ Following this meeting, Dower again pressed Lekoko for a list of all the Europeans in the reserve, along with full details of their leases. This time Lekoko complied but added the important detail that 'in every such agreement, no one has the right to remove any improvements he shall have made on such gardens.'⁸⁰ The nobility was already bracing itself for the worst.

Following a cabinet reshuffle in June 1912, Henry Burton relinquished his portfolio and became the Minister of Railways and Harbours. Hertzog was appointed as the new Minister of Native Affairs.⁸¹ The Department of Justice decided 'not to press for judgement against the plaintiff ... and to pay its own cost.' But under Hertzog, the Native Affairs Department's determination to impose segregation on Mafikeng was focused and aggressive. The chieftaincy sent another petition to the Native Affairs Department in July 1912.⁸² The department responded with more aggression: on 12 August 1912, Welsh confirmed that all 'rents accruing from strands occupied by traders and others' in the Bechuanaland reserves 'must be paid into Revenue', which meant they could no longer be pocketed by African landowners. This was in response to the nobility's plea that the rents be paid into the chieftaincy's coffers rather than individual landlords.⁸³

On 21 September 1912, the chieftaincy sent a desperate appeal for help to Burton in whom at least Plaatje continued to place trust. He was confident that the nobility had a 'very good relationship' with Burton.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Lekoko to Burton, 8 May 1912, SPA.

⁸⁰ Lekoko to Welsh, 12 June 1912, SPA.

⁸¹ Feinberg, 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa', 76.

⁸² Reference to enclosed letters to NAD and Department of Justice, 24 July 1912, SPA.

⁸³ Welsh to Lekoko, 12 August 1912, SPA.

⁸⁴ S. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 1911 April 2, A979Da14.

... the Divisional Council still insists upon having jurisdiction over the Molopo and Setlagodi Reserves, and that Barolong have to pay the Dog Tax. Barolong ... still strongly object against the alleged jurisdiction of this body over them, and against payment of the Dog Tax, stating that they would, as far as they are aware not derive any benefit out of the Tax, and that they do not wish, in any way, to be governed by the Divisional Council. They wish to be governed directly by the Minister of Native Affairs, through the local Magistrate.⁸⁵

Two days after sending this plea to Burton on 23 September 1912, the nobility requested W.P. Schreiner to represent it in the appeal case 'given the good work you have done for natives.'⁸⁶ Public records reflect nothing of the Native Affairs Department's thinking at this juncture, but clues lie in the looming crisis in the cabinet as the Prime Minister struggled to contain Hertzog's outspokenness. It was not so much Hertzog's sentiments on the 'native question' that alarmed Botha, but his divisive statements that Afrikaner and English speaking settlers should live as 'two streams' parallel to each other 'building and living by separate institutions'. Hertzog lambasted English-speaking settlers for their ties to Britain and questioned their loyalty to the Union. Hertzog was effectively dismissed from the cabinet, and, as a member of parliament, criss-crossed the countryside with his populist message, sensitive to rural white discontent. He was replaced by J. W. Sauer.⁸⁷ Through Schreiner, the chieftaincy put the case on the roll. The parties were to appear before the Supreme Court on 29 January 1913.⁸⁸

On 22 January, Silas and his son Sebopioa arrived in Cape Town. They had left Mafikeng a few days earlier and had been joined by Plaatje in Kimberley, and were received as guests by James Molebaloa in Maitland Location.⁸⁹ Molebaloa was Silas' supporter and

⁸⁵ Lekoko to Burton, 21 September 1912, A979Bd1.

⁸⁶ Lekoko to Schreiner, 23 September 1912, A979Bd3.2.

⁸⁷ Feinberg, 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa', 77-78.

⁸⁸ Illiquid Case: Lekoko 'Montsioa' to the Minister of the Interior, CSC 1/1/717 245.

⁸⁹ SJ Molema to E Molema, 23 January 1913, SPA.

amongst the educated Bechuana who received *Koranta* with enthusiasm.⁹⁰ At the time, Silas' son, Modiri, was also staying in Molebaloa's home on a more long term basis. The deputation of three planned to meet with Sauer. Though fluent in Afrikaans, Sauer was a liberal politician who had supported the enfranchisement of Africans. There were also other pressing matters that had arisen in the reserve, namely growing rebellion at Rietfonten. Certainly the seizure of stock there, during at a time when a protracted drought meant rural livelihoods were under severe stress (Chapter 4), aggravated discontent, but other Barolong minorities in the polity had also participated in visible acts of defiance. These tensions were the initial ripples in a widening crisis of authority within the polity, and the chieftaincy also wished to speak to Sauer about these problems.

The agenda for discussion was hastily changed however. Two days after Silas and his son left Mafikeng, on the 20 January 1913, Chief Lekoko was called to the office of the Resident Magistrate, where Welsh informed him of the 'matter of the eviction of whites'.⁹¹ Lekoko wrote to Molema immediately to inform him and urge him not to say anything to the Native Affairs Department about the rebellions in the reserve. He wrote again four days later, clearly in panic and distress. On 24 January 1913, the Native Affairs Department pronounced its segregation policy on Mafikeng. The relationship between the paramount chief's court and the 'native courts' under the magistrate was put into law. More critically, all Europeans in the reserve were declared 'squatters' and could not reside there without the colonial government's permission. Lekoko's anguish derived from what he recognised as a crushing blow to his authority as paramount chief. Silas and Sebopioa's new brief was to

⁹⁰ See *Koranta*, 8 November 1902, Sechuana

⁹¹ Lekoko to S.T. Molema, 20 January 1913, A979Aa4. Sechuana

... seek an attorney and ask what is really the prerogative (*thata*) of the chief over his people because the new laws truly have done away with the laws of the chief to rule his people so that if he gives a ruling they can erase the ruling of their owner ... This government has its ear to the ground so that when you speak of it, it may do you much harm. Today the laws that expel whites from here at home [*stadt*] and the farms and those with contracts was announced... I am alone here at home. Barolong it seems are people who pay no attention to things helpful to them. I am perplexed as to what this will mean to them.⁹²

Fearing further penalties from the colonial government, Lekoko pleaded with Silas not to mention to the authorities anything about discords in the reserve. 'I pray you not to say anything', he wrote again a day later, lest 'we stir against ourselves matters that have not yet risen against us.'⁹³ If initially intended to entice the chieftaincy into a compromise, Dower's measures were so suddenly and heavily imposed that the paramount felt completely crushed, with little confidence that his people would rally their support behind him. There were too many points of tension between Dower's segregation imperatives, and the notables' imagination of a successful African chiefdom. But the government had little time for deliberation and protraction because the appeal was due to be heard on 29 January 1913, in the Supreme Court of Appeal in Cape Town. It ensured that by then European settlers in Mafikeng would be entirely independent of African landlords.

An instructive example of the implications of this measure is recorded in the Molema archives. It indicates that the strident demands of local settlers and the intervention of the state was gradually shifting the power relations between Silas as a landlord and one of his white tenants, Charles Hall. In the late 1880s, a European tenant, J.W. Hall (then spelt 'Hull') on Silas' farm Kromdraai, west of Mafikeng, paid £25 every year. He is likely to have been Charles Hall's father as tenancy agreements were often passed through generations. The older

⁹² Lekoko to S.T. Mokema, 24 January 1913, A979 Aa4. Sechuana

⁹³ Lekoko to S.T. Molema, 25 January 1912, A979Aa2.35. Sechuana

man had bound himself to carry out building work on Kromdraai, and to extend a water furrow and bring it on to the farm at the cost of £14. He was also to plant and cultivate fruit trees and a vineyard.⁹⁴ In 1905, the younger Hall and another European, Richard Rowland, together signed a six year contract to ‘make a larger & good dam’ on the same farm. In return, they could live on the ‘enclosed’ garden for six years ‘free of charge.’ In 1911 Hall, this time in his own capacity, renewed the contract for another six years. According to the new contract, he was to pay rent of £36 a year whilst maintaining all the ‘improvements’ on the farm.⁹⁵ Tenant and farmer were on good terms. Early in November of 1911, Hall borrowed seven donkeys from his landlord. Hall needed to have his wagon repaired but anthrax restrictions meant oxen from outlying farms were not allowed to enter into town, not even to tow wagons to a blacksmith.⁹⁶ Subsequently, Silas sent his own farmhands to Kromdraai with the donkeys, at no cost to the tenant. Over a long working relationship, the lines of authority were firmly established. The tenant still addressed his landlord deferentially as ‘dear Chief Molema’. Everything changed however on 20 January 1913 when Hall and all other Europeans in the reserve were declared as squatters and could not lawfully reside in the reserve without special permission.

Although settlers like Hall would have preferred not to pay rent at all, they would rather pay it across the counter of the white Resident Magistrate’s office, than into the hands of an African notable. On 2 February the Resident Magistrate of Mafikeng, Welsh, confirmed that all rents due to Silas were to be forwarded to the Cape government. As Welsh explained to Hall, ‘you must however clearly understand that the Natives have no right to lease any portion of the Reserves’, on the grounds that the reserves remain Crown Lands.⁹⁷ As soon as the

⁹⁴ J.W. Hall to S.T Molema, c. 1880s, A979Aa3.5.1.

⁹⁵ Memorandum of Agreement, R. Rowland, C. Hall & S.T. Molema, A979Aa3.

⁹⁶ C. Hall to S.T. Molema, 1911 November 09, A979Aa3.

⁹⁷ Welsh to Hall, 2 February 1913, A979Aa3.

government confirmed it would adopt his contract, Hall wrote to Silas that he has been informed about the new regulations. Hall claimed that he could still remain on Kromdraai until his lease expired, in effect, another three years. When Silas demanded rent Hall enclosed Welsh's letter 'which explains itself', and further asserted that 'I must therefore pay the Government and not to you.'⁹⁸ Towards his erstwhile landlord, Hall developed nothing short of contempt, and he took every opportunity to ridicule and shame Silas. On the other hand, Silas tried to get the government to terminate the lease, threatening Hall that the government would evict him, as 'you did not carry on your part according to the agreement.'⁹⁹ Hall made himself subject to no laws. He pulled down the kraal he had built on the farm, and re-sold the stones in the town. He also sold the sand in the sandpit and pocketed the profit.¹⁰⁰ His cattle ran rampant, destroying Silas' trees and fields, as well as those of the community of Africans on the farm. Silas could do nothing to bring about Hall's eviction as he threatened to do, nor could he force Hall to pay for damages caused by his cattle on his trees and crop. More than once Hall simply dismissed the threats as empty. As he wrote to Silas in May 1914, 'will you please understand once and for all, that there is no agreement of any kind existing between you and me.'¹⁰¹ One morning in April of 1915, the landlord wrote to his tenant that

I have the honour to inform you that on Tuesday ... your cattle did great damage on my garden and I went and spoke to your foreman the white man and he promised me that he will pay the 13/- within 3 days time (sic) and now he is not willing to pay and I hear that he is leaving today for good. So I want you to know because I want to summon him. Please reply to bearer Sir.

In a hurried scribble underneath the landlord's neat script, Hall replied that 'you had better give me the full details of the matter, as to what and where the damage was done, and if my

⁹⁸ Hall to S.T. Molema, 14 March 1913, A979Aa3.

⁹⁹ S.T. Molema to Hall 15 May, 1914, A979Aa3.

¹⁰⁰ S.T. Molema to Hall, 5 January 1914, A979Aa3.

¹⁰¹ Hall to S.T. Molema, 22 May 1914, A979Aa3.

cattle have done any damage, I as the master am responsible, not my servant.’¹⁰² Hall was not simply saying he would take responsibility for his foreman’s carelessness. He was reminding Silas once again that he, erstwhile tenant, lived on the farm as a ‘Master’. In the meantime, Silas was playing ‘servant’, begging for his cooperation. His position as a landlord over European tenants had been completely undermined.

The Native Affairs Department had thus ensured that by the time the appeal was heard in January 1913, European tenants were effectively no longer under any obligation to their African landlords. Schreiner and his attorney on the case, E. J. Schultz, were cognisant of the consequences the appeal presented. If the government won, then the Native Affairs Department could continue with its plan to introduce segregation as and where it was necessary. But if the case was lost, all that the department had achieved in Mafikeng could be reversed, shifting the moderates of the NAD towards a land bill as the conservatives toughed their stance. As Parliament opened in January of 1913, the Governor-General’s speech did not mention any plans to introduce a national legislation on the ‘native question’, as was noted by the press.¹⁰³ On 29 January, the Supreme Court of Appeal reserved its judgement on the chieftaincy’s appeal. As Schreiner saw circumstances, this might present hope for the chieftaincy, and if so catastrophe for the African population at large. He pressed Schultz to reiterate his plea to the nobility not to press the matter further should the court rule against them. A hundred years of wear and mould in Sebopioa Molema’s private archive makes for curious gaps and murkiness, but what survives intact is Schreiner’s foreboding that, in the continuing parliamentary feud around the land bill and other contestations, the uncertainty around the appeal had given the

¹⁰² S.T. Molema to C. Hall, 1915 April 13, A 979Aa3

¹⁰³ Feinberg, ‘The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa’, 96.

radical conservatives a firmer grip. The consequences on the larger population on Africans, he feared, would be catastrophic.

In the event of judgement being in favour of the Government, a point which Mr Schreiner earnestly discussed with me, if we may be allowed to offer you our [...] would say to the Barolong we sympathise [with] them [...] We feel how the matter according [...] their view point affects them and how sore [...] will be, but we say that it would be best [to] bow to the inevitable and not to take the matter further for apart from the further very great expense, the Government have now not the old Cape government to deal with. They have another mixed lot of interests in the present Government and they do not show, as this case is evidence enough, the same sympathy for the Natives as the old Government. So by moving further it is possible that further legislation may be passed which might fall very heavily on the people which otherwise they will escape and such rights as they still have would be respected, for without good and substantial reasons the Government dare not move and if the Barolong were to take action we advise against [it as] the Government might use it as an excuse. I trust you will not consider I am going out of my way in tendering you this advice which as I have said, Mr Schreiner approves of, but I think by now you realised that I have all along had your interests thoroughly at heart and that it is solely given with that view.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, as soon as the judgement was reserved, the Native Affairs Department started to work proactively on the Land Bill in the first week of February. The pressure in Parliament was also gaining momentum, and on 18 February a motion ‘on the subject of introduction of General Pass and Squatters Bill, be set down’ was passed. This motion was debated at length in the afternoon of February 28. Hertzog managed to harden the content of the proposed Bill, but Sauer and the Prime Minister had already decided to go ahead with the Bill. As if to add more pressure on the government, the Supreme Court decided to reopen the trial, and set the date for 14 April. All that was decided then however was another delay. A commission that would take evidence of witnesses was established, and was scheduled to do so on 10 June in Mafikeng. With his hands full in the drafting of the Bill, Sauer was deeply worried about the consequences of the trial. In May 1913, he explored the possibility of letting the reserve remain

¹⁰⁴ E.J. Schultz to Lekoko, 29 (January), 1913.

under the conditions of its formal annexation in 1885. His inquired as to whether, given that the Bill would expel Europeans from the reserve, the government could still maintain that there had not been a breach of faith. The general feeling in the Department of Justice was the case being won was the only way forward.¹⁰⁵

On 9 June 1913, the Native Land Act of 1913 was passed, just a single day before the appeal was heard. On 10 June 1913, Rev George Weavind, Edgar Rowland, Silas Molema, Stephen Lefenya and Lekoko Montsioa presented their testimony before a commission, a hearing which was held in Mafikeng, not in Cape Town. The chieftaincy defended their right to place whomsoever they wish on their land. They premised this defence not on private property, but its adamant disavowal. In an important sense, this stress on communal tenure confirmed the colonial government's opinion that private tenure was contrary to the practice of communal land use in African societies, and hence the inappropriateness of private rents in the reserve. However, notables' very public evocation of this notion was an attempt to hold on not only to the hefty rents Europeans injected into the polity, but also to a discourse of an erstwhile hegemony in the polity. Weavind was a white minister in the Wesleyan Church in Pretoria, and a General Superintendent of missions including in Bechuanaland. He had been living in the Transvaal for forty years, since his arrival in South Africa. His first visits to Mafikeng were in 1883 or 1884, whilst the old Chief Montsioa was still alive. It was true as he claimed that he was well-acquainted with the affairs of the reserve, and was a trusted friend of the chieftaincy. According to his testimony,

... the chief is the trustee of the land. There is yet no system of cutting up the land so as to give individual title to any head of family or individual within the reserve. The Chief allocates to the different people what portions they will occupy and consultation with a particular headman in the area. Such an allotment is

¹⁰⁵ Dower to Roos, 1913 May 27, JUS 109 File number 23079/10.

transmissible from father to son. No actual title is given. There is no right to alienate, neither in the individual, nor in the chief. I have never heard of any interference by Government in this method of allotment. It is the function of the chief ... From the Natives' point of view, the land is recognised as belonging to the chief in trust for the people.

Eighty year old Stephen Lefenya argued, as mentioned in the last chapter, that the Divisional Council of Mafikeng could not possibly have jurisdiction over the reserve because 'the Barolongs have not been conquered by anyone.' He continued that before the treaty of annexation the paramount held the land 'and gave it out to different people with the advice of councillors', and that this was an 'old custom and it is still carried on today' without government interference. The Dog Tax, he argued, was 'a new law that we don't know.' Similar sentiments were expressed by Edgar Rowland. He added that 'there are no locations other than the one belonging to the [European] town.' All Africans, he said, lived in '*stadts*' and that they were 'never called them locations, only *stadts*.' Silas, then fifty-six years old, began his testimony by explaining that he was schooled in Healdtown, and had been serving as the paramount's advisor upon his return from school. This was in order to relay his technical understanding of the term of agreement between Sir Sidney Shippard and his great-uncle, old Chief Montsioa in 1895:

Lekoko Montsioa is the Paramount Chief of Barolongs. Lekoko owns the land in the Reserve. He holds it for the people. In 1885 negotiations were going on for annexation to the Cape Government. I acted as interpreter. I remember the obtaining of the letter of August 1895. Montsioa had [heard] that the Cape government ill-treated natives, and he wanted assurances on this point. Sir Sidney Shippard said, here is your Charter, and handed him the letter.¹⁰⁶

Judgement was handed down on 7 August 1913 and in favour of chieftaincy. It was considered by both judges to have been beyond the government's powers to declare the reserve

¹⁰⁶ Transcript of testimonies, Rex and DVC vs Lekoko (Montsioa), CSC 1/1/717 245.

a location without an Act of Parliament to that effect, given the conditions of the annexation of British Bechuanaland in 1885 that Shippard had allowed to remain in place when the Cape government took over ten years later. The judgement was carried fully and verbatim in the *Cape Times*. In a note that forwarded such coverage to the Department of Justice, the government's legal counsel urged that they 'strongly advice appeal.'¹⁰⁷ Two weeks earlier Sauer had died. The government's appeal hearing was held on 14 November 1913 in Bloemfontein, and this time the court made a ruling in the government's favour.¹⁰⁸

Though the reserve had become a location under its jurisdiction, the Divisional Council of Mafeking did not act upon its right to impose Dog Tax. The tax, as described above, had only been a litmus test. The substance of contention was the pattern of landownership in the reserve, so strikingly in contrast to the 'rule' of white supremacy in the Union. In June 1914, *Tsala ea Bechuana* praised Silas' property, Mabete, in the Bechuanaland Protectorate as 'a farm more developed than any other farm in this region, with the largest, largest (sic) dam from the Madibe River having just been completed.' The newspaper observed that as far as productivity and infrastructure on the land were concerned, Silas had no competition 'with grain and hay that can fill villages.' In the same vein, the newspaper mentioned also the large dams on the properties of Joshua Molema, and another relation Joseph Tawana.¹⁰⁹ It was not by accident that this coverage was on the first anniversary of the Natives Land Act of 1913, which was of no effect in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. About two months later Silas, his son Sebopioa, and the regent Chief Lekoko visited the farms to inspect 'improvements'. The newspaper applauded the tough handedness with which Silas and his cousin, R. Taoana handled Europeans who did not fulfil their contractual obligations. Silas was reported to have won a

¹⁰⁷ Reid & Nephew to Department of Justice, 8 August 1913, JUS 109/ File number 23079/10.

¹⁰⁸ Reid & Nephew to Department of Justice, 13 and 24 January 1913, JUS 109 File number 23079/10.

¹⁰⁹ *Tsala*, 1914 June 20. Sechuana.

suit against such a European tenant who subsequently had to pay £80. The newspaper was showcasing ‘the works of whites’ on these notables’ farms as a matter of both racial and national pride precisely because in the Protectorate, as it put it, ‘a person lets to a white and a white can let to a black just as they like.’¹¹⁰

This section has suggested how the chieftaincy’s battle for self-determination, and the preservation of African landlordism, presented a shift in the balance of forces towards the Natives Land Act of 1913. Different interests within diverse European and African societies insisted on an interpretation of segregation that could bode well for their status and success. The NAD was led by its own imperatives and a calculation of what it perceived to be advantageous in the long term. The department took very seriously Northerners’ outrage about European tenants’ exploitation under Africans landlords but it was not willing to achieve territorial segregation through a legal dispute to declare the reserve a ‘location’. It was not only that such a case could potentially be lost, but primarily because it preferred a political solution. It wished to establish and protect what it considered a strong ‘Sechuana’ domain, in exchange for an Africans-only reserve. The chieftaincy placed the case on the Supreme Court of Appeal’s roll precisely during the moment when Hertzog’s radical populism and its incitement of republicanism threatened stability and cohesion in the Union government’s first cabinet. As judgement was reserved, the moderates could not risk being proved incapable of upholding white supremacy in the interest of English-speaking settlers, especially those who were historically so distrustful of the government in the Cape. Even if Hertzog was not attractive to them, these settlers could potentially explore other alliances, adding further cracks to the Union government’s fragile cohesion. The moderates had to prove their muscle. By this time however,

¹¹⁰ *Tsala*, 1914 September 12. Sechuana.

the NAD had already been imposing segregation in the reserve. It is to the consequences of its efforts in the reserve that we now turn.

Segregationist policy, power and livelihoods

The era that had dawned with the promulgation of the Natives Land Act of 1913 was the darkest in Silas Molema's political and personal life, and as he did when *Koranta* collapsed, he took solace in his spiritual life. He perceived the power of colonial rule as an undefeatable giant, and though he sought encouragement in his faith, he developed an imagination of divine Providence that could amplify Africans' own energies to be stronger than the challenges of white rule. He was at the time composing hymns for the Methodist Church in Sechuana but he developed a very fervent and enduring interest in the independent African churches that were starting to mushroom.¹¹¹ Contrary to character, he sustained correspondence with a Rev J.L Masigo of the African Holy Catholic Church, a Morolong, between 1913 and 1915. Silas wanted his nephew to be ordained in Masigo's church, but was primarily 'writing to you reverend because I too love black churches of my own people and their own progress (*coelo-pele*) although I alone may remain in white congregations.'¹¹² He continued to encourage Masigo, to continue his work 'until that moment when all our black congregations can be under the strength and governance of our own black reverends.'¹¹³ In April 1915, he urged Mosiga to start a congregation in Mafikeng, 'a church of truth, strong in the works of God and in the works of assisting their nation [because] Barolong have a long time loved admirable things, they love their blackness (*buncho ba bone*) they never forget who can be of aid in their nation.'¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ J. Moishumi to S.T. Molema, 1913 February 14, A979Aa2.40.

¹¹² S.T. Molema to J.L. Masigo, 1913 December 4, A979Aa2.45.

¹¹³ S.T. Molema to J. Masigo, 1914 January 19, A979Aa2.48.

¹¹⁴ S.T. Molema to J. Masigo, 1915 April 4, A979Aa2.64

In the meantime, he had to face the various consequences of the NAD's segregationist measures in the reserve, which were imposed even before the promulgation of the Act. Whilst no land could be let to Europeans in the reserve, these relationships continued on notables' quitrent farms outside the reserves. However, even there, African landlordism over Europeans was severely undermined. African landlords could lease no more than ten morgen to European tenants. Of course, tenants that remained on such farms likely leased more than the specified ten morgen but if they ever defaulted on their contracts, then landowners had no recourse to the law.¹¹⁵ Chief Lekoko sold the farm Khaba in July 1912 for £1700.¹¹⁶ Successive paramount chiefs had been recognised as owners of the farm.¹¹⁷ The money seems to have gone towards defraying the costs of the resistance to Dog Tax. Mark Leteane sold his portion of Vryhof in 1916, even though an Afrikaner tenant's lease on the farm had not yet expired.¹¹⁸ But Silas retained his portion of Vryhof. In the 1920s, such farms were still being let to European tenants by the next generation of notables, and the term of lease were exacting. C. R. Hulme hired ten morgen of Ephraim Molema's farm Lotlage in 1923 for five years. The rent was £5 per annum, but in addition he had to 'dig a well on the said farm and find sufficient water therein to water 100 head of cattle per diem'. He also had to 'build a house of six rooms of raw brick with pitched iron roof' and also 'make a dam 10 yards long, the wall of which shall be 7ft high, 14 ft wide at the bottom'. All this had to be completed before the expiration of the lease, after which he could claim no compensation for his costs, as the lease stipulated.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵De Kock & De Kock to A. Tawana 30 May 1922, A979Cc11.1

¹¹⁶ S. Minchin to S. T. Molema, 04 July 1914, A979Aa3

¹¹⁷G. Green to W. Montsioa, 15 October 1903, 1 A979Bb2; G. Green to B. Montsioa, 14 March 1904, A979Bc1

¹¹⁸ De Kock & De Kock to M. Leteane, 8 December 1916, A979Aa3

¹¹⁹ Agreement, C. R. Hulme and E. Molema, 15 May 1923, A979Cb1.16

Hulme also had to 'agree not to interfere with the natives now living on the said farm.'¹²⁰ The primary reason why the farms were not sold *en masse*, given notables' very precarious livelihoods (Chapter 4) was because private sales were a dismemberment of the political body. Disposing of farms sold off the African households settled there and surrendered them into the hands of white-landowners. Farms in the reserves, of course, were impossible to sell. Losses suffered on these farmlands after the expulsion of European rents squeezed notables more tightly financially. Silas' household, like many notables families, had a family home outside the *stadt*. His wife and children often retreated to Madibespruit in the reserve, and it was the residence from which Mrs Molema held ceremonies and public feasts. (Chapter 1) But after European tenants were expelled from the reserve, the cost of keeping Madibespruit as a residential country house fell on Silas' shoulders. In 1913 he had to undertake the construction of a dam there, and hired Stephanus van Jaarsveld to undertake the work. Van Jaarsveld was his tenant on Vryhof. Silas became indebted to van Jaarsveld for £260, and could not pay. In 1914, the sheriff attached a 'cart, 2 horses, 20 goats, 1 plough and a number of sheets of gal iron, also furniture and other effects' at Silas' residence as guarantee on a promissory note. Silas was to pay the amount owed at 8 per cent interest, at £50 per month for six months.¹²¹ Eight years later in 1922, the amount had still not been entirely settled, despite 2 bulls paid to van Jaarsveld's brother, one cow, some money, £24 worth of rent withheld from Silas, iron sheets and at least 28 bags of kaffir corn. The entire debt was only paid off when the mineral diggings roused the wagon transport, and Silas transported corn for van Jaarsveld, who was still his tenant, and also lent him 2 span of oxen.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ S. Minchin to S. T. Molema, 04 July 1914, A979Aa3

¹²² S.T. Molema's private notes on debt owed to van Jaarsveld, A979Aa3, 1922.

A loss of capital was not the only consequence of segregationist measures however. They also significantly undermined the mechanisms through which chiefly power had hitherto regulated the social order and the course of everyday life in the reserve. Well before the implementation of territorial segregation, the expanding cash nexus challenged the language and practice of land tenure, and started to subvert accepted patriarchal authority in the polity. Thirty-eight year old Paul Sebaetse sparked a controversy in 1901 when he refused to accept his father's withdrawal of the 'placement' he had allotted to Paul in 1889. Following a recent disagreement, his father wished to disinherit him, perhaps temporarily. The Sebaetses were a family of wagon riders, who had purchased a quitrent farm when the Land Commission made such purchases available in the 1880s. The allotment in question was on the one hand the younger Seabetse's share of the farm whose purchase he contributed towards. On the other hand, it was his 'placement' from his father. The circulation of money, and new possibilities of private property deepened the ambiguity of land tenure in the polity, and introduced points of fracture in patriarchal authority if 'placement' could no longer be wielded by fathers as a mechanism of control to younger men. The ambiguity surrounding the meaning of 'placement' in this new economy is starkly apparent in the younger Seabetse's testimony before the Resident Magistrate

... we follow all Barolong customs ... Since my father bought the farm the quitrent has been paid by my father with money earned by me. When allotting portion of the farm to me [he] said he did so as I had contributed to the purchase price of the farm...It was a family arrangement. From that time I always looked upon this piece of land as mine ...The whole farm belonged to my father who simply allotted this piece to me as his son. I practically paid the whole of the quitrent. I gave all my earnings to my father ... The last time I gave my father anything was just before the war, when I gave him some money and 7 bags of kaffir-corn. I claim the land I occupy on the ground that my father gave it to me and I paid the quitrent ... I contributed towards purchase of the farm.

Stephen Lefenya testified however that ‘allotment by a father to his son can be revoked at will’ according to ‘Native Law’.¹²³ In reality it was never clear whether ‘placement’ meant security of tenure resembling that of private right, only that it could be expected to do so within the complex dynamics that made up the moral and political economy. Such questions became more complex with the penetration of money, colonial courts and the various expressions in everyday language that made such discussions of land tenure possible. Available documentation does not reveal how many Europeans had resided in the reserve but when their rents were suddenly expelled from this political economy, panic swung the ambiguous pendulum of land tenure towards overt interpretations of ‘placement’ as private property.

The loss of rents by Europeans happened when the northern hinterlands faced the sixth successive year of failed crops. The returns on hefty investments in children’s schooling were inexorably disappointing, almost worthless at worst and painfully slow at best. (Chapter 4) Consistent cash rents were necessary to live whilst those cultural obligations owed to notables, like the seasonal tilling of their lands by commoners was simply not sufficient. What notables needed was a new African tenantry that could pay in a currency that increasingly mattered in the countryside – money. Cash rents were soon to exchange hands ostensibly as ‘placement.’ Solomon Plaatje was amongst the first in Mafikeng to face the threat of losing his ‘placement’. All his efforts to borrow money from Joshua and the regent, Lekoko, over many months had failed, and whatever monies his landlord demanded went unpaid. He was finally expelled from Maduo Ncoa’s property at the beginning of May 1913, about five weeks before the Natives Land Act of 1913 took effect. He was due to have met J. W. Sauer as part of a SANNC delegation during that same week but he reported to Silas that ‘as I had no means to go our

¹²³ Transcripts of testimony, 19 April 1901, A979Cb2.2.

affairs were not represented.’ He described his eviction as a tale of ‘such sorrows as the wrenching of heart of finance that I find myself in’.

Maduo [Ncoa] has given away my field and the site of my house to Mr Ephraim Molema and he says he is confiscating my house on his lands. Ncoa has spoken before Chief Joshua Molema and the late Mrs Palo Molema and the sons of Mmona that he has given me placement on his farm (*fa a mpeile tshimo*), how can he renege just like that. When he evicts me he need only to speak to Monnaoapula [a sub-chief] and say nothing to me? Monnaoapula is pressing me for a reply, I do not know what to say.¹²⁴

Shortly after his eviction, Plaatje set off on his travels through the districts of the Orange Free State, the Cape and the Transvaal to document the eviction of many African families from white owned farms following the promulgation of the Land Act of 1913. As its general secretary, Plaatje travelled under the auspices of the SANNC. His descriptions of how African men and women on white-owned land were ‘driven from home, their homes broken up, with no hopes of redress’ were compiled into his celebrated *Native Life in South Africa*.¹²⁵ The book makes no reference to African tenants’ eviction from African-owned land, but his affecting and sensitive documentation of the plight of Africans displaced from their homes due to the Land Act was shaped by his experience of a similar loss and helplessness.

Notables were concerned about the influx of a great number of Africans in the reserve, who were forcefully removed from other parts of the Union and returned ‘home’ after the promulgation of the Act. When they arrived, the newcomers were by and large unwanted. Some educated classes thought they ruined what they imagined to be respectability and cultural sophistication in the reserves (Chapter 4). Chiefs could find no room for them, whilst the local

¹²⁴ S. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 12 May 1913, A 979 Ad30.

¹²⁵ S. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (Randburg, 1995), 13.

population felt they were being trampled underfoot by immigrants. As Molema put it before the Beaumont Commission in 1916

... we are now more in number than when the reserve was made. We can only receive some of our people who went to work in the mines and on the farms, but those who went away a long time ago I could not receive back because the land is only big enough for us. We are multiplying, and there is no other land to live on. We were born in this country, and we are accustomed to it. The number of the people is now more than before, and we are multiplying every year. At that time there was only one big *stadt*, but now we have a lot scattered about.¹²⁶

Ethnic minorities in the reserve were at greatest risk of eviction whenever notables' battled insecurity. Landlords and others explicitly articulated that land was not for 'foreigners' but for Barolong, particularly those of Tshidi-Barolong stock. Amongst the Rapulana Barolong at Rietfontein, fields had been appropriated during the most severe period of food shortage, as described below. Such ethnic diversity, especially the blending of various Bechuana groups, had of course characterised the chieftaincy for a number of generations. During the siege of Mafikeng for example, 'terribly many' of Chief Bathoen's people, Bangoaketse, were expelled out of the town by British troops to relieve the pressure on meagre food supplies in the *stadt*. They had been settled in their own ward and easily identifiable in the chieftaincy's records and also by the subtle cultural distinctions that separated them from Montsioa's own people.¹²⁷ Marriage and other ties also integrated various African outsiders into the polity, and blunted the edge of linguistic and other differences. During his anthropological work, Isaac Schapera counted only 21 of a total of 84 different wards in Mafikeng to be occupied by different lineages of Barolong in the early 1940s. The rest of the wards were constituted by groups accepted to be of Bechuana origin, though the actual composition of people in each ward was typically mixed with Hlubi, Thembu or Sotho, who spoke a different language.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Starfield, 'Dr S Molema', 146.

¹²⁷ S. Molema to T. Bathoen, undated c. 1899, A979Cc2.

¹²⁸ Starfield, 'Dr S Molema', 148.

After Unification, the growing number of Africans who were not Tshidi-Barolong in the reserve was not a simple continuity. It was a product of significant structural changes in the political economy, as people hustled about to make ends meet and maintain some sense of stability in a new dispensation of colonial rule. Notables and commoners alike tried to manipulate the underlying ambiguity of private and public land ownership. Mass insecurity was the general consequence. A tendency to sublet 'placement' to 'foreigners' developed as land shortage and the removal of sharecroppers on white-owned farms became more severe following the Land Act of 1913. The paramount chief forbade new 'placements' to foreigners on the lands of the Tshidi, but it was a directive rather contrary to the trend in the reserve. The so-called 'foreigners' were new cash cows, the best possible replacement for lost European rents, both in terms of cash and infrastructural developments. Exploiting the indigenous population outside the established norms of reciprocity presented a threat of resistance, which is exactly what happened as the next chapter shows.

On the same farm, Madibespruit, where Silas became burdened with the construction of his own dam, he later exploited a group of 'Fingoes and Xhosas' in 1919. As people who had agreed to be 'governed by the Rules and Customs of the Barolong Nation', in the words of the contract, they performed all the labour commoners in the polity rendered to chiefs under customary law, but also much besides. In addition to paying Hut Tax of 12 shillings, an annual contribution of 3 shillings to the Barolong National Fund (Chapter 4), 'any special levy made by the Paramount Chief' and ploughing his field 'with their ploughs and fields',

...the Fingoes and Xosas aforementioned agree and bind themselves to plough each season one garden of, and for the benefit of Silas Tawana Molema, being a plot of arable land measuring 900 x 400 wherever indicated by the said Silas Molema, and they further bind themselves to cultivate and sow with their own seed, reap and

thrash the crop of the said garden at their own expense and deliver the produce to the said Silas Molema ... reside and plough on the premises, and to graze their stock thereon, provided they undertake as they hereby do, to effect improvements on the same building houses, making dams and sinking wells.¹²⁹

These same readily exploitable immigrants however presented a most acute political crisis. Those ethnic minorities who wished to resist rule from the Tshidi centre could make use of the discourses of segregation to make their own particularistic claims, sometimes through an affective language of popular nationalism. Silas' painstaking elaboration that his 'Fingoes and Xosas' were under the jurisdiction of the paramount chief must be seen in the context of their potentially discrete ethnic claims, as events in Rietfontein demonstrates.

From 1912 the nobility was involved in a fierce dispute with their Rapulana kinsmen at Rietfontein, who wished to secede, arguing not only that Rietfontein was rightly theirs, but also that the 'correct' practice of 'customary law' was such that the jurisdiction of chiefly rule be circumscribed, not by 'territory' as was the case in the reserve, but by 'person', which in effect meant ethnicity. The British government's settlement that ended the frontier wars of the 1880s subsumed a handful of chiefs of various Barolong lineages settled on the territory allocated to Chief Montsioa under his 'territorial jurisdiction'. As the new Resident Magistrate, R. C. Lloyd explained to Edward Barrett, the new Secretary of the Native Affairs Department in 1913, the Land Commission of 1886 had 'purposely refrained from defining boundaries between the tribes or sections of tribes considering the reserves to be available for all natives no matter of what nationality.'¹³⁰ Rapulana-Barolong chiefs however remained dissatisfied with rule by Mafikeng, but they were not the only ones. In 1910 for example, the Resident Magistrate instructed a chief of the Ratlou-Barolong to return wagons belonging to the Mafikeng notables.

¹²⁹ Agreement, S. T. Molema with 'Fingoes and Xosas', 24 March 1919, A979Aa3.5.15.

¹³⁰ R. C. Llyod to E. Barrett, 23 May 1913, A979 Bc3.2.

He had impounded these years before in Pitsane, claiming that part of the reserve as his. A similar 'boundary dispute' was also unfolding in another part of the reserve, Mareetzane at the same time. In both instances colonial courts recognised Mafikeng's jurisdiction over their kinsmen.¹³¹

Rietfontein proved to be a more sensitive case. When the spell of bad harvests continued unabated in the northern districts, and when the first measures withdrawing European rents from the nobilities' pockets were introduced, Rietfontein appears to have been the first port of evictions. In January of 1912, the Resident Magistrate received complaints from Rietfontein that peasants were being 'ejected' by the headman, Paul Montsioa.¹³² Between 1910 and 1913, the most severe period of protracted food shortage in the reserve, at least six Rapulana households were dispossessed of their lands, which were transferred to Tshidi notables, including Stephen Lefenya. Two evictions followed the expulsion of Europeans from the reserve. Thus the disgruntled Rapulana chiefs could ride the wave of popular ire to court the sympathy of colonial officials, and loose themselves away from Tshidi control. Rapulana chiefs said they wanted to be ruled by their own paramount chief in the Transvaal, from whom they were separated by a mere fence. (Map 1) They and their closest clients, notably Sejesho Mothibi, presented a claim to the colonial government that Montsioa's house, that of the Tshidi, was junior to that of their own chief, and that submitting to Mafikeng's authority was contrary to 'customary law'.

At least initially, ordinary people emphatically stressed the injustice of dispossession, and not so much the impropriety of Montsioas' rule by customary rule. Drawing from accepted

¹³¹ *Tsala*, 15 October 1910.

¹³² H. Frost to Lekoko, 1 January 1912, A979 Bc3.2.

constructions of chiefly rule, they questioned their belonging to the polity given that the dispossession of land was dismemberment from the political economy. They questioned whether Paul Montsioa, their designated authority from Mafikeng, had acted as a 'chief' and wanted his replacement by George Mothuba, a junior Rapulana chief. In the words of Isaang Lerang, who fields were allegedly turned over by two span of oxen 'with the mielies as they stood' at Paul's instruction, 'it shows Paul is not my chief as he oppressed me when [I was] in trouble.' Mangoe Mogani expressed similar sentiments, that

Paul is not our chief. I had a land on the river allotted to me by my chief Mothuba and Paul has deprived me of it. A second land was away from the river and it has also been taken away from me by Paul. A chief would not treat us so and therefore he is not our chief. We have nowhere to plough. We now go to the Transvaal to plough.

Others were blunter still that it was the ruling elites who were embroiled in a political dispute, about which they cared little. They only wanted secure livelihoods. 'We do not say anything of the chief', explained Ramatsiledi Mosekare, 'we do not dispute the headmanship of Paul; we complain of our lives we live here.' For two successive years, the nobility had appropriated his fields after ploughing. The pain of injustice was sharper still for Mosekasi because ethnic minorities actually paid tributary cash rents to Mafikeng, in addition to Hut Tax. A determined peasant producer, Mosekasi had adapted to the terms of 'citizenship' in colonial reserves – tax, and expected support from the institutions that imposed it. 'I am a taxpayer', he said, 'both to the government and to the chief.' Mafikeng's notables vehemently denied any knowledge of the evictions, arguing that 'native custom' did not allow them such leeway. Both sides' testimonies were heard and recorded by the Resident Magistrate, R. C Lloyd, in Rietfontein on 29 May 1913.¹³³ Another meeting, attended by over 200 Africans was held, again at

¹³³ R. C. Llyod to E. Barrett, 23 July 1913, A979 Bc3.2.

Rietfontein, by the Superintendent of Natives, H. Frost. Apparently, Sebopioa Molema 'took down very extensive notes of all that transpired.'¹³⁴

The government's decision, delivered on 7 January 1915, was that territorial jurisdiction must be upheld. Sebopioa's interpretation of events, as he relayed in his note to Rev George Weavind, was that the rebellion was 'kindled by the would-be-officials of the Government in their capacity as Superintendent of Natives and Inspectors who would like to see the native people split up and the power of the chiefs broken that they may have great and glorious name that they have destroyed us.' The government's decision only served to fuel popular discontent however, which took on a blatantly nationalist tone. The Rapulana wanted the Resident Magistrate to 'make a division of the Molopo Reserve', so they can be established on their own land.¹³⁵ Sejesho Mothibi stirred religious fervour into rife ethnic feeling. In that ferment the *stadt*'s population was urged to build their nation, literally stone by stone. Mothibi invited the rector of the Anglican Church, Rev George Robinson, to build a church at Rietfontein.¹³⁶ Permission for the planting of such a mission, as Mothibi well knew, had to be granted by Chief Lekoko in Mafikeng, but on 3 April 1915 Mothibi and Mosekasi called a public meeting at Rietfontein, inviting residents of the *stadt* to participate in the building of the church, 'without having asked for permission from anyone'. This, he said, was the first step towards not only collective success, but an invitation to their own chief to cross over from their Transvaal, and take his place.

The same Mosekare, who before cared little about chiefly disputes, also addressed the meeting. 'Where on earth', he asked, 'have you ever seen a people hindered to worship their

¹³⁴ H. Frost to R. Lloyd, 2 July 1913, A979Bc3.2.

¹³⁵ S.J. Molema for Lekoko to G. Weavind, 8 January 1915, A979Bd1.

¹³⁶ H.J. Frost to Lekoko, 10 April 1915, A979Bd1.

God by those in authority, asking that instead of worshipping God they must be worshipped?’ He continued that ‘those in power do not want us to build a church house, they want us to worship on trees’, and that ‘these assertions’ that the plan of worship in the stadt was to be hindered, were not ‘without foundation’. The chieftaincy refused to grant Robinson permission to establish the church. As Sebopioa Molema noted to Frost, such activity was ‘merely a pretext’ to the original dispute.¹³⁷ That Mafikeng would interfere with worship confirmed to the local population all the allegations of malice and heavy-handedness Mosekare had described. Two years later they were still resisting its rule.

In February 1917, the colonial government recognised both Paul Montsioa and George Motuba as headmen on their payroll. Paul was paid £12 per annum, twice the amount of George’s stipend. In April 1917, Silas (on behalf of the paramount chief) asked the Resident Magistrate to clarify the position of Paul Montsioa at Rietfontein. In the same letter he agreed with a statement that Edward Barrett, the Secretary of the Native Administration Department, had apparently made, that ‘if we continue to quarrel within ourselves about the question of precedence and jurisdiction we shall never be a nation.’¹³⁸ The colonial government prevaricated, and eventually the nobility again chose the legal route, resting their case on the claim to ‘special conditions.’¹³⁹ The Supreme Court’s decision, delivered on 23 December 1920 was that the reserve was under the Natives Locations Act of 1884, and that no special conditions applied. The allocation of land, according to the Act, rested not with the chiefs but with the Governor-General. As such, the Supreme Court decided that

¹³⁷ S.J. Molema for Lekoko to H. Frost, 12 April 1915, A979Bd1.

¹³⁸ S. T. Molema to R. Lloyd, 20 April 1917, A979Bc3.2.

¹³⁹ S. Minchin to S. T. Molema, 24 October 1917, A979Bd1.

the Chief's jurisdiction is personal and not territorial. This means that the chief cannot exercise jurisdiction over any particular area (such as the Molopo Reserve) but only over the natives belonging to his own tribe.¹⁴⁰

The paramount chief continued to disallow any more 'placement' of so-called 'foreigners' on 'tribal lands'. Notables and commoners' insecure livelihoods however encouraged further subletting of 'placement' to such new immigrants, a growing population that was not under their control. For example, disputes that involved them could only be heard in the colonial 'native courts' by the local magistrate. This class of African tenants could defy the jurisdiction of Mafikeng notables when it suited them to do so, and withheld the very rent notables meant to extract. Notables' extraction of cash rents from commoners as their livelihoods became ever more vulnerable follows in the next chapter. They were not the only ones however. Some commoners also sublet their 'placements' to new immigrants and pocketed the cash rents.¹⁴¹

In conclusion, segregationist policies significantly undermined the norms of chiefly rule in the Molopo Reserve. Silas' position as an influential chief and a landlord was subsequently weakened. However, these policies were not simply the design of the colonial government, but derived also from how various strata of Africans sought to secure their strategies of survival and accumulation on the land. From Mafikeng notables' resistance to Dog Tax, to attempts by a peasant community to establish an Anglican mission in Rietfontein, these struggles for self-determination were inseparable from livelihoods. In his personal life, Silas found solace in his Christian faith, but not as a retreat. Rather, his sympathies for African led 'independent churches' grew in the 1910s although he remained loyal to the Methodism of his father. (Chapter 1) During this decade, he also saw the SANNC as an important platform

¹⁴⁰ A.M. Wilmot to Chiefs and Headmen, 23 December 1920, A979Be3.

¹⁴¹ Notebook, Papers of Molema, Silas Modiri, GB 0102 MS 380268

through which the government could be engaged and resisted. (Chapter 4) The segregationist measures described above were not implemented in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Hence they did not apply on Barolong Farms. It is to everyday life on this northern section of the cross-border polity that we now turn.

Chapter 3

Chiefs and landlords south of the Bechuanaland Protectorate

The setting of this chapter is Silas' farmlands in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Mabete was one amongst the strip of Barolong Farms leaning against the Western border of the Transvaal, north of the Molopo River. (Map 1) It was on this very farm that the infamous Jameson Raid was launched in 1896¹. A railway line connected Mafikeng to Palapye and enhanced the value of Barolong Farms whilst facilitating the smooth transportation of goods and people.² The railway line diagonally traversed Mabete, throwing about one third of it onto the eastern side of the track, and continuing further in a northwesterly direction into Lobatsi, a patch of white-owned farms that adjoined it on the north. (Map 3) Pitsani Siding was situated on Mabete. The line from Mafikeng to Rhodesia generally followed the main watershed of the Limpopo valley so that land bordering the Transvaal province was also amongst the most fertile and well-watered in the region. Mabete had two large natural pans. (Map 4) Mail was carried between the two colonies by rail twice daily, making possible frequent communication between tenants in the Protectorate and their absentee landlord in Mafikeng. Between 1911 and 1927, Silas amassed an unusually rich and detailed archive of correspondence between himself and his tenants, especially Phoebus Fincham.

Fincham and others described below were amongst the early stream of European immigrants into the Bechuanaland Protectorate following Unification in 1910. They were settlers enthused by the pioneering spirit of the Northerner, and confident in the promise of agrarian enterprise. (Chapter 2) They also anticipated the colonial government's assistance.

¹ E. Garrett and E. Edwards, *The Story of an African Crisis, the Truth about the Jameson raid and Johannesburg Revolt of 1896*, (Garrett, 1897), 46.

² J. Lunn, *Capital and Labour of the Rhodesian Railway System, 1888-1947*, (Basingstoke, 1997), 42.

The High Commissioner, Lord Selbourne, had announced in 1910 that the Bechuanaland Protectorate would be transferred to the Union 'in the natural course of things'³. The stratum of landless white immigrants into this region included Transvaalers whose access to land was limited due to population growth, immigration and the development of a landowning oligarchy during Paul Kruger's government. As Krikler has shown, the position of these landowning elites was successfully reinstated after the South African War when the British sought to channel the further rationalisation of the colony's agrarian economy in a manner more compatible to their overall political and economic interests.⁴ Keegan, Krikler, Trapido and van Onselen, who have all written extensively about various tenancy arrangements between white landlords and African tenants in Transvaal, do not have much to say about the survival strategies pursued by landless whites.⁵ The correspondence between Silas and his tenants makes possible an exploration of the struggles of this understudied stratum of landless whites, like Ben Burger, who hoped to escape waged work on the mines or railways.

The very frequency with which Fincham wrote to Silas, sometimes twice a day, illuminates everyday life and culture. It also documents rural anxieties where water remained an expensive resource and the climate tended towards cyclic droughts, while the clientele for stock, grain, animal hides and other trade commodities was limited. Moreover the export of the main agricultural commodity, cattle, was strictly regulated in order to protect the Union's beef industry.⁶ During these years the Protectorate government practiced an aggressive fiscal

³ Q. Hermans, 'Towards Budgetary Independence: A Review of Botswana's Financial History, 1900 to 1973', *Botswana Notes & Records*, 6, (1974), 91.

⁴ J. Krikler, *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: The Agrarian Transvaal at the Turn of the Century*, (Oxford, 1993).

⁵ T. Keegan, 'The Restructuring of Agrarian Class Relations in a Colonial Economy: The Orange River Colony, 1902-1910', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 2 (1979), 234 – 254; S. Trapido, 'Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: the Transvaal 1880-1910', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 5, 1 (1978), 26-58; Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*.

⁶ See M. Hubbard, *Agricultural Exports and Economic Growth: A Study of the Botswana Beef Industry* (London, 1986)

control, meeting all expenditure from domestic revenues with no external budgetary support from Britain. It was unwilling, if also unable, to lend a helping hand to European settlers.⁷ A reconstruction of everyday life on Mabete during this period reflects long-term transformation in patterns of farming and trade in the region.⁸ The large volume of correspondence generated in sixteen tumultuous years of Fincham's and Silas' relationship offers a rare insight into the experiences of three disparate but interdependent social groupings. a growing white tenancy, a handful of absentee African landlords, and an African peasantry. These were elements in an evolving frontier society in which racial and ethnic boundaries remained relatively fluid compared to the Union. It may have been an unusual and unique set of relationships in southern Africa.

This chapter explores how race was discursively constructed and embodied in practice. Whilst racial prejudice hardened in southern Africa and became inscribed in law in the Union, continuous interdependence and cooperation were the bare and essential requirements to subdue a semi-arid landscape and a hostile climate north of the Molopo River. Moreover racial legislation was more subdued in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Legassick has cogently challenged the understanding – for an earlier period – that ‘frontiersmen’ were always brazenly racist, and always opposed to the interference of the government.⁹ This chapter explores the sensibility of the ‘Northerners’ that hired various portions of Silas’ farm. Whilst Silas’ position as a landlord was undermined a mere 30 miles away in the Cape, European tenants in the Bechuanaland Protectorate could get almost nothing from the colonial government. Silas’ relationship with his European tenantry suggests this rural community was not ‘colour-blind’, but they often attempted to overcome race with a self-conscious and deeply emotive language

⁷ Hermans, ‘Towards Budgetary Independence’.

⁸ A. Best, ‘General Trading in Botswana, 1890 – 1968’, *Economic Geography*, 46, 4, 598-611

⁹ M, Legassick, ‘The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography’, in (eds.), Marks, S and Atmore, A (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, (London, 1980), 44-80.

of being 'brothers', 'dear friends', and 'family', for example. The self-assured language of racial separation and white supremacy across the border in the Union shamed any European settler that was perceived to be too embedded in the institutions of 'native life' into racial conformity. This also impinged on the Protectorate, as is evident in the public outcry against the 'vagrant' settlers who married or took African lovers in the 1930s.¹⁰ European tenants on the Barolong farms were not entirely removed from such pressures but for a few decades their responses were mediated by the requirement of economic interdependence.

As Stoler has demonstrated, the genesis of institutional racism and especially the trenchant prohibition of sexual relationships between settlers and indigenous populations, accompanied the crystallisation of distinct classes amongst settlers themselves.¹¹ There was a jarring contradiction between the Protectorates' District Commissioners' acknowledgment that many a settler took care of his so-called *métis* children and their mother, and their simultaneous support for legislation against so-called miscegenation (following the publication of the Immorality Act in the Union in 1927). Contrary to Mgadla's argument, it was thus not simply because an untameable sexual instinct 'has always created serious problems for guardians of ethnic boundaries' that pervasive miscegenation persisted in the Bechuanaland Protectorate well into the 1950s.¹² Rather the pattern of rural livelihoods from the mid-nineteenth century weaved racial and ethnic identities into a jagged fabric of solidarity, albeit one layered with ambivalence and contradiction. Yet these communities were not merely a function of expediency. For example, the light skinned H. Buchman, son to an unnamed German mason who first arrived in Mafikeng in 1863 and married a Morolong woman, refused to untie himself

¹⁰ P. Mgadla, 'Of Mistresses and Concubines: Miscegenation and European 'Shame' in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1911-1950', *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 1 (2004), 47-66.

¹¹ A. Stoler, Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31, 1 (1989), 134-161; *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, (Berkeley, 2010).

¹² Mgadla, 'Of Mistresses and Concubines', 48.

from his 'identification and citizenship as a Morolong', denying himself the legally enshrined privilege of whiteness in the wake of the Native Land Act of 1913. (Chapter 2) The discourse of racial segregation was rife and institutionally entrenched, yet evidently some European settlers disregarded it and not only because their livelihoods depended on a network of relationships across the colour line. Some had also formed deep and enduring ties of belonging.

As traffic towards the northern frontier ebbed from the mid-1920s, so did the capacity of African landlords to exploit the optimistic and landless Europeans. Many Europeans enjoyed the benefits of institutionalised racism in the Union of South Africa, a mere 30 miles from Barolong Farms. The truncated upward mobility of educated notables also reconstructed the role and status associated with the category of 'landlord' in various ways. At least in Silas' case, it meant a landlord chronically indebted to one or more of his tenants. These relationships of dependency facilitated the construction of an ambivalent 'brotherhood', which was shaped by images of Christian fraternity and mutual cooperation in the countryside. Yet, it also loosened the rigidity of contractual obligations, and introduced a large scope for manipulation of power on both sides. Gossip and rumour must have spread about educated notables facing bankruptcy, especially those like Silas who were dragged before the courts, had their animals and furniture carried to the sheriff's pound (Chapters 1 and 4), and most importantly, were known to borrow small amounts of cash, even as little as a pound, from ordinary commoners. More and more peasants started to pay some shillings for 'placement', often in addition to performing some or all the obligations owed to notables according to custom.

But these new exactions were still not necessarily experienced or spoken about as 'rents'. Rather, worsening (and highly visible) genteel poverty lent these open transactions of 'contract' the texture of reciprocity, cooperation and goodwill. By the 1930s the notion of

'rents' had broken through the canons of everyday language. Notables charged a standard rate of 5 shillings a year for 'placement' on all Barolong Farms. Silas straddled the often competing roles of patron, landlord and chief with caution. Many times he secured his private appropriation of resources that were spoken about as communal through the unscrupulousness of his European tenants. Popular discontent, when it did arise, was directed at Fincham and his fellow tenants.

i. Countryside strategies and sensibilities

Phoebus Fincham approached Silas to lease him a portion of Mabete in 1911. European tenants aimed to accumulate profits, but the code of ethics also dictated a benevolent entrepreneurship, perhaps of the kind Plaatje wrote about in *Tsala* in September of 1910. In this case, Plaatje was backing a merchant H. A. Oliver as representative of Kimberley in the new Union government, and his endorsement provides glimpses of the kinds of moral outlook that earned men influence. Plaatje wrote that even a 'most professional faultfinder would not be able to accuse such a man (Oliver) of being a "capitalist"'. Capitalism held connotations of exploitation of others for one's own gain. Self-made men, like merchants who built their enterprises with their own hands were legitimate businessmen.¹³ Even on the farmlands in the north, the place that Plaatje in fact considered home, this was the attitude that mediated daily transactions on the land and in business. Everyday life on the land was competitive and geared towards profit, but these strategies were couched in the language of fraternity and cooperation. Thus when Fincham first inquired if he could lease Mabete, he approached Silas as his 'old friend'.¹⁴ Silas was well-versed in negotiating profitable contracts and Fincham aimed to put

¹³ *Tsala*, 10 September 1910.

¹⁴ P. Fincham to S. T. Molema, March 1911. Unless stated otherwise, all correspondence in this chapter is from A979Aa3.1.1. (1911-1914); A979Aa3.1.2 (1915-1917); A979Aa3.1.3 (1918-1921); A979Aa3.1.4 (1922-1927)

the language of mutual cooperation to maximum utility. He was suggesting that Silas be less a landlord and more a business partner. Thinking of a 'partnership' was a relationship more preferable than being simply a tenant for an African landlord.

Fincham put forward that should Silas be willing to let a portion of the farm, he, as landlord, 'must also agree to sink a well'.¹⁵ Ordinarily, tenants were responsible for securing water. Unless the tenant could secure water in his own portion of Mabete, the well or dam he built was also accessible to the landlord. Fincham's confidence sprung from the shrewd aggression of a man well-acquainted with failure, who was making a calculated comeback to trade. Just a year earlier, 'Fincham's Grocery Store' in Mafikeng ceased to appear on the advertisement pages of the *Mafeking Mail*.¹⁶ At the beginning of 1910, his general dealers had been advertising 'Early Rose' seed potatoes.¹⁷ As a family, the Finchams ran a number of businesses in the area. A.W and A. E Fincham owned *Fincham's Ironmongery Stores* in Mafikeng at the same time, selling wire, timber, paint, ploughs and other farming implements, crockery, glassware and kitchenware. This pair appears to have taken over Phoebus' grocery store, whilst he tried to operate as a general dealer in Ramatlabana in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. This latter venture also failed but he opened 'a little shop' at Pitsani Siding where Mabete was situated. These other Finchams owned another shop at Vryburg, a nearby district, with a large salt pan called Grootchwaing in the Transvaal. According to a widely publicised murder trial involving them, the Finchams were landowners in their own right.¹⁸ Clearly, Phoebus may have been born of trading and farming stock, but was less successful than some of his kin.

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ *Mafeking Mail*, 7 March 1910.

¹⁷ See for example, *Mafeking Mail*, 4 January 1910.

¹⁸ See *Mafeking Mail*, 4 March 1910.

From the 1890s the farm ‘Mabete Hill’ was favoured as profitable for trade.¹⁹ In the late 1890s a European trader, R. Transfeldt operated from the farm as a general merchant and importer, selling produce, karosses, game horns and ‘native curios’. He held a trading monopoly in the region because Silas had agreed not to allow any other tenant to trade on the farm. Silas had a good relationship with the Resident Commissioner, who relied on him for the smooth collection of Hut taxes on Barolong Farms, and once even for carrying out a census.²⁰ Any other European’s application for a trading license within a radius of about 20 miles from Transfeldt’s shop was declined. But in January of 1899, a European tenant on the adjoining farm which belonged to the paramount Chief Wessels Montsioa, started to put up a shop and trade very near to Mabete. So near in fact was Edgar Lee’s shop that Transfeldt claimed it was on Mabete.²¹ At his tenant’s complaint, Silas ordered Lee to pull down the building, but the latter refused. Silas’ relationship with Chief Wessels was far from amicable (Chapter 1) and Transfeldt’s hope that ‘no doubt your Raad will pass decision in your favour’ was disappointed.²² For months, things stood at a stalemate, until Transfeldt called a surveyor to establish the farm’s boundaries, hired Spencer Minchin to act as an attorney for him and withheld six months’ rent to cover his expenses, saying ‘therefore there is no money due to you just yet ... I am sorry that you lose money over the whole affair, but I lost money too’.²³ Adopting a tone practicable only to a white tenant addressing a black landlord, he added ‘you better claim from Mafeking chief or Edgar Lee.’²⁴

Between Fincham and Silas race had to be carefully negotiated. Fincham’s inclination towards outbursts of rage and his unending provocations grew from the unspoken claims to

¹⁹ R. Transfeldt to Molema, 5 January 1899 January 1899; 15 January 1899, A979 Aa3.

²⁰ S. T. Molema to Unknown, 5 May 1910, A979 Aa3.

²¹ R. Transfeldt to Molema, 15 January 1899, 21 January 1899, A979Aa3.

²² R. Transfeldt to Molema, 2 March 1899, A979Aa3.

²³ R. Transfeldt to Molema, 8 September 1899, and 17 September 1899, A979Aa3.

²⁴ R. Transfeldt to Molema, 17 September 1899, A979Aa3.

power his skin colour held over Africans. He also took for granted that both the technicalities of written contracts and the unspoken cultural codes of such transactions were Europeans' forte. Yet he insisted that he and Silas were partners and members of a family, in a mutually advantageous leasing agreement. Like Transfeldt, he wanted sole trading rights on Mabete, and also that Silas ward off competitors nearby. Insisting on the terms of their contracts was not always advantageous for tenants because informal arrangements of the lease agreement could be manipulated as the situation demanded. In fact Fincham was soon to learn the hard way that defending his interests in legal contracts might leave too little room for manoeuvre. Absentee landlords like Silas also had something to gain from amicable and informal 'partnerships' that bought tenants' loyalty. Though not allowed to sublet the property, nothing prevented an enterprising tenant from allowing other farmers' stock to graze on the farm and withholding the monies from the landlord. For a landlord living from hand to mouth like Silas, these amounts were not inconsequential. Tenants could prove loyalty by forwarding these precious shillings to the landlord, or at least claim that what they did hand over was everything. In turn, Silas could return the favour, perhaps arbitrate disputes on the farm in their favour, or share the costs of some 'improvements' on the farm.

Silas did not agree to build the well, as Fincham had requested, but as usual, considered its construction a contractual obligation on Fincham's part. If the well was dug within the boundaries' of Fincham's portion, then Fincham had exclusive right to it. If water was anywhere else then his own stock, as landlord, could be watered there also. By mid-May 1912, Fincham was hard at work at Mabete. He had built a residential house and his store buildings, but his attempts to find water within his own portion failed. In mid-May of 1912 he was digging a well elsewhere. 'Man, I am working hard', he told Silas, 'and you must help me [as] the

stones are very hard in the well and the water is little.²⁵ Silas was not inclined to help but was also not in any position to lend a hand. It would not be very long before Fincham became part of a growing circle of creditors from whom Silas was borrowing money and enlisting help. Silas had become heavily indebted to Sundel Gordon, owner of ‘Gordon and Sons Butchers and General Cattle Dealers’ in Mafikeng, having borrowed money from him at the beginning of February 1911. In addition to just over £88 owed to Gordon in unpaid accounts and cash loans, Silas took a further £75 as a bond from the same trader in March of 1912.²⁶ He bound eight donkeys and five slaughter cattle. In the same week that Fincham was sinking the wells, Silas bought a little sorghum corn from a European trader on credit.²⁷ Money was also owed to various others, including a Chinese migrant and a European tenant on Vryhof.²⁸ In the meantime Lovedale had sued Silas for unpaid fees.²⁹ Since the harvest of 1908 the region suffered a protracted drought.

In the summer of 1912 finally the rains came and the much awaited promise of harvest stirred up much activity across the countryside. Fincham turned his attention to the white men who wanted to rent remaining portions of Mabete. Aspiring tenants thought it advantageous to work through an interlocutor who could vouch for the newcomer’s integrity and pioneering spirit. Also, Fincham could collect a fee for playing middleman. As a trader, Fincham also had to keep a close eye on new lessees on neighbouring farms, lest he lost out to another trader in the region. He put forward an English-speaker by the name of Crosby as a suitable tenant on a farm belonging to the regent Chief Lekoko Marumoloa, probably Pitsane Photlokwe, which

²⁵ Fincham to Molema, 18 May 1912 .

²⁶ Promissory notes: 3 and 4 February, 11 September, 30 December 1911; and 29 February, 7 March 1912, A 979 Aa3.4; General bond agreement S. Gordon and S.T. Molema 16 March 1912, Molema vs S. Gordon, CSC 2/1/1/801 84.

²⁷ Invoice L. Iving to S. T. Molema, 21 May 1912, A979Aa3.4.

²⁸ See for example, Promissory Note Luk Long, Late 1911; Loan invoice A. van Jaarsveld 26 November 1912 A979Aa3.4.

²⁹ DeKock and De Kock to Molema, 21 June & 22 August 1912, A979Aa3.3.

adjoined Mabete on the south. He presented Crosby as a ‘friend’ who was ‘not a Dutchman but a man like myself’, a ‘good man’ who could sink a ‘good well and build a ‘good decent house’ on the farm.³⁰ The said Crosby was a brick-maker and posed very little competition to a trader.³¹ Four months later, Silas had still not responded, which was anguish for Fincham considering that mail was transported between Mafikeng and Pitsani Siding in the morning and evening. He chided Silas, that ‘you must know it is bad policy to a businessman not to answer letters.’³² At the time however, Silas and his son were immersed in the preparations for the court case against Dog Tax. (Chapter 2) Crosby was eventually settled on Pitsane Phothlokwe, after Fincham’s desperate pleading that the regent ‘must please say yes and not no.’

Fincham heard rumours that an Afrikaner by the name of Dirk Immelman intended to rent another one of the regent’s farms, Sarra Kop, also close to Mabete. Fearing competition with Immelman, Fincham again wrote to the landlord:

... now I believe that farm belongs to my friend Chief Lekoko and I also know that Immelman will have to get the chief’s permission to put up a shop there and I think it is not right that another shop should be so close to me [because] either one of the two shops will not make a living [.] I trust that you will use your influence and not allow another shop so close to mine and please keep this confidential and protect your friend.³³

Ben Burger, a Dutch-speaking Afrikaner made contact with Silas in February of 1913, and signed an agreement to carry out the sorts of ‘improvements’ Fincham had agreed to. His portion of Mabete was one on which Fincham had been forced to sink a well. Thus both Fincham and Burger both contributed substantially towards the well’s operation and upkeep. Although Fincham retained the right to water his stock at the well, his cattle could not graze

³⁰ Fincham to Molema, 18 May 1912.

³¹ Fincham to Molema, 30 July 1912.

³² Fincham to Molema 17 September 1912.

³³ Fincham to Molema, 25 March 1913.

on that portion of the land. Silas' stock on the other hand had free access to the water and grazing. Fincham thought of Burger as an encroacher who limited the freedom he had been enjoying as a sole tenant. Like many English-speaking Europeans in and around Mafikeng, Fincham harboured a deep antipathy against any 'Dutchman'. Besides, even if his prejudices were not so inclined, it was easier to come to a gentleman's agreement with a tenant with whom he had more ground in common.

From then on Fincham continually manoeuvred to establish himself as a representative of the absent landlord and the trustee on the farm. One of the more straightforward ways of doing so was to collect rent from Burger on Silas' behalf, for example in April 1913.³⁴ His note asking Silas for a receipt of £1 (two months' rent) would have barely reached Mafikeng when Fincham scribbled another desperate dispatch the following morning in an attempt to forestall the signing of a third lease agreement with another European tenant on the farm. In a 'confidential' dispatch, Fincham urged Silas that it was better to 'refer him to me', and that 'don't on no a/c [account] close with him before you see me first & I will explain to you.'³⁵ However this man, James Higgs, was at the same time pressing Silas to meet as early as possible 'and be ready to fix up agreement and don't disappoint me'. Silas agreed that Higgs could first sink a well on Mabete. Higgs had to dig deeper than he had anticipated despite the recent rain. 'My well is 50ft already and is very hard [and] it cost me a lot for blasting.'³⁶

African peasant households were also experiencing tremendous distress. They were allowed ploughing and grazing rights, but were seasonally expected to organise work parties to plough the farms of both the paramount chief, but also that of the occupant, like Silas. From

³⁴ Fincham to Molema, 24 April 1913.

³⁵ Fincham to Molema, 25 April 1913.

³⁶ J. Higgs to S. T. Molema, 21 April 1913.

1911 they were prohibited to shoot game on the farms, which only European tenants were allowed to do. This meant they could not participate in the trade of skins or other wildlife commodities. They were prohibited also from cutting brushwood to make cattle-kraals without the permission of the occupant.³⁷ They were allowed ploughing rights on European portions also. Those who had ‘placement’ on Mabete watered their stock on one of the farm’s natural pans. The other was for Fincham and Silas’ exclusive use. (Map 4) During the autumn of 1913, an infuriated Fincham reported to Silas that ‘there are too many cattle and sheep drinking at our pan’, and that ‘there is only one plan for us’, which was to ‘fence the pan in’ and to ‘put on a gate’. He suggested that Silas supply seven rolls of barbed wire, and he (Fincham) would contribute poles and find labour.³⁸ The Land Commission had not allowed fencing amongst Africans, insisting that chiefs held land on behalf of their people through a system of communal tenure. (Chapter 2) Even those like Silas who held ‘certificates of occupation’ on Barolong Farms were not allowed to fence them. As Fincham was to find out on Mabete, resistance to fencing was fierce among Africans. As fencing was going up around the pan, Silas issued another notice prohibiting the shooting of game on the farm. This notice was pinned to the door of Fincham’s store. Setlhako Mancho, whom Silas described as ‘my headman on the farm’ was notified to this effect not by his chief, but by the mouth of Fincham, a white tenant.³⁹

In correspondence to Silas, Fincham had begun to refer to Mabete as ‘our farm’ by 1913. He felt at liberty to make decisions about everyday matters there, negotiating with neighbouring white farmers a fee to hire veld, like ‘old Mr Nel’, who wished to graze four-hundred sheep on Mabete for a fee.⁴⁰ Fincham wrote to Silas that there was ‘too little water’,

³⁷ Schapera, ‘The System of Land Tenure’, 21.

³⁸ Fincham to Molema, 21 May 1913.

³⁹ Fincham to Molema, 5 June 1913.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

and Silas agreed to share the cost of a new borehole.⁴¹ Fincham was in good cheer because he was exerting himself in what felt increasingly to him like a joint enterprise, rather than the obligations of tenancy.⁴² Unlike Transfeldt before him, Fincham could benefit from Silas' good relationship with the paramount chief because Silas' son, Sebopioa, had taken the regent's daughter as wife. (Chapter 2) Seemingly at Silas' request, Chief Lekoko allowed no tenant to trade on his farm, Sarra Kop, neighbouring Mabete. Dirk Immelman was denied trading rights. In gratitude for Silas' influence, Fincham assured Silas of his commitment to protect his interests.

... you acted wisely & I thank you again [.] You must bear in mind that in our agreement it clearly states that no one will be allowed to trade on this farm and I think you & Chief Lekoko will protect me & not even grant a license at Sarra or anywhere else within 24 miles of this place as if you do I will loose [sic] a lot of my customers & it will mean that all my improvements that I have made on your arm will be of no value to you or me. I think the Immelmans are a mean lot of people as the country is big enough & plenty of room for all without one another cutting each others [sic] necks off.⁴³

Little could be done about illicit trade though. A few days after Immelman's competition was warded off, another trader started to operate on Sarra Kop without a trading license.⁴⁴

In August 1913 Richard Rowland received 40 bags of 'good corn' that was harvested on Mabete that year for his trading store a little further north in Lobatsi. The bumper harvest that autumn awoke wagon riders from slumber, transporting sorghum and maize even into the towns of the Transvaal.⁴⁵ The sentiments Rowland, as a European farmer and trader, expressed to Silas confirmed the triumph of the Northerner spirit, which battled the odds to conquer dry

⁴¹ Fincham to Molema, 25 July 1913.

⁴² Fincham to Mokema, 25 June 1913.

⁴³ Fincham to Molema 25 July 1913.

⁴⁴ Fincham to Molema, 30 July 1913.

⁴⁵ Molema for L. Marumoloa to R. Llyod, 4 July 1913, SPA.

hinterlands and pioneer trade and industry. It also expressed the bonds of empathy, friendship and mutual cooperation across the boundaries of race, that helped men survive six gruelling years of bad harvests.

I am exceedingly pleased you have at last had a little luck. We had a hard time of it together for six years. So I hope we have nothing but good times for the future. I have long ago seen how your words to me about too much wealth or good luck not being good for a man – taken in a manly way bad luck makes a man a real man. I think cruel as the experiences we both had to go through were we are both today the better for it. I will always be proud to think that instead of giving in we made a fight for it and won unaided.⁴⁶

Silas' fortunes were a long way from turning however. He was still in a rut of debt. Fincham sent him an account of £86.6.3 mid-September 1913 as part of his share for fencing the pan and erecting an extra borehole as had been agreed.⁴⁷ Silas' priorities were elsewhere however. He invested heavily in his son's education (Chapter 4). He also added substantially to the size of his stock, purchasing 11 big oxen, 11 medium oxen, 6 small oxen and 2 bulls for £149. All this was paid for in cash. Silas also bought a wagon on credit. He only paid £2 towards Fincham's claim in October, and signed a promissory note for the rest.⁴⁸ When the promissory note was due at the end of the month, he made no provision for it at the bank and asked Fincham not to issue summons.⁴⁹ By the end of the year, Silas had paid not a single penny to the debt, and Fincham felt betrayed.

I asked you to help me & you treat me as if I am nothing. I must have some money from you. You asked me not to let you wash down the river when your promissory note falls due ... if you could have helped me now in time of need I could return the complement to you but you don't even try to help me you agreed to pay half

⁴⁶ Rowland to Molema, 27 August 1913 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ Fincham to Molema, 15 September 1913.

⁴⁸ Fincham to Molema, 22 October 1913.

⁴⁹ Fincham to Molema, 31 October 1913.

the expense & now I ask you to help me & you simply sit down & leave it all to me.⁵⁰

Fincham kept the rent he collected from Burger of £1.10 a month against the much larger account that Silas owed him. Early in 1914 he approached Minchin to force Silas to provide for his promissory bill.⁵¹ He told Silas that he no longer considered him a 'big man & a friend', because such a man would not let him 'drown' and would 'let me keep my name with the bank.'⁵² He was no longer willing to ward off trespassers, or collect rents and fees from farmers who grazed on Mabete. If Silas required him to continue with any of these responsibilities, he would only carry them out for a fee as 'I have enough work to do myself'.⁵³ Eventually Silas was summoned to face Fincham in court on 10 March 1914. Silas tried to use Minchin to negotiate a settlement. He had no money, having just invested in livestock, and was hoping that he could draw from the remaining credit of a friendship with his tenant. Fincham offered that as a friend, 'I am not cross with you' but as far as the debt is concerned 'it is a matter of business.' He demanded that at least £30 be paid in hard cash on the first week of April.⁵⁴

New developments on the farm motivated Fincham not to press Silas too hard. In May, Fincham discovered that Ben Burger was unable to remain on the farm. Burger had already completed building a house on the farm, but unless a white tenant could trade, surviving on the farm was near impossible. Were Burger to leave the farm before the legal termination of his contract, it would be impossible to recover any of the costs. Fincham offered to buy him out

⁵⁰ Fincham to Molema, 7 December 1913.

⁵¹ Fincham to Molema, 22 December 1913.

⁵² Fincham to Molema, 07 January 1914.

⁵³ Fincham to Molema, 23 February 1914; 27 February 1914.

⁵⁴ Fincham to Molema., 11 March 1914.

for £70. He wanted to pass the lease on to his brother-in-law, an Englishman by the name of Dickerson, who had worked on the railways. White tenants preferred renting adjoining portions of a farm with family members, hoping to share water and pasture.⁵⁵ He hurried to Silas in Mafikeng to vouch for Dickerson as ‘not a rich man’ but a ‘good man’ who would carry out good improvements on the farm. He reverted to his old position of friendship, and loyal trusteeship on the farm, but he also wanted more authority to make independent decisions.

I have also placed to your account 10/- which I charged Rowland of Kanye [for grazing] and 10/- I charged Nel for grazing and water from the pan. So you see I am looking after you, and if you are agreeable I would be pleased if you will give me more power to act on your behalf here and then I can show people that I am master here and acting for you & will collect all the moneys I can for you from this farm.⁵⁶

He heard nothing from Silas, so he acted independently. He sold Burger’s right to Dickerson for £70. In May 1914 he wrote to Silas that

I want you to approve of this as it is a good man & will still improve the property [.] [Y]ou must not be afraid [because] in the end the building is yours all the same and you hold out your right to water your cattle @ the well just the same as when Burger was there [.] [A]ll that Mr Dickerson wants is a proper lease to be drawn up for 5 years. This of course we can talk about when you come[.] [W]e will always meet one another as we are old friends & will not squabble over nothing.⁵⁷

Whilst Fincham was trying to secure his long term interests, Silas was focused on what gave him money in hand immediately. Instead of showing rage at Fincham’s impudence for going above his head, Silas redirected the £70 from Dickerson to his own pocket rather than Burger’s, who got nothing. He also signed up new tenants.⁵⁸ Since Silas was ‘letting more ground to other people, strangers whom we don’t know’, Fincham wanted his interests protected because

⁵⁵ See for example, Ruthenberg to Molema, 28 May 1914.

⁵⁶ Fincham to Molema, 3 May 1914.

⁵⁷ Fincham to Molema, 17 May 1914.

⁵⁸ Ruthenberg to Molema, 28 May 1914.

‘I think as I am your first tenant and have already made improvements to the value of over £700-0-0 on this farm that you must protect me & assist me for any grazing rights’.⁵⁹ For the sum he paid, Dickerson had exclusive rights to the well. Silas’ stock could no longer drink there from 1 September 1914, unless he paid.

James Higgs, a tenant for 18 months, was ‘in a hurry’ to leave the farm in October 1914 to take up employment in Potchefstroom and begged Silas to reimburse at least part of his spending on the farm ‘as you are an honest man.’⁶⁰ Higgs begged Silas that ‘please have pity on me and give me say only £10 of all the expense which I had. I can tell you that my family have to sup without meat now for 2 or 3 weeks.’ Nevertheless, despite these great risks, there were other European settlers vying for Higgs’ portion, and other available parts of the farm. Silas continued to take up new tenants. As he wrote to J. van Rensburg in June 1914 ‘there are many people who want me to lease this farm to them.’ Van Rensburg was supplying Silas with at least 300 bags of sorghum to sell for him in Mafikeng during a season when prices were high.⁶¹ Such trade was illicit because only those traders who had permission to remain in the reserves could do business in the reserve. Despite Fincham’s remonstrations that van Rensburg brings only ‘troubles and complications’ Silas took him on. Fincham was much aggrieved, and agonised that ‘my heart is sore today as I see troubles in store for all of us here’⁶² It was not very long before van Rensburg started to sell mielies from the farm, but without a trading licence or even a trading store, merely operating from his front door. This trade, Fincham complained to Silas was ‘in direct opposition to me.’⁶³ Without some trade however, it was almost impossible to survive on the farm – as Higgs and Burger had experienced.

⁵⁹ Fincham to Molema, 30 May 1914.

⁶⁰ J Higgs to S. T. Molema 10 October 1914.

⁶¹ Molema to Van Rensburg, 23 June 1914.

⁶² Fincham to Molema, 29 June 1914.

⁶³ Fincham to Molema, 24 August 1914.

It was equally difficult to make a living without cooperating with other tenants, and even Africans on the farm. Fincham however had an extreme aversion for Afrikaners. Van Rensburg was one of two new Afrikaners. The other was G. Beukes, who was Dickerson's new neighbour. So Fincham hurried to a firm of attorneys in Mafikeng to have their contracts negotiated with Silas in a formal agreement – especially Dickerson's exclusive right to the well. Beukes fenced off the second natural pan for his and Silas' exclusive use. He also started to dig his own well. Fincham wanted to protect the advantages he had secured for himself and his brother-in-law from the encroachment of 'Dutchmen'. The water was already 'by no means enough' and Dickerson was going to have to dig deeper at 'considerable expense'.⁶⁴ Silas, meanwhile, was motivated to ease the pinch of his indebtedness rather than think through the implications of his agreements. In giving Beukes the second pan, and giving up his right at Dickerson's well, he left van Rensburg with no water. As far as Fincham was concerned, Silas was 'causing & have been the cause of a lot of trouble here between the white people ... You agree with one man this way & the other that way & you are causing rows & unpleasantness.'⁶⁵ The attorneys duly drew up agreements in line with what Silas had consented. Fincham wanted the exclusive right Dickerson had over the well to be clearly stipulated. To be fair, during Burger's tenure Fincham himself had contributed substantially to the well, and in practice he could freely access it through family ties to his brother-in-law.

Whilst these European tenants inscribed their rights in legal writ, these very arrangements were locking Africans out of available water sources. Africans had no access to the pans. They could dig their own wells, but certainly very few could afford to do so. The

⁶⁴ Dickerson to Molema, 7 September 1914.

⁶⁵ Fincham to Molema, 2 September 1914.

herders that brought Silas animals to the pans or to his tenants' wells often tended other Africans' stock as well. It was very difficult for European tenants to know which animals were Silas', and which were those of 'his people'. Unless a tenant was fortunate enough to secure water in his own portion of the farm, to which he then had exclusive right, his well provided water for a wider community of Africans as well. In September 1914 a herder took animals to the well that just started to belong exclusively to Dickerson. The 'Native Mongolish[i]', according to Dickerson, 'though very respectful about it he cannot see that he should pay.' Dickerson wanted Silas to provide '3 boys for white man's wages' for the purpose of digging his well deeper into the ground.⁶⁶ Dickerson did deepen the well, but like James Higg and Ben Burger before him, he too was forced to abandon his contract and take up paid unskilled work despite his age, at Blanc Witkop Mine in Zeerust where high grade fluorspar had recently been discovered.⁶⁷ Fincham was deeply distressed because whosoever bought Dickerson out, had exclusive right to the well – a right he had insisted should not be informally agreed upon, but stipulated in contract.

On Christmas Eve of 1914 Silas had received summons for £58-1-0 owed to Fincham, who had acted through Spencer Minchin, Silas' loyal friend. (Chapter 1) Minchin forced Fincham to accept a payment of £2 a month until the debt and the accruing interest had been settled by withholding his rent. Fincham was aggrieved that 'Mr Minchim and you know that you owe and are not playing the game'. By March 1915, Silas was so hard pressed that he wished to consolidate his debt with Fincham at £100 if the latter would lend him another £30. Fincham did not refuse outrightly, but suggested that the door for negotiating was open if Silas would help him keep his hands on the well on Dickerson's portion.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Dickerson to Beukes, 27 June 1915.

All owe me money & no one pays me so how can I help you. I am indeed sorry for you ... Now a line about Dickerson. I hear he wants to sell his right ... if you can manage it you ought to try & keep the place for us as it is the only water we can depend on & a new man may be nasty & do us out of water.⁶⁸

Fincham could not afford to shoulder the responsibilities of two lease agreements. He made a bizarre proposal that a 'lease' be given for Beukes for monthly lodgings in Dickerson's house, whilst he would take over Dickerson's 'right' to the well and grazing ground. Then 'when I see my way clear', he suggested to Silas, he would completely take over both.⁶⁹ Silas was no longer interested so much in larger infrastructural developments on Mabete, but what could give him money in hand. He transferred the whole lease agreement to Beukes, a 'Dutchman' that Fincham particularly loathed.⁷⁰ Silas needed rent to survive. Beukes wanted Dickerson's property for the already finished cottage, so he could bring his children closer to the primary school on the farm. This was a school for European children that had been built under Fincham's fundraising initiatives.⁷¹ Beukes' main drive for making a living was to invest in his children's education, a motivation he shared with his African landlord.

Fincham was unhappy with this arrangement and did not see its advantages for Silas, 'You seem to have a lot of trouble [and] work, don't you earn anything by it'.⁷² Then, he painted for his landlord the grim picture of a horde of Africans helping themselves and their stock to water in the pan. Indeed by this time, Africans had simply cut the fence, and Fincham was using the wire and poles for something else.⁷³ The cost for hired water had peaked from 2 shillings to 5 shillings a load during the winter of 1915. As Fincham put it 'I am quite sure you

⁶⁸ Fincham to Molema, 26 March 1915.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

⁷⁰ Dickerson to Molema, 7 September 1914.

⁷¹ Fincham to Molema, 30 November 1913.

⁷² Fincham to Molema, 7 June 1915.

⁷³ Molema to Fincham, 30 November 1916.

can make some money from the water in the pans. It is no use you asking me to do this or that as I can't leave my shop & go and stand [at] the pan & look after other peoples [sic] cattle.'⁷⁴ Fincham was deeply anxious about the number of Africans who were helping themselves to water in the pan. They refused to pay and also flatly refused to provide any labour when Fincham ordered them to help make fodder as their cattle trampled the grass on the way to the pan.⁷⁵ When Fincham showed Silas' headman on the farm, Setlhako Mancho, a letter wherein Silas forbade him from watering his cattle at the pan, Mancho simply 'went home and said nothing to me.'⁷⁶

All the while, Fincham had no access to the well on Dickerson's property because his relationship with the Dickersons had broken down. He hated them for leaving and thus separating him from the well. They resented him for a joint partnership that secured his interests rather than theirs. In fact Fincham wanted his sister to be thrown out. Silas wrote Dickerson a scathing letter, for not paying rent, not planting fruit trees, and not 'improving the place as much as you can.'⁷⁷ Dickerson took a train to Mafikeng, and called at Silas' place in the *stadt* because he preferred to talk 'rather than have everything settled through a letter'. Silas was not at home. Eventually Dickerson had to leave, but he left a detailed account of all the 'improvements' he had carried out over the course of a very brief stay on the farm. Fincham begged Silas to 'leave this entirely in my hands and you will then find that your old friend is a truthful man [and] look [(sic) after your interest.'⁷⁸ He wanted Silas to grant him power of attorney to make all decisions on the farm. He would take up Dickerson's lease, and manage the farm as joint enterprise for him and Silas. He would sell water, charge fees for grazing,

⁷⁴ Fincham to Molema, 7 June 1915.

⁷⁵ Fincham to Molema, 20 April 1915.

⁷⁶ Fincham to Molema, 23 April 1915.

⁷⁷ Molema to Dickerman, 1 September 1915.

⁷⁸ Fincham to Molema, 2 August 1915.

manage the other tenants, and collect their rents. More important, the power of attorney would give him control over Africans, who were watering their stock in the pan, and probably in the well too whilst Dickerson was away. He would charge them, especially a community of Basotho on his portion, for trespassing. As he put it they 'will not listen to me [and] as a matter of fact my agreement with you does not give me the power to interfere with them, all that I can say is that you are losing money every day in this matter.'⁷⁹

Silas was not interested in grandiose schemes, especially if they meant losing control of the farm. Besides, he was still deeply indebted to Fincham, and all the money Fincham claimed was his share would be sucked up by the debt. Silas' focus was on fitting as many European tenants as possible on the farm. An English-speaking family, the Sangers, were living at the cottage near the railway on the farm. They wanted to build another small cottage of three rooms across the railway on the eastern portion of the farm seemingly in order to secure schooling for the small children of the extended family. They would pay 5/- a month for the stand, whilst building the cottage. Another unnamed European wanted to build a cottage of 3 rooms as well as a school near the cottage, this time for 'coloured children'. He would also pay 5/- per month.⁸⁰ Both agreements, prepared by Fincham, were authorised by Silas.⁸¹ In November, 1915 another Afrikaner by the name of Van Wyk arrived on the farm. He eventually helped Beukes to buy Dickerson out, and probably negotiated for himself some access to the well. Only four months later, Beukes was already behind on his rent of one pound a month, and had to 'beg' Silas to 'wait a little longer as I am hard up just now but I shall make a plan.'⁸² To lure his neighbour away from the temptation of illicit trade, Fincham hired Beukes an itinerant trader to do business in other parts of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Instead, Beukes

⁷⁹ Fincham to Molema, 9 July 1915.

⁸⁰ Fincham to Molema, 20 July 1915.

⁸¹ Molema to Fincham, 31 July 1915.

⁸² Beukes to Molema, 11 March 1916.

saw opportunity to make his own money by trading with hides and skins from his own front door.

Silas kept aloof from the ensuing feud, as letters started to arrive from Fincham that Beukes 'is doing me a lot of harm here and with a vile tongue' and subsequently he was 'losing a lot of customers'. Fincham wanted Beukes kicked out for his late rent, whilst he found Silas another tenant, but 'not a Dutchman again [...] I will get an Englishman this time.'⁸³ It was clear to Silas however that those European tenants without trade abandoned their contracts, or at least could not pay consistently. Van Rensburg had taken steps to legalise his illicit trading, and obtained a license. The government simply responded to Fincham that it 'was not aware that the Protectorate had granted you exclusive privilege.'⁸⁴ Water was Fincham's greatest concern, and worry worsened his racialised antipathies. He started to harass Beukes, wanting control of the well that he had sunk 'with my own money'. Silas was willing to let the well to Fincham for £2 per month. Fincham refused. 'Who', he asked Silas, had sunk the well, 'you or me'?⁸⁵ His next step was to threaten legal action.⁸⁶ Silas knew Fincham had no right to the well having signed it away in a contract. Besides, he was preoccupied with a continuing rebellion at Rietfontein (Chapter 2) and his shortage of cash.

Fincham finally travelled to Mafikeng to see Silas in July, 1916. Notwithstanding a 'long conversation' he returned to Mabete dissatisfied.⁸⁷ In October 1916, Fincham received a note from Silas that he was prepared to ask Beukes to allow him some water from the well. Fincham did not wait for Silas to do so but sent his herders with his stock there the following

⁸³ Fincham to Molema, 23 May 1916.

⁸⁴ Hyde to Fincham, 20 June 1916.

⁸⁵ Molema to Fincham, 13 June 1916.

⁸⁶ Fincham to Molema, 23 June 1916.

⁸⁷ Fincham to Molema, 24 July 1916.

morning. Beukes wrote in Dutch that ‘I give no water’ and that ‘unless Molema tells me so himself’ Fincham had to pay.⁸⁸ Having a ‘Dutchman’ drive away his stock and send a note to that effect by the hands of African herders was humiliating for Fincham. On the same afternoon Fincham saw men carrying about thirty skins to Beukes’ place.⁸⁹ Ten days before that he had watched some of his own customers follow the same path.⁹⁰ He dispatched yet another grievance to Silas that Beukes was not only buying skins, but was ‘driving a business on this farm’. If only Silas would evict Beukes as ‘the only trouble’ between the two of them ‘we can settle.’⁹¹ Silas did nothing. Fincham pursued a process of arbitration between him and Silas through Spencer Minchin, and also arranged to meet the Resident Commissioner the following month.⁹² He expected that such pressure would be too considerable for his landlord to resist. Silas declined the invitation to arbitration. Fincham was very confident that the Resident Commissioner would take his side against the African landlord. He was certainly much bolder after his meeting with him. He would charge to Silas’ account the price of all the water he claimed to have hired since Dickerson left the farm over a year before ‘until you shall deem it fit and fine to grant my rights to the water in the well as before your friend Beukes came’. He concluded,

... you have now completely broken our friendship & I shall only expect you to carry out our agreement ...don’t think I am finished with the authorities yet [.] [Y]ou will hear more ... I don’t require any answer to this [.] [T]reat it as usual.⁹³

⁸⁸ Fincham to Molema, 26 October 1916.

⁸⁹ Fincham to Molema, 26 October, 1916.

⁹⁰ Fincham to Molema, 15 October 1916.

⁹¹ Fincham to Molema, 26 October 1916.

⁹² Minchin to Molema, 27 October, 1916; Fincham to Molema, 10 November 1916.

⁹³ Fincham to Molema, 10 November 1916.

Indeed Silas did ‘treat it as usual’, and offered no response. The following day two men, Subganger and Antony, who were either Africans or of mixed colour, were granted ‘placement’ by Mabete’s headman, Setlhako Mancho. Seeing the men were paying cash rents, Fincham took the men to be tenants like him, and threatened to graze his cattle over their fields. He was clearly convinced that his meeting with the Resident Magistrate would yield results, and so he threatened Silas that ‘I want you to be very careful to carry out our agreement in future.’⁹⁴ This solicited no response. Ten day later later he tried to fall back on Silas’ offer to speak to Beukes to give him some water. He prayed Silas to remember their friendship, their bond in one God, and thus honour their legal agreement over the well, or at least his interpretation of it.

My heart is bleeding over this matter if I consider that I should have course to have to go to law and be bad friends with my dearest friend I had before Beukes came here and why should our written agreement be broken through an outsider [.] [M]ay God grant and strengthen you to put this matter right soon. [I am] yours as ever so soon as our agreement in fulfilled.⁹⁵

As Fincham had intended, it was precisely the reference to God that wrenched a reply from Silas. It was a response that relays the kinds of affections that knitted personalities across the colour bar, bedevilled though such ties were by race and economic interest. Silas felt betrayed. As he saw circumstance, he had always extended a long hand to give Fincham ‘all the help I can’.

Although you asked me in your letter not to answer you ... I am compelled to answer your letters, one by one, as they come. Sir, I am so greatly moved by your letter ... in ... which you said may God grant that our friendship not be broken by a stranger, and outsider that I have thought [about] it deeply when you said in your letter [:] you my Dearest friend before Beukes came, and I said in my heart with pain surely I must do something ... Sir, I never said you have right to [the well]. I said [Beukes] must let your stock [drink] ... You have mentioned something about 10/- a month to me for not using windmill pump. I think you think that I am a fool

⁹⁴ Fincham to Molema, 11 November 1916.

⁹⁵ Fincham to Molema, 22 November 1916.

kaffer who do (sic) not see thing[s] in the light of business. I never at any time trouble you when you use the windmill pump, alone [being] paid for the water of same when dipping stock there ... Surely you think you must think I am a fool but [because] I want to be in peace with my very dear friend Mr Fincham to give him all the chance I can, not through my foolishness. I am getting letters nearly every day from the attorneys demanding this and that in favour of Mr Fincham. This troubles me much. Dear Sir, imagine say I might [have] died and you are still alive, and my son comes in, and goes through all the correspondence which passed between us of late years [...] [D]o you think he will give you any more chance. [A]s to myself I am alright we are old friends; just nearly like brothers, although one white and the other a black man, still we are talking together and not with bad spirit but as brothers in the same family.⁹⁶

In the same letter, Silas also reflected the anxieties of a generation of noble families whose elite education was failing to secure sufficient wealth to guarantee a secure existence. (Chapter 4) Whilst Fincham was infuriated that Subganger and Antony were renting the same portion of land as he was, Silas' clarification laid bare the transformation in the moral economy.⁹⁷

... you say it has come to your notice that I have let certain lands for ploughing purpose to Subganger and Antony ... I never let any place to [them] but he, Antony, has been ploughing there ... They have (sic) been placed there by my Foreman, Setlhako Manco, who has a perfect right to place him there at that time ... of course seeing that Antony is using my farm for ploughing purposes and also grazing his stock, it came to my mind that I must charge him, something, not to say that I have let my lands to him.

The language of 'placement' never stipulated payment, whilst in practice payments were extracted through cultural obligations. (Chapter 2) In reality, notables' quality of life had so declined that even educated sons tended to live from hand to mouth. (Chapter 4) Earlier that year for example, Silas had to plead with his nephew Joel Motshegare to pay the money owing to the surveyor for the assessment of his (Motshegare's) huge estate, Bethe. This farm, as well as that of the Chief Lekoko's son, and Silas' farm had all been surveyed. Not one of the three,

⁹⁶ Molema to Fincham, 30 November 1916.

⁹⁷ For use of the term 'moral economy', see E. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York, 1991), 341

including the two younger men, could settle the £5 each owed to the surveyor and eventually summonses were issued. Silas pleaded for time that 'I am still trying to sell grain', and pleaded with Motshegare that 'dear son, my son, truly you want to say tomorrow that I do not love you but that would not be true ... my son, please pay.'⁹⁸ Silas also owed varying amounts to some of his subjects. By the time Daniel Mokaka died in 1919 Silas had still not paid his £18-5-0. His widow and his children wrote to their chief, 'please send us our money we are in need of it.'⁹⁹ From one commoner was borrowed £4 in 1913, and from a man who could not write £1 was owed in the same year.¹⁰⁰ Public knowledge of such precarious lives tarnished the image of the nobility. This of course embarrassed the nobility, but visible lack also helped to free them from the constraints hindering accumulation through land. (Chapter 2) They ruled as chiefs, but lived through painstaking difficulty like other men. If they needed a few shillings from a commoner to secure his 'placement', it was not a greasing of the palms, but empathy, cooperation and mutual survival.

Thus, cash rents were slowly being accommodated as an acceptable strategy for notables' survival, but not so perceived avarice and cruelty, like blocking access to water pans or forests. In the meantime, Europeans' own struggles for survival pushed them to put up more fences and to impound any stock belonging to trespassers. Hard times also pushed Europeans towards illicit trade – Fincham's worst nightmare. In response to his landlord's 'long letter', he pleaded that 'if you will only trust me all will be well and no trouble will come [and] may God bless you to put more trust in me.'¹⁰¹ Beukes' informal trade in animal hides took him even further north. Early in January 1917 he travelled all the way to Lake Ngami to trade, whilst his rent remained unpaid. In Beukes' absence, Silas increased his rent to £1 a month,

⁹⁸ S. T. Molema to J. Motshegare, 12 February 1916, A979Aa3. Sechuana.

⁹⁹ M. Pringle to S.T. Molema, 1 August 1919, A979Aa3.

¹⁰⁰ Promissory Note, 31 March 1913, A979Aa3.4; Payment note 15 July 1913 A979Aa3.3.

¹⁰¹ Fincham to Molema, 22 December 1916.

despite what had been agreed on in the contract. Mrs Beukes pleaded with Silas to ‘work mercifully with us to put a few pounds together [.] [P]lease be patient [.] [M]y husband will pay all that we owe when he comes back.’¹⁰²

Van Rensburg traded illicitly in cattle. Fincham complained vociferously, but Silas was hoping for more consistent rent payments. Van Rensburg’s lease agreement stipulated that he would build a house of five rooms and hand it to Silas when his lease expired. In March of 1917, van Rensburg asked Silas to share the cost of wood for the house, but Silas refused. Three days before the appeal in his case against Sundel Gordon was heard, Silas had still not paid his solicitors. So he went back to negotiate with van Rensburg that ‘If you lend me the sum of £35 and give me four months to pay it without interest, I will then agree to pay you the sum of £45.’ Absurdly, payments would ensue only at the expiration of the lease, but nevertheless Van Rensburg obliged.¹⁰³ Perhaps the unspoken trade-off was that Silas turn a blind eye to the illicit trade. Fincham’s strategy was to approach the government about the unlicensed and growing trade in hides and cattle on Mabete. Silas had presided over disputes of cattle theft on his farm at least twice.¹⁰⁴ The Protectorate government refused to intervene. As matters stood, it was taxing cattle exports to navigate rather narrow fiscal constraints, without offering any assistance to European settlers. Nor was it taking any steps to incorporate the Protectorate into the Union. Interfering in landless Europeans’ trade was to stir up a hornet’s nest. The Government Secretary merely responded to Fincham that the government had issued no trading licences on Mabete, but no one, however, could be prevented from buying either cattle or hides.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Mrs Beukes to Molema, 8 January 1917, Dutch.

¹⁰³ Molema to Van Rensburg, 10 March 1917; De Kock to Molema, 13 March 1917.

¹⁰⁴ Mincham to Molema, 1 September 1922 is one example.

¹⁰⁵ Molema to Fincham, 4 January 1917.

In 1918 Fincham decided to build a stable. The headman named Papename at the quarry on a neighbouring farm refused to let him have stones unless he paid ten shillings per load. Fincham wrote to Silas that there is 'more trouble to settle'. The quarry, much like pans and forests, was common property, but the headman there recalled that Silas had 'made his people pay heavily for the trees they chopped' on Mabete. In turn, he felt it justified to withhold stones. Fincham considered that the scarcity of water ought to change Papename's mind. 'When setting up this matter', he advised Silas, 'you can bear in mind that Papename has free access to the water in the pans for his cattle.'¹⁰⁶ Silas response was to borrow £15 from Fincham in addition to moneys still owed for purchases and other debts.¹⁰⁷ Fincham had in fact not paid any rent for several years against Silas' indebtedness. Fincham agreed to pay one shilling a load for stones, but not ten. He wished for Papename's cattle not to come near the pans, and for Silas to speak to the farm owner.¹⁰⁸ Nothing came of these pleas, but something might have been done had he lent Silas £15.

In October 1918 van Rensburg left the farm.¹⁰⁹ His replacement was another Afrikaner tenant, by the name of Wolhuter. No sooner than he arrived that Wolhuter started to let grazing fields to other Europeans in surrounding farms. One day in May 1919 he brought three hundred cattle on the farm to graze. Fincham complained to Silas that 'Mr Wolchuter wants to get mostly like the rest of the [D]utch. [T]hey always look for trouble.'¹¹⁰ Having finally given up on Beukes' well, Fincham started to sink another one.¹¹¹ Wolhuter protected his interests fiercely. Any stock that strayed towards his boundary was immediately impounded. He traded, also without a license, in cattle, sheep, corn and even consumables like coffee from his residence. Grain was again scarce that spring but Wolhuter had more supply than Fincham due

¹⁰⁶ Fincham to Molema, 6 May 1918.

¹⁰⁷ Molema to Fincham, 13 July 1918.

¹⁰⁸ Fincham to Molema, 25 May 1918.

¹⁰⁹ Fincham to Molema, 3 October 1918.

¹¹⁰ Fincham to Molema, 28 May 1919.

¹¹¹ Fincham to Molema, 31 July 1919.

to a wider trade and barter network. In September 1919, he sent three bags of mielies to his landlord, most likely in lieu of rent.¹¹² In the same month Fincham reported the illicit trade to the Lobatsi authorities directly because, as he told Silas, 'I am sick & tired to be always complaining to you'.¹¹³ A month later, Fincham testified against Wolhuter in the magistrate's court in Lobatsi for 'trading on this farm & [and] at his home without the necessary license'.¹¹⁴ The court found Wolhuter guilty of selling mielies from his home. 'The question is', Fincham asked Silas 'what are you going to do about it.'¹¹⁵ Needless to say Silas did nothing. By the end of that year, Wolhuter had been granted a hawkers license.

At the beginning of 1920, Fincham's attorneys were proceeding with a case against Silas for breach of his agreement with Fincham. In the meantime, Wolhuter also acquired a dealer's license and decided to quit the farm to open a shop elsewhere. He intended to place another Afrikaner, Gert Pretorious, in his place. Fincham could not bear to imagine another 'Dutchman', so he suggested to Silas that the lease should revert back to Silas instead. He would then pay him £50 for the stand and rent. His primary motivation, he said, was Wolhuter's well, which he promised to share with Silas and 'we will have no more trouble about it.'¹¹⁶ But as Silas received the letter, he also received the summons Fincham had issued against him after Wolhuter received his hawkers' license. Silas was livid and all that fostered mutual cooperation between them, be it friendship or any other affective bond, no matter how ambivalent, was ruined.

I am sorry to say that when I was just writing to Mr Wolhuter to tell him what you wished me to say a letter came into my hands from your attorney ... challenging me that if I am not doing this and that immediately you were going to take

¹¹² Wolhuter to Molema, 23 September 1919.

¹¹³ Fincham to Molema, 26 September 1919.

¹¹⁴ Fincham to Molema, 26 September 1919.

¹¹⁵ Fincham to Molema, 24 October 1919.

¹¹⁶ Fincham to Molema, 14 January 1920.

proceedings against me and I was so annoyed by this letter I stopped sending my letter to Mr Wolhuter so as to let your attorney to take steps he intends to take; because I have often told you not to speak with me by the attorneys but we must speak as friend to friend [...] [T]he attorneys are for money [,] not for friendship so you better please yourself with the step you are going to take.¹¹⁷

For an entire year, with the exception of sending account statements, Fincham did not write to Silas at all, but he also did not proceed any further with the suit. In the meantime Wolhuter changed his mind and remained on the farm.

In the middle of February, 1921 Fincham's stock landed in Wolhuter's pound. In reporting the incident, Fincham resumed correspondence with his landlord to demand that he be allowed to fence his grazing fields. He also wanted Silas to 'order all the natives that they have no right on that piece of ground except yourself.' By then the total population of Africans on the forty-one farms was 3154, of which only 150 were reported as absent migrants.¹¹⁸ Silas responded through Spencer Minchin that he had 'gone into the matter seriously.' He could not allow a fence between Fincham and Wolhuter, but he would allow the southern portion of the farm to be fenced in for his and Fincham's 'exclusive use'.¹¹⁹ The fencing was completed on the 2 April 1921, and the camp measured about 600 morgen. A small portion around the pans was left open for the landlord and his headman to water their cattle.¹²⁰ This effectively raised the fencing that Africans had cut and rolled down a few years before. Moreover at least one African household, or possibly more, had been forcibly removed from the site. A note of distress was sent to Silas as the chief.

I tell you about Fencham (sic) that while he put up a fence along the farm he removed those of Makepe from there [all the while] knowing he is chasing the ones

¹¹⁷ Molema to Fincham, 2 February 1920.

¹¹⁸ V. F. Ellenberger to the Agricultural Officer, Lobatsi, Barolong Farms: Agro-Economic Survey, by F.O.A. Wande, S.168/5 BNA.

¹¹⁹ Molema to Minchin, 31 March 1921.

¹²⁰ Fincham to Molema, 2 April 1921.

of Makepe from there and [now] with whom do I remain if these ones of Makepe are removed due to Fencham while he knows [what he is doing]. Chief it grieves [me] very much because [already] Radipetse had taken away their fields and now Fencham is fencing them away from there knowing he is [therefore] sending them away and I want to know Chief if you have allowed Fencham [to fence] and [also] Chief, Mookodi says you should come to give him placement [on the farm], so that he can choose [now] whilst it is still raining and I agree that you come to place Mookodi [on] a field [because] Radipetse has stepped onto his site.¹²¹

In addition to the traumas of such evictions, and competition for space aside, African households were also carrying a new tax burden. The Bechuanaland Protectorate government imposed a tax of 5 shillings a year in addition to Hut Tax from January of 1920. It was a contribution to a 'tribal treasury' legitimated through the auspices of the Native Advisory Council, The government also established in parallel the European Advisory Council. (Chapter 4)¹²² There followed immediately a trend towards more intensive and larger-scale trade after the railway strip in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was sold to the South African Railways (SAR). Excluding Fincham, the other three European traders on the farm – Van Wyk, Wolhuter and Crosby – collaborated together, and negotiated with the SAR for an agent that would forward their goods at the siding, right across Fincham's shop.¹²³ There was no way Beukes' informal trade could survive such a larger conglomeration. The more vulnerable were going to be elbowed out. 'Times are very hard' Fincham wrote to Silas as his own creditors hounded him through the courts, 'so things are very bad and tight [and] no money anywhere.'¹²⁴ In May 1921, Beukes left the farm.¹²⁵ The next tenant who took his place remained on the farm for barely two months.¹²⁶ Two years later, Van Wyk's enterprise in cattle dealing was coming to

¹²¹ Unnamed to Molema, 3 April 1921. Sechuana.

¹²² V. F. Ellenberger to the Agricultural Officer, Lobatsi, Barolong Farms: Agro-Economic Survey, by F.O.A. Wande, S.168/5 BNA.

¹²³ Fincham to Molema, 22 April 1921.

¹²⁴ Fincham to Molema, 1 March 1922.

¹²⁵ Fincham to Molema, 16 May 1921.

¹²⁶ Fincham to Molema, 16 May; 10 August, 4 October 1921.

greater success, and he hired the eastern portion of the farm. As soon as Van Wyk took over the portion, he erected a fence of wire and wooden standards.¹²⁷

These fences, so insistently and laboriously put up, were simply cut and rolled down by Africans. Whilst their counterparts on the side of the polity that lay in the Cape had some opportunity to break into hawking in a racially segregated reserve, (Chapter 4) Africans on Barolong Farms were squeezed out of informal trade by whites who rented land. They were increasingly resentful at their increasing disenfranchisement. When Fincham sent his 'boys' to break stones at the quarry in a neighbouring farm to build a silo for green forage in October 1921, Africans on 'placement' there chased them away, and threatened to get them arrested.¹²⁸ In June 1922, cattle belonging to Dota, an African who had placement on the farm, allegedly 'strayed' towards Fincham's well. Fincham's son-in-law, Orwell impounded them and placed them in his kraal. Having heard the report from his herders, Dota himself confronted Fincham:

Then Dota himself arrived at the store armed with a knobkerrie and in a nasty manner demanded to know who had interfered with his cattle ... he threatened me with his knobkerrie and told me that the water on the ground did not belong to me, and that he was going to do as he liked.¹²⁹

'Even now', Fincham wrote to Silas in 1923 'there are hundreds of cattle drinking from all sides of the farm.'¹³⁰ Fences around natural pans, and even around wells, were simply not effective.

Fincham's own energies, like those of others around him, were focused on conglomeration. His store became registered as *Fincham & Co General Dealers*, without any

¹²⁷ Van Zyl to Molema, 8 May 1923.

¹²⁸ Fincham to Molema, 4 October 1921.

¹²⁹ Fincham to Molema, 5 June 1922.

¹³⁰ Fincham to Molema, 9 April 1923.

consultation with Silas. When the paper work around the new partnership had to be legally constituted, Silas refused to sign them, and never did. He would have been willing to cooperate however, had Fincham not resisted an increase on rent on a cottage he had just finished building for his son-in-law, Orwell, in June 1923. He had received permission from Silas to take over Beukes' old house and rebuild it into a cottage for Orwell for £150. Orwell's monthly rent of £1 was to be held back until the new cottage was completed. He carried out all the work, in his words, 'like a white man [does] work [,] as you know, all I do I do properly [and] make good work.'¹³¹ When Fincham demanded that Silas pay £30 towards the fence around Orwell's new cottage, Silas pithily put it to Fincham that throughout the many years of their relationship, 'matters between you and I are somewhat complicated.' He refused to contribute anything towards the fence, and did not accept that he owed Fincham any money. Silas argued that he had received no rent for two years and three months, all of it going towards the settlement of his debt. Further all the iron, wood, doors and windows remaining in Beuke's house were surely sufficient to settle whatever small amount was remaining.¹³² Now that Orwell's cottage had been completed, Silas doubled the rent to £2. Fincham found his landlord to be 'a very hard man' and 'very very (sic) unfair' considering his investments on the farm.¹³³ The rent remained at £1, but the documents for the business partnership also remained unsigned. Orwell quit the farm and Fincham arranged that his clerk move in instead.¹³⁴ The investment in the cottage brought absolutely no returns for him, and his plans for a larger trade partnership consolidated lawfully through his general dealers were ruined. Fincham stayed on but with no less conflict over his rights, and not much control over Africans from grazing in what he construed to be his area.¹³⁵ The age of the small European tenant farmer had come and gone, as had the

¹³¹ Fincham to Molema, 8 August 1922.

¹³² Molema to Fincham, 13 October 1923.

¹³³ Fincham to Molema, 26 October 1923.

¹³⁴ Fincham to Molema, 19 January 1924.

¹³⁵ J. Fincham to P. Fincham, 2 August 1927.

motivations that enthused Northerners' rush for land from the 1880s, and brought them to the Bechuanaland Protectorate after 1910. In its wake lay many white men's broken spirits as the frontier closed.

To recap, Molema exploited tenant farmers who spent every penny and strained every sinew to realise their ambition. Though it provides no information about so-called miscegenation and mixed-colour communities, these relationship and the vulnerabilities they relay show the substance of their material composition. It also suggests the ambivalent language of family and Christian brotherhood that knitted many, including black landlords and white tenants, into an affective community of empathy and honour. At times Fincham gritted his teeth and bore his lot. At times he aggressively sought to defend the claims of white supremacy. His prejudices did not always yield to impulses of material benefit. Neither did he and his co-tenants always conform to the expectations of 'whiteness' in popular rhetoric, though it did shape their aspirations towards self-improvement and a higher status. Among European tenants cattle smuggling, illicit trade, and the patronage of colonial officials were critical survival strategies. Yet, it was those European farmers that had exploited these strategies successfully, and had cooperated most readily across shifting racial boundaries that could take advantages of the limited collective bargaining the European Advisory Council facilitated from the 1920s. Some survived but the imperial government could not provide for them the benefits of institutionalised racism, as the Union government was doing 30 miles south in the Cape colony.

The political economy through which Silas was landlord, patron and chief on Mabete was considerably transformed during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Cash rents were more and more the norm, but the frequency of resistance against private appropriation of

water especially, increased. An absentee landlord like Silas could for the most part turn a blind eye, and leave the European tenants no other options than to watch ‘hundreds of cattle’ trample the veld they paid for, the pans they fenced and the wells they built at considerable cost. Other tenants like Wolhuter were more aggressive and used guns and dogs to ward off ‘trespassers’ – African or otherwise. That was the exception however, and not the norm, precisely due to the need for mutual cooperation in a hostile climate. A bankrupt landlord had mostly much to gain from cooperation but his vulnerability allowed his tenants at times a limited upper hand. The greatest benefactors of these arrangements on Mabete were in fact Silas’s children, whose education was enabled by the proceeds of various rents. It is to how education shaped the lives and employment strategies of Silas’s children that we now turn.

Chapter 4

Family, nation and education

This chapter focuses on the next generation of the Molema family, exploring the reproduction of inherited privilege through the interconnected lives of two brothers Sebioia (b. 1880) and Modiri (b. 1891) and their sister Harriet (b. 1896). Its thematic spine is how education structured the lives and opportunities of Silas' children; this intertwined with the affective sphere of family life as an intimate moulding experience and a powerful institutional force. The chapter analyses the evolving relationships that were constructed around the interacting roles of parent and child. Particularly important were 'turning points' in children's lives that also weaved new meanings into these roles. Each of Silas' children was born into the same family, but as each pursued education, status and a secure livelihood, they continually reimagined their family and what it meant to carry its name and obligations. Silas was anxious that his sons especially step into his shoes and build a lasting dynasty. This was by no means unique to his family. Ranger discusses similar family priorities in his *Are We Not Also Men*, based on Rev Thompson Samkange and his sons in Rhodesia from the 1920s.¹ They too were part of a tradition of education and African Methodism, but the Samkanges did not have chiefly origins or were on the very periphery of traditional power. Rich sources of Molema's chiefly lineage and the three sibling's upbringings provide a unique opportunity to study how family dynamics can mediate between notions of self and nation, and by so doing shape aspiration.

The three siblings' life histories portray complex people who suffered anxieties particular to a colonial context. Whilst the reconstruction of these lives is situated in the history

¹ T. Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men: The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1920 -64*, (London, 1995),

of race and colonial rule, this chapter considers them also as a sequence of private decisions about schooling, livelihoods and marriage that were mediated by family life. The chapter argues that though children's decisions were certainly influenced by seniority and gender, those ideas they held about the 'nation' and their family's place in it profoundly shaped their choices at critical moments in their lives. This was especially the case when sons were 'sent across' to university overseas. Sons' solitary moments of decision-making proved to be pivotal junctures in how family dynamics reproduced inherited privilege along different but overlapping positions of class and status. Rather than being 'smashed' – as has been suggested in the literature – this chapter argues that dynastic legacies like that of the Molemas were 'splintered' along different trajectories in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The family itself emerges as the primary site of social differentiation. To a significant degree, in the words of Edwards et al, '*the family functions for society.*'²

Caine argues that families organise and imagine economic, sexual and emotional lives as stable while they are in practice 'shifting, complex' and sometimes lead to conflict.³ Families produce narratives that flatten out rank but they can socialise children along a hierarchy of structured roles. Family members however do have agency and do not always do what is best for the family; individuals position themselves between obligation, personal ambition and desire. Anderson and Wortsman identify a similar logic in the strengthening of nationalist sentiment. Even rituals commemorating a cenotaph are intended to rub off the glories of individual sacrifice, presenting death for the nation as something any one of us would have done.⁴ In families too applause and reward rarely accompany self-sacrifice, whilst the fear of

² R. Edwards et al., 'The Politics of Concepts: Family and its (Putative) Replacements', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 63, 4 (2012), 731-46.

³ B. Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey Family* (New York, 2005), 5.

⁴ B. Anderson and P. Wortsman, 'Replica, Aura and Late Nationalist Imaginings', *Qui Parle*, 7, 1 (1993), 1-21. B. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, South East Asia, and the World* (London, 1998), 55-6.

shame and disapproval discourage 'prodigal' self-interest. Duty and desire however, are not necessarily experienced as polarised aims because the family's structured roles can offer stability for young people growing in tumultuous times. In a dynastic context like Molemas, where the family explicitly straddled public and private roles, fulfilling expectations bestowed the honour of being part of a legacy greater than one's self. When children did depart from the family's expectations, they tended to defend their choices as being nevertheless in line with the family's legacy of leadership and accomplishment. What it meant to be a Molema was the turf that defined generational conflict.

Whilst parents were quick to recognise and challenge new positions, shifts in understandings of work and service, love and marriage, status and belonging were subtle, and variably noticeable to the children themselves. Time polished fine shifts in positions of thought and practice, not always consciously made, into an unproblematic veneer of consistency. It thus made possible a 'home' in between multiple frontiers and contrasting loyalties, and created imaginative opportunities towards a different world. This notwithstanding, Silas' sons never turned their backs on the past but rather adapted to a world very different from that of their forebears. It was as if they walked backwards into the future clinging firmly to their recollections of the family's place in the world to shape new niches of belonging, albeit in different ways. As they stumbled across twists and turns in their own lives, they also could bump into new ideological material for alternative visions of nationhood. By drawing comparisons across and within generations, this chapter unpacks the relationship between individual selves and the potentially formative discourses and practices of various institutions. These include the programmes of political movements, chieftaincies and the projects of families themselves. This relationship is never entirely given, but is often contingent upon the multiple, fragmented and contradictory strategies of everyday living, and how these challenged

and confirmed people's sense of themselves. In this instance, family ideals mediated some of the conceptions of nationhood in the younger generation.

Silas had to support each of his children's aspirations financially during times of acute anxiety over status. Any investment into education, particularly after *Koranta's* collapse, meant a sacrificial cost to the family's purse. The integrity of the nation was the family's chief priority. Formal education was thus imbued with a deep sense of 'vocation'. Sons' university training in medicine and law overseas could immediately launch them into independent professions and lift them above the mass of missionary educated Africans, who at best achieved careers as teachers, ministers, clerks and court interpreters. Education was considered a father's gift of love, but not a mere indulgence of a child's ambition. Any sacrificial investment was a contribution to the nation's progress. The journey through formal schooling required children to hold firmly to the moral compass of their family's name, which was the strongest filter against wayward behaviour. Molemas were impressively inclined to endure hardship and sacrifice for the nation. Their strong inclinations always to preserve the nation were not dissimilar to those of the British aristocracy at the turn of the twentieth century, who wished to justify their privileged existence through a demonstration of leadership and a capacity to win wars. As Cannadine has described, young British aristocrats were slaughtered on the battlefields of the Great War and, as he argues, even though this hastened the waning of their class.⁵ Silas Molema's children were not sacrificed in this way but some of their aspirations and dreams were bludgeoned on the altar of nationhood and similarly contributed to the eventual decline of their class. Silas maintained a relatively strong bond with his children. Whilst his chiefly age mates often found the younger generation difficult to control. Silas continued to impose great control over his children and their aspirations, rarely by application

⁵ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 71-86.

of force, but because he was an imperfect and doting father who was much loved. Whilst he set the bar of expectation very high, his children determined to surpass it.

Through an analysis of the different trajectories of both sons' education and career trajectories, this chapter aims to contribute to existing interpretations of the early politics of the South African Native National Congress. Hughes' biography of the first president of the SANNC, John Dube, explores how he straddled, in her words, 'broadly based *African* nationalism' and 'narrowly based *Zulu* nationalism' as he removed from Congress politics in 1917 to garner a sizeable constituency in support of the reinstatement of the Zulu paramount in Natal.⁶ In explaining Dube's trajectory, Marks argued earlier that times were changing, but some within the 'peasantry and petty bourgeoisie that derived from it' could not cast off the traditions of Cape liberalism, nor move with a 'radicalising' Congress into the political orientations of an industrialising society. Dube thus found himself, in Marks' words, 'outflanked by the times.'⁷ Serving as an illustration of 'structural ambiguity', Marks interprets Dube as an archetype of educated Africans who had to wear different masks, not so much to mislead but to cater to the expectation of different audiences.⁸ Hughes on the other hand explains Dube's trajectory as due to a crisis in his marriage, which interfered with his responsibilities at a critical moment of Congress politics. In her interpretation, Dube had to abandon Congress and re-establish himself as a politician with a rural constituency.

Both Marks and Hughes maintain the distinction between the nationalism of the Congress movement and the splinter ethnic nationalism in Natal. The collaboration between two generations of Molema men, as representing the Mafikeng nobility, and Solomon Plaatje,

⁶ Hughes, 'Dialectical Dance', 427.

⁷ S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence*, 47, 66-73.

⁸ S. Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies* (1973), 1, 2 (1973), 162-180.

suggests a very different picture. This chapter argues that it is not entirely accurate to speak of a 'broad based *African* nationalism' in the Congress in the early twentieth century, especially during the 1910s. Although a standard narrative in other historians' work as well, this nationalism had no real ideological hegemony for educated Bechuana and some key figures in the Congress then. It took time for Congress fully to develop an anti-colonial sentiment as the ideological locomotive towards political struggle. To the extent that platforms where sentiments towards a broad based nationalism did exist, including the Industrial and Commercial Union, there is no evidence that Silas and other Bechuana notables participated. In the first two decades after Unification, especially from the vantage point of the Molema family, the Congress and the idea of 'national' political aims were loose and largely empty ideological containers. They made for a broad organisational platform for a spectrum of concerns rather than a political party with a clear ideological mission.

The chapter argues further that educated African constituencies organised Congress representatives by and large according to imagined ethnic 'nations'. These plural nations coincided with a regional geography of African reserves, and influenced the diverse content of the political agenda. National newspapers, as this chapter shows, aimed to court the favour of 'enlightened' public opinion within each nation towards one or other vision of nationhood. A newspaper showcased a nation's prestige and discussed its local struggles and vision. In fact the existence of a newspaper was one proof of a nation's existence. Certainly, in the South African Native National Congress, the word 'national' indicated collaboration across these regional and linguistic cleavages, but largely for the purpose of maintaining their separateness as successful and quintessentially 'progressive' national domains. Thus this chapter departs from Marks conclusion that

... although many of the African national leaders in the twentieth century [have] come from Natal, there has also been a strong tendency on the part of many of these same leaders to hive off and run their own show in the province, where a somewhat different political context 'set the limits within which they operated, amassed influence and acquired power'.⁹

This chapter considers such seeming 'hiving off' into provincialism as characteristic of the nature of politics amongst educated Africans, and not atypical of the politics of the 'centre' in the early Congress. Macmillan describes the young lawyer and founding member of the Congress Pixley Seme's attempts to enthrone Swazi-speakers, separated by the border between Transvaal and colonial Swaziland, with a shared national identity.¹⁰ Dube's robust and successful efforts to reinstate the Zulu paramount were a concurrent regional struggle. In the same vein, the Molemas and Plaatje aimed to utilise the Congress platform in their fierce struggle for self-determination. (Chapter 2) Political ferments and other regional dynamics in the Eastern Cape and the Rand may have brewed different ideological leanings amongst educated Africans there. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the eastern Cape's educated classes also derived from the countryside, as was the case in Bechuanaland, Natal and Swazi territories. They too placed great emphasis on showcasing cultural achievements, including newspapers and books, in an increasingly uniform regional vernacular. Some aspects of the Rand as an industrial zone are discussed below. Congressmen's regional projects, like any nationalist aspirations, were highly ambiguous and murky in their detail, but found strong legitimisation in segregationist discourse about race and cultural difference. As Beinart has argued 'segregation was in some sense a route which followed the line of least resistance' because 'it seemed to promise a limited local autonomy to Africans', which is not to suggest that this was their only political ambition.¹¹

⁹ Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L Dube of Natal', 162

¹⁰ H. Macmillan, 'A Nation Divided? The Swazi in Swaziland and the Transvaal, 1865 – 1986' in Leroy Vail (ed) *The Invention of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1991), 289-323

¹¹ W. Beinart, 'Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation: South Africa circa 1900-1950', in Beinart and Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid*, 176-88

Moreover, as Marks notes of Dube's involvement in challenges faced by the Zulu paramount's house, these provincial struggles garnered the energies of educated Africans because they combined ethnic nationalism with a 'self-consciously modernising role'. As argued in Chapter 1, Bechuana chiefs were the first in the northern hinterland to receive, through Protestantism, the ideological and other material artefacts that craft nations. Where commoners had inherited the same toolkit, there too nationhood enthused imaginations of belonging and community, even amongst the Tsonga in pre-colonial Transvaal for example.¹² In parts of the Cape and Transvaal, this educated peasantry typically disagreed with uneducated chiefs over ideas of progress.¹³ Progress was not the end in itself but its absence was thought to truncate the trajectories along which nations developed. Educated Africans sought to resist the ways in which segregation, at least as they perceived the colonial government to be implementing it, was fast turning reserves into remote peripheries and a backwater of cultural stagnation. Their own aspiration was that reserves should remain and develop as thriving national centres. What they favoured was segregation as a modernising discourse to sustain the countryside as the hub of cultural sophistication and national prestige. Modern agricultural techniques, craftsmanship and trade, school and churches, roads and dams – all of these were included as an important part of 'progressive' nationhood.

The role of chiefs in these self-consciously modern projects was often highly contentious and divisive. Platje was amongst those members of Congress who backed traditional authority, and raised constituencies in support of chiefs in new industrial zones, especially Kimberley, Klerksdorp and Johannesburg. In this regard, this chapter considers

¹² Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 152-5.

¹³ Bundy, *The Rise and Fall*, 97, 149, 210.

Plaatje's Brotherhood Movement in Kimberley as a stage to display the capacity of Bechuana and other chiefs to foster progress and respectability. Plaatje's biographer, Brian Willan, has argued that the movement 'demonstrated hope ... for an organic Christian society that effectively diffused class conflict ... with its very particular concern to infuse industrial relations with the spirit of Brotherhood'.¹⁴ However exploring the working relationship between Bechuana chiefs, including Silas, and Plaatje suggests that class conflict and especially the Rand strikes of 1918, which Willan pays much attention to, were only a serendipitous event in Plaatje's strategy. Even prior to the strikes, Plaatje had taken opportunity to exploit growing anti-imperialist sentiment amongst white settlers during the Great War to woo representatives of the imperial government, particularly the Governor-General Lord Buxton, to support Bechuana chiefs' claims. When they broke out, Plaatje cunningly used the strikes to encourage the highest echelons of the imperial government to strengthen their support for Bechuana chiefs.

In the meantime, the challenge against educated Bechuanas' attempts to consolidate their nation stemmed not only from the colonial government (Chapter 2) but also from within. They arose from the very monster their nationalist reawakening at the turn of the twentieth century was trying to tame: the growing density of educated Africans in the countryside (Chapter 1). Cobley suggests that dynastic families like the Molemas found security and status in white-collar work. However, this chapter shows that part of their experience was also disillusionment and a precarious struggle to live from hand to mouth.¹⁵ Especially in the cities, educated Bechuana lived cheek by jowl with working-classes and often were unable to achieve the status of white-collar employment they desired. The possibility of being on par or even

¹⁴ B. Willan, 'Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an Old Tram Shed: Class Relations and Social Control in a South African Town, 1918-1919', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4, 2 (1978), 195-215.

¹⁵ Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, 71.

overtaken by lower classes, including migrant labourers with consistent mine wages, wrought anxiety amongst educated Africans in a context of their rising white-collar unemployment in the 1910s and 1920s. Rather than fostering collaboration with their unskilled counterparts, such structural proximity fuelled educated Africans' disquiet over their declining status. They huddled into exclusive circles where other symbolic and cultural distinctions rather than income carried significance.

The Rand strikes of 1918 and 1919, where the Transvaal branch of the SANNK took part in strike action, were a notable exception. According to Bonner this moment 'radicalised' this segment of Congress. His interpretation influenced many historians' understanding of Congress, in the late 1910s and after, including Marks and Hughes, mentioned above. Bonner argues that the ideological and dispositional orientation of Congress, was that of a 'petty-bourgeoisie' as a class 'articulat[ing] with conviction its metropolitan values.'¹⁶ In contrast to the argument this chapter proposes, Bonner attributes urban origins to educated Africans' nationalism. He describes the Transvaal Congress's abandonment of constitutional routes of protests, especially petitions, and their adoption of strikes and other forms of mass action. He narrates also how congressmen like Pixley Seme articulated their claims and incited the working classes through a nostalgic language of chiefly power and evocations of conquered African dynasties – from Hintsa to Shaka. As Chapter 1 argues, a shift in practices does not necessarily indicate a significant shift in ideological orientations. (Chapter 1) Bonner's argument rests then on educated congressmen's reconstruction of an African past under chiefs as a new (and thus radical) language that connected them to the working-classes. But rather than a new and radical language, this chapter interprets their stance as a continuing loyalty to

¹⁶ P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress', 272.

the political imagination of the countryside. How urban settings like Kimberley could nurture such ethnic symbolisms amongst educated and other Africans will become apparent below.

There was however a different kind of radicalisation, which Bonner mentions only tangentially. Van der Walt's recent analysis focuses on the history of socialism and 'revolutionary syndicalism' in various parts of the world at this time, and how it intersected with this moment of working-class discontent in the Rand.¹⁷ He emphasises that such direct involvement of the SANNC with worker's struggles was once off and short-lived and argues that the 'moribund' nature of Congress and its 'weak structures' were stumbling blocks to other collaborative efforts. This chapter proposes an alternative explanation – that purely urban concerns typical of industrial zones had too little traction amongst educated Africans. They offered too little political fodder to Congressmen who wished to build a constituency. Concerns about 'home' had to be part of the package because the countryside was the landscape where status was paraded – from western style residences to cultural clubs and other displays of respectability, which educated classes tried to reproduce in towns. Furthermore, although they did not have everyone's confidence, chiefs could not be simply shoved aside because their rule was lent durability by segregationist policies. (Chapter 2) Any 'radicalisation' of educated Congressmen towards working-class politics was structurally limited by these expediencies.

The 1920s saw some alarm and disillusionment in the SANNC about the limited success of the previous decades' struggles, as Hertzog ascended to power. There was greater urgency to tone down the previous decade's emphasis on ethnic nations and regional foci, and conceive of a more uniform plan of action. But Silas Molema, in the closing years of his life, had not

¹⁷ L. van der Walt, 'Adding Red to the Black Atlantic? Black Revolutionary Syndicalists and the South African Native National Congress's Radicalisation, 1917-1920', presented at the Critical Studies Seminar, Rhodes University, 2012 August 31

fully made this transformation - neither had Plaatje. Moreover despite some shifts in thinking, anxieties around insecure livelihoods, stymied aspirations and declining status encouraged arguments for the retention of reserves and greater investment in their development. Reserves remained central even for members of the SANNC. In this context, there was limited opportunity even for a new generation of overseas educated Africans to develop alternatives within the Congress family, despite their exposure to pan-Africanism and other imaginations of nationhood. Ideological fractures within Silas' family were apparent during these 1920s, but were mediated by the emotive world of family life.

There were other platforms though, like the Native Advisory Council in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, in which Silas' sons participated. Through this council, chiefly rule in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was re-tailored into an attire of constitutional democracy from the 1920s. Much like in *Koranta's* vision, formal schooling, Christianity and large investments into modern agriculture were the building blocks through which Silas' sons and other chiefs laid strong foundations for Bechuana's nationhood. The British Empire's resources were critical in lending Protectorate chiefs support. The government assembled the structures of taxation through which chiefs could develop their reserves and regional agrarian towns. Chiefs could provide white-collar employment in the 'native courts', schools and other bureaucracies, as well as support the peasantry with improved livestock, seed, boring machines and so on. The Protectorate administration, ironically based in Mafikeng where the Molemas found themselves so constrained, put chiefs into the very centre of 'indirect rule' north of the border. That Botswana emerged as a nation ruled by patriarchy and the hierarchy of traditional institutions was profoundly shaped by these developments.

Notables' wives were indispensable in the birth of this nation from the 1930s. Their own husbands were largely teetotalers but part of a generation that had succumbed to a scourge of alcoholism, shortening the radius of eligible men for arranged marriages. Devout, prayerful women who threw their spiritual passions into uprooting the evils that were devastating their sons and could ensnare their husbands were one consequence. As they took up Seventh Day Adventism in the 1930s, these women significantly broke down the social barriers that severely hampered the efforts to build a chiefly Bechuana nation in the Union of South Africa. They won the hearts and loyalties of ordinary people.

i. The promise of an eldest son

In May of 1904, the Resident Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Rev L. J. Coppin and his wife, visited Mafikeng.¹⁸ Coppin was received at the Masonic Hall to loud cheers as a man presenting, in Plaatje's words, 'a new thing', and 'very strange', and was congratulated for leading a 'church religious denomination managed exclusively by coloured people' without European supervision. Coppin was one of the African-American evangelists who scoured the South African countryside for promising young people to spread the message of 'upliftment', especially those from respectable missionary-educated families. The evangelists helped to enrol some of the students at colleges in America. Educated Africans were already feeling hamstrung by limited opportunities at available mission institutions at home. As one headman commented to the South African Native Affairs Commission in 1904, there were already 'too many of the school teachers and they cannot get work.'¹⁹ America was thought to offer a 'wider education'. Over one hundred and fifty Africans émigrés were

¹⁸ *Koranta*, May 1904 date unclear.

¹⁹ Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 272.

absorbed into the American educational system between 1894 and 1914. In March of 1904 alone, a total of eighteen Africans passed through Cape Town en route to America.²⁰ Stephen Lefenya's grandson, George Montsioa, left for America in 1902.²¹ About half of such Africans were offered support by the AME church, and many ended up at Wilberforce University in Ohio, including Charlotte Manye, as the first African woman to hold a university degree in South Africa.²² On 7 July, 1904 Sebopioa Molema too left for Wilberforce. Coppin graciously received him in Philadelphia early in August, and arranged for him to start his preparatory studies in law.²³

Silas wrote a warm and good-humoured note of thanks to Coppin, but on behalf of Joshua, his older brother and Sebopioa's biological parent. (Chapter 1) Joshua, the note explained, was grateful but reported being only 'good enough to bask in the sun and let his beard grow'.²⁴ Joshua perceived his son's present experiences – from the first glimpses of the New World's architecture to university curricular – as well beyond his grasp. Joshua accepted his position as the most senior Molema. He was a fervent believer and a keen advocate for education. He made a few contributions to Sechuana newspapers, refering to biblical texts to support his opinion.²⁵ Plaatje considered him 'that deep thinker from whose lips I have often drawn the wisest council of my life.'²⁶ Nevertheless Joshua did not consider himself to be of Plaatje's times, or even those of his younger son. He had adopted a stance of disengagement with a rapidly changing world, only sticking to the chiefly roles he had inherited. He did not shy away from chiefly power, but invested very minimally into the new aspirations of wealth

²⁰ J. .Campbell, 'The Seed You Sow in South Africa: South African Students in the United States', additional seminar paper prepared for the University of the Witwatersrand's Institute for Social Research, undated.

²¹ *Koranta*, 5 November 1902 Sechuana.

²² Campbell, 'The Seed You Sow in South Africa',.

²³ L. Coppin to S. T. Molema, A979Aa2.22; and S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 6 July 1904, all in A979Ac1 unless noted otherwise;

²⁴ S.J. Molema to L.Coppin, undated draft, A979Ca11, c. 1903.

²⁵ *Koranta*, 15 November 1902.

²⁶ S. Plaatje to S.M. Molema, 25 August 1920, A979Da62.

and status. His purchases at European-owned stores in town were minimal, kept to what had become the bare essentials of everyday life - tea, sugar and grain when needed. (Chapter 1) Neither was Joshua enterprising. There is no evidence that he ever attempted to set up a wagon business, for instance.

Joshua was thoroughly trusting of his brother's judgement, and ill acquainted with the handling of even rudimentary transactions of promissory notes and contract agreements. Once Joshua signed as his brother's witness without the faintest idea of what the transaction with a Jewish trader entailed. After Silas allegedly defaulted on the bond, Joshua appeared before the court a naïve and bewildered witness.²⁷ Even in matters of marriage and his intimate life, he resigned himself to the 'better' judgement of others, lest he stirred tension and disagreement. When his children encouraged him to remarry after their mother's death, he insisted that they scout for a suitable companion. He implored Sebopioa to consult the family, and especially 'your father Silas. T. Molema.'²⁸ He thought his own parental role required supplementing if Sebopioa was to be assisted to venture further into the world. He thus relinquished control over Sebopioa. The young man learnt to walk with a cane to compensate for the disability of his left foot, whilst resting the entire expectation of fatherly love and guidance on his uncle's shoulders. Sebopioa became entangled in the dilemmas of plural filial attachments very early on.

Sebopioa often found himself a little anxious about cultivating a sense of belonging to both of 'the fathers' – his term for Joshua and Silas as a parental pair. He was particularly concerned for affirmation and acceptance into Silas' home, not merely as a nephew but a son.

²⁷ Gordon versus Molema, CSC 2/1/1/801 84.

²⁸ J. Molema to S.J. Molema, included in S. T Molema to S. J, Molema, 1 October 1917.

Whilst Silas paid primarily for fees and books of a handful of his nieces and nephews, he took responsibility for all of Sebopioa's needs. Sebopioa's appearances in *Koranta* reflect public consent that his achievements and distinction were indeed inherited from Silas. (Chapter 1) Neither public sanction nor Silas' deep affection however were always sufficient to provide Sebopioa with a secure sense of knowing himself as Silas' son. He placed the burden of proof upon himself and laboured to mould himself into a dutiful and devoted son. This was so even at Lovedale where he and Silas' daughter Seleje were resident. Silas made arrangements for Seleje to be accompanied to Cape Town for Christmas holidays shortly after the siege of Mafikeng, but had issued the school with no instructions for Sebopioa, perhaps leaving that to Joshua's discretion.²⁹ But Joshua had surrendered decisions to do with Sebopioa's schooling to his brother. Sebopioa took the blame for the lack of organisation, and used the incident to reassure himself of his belonging to Silas as a son.

*My sister [Seleje] asked me to write to you and request to come home (for our holidays). I was afraid many times [but] I discovered that a child must ask his father (which is reasonable)*³⁰

On his way to America in 1904, Sebopioa visited Zonnebloem College in Cape Town whilst awaiting to board his ship. He was little impressed with the school because 'the general health of the place is bad for upcountry people'.³¹ His alma mater, Lovedale, upheld ranks of distinction. Wealthier children enjoyed more colourful breakfasts with eggs, jam and coffee for example, whilst their less affluent peers had to make do with porridge, bread and tea. At Zonnebloem on the other hand young people from mixed backgrounds were thrown together. Sebopioa was also ill at ease with the city, and thought being 'close to town [,] one was liable

²⁹ Lovedale Missionary Institute to S. T Molema, 17 & 23 November 1900, A979Aa3.

³⁰ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 1900 November undated, A979Aa2 (italics in Sechuana).

³¹ S. J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 6 July 1904.

to get bad companies'.³² His discomfort with liquor, 'coloured boys' and Zonnebloem's unpolished English reflected his poor impression of large cities as degenerate and putrid – a view shaped by the wider perceptions of the milieu from which he came. Christian families worried about moulding influences that could lead children astray when they were far from home. Liquor and inappropriate sexual behaviour were considered the most serious vices.³³ He urged that his younger brother Modiri be sent rather to Lovedale.

Upon arrival, Sebopioa described Wilberforce as 'this great negro University where young men from different parts of the globe gather for the cause of higher and sound education.' He also sent an account of his journey to *Koranta* so it may 'be of interest to some people who are pleased with the prosperity of human beings.'³⁴ In that year, the largest contingent of black South Africans, twenty in all, were registered at Wilberforce.³⁵ All of them had a feeling that 'providential destiny' had brought them to America so that they might lead their continent into a prosperous future. In 1906 Sebopioa graduated from his preparatory training, and joined the collegiate division of the university. He was one of only three black South Africans that did not opt for qualifications in education and theology.³⁶ Whatever the qualification, returning home meant a laudatory citing in the African press and elevated status. But Wilberforce's glow was one of early twilight. W.E. du Bois identified the signs of decline as soon as he took up a teaching post at the university in 1894.³⁷ The university's financial resources had dwindled, and the annual £3,500 it received from the AME was not sufficient to offer an education that matched Wilberforce's reputation. For example, the library was only

³² Ibid.,

³³ D. Gaitskell, 'Wailing for Purity: Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters, 1912-1940,' in Marks and Rathbone, (eds.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, 338-57.

³⁴ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 18 October 1904.

³⁵ Campbell, 'The Seed you Sow in South Africa'.

³⁶ Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 268.

³⁷ W.E. B du Bois., 'The Future of Wilberforce', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 9, 4, (1940), 553-70.

established in 1903. Also the large majority of students were enrolled in the preparatory and not the collegiate division and until 1939 its bachelor's degree was not recognised by white institutions in the United States. 'In Europe', Du Bois commented in 1940, 'such an institution would not be allowed to confer degrees at all.'³⁸ Nevertheless its place in America's post-bellum history, the support of its neighbouring black American middle-class, and the gravitas and commitment of its teachers and administrators made Wilberforce a formidable socialising institution. The daily routine, as in many other 'black colleges', was monastic and gruelling.³⁹ The overall effect was a self-conscious student body, committed to a philosophy of upliftment, especially of the 'dark continent'.

Sebopioa returned home before completing his studies. It is possible that news of Wilberforce's failure to issue accredited qualifications may have reached home shores and besides, American trained lawyers could not practice in South Africa. Nevertheless, a qualification from America was a stepping stone to other institutions of higher learning in Britain, as exemplified by the educational trajectories of Sebopioa's cousin, George Montsioa and also Pixely Seme, both British trained lawyers whose first qualifications were from American institutions. Furthermore, an overseas degree acted as a status-driven pulley out of the growing mass of missionary educated Africans at home. It proffered young noblemen with the sense of distinction they wished to uphold. Even if Wilberforce's was his only qualification, the illustrious careers of other Wilberforce graduates, including Charlotte Manye and her husband, would have provided every incentive for Sebopioa to continue. There are suggestions in the correspondence that Sebopioa's funds were dwindling, considering his visit to the Freedmen's Aid Society 'several times' in 1909.⁴⁰ But he raised funds to support himself in

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ M. Little, 'The Extra-curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868-1940, *Journal of Negro History*, 65, 1 (1980) 135-48.

⁴⁰ Freedmen's Aid Society to S. J. Molema, 29 October 1909, SPA.

America by entertaining crowds as ‘a pleasing speaker, a good singer’ who ‘plays music thru (sic) the nose’. He gave at least two lectures in 1910. One was described as ‘an unusual and sensational lecture’ on ‘The Africans and their Customs’, during which he told an audience at a Baptist Church about ‘how many wives they marry in Africa and about the honeymoon.’⁴¹ A similar lecture was delivered a few months later at a Presbyterian Young People’s Society’s programme. In the same year he had found work at an attorney’s firm, I.L. Purcell, in Jacksonville, Florida, but remained enrolled at the university.⁴²

Sebopioa returned to Mafikeng not due to financial difficulties, but because he received a homeward call. His family had become the frontline in Barolong’s political battles. His decision to discontinue his studies in 1910 was, in his words, ‘pursuant to the decision of fathers Joshua, Silas, Messrs. Plaatje and Mbelle’. Isaiah Bud’Mbelle was Plaatje’s brother-in-law, and the first African to sit the Cape Civil Service examination.⁴³ In October of that year Sebopioa prepared ‘to suspend my law studies in America and proceed to England’.⁴⁴ It had been arranged that he would take up work in a London law firm. Though serving articles in England could eventually open doors to further education in England, the ‘fathers’ knew that they were in no position to fund such aspirations. Sebopioa’s own impulse to follow this deeply destabilising decision was motivated by an instinct to reaffirm his filial ties to Silas, especially at a time when his expectations of fatherly affection were disappointed. As other members of the family and close friends were frustratingly discovering, Silas had grown more and more absorbed in his work. He rarely responded to personal letters unless the circumstances were exceptional. Even business correspondence was typically attended to very belatedly. The collapse of *Koranta* and his financial woes seem to have pushed him towards withdrawal.

⁴¹ Advertisement, 08 March 1910, SPA.

⁴² See address on S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 18 October 1910.

⁴³ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 35.

⁴⁴ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 18 October 1910.

Throughout his stay in America, Silas had not written a single word to Sebopioa. Discouraged, the younger man stopped writing early on after his arrival in America. Only Joshua had consistently corresponded with 'their' son. For six years, all there was in Sebopioa's relationship to Silas was a 'long and continued silence'. The letter that persuaded him to abandon his degree was the first letter Silas had written in six years. This same letter also presented the younger man with an opportunity to prove his unchanging love and devotion, which in his view was expected of a son.

As stated in your letter, I could not help but have all sorts of strange feelings, when failing to hear from you, but was never tempted to entertain the idea that father loved me the less by reason of such long and continuous silence. I am free to admit that as a son, I feel clear in my conscience that I have played my part and did all that was and is my duty to do by writing to you. Once I was faced to feel that I had become an unknown quantity in my father's own house ... Indeed this is enough to cause one to have perturbation of mind, but my love to parents has not been changed nor even shaken.

Also, in the legacy of chiefly power and 'progress', Sebopioa was heir. His sense that the 'fathers' intended to pass on a dynastic baton to him reassured him that abandoning his studies was merely a temporary setback. Molemas, in his view, were born to succeed. He held firmly to the narrative that had been so pervasive in *Koranta* when he left home in order to ease himself into his father's shoes.

My aim in life is a very high one, in short my ideals are as high as the stars and shall never stop until I have accomplished all that is possible ...The sons of Molema should be leaders among the Bechuana just as our grandfather was the instigator of civilisation to the Barolong, so his grandchildren should perfect those fundamental principles that he had ... I hope you will keep on improving the conditions of our people till we shall come, when we, young people, with all the advantages before us hope to do better and start where you have left.

Sebopioa had grown up in the late nineteenth century, during the height of his family's affluence and political power. In America he was situated at too great a distance to appreciate its decline. He also had no exposure to the tone of post-war reconstruction in South Africa, which was particularly inimical to the ambitions of Africans such as himself. Whilst the motivations of 'the fathers' remain unclear, a London firm could potentially connect Sebopioa to networks in the British legal system, and also provide informal support and guidance in the court battles that embroiled the chieftaincy. Unbeknown to Silas by the time he settled to write to his son, a decision had already been taken in the office of the Prime Minister of the Union that Sebopioa would not be granted permission to work in Britain. This followed a damaging character report of the Molemas as a family by N. C. Welsh, the Resident Magistrate of Mafikeng. Joshua had requested that Welsh write a character report for Sebopioa. Without such a mandatory report, an African could not be permitted to gain white-collar employment, not least in Britain. Considering the chieftaincy's protracted resistance to Dog Tax, Welsh wrote about 'all the pretentious claims which the Barolong have from time to time presented to the Government'.⁴⁵ It was only as he alighted in England that Sebopioa realised that his hopes were disappointed. By then, there was little else to do, having already left his work and suspended his studies, but return to Mafikeng.

News of Sebopioa's homecoming was reported in *Tsala ea Bechuana*, another bilingual weekly in Sechuana and English that Plaatje was editing in Kimberley. The first number of *Tsala ea Bechuana* appeared on 18 June 1910. Plaatje's biographer, Willan, was unable to trace how *Tsala* and the idea to launch it came into existence. He only identified that much of its initial capital came from educated and landowning Seleka-Barolong notables in Thaba

⁴⁵ W. Welsh to E. Dower, 27 July 1910; E. Dower to L. Botha 6 August 1910, SAB GG 1182, 28/1-28/28

Nchu, including erstwhile *Koranta* enthusiast, Rev. J. Goronyane.⁴⁶ (Chapter 1) Although educated Bechuana certainly desired to have a newspaper, the plan to launch *Tsala* came from elsewhere. Its source illuminates influential educated Africans' commitment to the ideology of plural ethnic nationalisms. In February 1910, the editor of *Imvo*, Tengo Jabavu, wrote to Silas, that he was 'very sorry to see that in today's great matters, of the unification of all the colonies of South Africa, Bechuana are the only nation without an organ of nationhood (*kodu ea bomorafe*).' He offered that 25 shares of *Imvo* could be sold to any ten Bechuana men enthused with 'the spirit of Becoana's (sic) own nationhood.' In that way, he suggested to Silas, 'Becoana too would have a voice, like the Xhosa, the Zulu, Basotho and whites.'⁴⁷ Silas must have communicated the idea to his kinsmen in Thaba 'Nchu and Plaatje because, as Willan notes, Jabavu and Co. were the first registered proprietors of the new newspaper. Shortly thereafter, Thaba 'Nchu's notables completely financed the newspaper.⁴⁸

The tone that celebrated Sebopioa's homecoming in *Tsala* at the beginning of 1911 was noticeably different from the typical laudations that welcomed African graduates home. News of both Seme and Montsioa's qualifications and admission to the bar were reported on the same page as the insert of Sebopioa's return. Though proud, *Tsala* reported only that Sebopioa had 'studied considerably', had travelled throughout the United States, and was 'like a follower a Jesus Christ.' After seven years, 'the cattle had returned to the kraal, and milking pails shall overflow.' According to the newspaper, he was much impressed by England, and planned to return there to further his studies.⁴⁹ Sebopioa continued to hold his professional ambitions close to heart, enmeshed as they were, even in his own mind, to the dreams of 'the fathers'. Through his wife, Emang, (Chapter 2) Sebopioa acquired yet another father. His father-in-law,

⁴⁶ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 143.

⁴⁷ T. Jabavu to S. T. Molema, 5 February 1910, A979Cc9. Sechuana.

⁴⁸ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 144.

⁴⁹ *Tsala*, 14 January 1911.

Lekoko Marumoloa was an elderly regent of minimal education who depended on his educated son-in-law. Arranging fee payments for Lekoko's son, Dick at Healdtown and even basic communication with him, were some of the new responsibilities Sebopioa took on.⁵⁰ Rather than seeking white-collar employment immediately upon arrival, Sebopioa took on all the administrative functions of the chieftaincy as National Secretary.

His return home coincided with the fourth year of acute food shortage in the reserve. Exactly a year before his arrival, the need for mine wages in the reserve was so great that Chief Lekoko asked the Resident Magistrate to speak to the General Manager of De Beers to employ his men. The response was that 'at present they have more natives than they can find work for.'⁵¹ Sebopioa wrote numerous petitions to the government to lessen the burden of taxation, including licenses to gather firewood in specified forests and woodlands. Women were charged at least six shillings a bundle.⁵² Tax was also extracted in the form of labour. Lekoko was forced to provide men to fence railway tracks, and maintain any such infrastructure going through the reserve.⁵³ From mid-1913, even the estates of households of deceased and aged persons, which were all along struck off the Hut Tax register, were taxed. Writing again to the Resident Magistrate on behalf of the paramount, Sebopioa described how such regulation caused 'such unrest among my people'.⁵⁴

Whilst the Union government was intent on establishing the reserve as a 'tribal' domain, Sebopioa was keen to establish the chieftaincy as an efficient bureaucracy, and an active participant in the politics of the Union. In November 1912 the Minister of Railways,

⁵⁰ S.J. Molema (for Lekoko) to Healdtown and D. Montsioa, 1914 to 1915, A979Bd1.

⁵¹ N. Welsh to L.Marumoloa, 24 January 1910, SPA.

⁵² SJ Molema for L.Marumoloa to N. Welsh, 22 November 1911, A979Bd1.

⁵³ N.Welsh to L.Marumoloa, 27 December 1912, SPA.

⁵⁴ S.J. Molema for L.Marumoloa to R. Lloyd, 30 April 1913, SPA.

Henry Burton, was invited to open a railway line in Mafikeng. When the Native Affairs Department intentionally side-lined the chieftaincy from any involvement in the visit, Sebopioa prepared the chieftaincy to stage a dramatic coup of the event. Afterwards *Tsala* congratulated the chieftaincy's bold action and reported that 'though their chief had not been officially notified, still as sensible people they forced their way to the platform to greet the Hon. Minister, for they thought it their duty as humble members of the British Nation to show some signs of courtesy to a Cabinet Minister.'⁵⁵ Embarrassed officials, anxious to restore order to the interrupted proceedings, hastingly agreed that Chief Lekoko would be allowed an appointment with Burton at the courthouse the following Monday. This bought the nobility what they considered priceless minutes with a minister they considered a 'friend of the natives' as the hearing of their case in the Supreme Court in Cape Town drew near. (Chapter 2) Afterwards, Sebopioa showed Burton around certain improvements in the *stadt*. He also read a speech that described how the railway line 'connects our small town with the gold-fields of Transvaal and the metropolis of the Union of South Africa', thus communicating clearly that Barolong were available for labour. Sebopioa described Mafikeng as 'our little town' which was turning into a 'Junction City', and 'the Mafeking market will be much improved.'⁵⁶

The protracted court battle against Dog Tax absorbed much of Sebopioa's energies during these first years home. In May of 1912, he travelled with Plaatje and Lekoko's brother, Paul Montsioa, as a member of a deputation 'to discuss a matter about collection of Dog Tax and other matters in the Native Reserve' with cabinet ministers.⁵⁷ The financial cost of the protracted court dispute was becoming prohibitive, whilst numerous petitions to the government failed to curb the NAD's segregationist efforts in Mafikeng. (Chapter 2) But these

⁵⁵ Copy of article, *Tsala*, 1912 November undated A979Bd1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁷ SJ Molema for L.Marumoloa to H. Burton, 08 May 1912, SPA.

difficulties coincided with unparalleled political collaboration between influential and educated African leaders in the Union. In March of 1910, Silas Molema was elected as vice-president of the South African Native Convention, as described in Chapter 2. Pixley Seme, George Montsioa, Richard Msimang and Alfred Mangena were the four young attorneys behind the founding of the South African Native National Congress in 1912. As noted above, their return from studying in Britain overlapped with Sebopioa's homecoming. According to Seme, Congress was motivated by 'a general desire for progress, and co-operation.'⁵⁸ Given the existence of the Convention, the 'national congress' seems a notion borrowed by these young returnees from ideas, experiences and people they encountered in Europe.⁵⁹ Seme wrote that the Congress rejected 'all those things which poison the springs of our national life'. He denounced ethnic feuds as 'divisions' and 'jealousies' that stifled progress and announced that 'We are one people'. The Congress would be 'the only effective means whereby [we] shall be able to make [our] grievances properly known and considered both by the government and by the people of South Africa at large.'

The Congress was constituted of a House of chiefs (elected from at least three provinces and all the Protectorates), and a larger house of ordinary members.⁶⁰ Educated chiefs like Silas were Seme's first port of call. Perhaps Sebopioa would not have relegated himself to the backbenches of the SANNC had he also been an accomplished member of the bar. His role was in the reserve and complemented Plaatje's function as a representative of the Bechuana nobility on the platforms of national politics. Plaatje had become both national General Secretary of Congress, and editor of *Tsala ea Bechuana*. Sebopioa and Plaatje did not have a formal working relationship, but it was understood that each was doing his part for the greater

⁵⁸*Tsala*, 11 October 1911.

⁵⁹ See D. Killingray, 'Significant Black South Africans in Britain before 1912: Pan-African Organisations and the Emergence of South Africa's First Black Lawyers', *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 3 (2012), 393-417.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*,

benefit of Bechuana. As the National Secretary of the Tshidi-Barolong in Mafikeng, Sebopioa was in touch with surrounding nodes of chiefly power. He had also taken all the administrative duties in the chieftaincy upon himself. Plaatje could be relied upon to publish the national newspaper, represent the chieftaincy's interests through the Congress platform, and direct activities which could boost Bechuana's national prestige and secure their interests. An energetic young notable like Sebopioa could rejuvenate the tired institutions of chiefly power in the reserve, and coordinate other chiefs' participation in the greater goal, and especially in the campaigns Plaatje organised.

While the Sechuana-speaking elite had been a significant nexus of national politics, there were signs that they were lagging in relation to regional activity. In June of 1911, *Tsala* was already teetering towards financial collapse. Rev Goronyane pleaded with Silas to pour 'your heart and soul in the work' and collect subscriptions, 'as the only solution to relieve us from the present embarrassment.'⁶¹ On the Congress platform, Bechuana's performance was also tardy and they perceived themselves to be carried on the shoulders of other nations. In April 1912, after Congress sent its first deputation to the Minister of Native Affairs, John Dube recognised Plaatje as Chief Lekoko's 'special representative' in the Congress. Bechunas' failure to pay Plaatje's fares meant Dube had to part with £21 to cover Plaatje's costs. Plaatje was immensely worried that on both fronts – the affairs of Congress and the distribution of a newspaper – Bechuana were becoming a laughing stock. The trip to Cape Town for example, had eventually turned into a three month absence from his family as he tried to raise funds for the newspaper. He confided to Silas how 'it is hard to go and arrive there [home] after three months without a penny', adding that 'it would not be so shameful if the train money had been

⁶¹J. Goronyane to S.T. Molema, 05 June 1911, A979Aa3.6.2.

paid for.’⁶² It was into this world of little or no pay, long working hours, and sacrificial service to a reputedly unappreciative nation that Seboipoa poured the peak of his youthful energies.⁶³

He travelled to Cape Town, Lovedale, Middledrift and King Williamstown as early as the spring of 1911 seemingly as the new face of Mafikeng’s chieftaincy.⁶⁴ He was the one tasked with the responsibility to tell the Protectorate chiefs to attend the launch of Congress, or send representatives to Johannesburg.⁶⁵ There were others who continued to nurture the vision of Bechuana’s progress and nationhood. A continuing thread of *Koranta*’s narrative about this still appeared in its successor, *Tsala*, though the volume of contributors was significantly reduced. A reader, Piet Fomatsohle in Mafikeng, lamented young Bechuana’s apathy in the project of nationhood. He criticised the younger generations’ contributions to *Tsala* about sport and concerts. In his view, the youth had no regard for the ‘progress of the nation’. He also urged them towards industrial works, including the manufacture of wagons, carpentry and shoemaking. More importantly he reminded them of what it meant to be what *Tsala ea Bechuana* as represented in its translation as ‘friend of Bechuana’:

Our friends, Barolong, Batlhaping, Bakoena, Bakgatla, Batlokoa, Balete, Bahurutse, Bamangoato, pay attention to keep your paper *Tsala ea Bechuana*. Know that when it is said *Tsala ea Bechuana*, it is meant the peoples (*dichaba*) whose names I have written; keep your paper so that it does not die. Welcome it and pay for it as it is printed with money and show nations (*merafe*) that yes, you are paying it attention.⁶⁶

When *Tsala* collapsed in the latter half of 1912, it was the urban periphery that put hands together to set up another newspaper, demonstrating educated elites’ understanding of

⁶² S. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 9 August 1912, A979Da19.

⁶³ S. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, 14 September 1912, A979Da21.

⁶⁴ *Tsala*, 23 September 1911, Sechuana

⁶⁵ S. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, undated c. 1912, A979Da23.

⁶⁶ *Tsala*, 13 January 1912. Sechuana

national collaboration and unity. Zulu-speaking communities in various urban districts, especially Kimberley, collected money for Bechuana to purchase a printing machine. Plaatje was disheartened about Bechuana's own apathy. Of 'the many things that pain me', Plaatje wrote to Silas, 'what tore my heart apart was when Matebele [Zulu-speakers] bought us a machine for £200 while Bechoana cannot help with even small monies.'⁶⁷ That he was toiling for the nation, whilst 'Bechoana say nothing about nothing', he said, 'makes me feel sometimes that there is no good in all this striving for the rights of the Bechoana.' As Plaatje explained, the new *Tsala ea Batho* was to be a publication in Sechuana, Sepedi and English. 'It is considered', he said, 'as a sort of union between Barolong and Bapedi'. The launch of the paper was celebrated through a countrywide concert scheme in Krugersdorp, Nancefield, Klerksdorp, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Kimberley. These musical events had also raised funds to launch the paper. Plaatje pleaded with Silas to implore the paramount that 'Barolong must not lag behind and appear as if they are reluctant to collaborate [with the result] that collaboration is based on the Zulus.'⁶⁸

At this very moment, severe food shortage wrought misery across Bechuana's northern hinterlands. In the winter of 1912, even notables of Silas' stature had no grain. The rural population could not rely on their chiefs for provision or help. Plaatje was desperate for support from below, but there was disconnectedness between the focus of 'national' politics and precarious livelihoods in the countryside. It is not surprising that letters to *Tsala* about nationhood at this time were written by Bechuana situated in regions outside Bechuanaland or 'outsiders'. One E. Tshongwana, identifying himself as Mpondo and living in Alice in the Eastern Cape, was thoroughly disturbed by the poor quality of the Education Department's

⁶⁷ S.Plaatje to S.T. Molema, 8 August 1912, A 979 Da19. Sechuana

⁶⁸ S.Plaatje to S.T. Molema, 14 August 1912, A 979 Da20. Sechuana

matriculation paper for Sechuana. He wrote a complaint to *Tsala* in February of 1912. Plaatje's response was to chastise Bechuana for apathy. 'Bechuana ought to be ashamed of themselves', he said, 'because the language is theirs and the paper is theirs, but it is the Zulu who say something'. He added that 'we do not know when Bechuana will stir from their great sleep.'⁶⁹ Whereas the rhetoric of progress and improvement had been more inspiring a decade before, now it seemed desperate.

Sebopioa, situated in the reserve was also struggling to make ends meet. Like Plaatje, his meagre pay from the chieftaincy's coffers was grossly irregular. Poverty in the reserve had great potential to mobilise the ordinary educated and uneducated alike, especially given the imposition of a Dog Tax. Yet these were not the main concerns articulated by the chieftaincy. Rather, under Sebopioa's efficient capacity, the chieftaincy advised clamping down on migration out and into Mafikeng. Sebopioa wrote numerous memoranda to the Resident Magistrate concerning the 'removal of loiterers from the streets.'⁷⁰ The control of women in particular posed considerable challenges in the reserve. In 1913, one woman so desperately wished to leave the reserve that she pretended to be sick for three months. According to Sebopioa, the woman 'acted as a lunatic and was confined to her bed and helpless', only to escape one day whilst everyone was gone to church.⁷¹ Upon request by the chieftaincy, the Resident Magistrate made his police force available to patrol the reserve, 'compelling able bodied males to seek proper employment.'⁷² The chieftaincy collaborated fully with the colonial government against 'the loafing and loitering', but also against displaced Africans, squatting on any vacant plots in the reserve. Sebopioa complained that 'long since we have complained to the government about this class of persons who are under nobody's

⁶⁹*Tsala*, 24 February 1912. Sechuana

⁷⁰ S.J. Molema for L. Marumoloa to R. Lloyd, 13 October 1913, SPA.

⁷¹ S.J. Molema for L. Montsioa, to N. Welsh, 10 March 1913, SPA.

⁷² S.J. Molema for L. Montsioa, to N. Welsh, 13 October 1913, SPA.

jurisdiction.⁷³ To ignite the passions of national collaboration, Sebopioa turned rather to a narrowing circle of influential chiefs. But the very terms of segregation Sebopioa and his ‘fathers’ opposed reassured other chiefs of their hold on power (Chapter 2).

Sebopioa organised petitions, liaised with lawyers, met with cabinet ministers in Cape Town, and acted as a translator in court. His need to carve a name for himself as a bright star in his own generation pulled him in this direction. From a very young age his thoughts of himself were quintessentially regal, and collaboration with ordinary people on the ground heightened his own anxieties around status and achievement. These anxieties plagued educated classes, especially a nobility swimming against a tide of genteel poverty. Like Plaatje, Sebopioa aimed to bolster Bechuanas’ prestige through cultural revival, including music. He was, at least according to oral testimony, an accomplished trumpeter.⁷⁴ In February of 1913, he circulated a plea for donations to purchase four trumpets ‘before the African chiefs of South Africa’

... so that Mr SJ Molema can teach four boys to worship God through them. As for Mr Sebopioa J Molema, he makes music with the trumpet at church, and now many people attend sermons and the works of God. The white nations praise God with their own tunes, let us help one another in the work of God. We trust that God will bless one who gives and offers, doing so with a willing heart ... We appreciate any and every gift that you will offer to congregation and may God bless you and your whole house and all of your nations.⁷⁵

Nothing seems to have come out of this fundraising plan. In the middle of that year, the Native Land Act of 1913 gave the Native Affairs Department an upper hand in the legal challenge to Dog Tax. (Chapter 2) The disillusionment of his family’s limitations against the forces of the times jarred Sebopioa’s imagination of Molemas as pioneering and unconquerable. He was

⁷³ S.J. Molema for L Montsioa to H.J Frost, 21 January 1915, A979Bd1.

⁷⁴ Interview, Mrs Mercy Molema, August 2012, Mafikeng.

⁷⁵ Copy S.J.Molema, SPA.

crushed and had little to fall back on. He suffered painful feelings of time (and a future) irredeemably lost without any gains to himself whatsoever, not even a salary. He confronted 'the fathers' in December of 1913 that 'the Barolong are a strange nation.' How could the chieftaincy claim to have no money to pay him whilst 'lots of money has passed from my hands to be sent to your lawyers'? He presented that he had been 'working for the Barolong as a nation', for 'the Chief of Barolong' and for 'my fathers as a son.' He begged to 'resign and work as a member of Barolong, as fathers, brothers and others are doing, before you make me resign on account of being insolvent.'⁷⁶ Although he said nothing about it directly, the fact that Modiri had completed his studies at Lovedale but remained in Cape Town to earn a living added salt to the wound. Although it seems he had initially been promised around £7 per month, it was impossible for the chieftaincy to guarantee secure monthly payments. At the meeting, the elders could only pledge to try harder. He had however been appointed as chief of Signal Hill west of the reserve. It was a reward from the fathers, but also their strategy to defend this stretch of farmlands on the northern outskirts of the reserve against Afrikaners.⁷⁷

In February of 1914, Plaatje was selected as a member of an SANNC's deputation to England, which aimed to oppose the Natives Land Act of 1913.⁷⁸ Plaatje had traversed the countryside, collecting testimonies of men and women displaced by the Act. His own eviction from his land in Mafikeng brought him closer to the pariahs he described. (Chapter 2) Published as his *Native Life in South Africa* in 1916 in England, these narratives were intended to appeal to British public opinion, and thus influence the imperial government to repeal the Act.⁷⁹ If the appeal was successful the court case over Dog Tax could be reopened. This possibility returned new hope to the chieftaincy, and to Sebopioa. He threw his energies unreservedly into

⁷⁶ Undated minutes of *kgotla*, December 1913, SAP. Sechuana

⁷⁷ *Tsala*, 20 June 1914. Sechuana

⁷⁸ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 169.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

mobilising support for Plaatje's trip. In addition to opposing the Act the chieftaincy wanted Plaatje to confirm the autonomy it still enjoyed in the Protectorate. Barolong Farms had not been proclaimed a reserve, but the nobility's was anxious that the farmlands were nonetheless defined as 'crown lands'. On the eve of Plaatje's departure, Sebopioa wrote to him that, 'you are now clothed with all the power to fully represent the Barolong nation in England, and we hope the God of your fathers will crown your work with success.'⁸⁰ Plaatje was tasked to remind the Secretary of State for the Colonies of Mafikeng's special conditions of annexation, and to query the attachment of 'crown lands, which name is not known' to Barolong Farms. Plaatje was also to present these concerns to the Aborigines Protection Society, the Native Races Committee, the Wesleyan Missionary Society and 'all the Christian people in England.'⁸¹

The idea had been to present a number of petitions to the Secretary of the Colonies from a united front of Bechuana Protectorate chiefs, but Sebopioa found 'no responsible person to sign the names of Sechele and Seepapitso', the chiefs of Bakwena and Bangoaketse.⁸² Apart from the Thaba 'Nchu nobility, who prepared a detailed petition around the crisis of land in their reserve, other Bechuana chiefs in the Union do not seem to have forwarded any of their own particular concerns. In the meantime, erstwhile supporters of educated chiefs in Mafikeng were disillusioned, and besides they had not been invited to participate. No sooner had Plaatje boarded the ship to England than an educated Mochuana in Mafikeng sent numerous criticisms of chiefly rule to *Tsala ea Batho* under a pseudonym. Setumo's angst was against the imposition of tribal levies on the population to pay for the legal costs of the campaign against Dog Tax. 'Today money is required', he wrote, 'each man a beast to pay for the Court of the

⁸⁰ SJ Molema to S.T. Molema, 11 May 1914, A979Da38.

⁸¹Ibid.,

⁸²Ibid.,

Dogs.’⁸³ He continued that ‘if Barolong had simply made a Court of the Nation like the Zulus in the Transkei, there would have been no Dog Tax.’⁸⁴ He suggested that, ‘Barolong should have made for themselves roads and other works in their land, and they would have been the owners of such works, and their own managers’. Setumo was implying, and without much subtlety, that the resistance to Dog Tax protected Mafikeng’s notables’ interests. Educated chiefs, so highly praised by educated classes a decade before, were being described as the ‘dogs’ devouring the nation.

Setumo’s proposition was that Barolong chiefs ought to have poured that money and energy into education and employment, in other words, they should have invested in livelihoods and aspiration. Even a woman, Setumo wrote, ‘Queen of the Swazi nation’ had purchased a printing press for *Abantu-Batho*. As he suggested in another letter ‘a newspaper is the mouth and representative of black nations’, and ‘chiefs are the newspapers of the black nations’. In his view, Bechuana chiefs, whom he considered ‘wealthy with cattle and money’, had failed in the quest to bring not only progress, but opportunity. He pointed to the ‘teachers with certificates in full’ who were living unemployed ‘in the big villages of the nations of Bechuana’. He counted ten. ‘How shocking!’ he exclaimed.

The fault lies with the chiefs of the Bechuana who care nothing for education. If it were not for white missionaries there would have been no school. We are thankful to the white missionaries for forcing chiefs to build the schools that exist today. Hence I say, you are the chiefs of the nations of Bechuana. Wake up from your sleep. Look for teachers in your villages and improve your nations through education just like the nations of the Matebele [Zulus] and the Basotho.⁸⁵

⁸³*Tsala*, 18 July 1914.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*,

⁸⁵*Tsala*, 27 June 1914. Sechuana

In May of 1915, the regent lay sick in his death bed, whilst Sebopioa patiently wrote down what the old man dictated as notes of thanks and farewell to close friends and neighbouring chiefs. Lekoko died the following month.⁸⁶ His successor was John Montsioa who according to Silas' notification to the Resident Magistrate, was 'unanimously appointed the chief, and as such he is the rightful chief.'⁸⁷ It was an inherited and salaried position not earned by merit. For Sebopioa, who had effectively manned the position for four years, there was little recognition and almost no reward. Sebopioa's dedication had earned Lekoko's praise from the NAD that under his reign, 'there was happily some improvement and Government is determined that such improvement shall be at least maintained.'⁸⁸ Sebopioa left the reserve shortly after the funeral.

In sum, for Sebopioa consolidating a committed Bechuana constituency, even amongst the Barolong, was difficult, even whilst notables in Mafikeng were focusing their energies on what they considered priorities. The struggle for self-determination held no immediate solution to the problems of food insecurity, and growing unemployment of educated Bechuana in the northern districts. But also Sebopioa was not Plaatje. He worked extremely hard to bring cohesion and a bureaucratic order in the chieftaincy, but he was not a leader with sufficient gravitas to inspire a following. Certainly, his own generation admired him for studying and travelling in America and Europe, but he was attached so securely in the long shadow of 'the fathers' that he could not woo others into his own light. It is to his younger brother's attempt to chart his own course and follow his own star that we now turn.

ii. The determination of a younger son

⁸⁶ S.J. Molema for L.Marumoloa to G. Gaseitsewe, 7 May 1915, A979Bd1.

⁸⁷ S.T. Molema to R.C Lloyd, 10 July 1915, A979Be1.

⁸⁸ Secretary of Native Affairs, Edward Dower to W. C. Welsh, 4 November 1915, A 979Be1.

Modiri was old enough to watch familiar food items disappear off the table during the South African War. Seleje and Sebopioa were already at Lovedale, and soon afterwards Sebopioa sailed to America. Circumstances rapidly turned for the worst after *Koranta*'s launch. The family's clothes were bought at auctions, and so was simple tea. (Chapter 1) Modiri started school in the mission school in the *stadt*, before attending Healdtown Missionary Institute in the eastern Cape. When Harriet left Healdtown for Emcwadi in 1908, Modiri remained there a further two years. Beyond purchasing books, his father hardly paid anything towards his fees. He would not have proceeded to Lovedale had he not won a scholarship of £20 at the beginning of 1910.⁸⁹ By October of the same year he knew that 'the way planned for him' was a degree in medicine, but it was difficult to imagine how it was all going to be paid for.⁹⁰ As things stood then, two years' worth of fees at Healdtown was unpaid, and the Rev Richard Hornabrook harangued him about it.⁹¹ As soon as he won the scholarship, he portrayed himself as dispensable, almost unnecessary, to the rhythm of life in Mafikeng. That very Christmas he wrote to his father that 'I do not suppose you will want me very much at home since I was there last December.'⁹²

Going home presented the perennial problem of transport monies, but even if there was money enough the greater dilemma remained. He wanted a university qualification abroad, but his father was reluctant or unable to make a hefty investment in a university degree at the very moment when his finances had collapsed and his political projects were failing. He knew his father had a desire to send him to Britain, but suffered anxiety that he would wait endlessly whilst the nation struggled to coalesce into a stable unit. Moreover, he was watching Sebopioa

⁸⁹ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 28 February 1910, all in A979Ad1.

⁹⁰ S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema 18 October 1910.

⁹¹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 28 February 1910, 9 July 1911.

⁹² S. M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 27 September 1910.

and seeing how easy it was to be sucked into the chieftaincy's priorities, and how it pleased his father when his children showed such commitment. But Sebopioa had still not returned to England to qualify as a lawyer. Modiri wanted to be in a position to board the ship to England as soon as money, from whichever source, became available. It was very important to secure his father's trust if he was to wield his aspirations out of his father's control, and stay away from home.

He was in any case rather precocious and had the confidence to tackle the course of his school career without close parental supervision. Concerning the Lovedale scholarship for instance, he had written down 'the general principles and circumstances under which one may be recommended for the bursary' to the last exhausting detail, 'explain[ing] this to you Rra because I know that Mr Moikangoa did not explain it to you clearly.'⁹³ (Rra stood for 'father' and was an appellation Sebopioa also used.) Moikangoa was his very conscientious teacher, who had taken every trouble to inform Silas about the scholarship.⁹⁴ At Lovedale, Modiri failed his first matriculation examination in 1910, in part because the Education Department confirmed his enrolment into the examination too late.⁹⁵ He then entered into agreement with the principal of Lovedale, Dr Neil Macvicar, to be exempted from afternoons of industrial training to work in a hospital every day from 3 to 5 o'clock. On Saturdays he would work a full day, and also until lunch on Sunday. Macvicar would then pay Modiri's outstanding fees at Healdtown. This exposure to medical practice could be useful towards a professional qualification he eagerly wanted. He entered the agreement without the slightest consultation with his father.

⁹³ S.M Molema to S.T. Molema, 28 February 1910.

⁹⁴ R. Moikangoa to S.T. Molema, 28 February 1910, A979Aa2.28

⁹⁵ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema undated, c. 1911.

On the closing day I met Mr Henderson and Dr Macvicar. I entered into arrangements with them to the following effect. Father dear, you will pardon me for not consulting you beforehand but I thought you would approve of it as [being ok]ay ... I dont (sic) know if I have made myself clear, but if not Rra, I shall have much pleasure in explaining anything that you do not understand.⁹⁶

Macvicar was a Scotsman, and whilst principal at Lovedale, also a medical doctor. His personal ambition was to change the face of health care in the Union. He wished to curb the spread of tuberculosis amongst Africans in the cities, and to produce a cohort of black physicians. Education and health care were for him the leading issue in the continuing debates about the 'native question.' African nurses could not find employment in hospitals, white nurses refused to attend to African patients, whilst in the meantime Africans' tax was being used to support public hospitals.⁹⁷ There were only two black African doctors in the Union in 1910.⁹⁸

At the very commencement of his work with Macvicar, Modiri had warned 'further Rra, I shall not be able to go home ... [as] this gives me a shorter holiday than other scholars.'⁹⁹ He stayed at the residence of James Molebaloa at Ndabeni Location in Cape Town over the Christmas holidays of 1911, whilst working at Victoria Hospital. Modiri's long absences from home made his father suspicious that he was spending weekends at Healdtown with Chief Lekoko's son, Dick, who was known to be ill-disciplined.¹⁰⁰ Especially as he entered the last lap of his school career, Modiri could not afford any apparent breach of trust, so he described his punishing schedule at the hospital, and that 'it is quite natural that I should defend myself in the charge made against me.'¹⁰¹ His fees at Healdtown were still unpaid because, when Macvicar had insisted that he work formally in the hospital as an apprentice in March 1912, he

⁹⁶ S. M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 11 July 1911.

⁹⁷ See for example, *Tsala*, 10 September 1910.

⁹⁸ A. Digby, 'Early Black Doctors in South Africa', *Journal of African History*, 46, (2005), 427-54

⁹⁹ S.M Molema to S.T. Molema, 9 July 1911.

¹⁰⁰ See for example, J. Henderson to L. Marumoloo, correspondence in 1915, A979Bd1

¹⁰¹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 7 January 1912.

had refused as 'that would greatly interfere with my school work.'¹⁰² He matriculated from Lovedale at the end of 1912. Tigerkloof Native Institution turned down his application to fill a vacant teaching post, and he felt the need 'to immediately turn my eyes to something else'.¹⁰³ He planned rather to return to Cape Town where Molebaloa was an itinerant salesman of patent medicaments for Graham's Remedies, earning his income largely on commission. Modiri was hired as a clerk at the same company and helped to write and edit brochures. His father again called him home, also wishing to congratulate his son on his achievement in person, but even then Modiri was unyielding.

I am writing to you in connection with my holidays. You mentioned that I should go home for my December holidays – I was just wondering what answer you made to Mr Molebaloa's letter. I believe he wrote to you about me, touching the situation I could fill for a short time at Cape Town in December ... to be frank Papa, I think it will be a great advantage to me if I go occupy that position from the view of pay it will bring and extra medical knowledge ... I write Papa dear, to give you my view of the matter, as I think you would like to know.¹⁰⁴

Graham's Remedies could hardly be said to offer 'additional medical knowledge' but white-collar work was scarce for educated Africans. He was confident that Graham's Remedies was simply a temporary stopgap. In his words, 'great things have small beginnings.'¹⁰⁵

The distance from home had influenced his imagination of 'great things' through the lives of personalities in whose light his father's accomplishments seemed pale. In the winter holidays of 1908 he had stayed at the residence of Dr Walter Rubusana in East London. Rubusana was a minister of the Congregational Church. In 1909 he was elected as president of the South African Native Convention. He was soon to embark on an illustrious career as a

¹⁰² S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 26 March 1912.

¹⁰³ W. Willoughby to S.M. Molema, 26 September 1912, A979Ad4; S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 30 December 1912.

¹⁰⁴ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 27 October 1912, A979Ad1.

¹⁰⁵ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 30 December 1912, A979Ad1.

politician in the Cape Parliament as the first and only African to sit on the provincial council from 1910, representing Thembuland. Though almost a decade younger than his own father, Rubusana's accomplishments were more wide ranging and he was not tied down by the burdens of chiefly rule. He pursued a professional career whose opportunities for promotion were governed by merit and individual drive, and was also a published author.¹⁰⁶ A figure of outstanding mental faculty and gravitas such as Rubusana could cast a younger man's eyes well beyond the provincialism of Mafikeng and chiefly aspiration. Rubusana embodied success in ways even the prodigious but cash-strapped Plaatje never could have done. Rubusana's household embodied an outline of achievement that the younger man could aim to reach. 'Oh father,' he had told his father then, 'I owe them as many thanks as you do', elated and grateful for benefits more enduring than hospitality.¹⁰⁷ He was then an impressionable seventeen year old.

The experience of working for Graham's Remedies fuelled Modiri's sense of urgency to board the ship to Britain as soon as possible. Many Africans from all ranks came to Cape Town to find work, and others wished to press on even to South West Africa.¹⁰⁸ The educated amongst these hoped to gain respectable and secure white-collar employment but were often disappointed. Molebaloa loathed his job, and desperately wished for a fresh rural start. For that reason he exploited every opportunity to serve chiefly patrons. His residence became a home for young Mafikeng notables. At the beginning of 1913, both Modiri and his cousin Theo Gaboutlooe were under Molebaloa's care.¹⁰⁹ The following year Molebaloa was charged with the responsibility to keep an eye on the eighty year old Chief Tantinyana Motshegare, in jail in

¹⁰⁶ S.J. Ngqongqo, 'Mpilo Walter Benson Rubusana, 1858 – 1910: The Making of the New Elite in the Eastern Cape', MA thesis, University of Fort Hare, (1996).

¹⁰⁷ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 1908 July 21, A979Ad1.

¹⁰⁸ W. Beinart, 'Jamani': Cape Workers in South West Africa, 1904-1912', in Beinart and Bundy (eds.), *Hidden Struggles*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ SJ Molema to E. Molema, 23 (no month) 1913, SPA.

Cape Town for the death of his niece.¹¹⁰ (Chapter 1) Through Silas, Molebaloa also gained an opportunity to enlarge his customer base for Graham's Remedies medicaments amongst Bechuana because, as he said to Silas, 'when I have nothing I will not feel ashamed to eat from those who have something, verily, verily, it is better to eat from your own people than eat from whites.'¹¹¹

This was in part a defence against *Tsala's* objection that advertisers and distributors of patent medicaments were 'enterprising quack medicine canvassers.'¹¹² African newspapers like *Imvo* drew about ninety percent of their advertising revenue from companies like Graham remedies. Plaatje refused to advertise such medicaments. He made one exception and advertised Dr Williams Pink Pills, which used the faces of well-known personalities amongst the African elite for advertisements.¹¹³ It seems Macvicar had already launched his South African Native and Coloured Health Society by the time *Tsala* was first printed in June 1910. *Tsala* was determined to make the society a success. The 'Native Health Society Notes' packaged health and hygiene in a language that reinforced progress, which was something the newspaper strived to inculcate amongst Bechuana. The SANCHS introduced germs and epidemiology into public discourse, paying particular attention to how Africans' living conditions encouraged illness, especially tuberculosis. 'Notes' sold hygiene as a top middle-class value. One of them urged Africans to follow Booker T Washington's advice to get a house with a 'sitting room, where books and papers can be found' because even educated people who did insist on these living arrangements were 'failing to rise higher in their habits of life ...

¹¹⁰ S.T. Molema to J. Molebaloa, 1914 undated A979Aa2.9.

¹¹¹ J. Molebaloa to S. T. Molema, 1 February 1912, A979Aa2.1. Sechuana.

¹¹² *Tsala ea Batho*, 14 March 1914.

¹¹³ See for example, *Tsala*, 1911 April 15.

becoming careless and dirty in their clothing ... eating in a disorderly way ... Among such people diseases easily spread.’¹¹⁴

Molebaloa’s origins were very humble but he was reasonably educated and very confident. He held a deep antipathy for whiteness. Any working arrangements with whites were to him doomed to be relations of servitude. Europeans were not just employers but *makgoa* – masters. Molebaloa’s politics were pragmatic and not dissimilar to the message of nationhood amongst many educated Africans – ‘national’ self-reliance at all costs. He had fervently supported and contributed to *Koranta* in its heyday. His father had been a travelling trader, probably selling small household items amongst African and Afrikaner families in the northern districts. Later he had hired a farm from an Afrikaner landlord in the Transvaal on which he ran stock, likely paying rent with a share of his crop and some labour. Molebaloa had grown up on the farm and it was there that his aversion to working under Europeans’ control developed. After his father died in 1901, his siblings remained on the farm as part of a growing community of sharecroppers and wage labourers. He, on the other hand, pushed on further south, determined rather to be a sharecropper for an African landlord than till white-owned land.¹¹⁵

Molebaloa’s burning aspiration however was to be an ordained minister in the Wesleyan church, a vocation he had desired since he was fourteen years old. He had passed his examinations as a local preacher at sixteen, and by the time he was eighteen years old, had been officially appointed as an evangelist. In 1894 he was travelling between various circuits as a teacher of the gospel, and as an interpreter for European missionaries. In 1899 he attended

¹¹⁴*Tsala*, 1910 December 24.

¹¹⁵ J. Molebaloa to S.T. Molema, 1 February 1912, A979Aa2.

Kilnerton Training School, and was expecting to be inducted shortly afterwards following the completion of his training. The Wesleyan Missionary Society postponed his installation when the war broke out but he was not put forward for ordination even when the war had ended.¹¹⁶ In 1903 his wife contracted tuberculosis, and was taken to a poorly equipped hospice and mental asylum for Africans on Robben Island. After her death in 1905 he remained in Cape Town, not only because he had by then lost his livestock, but also because he had hoped an urban-based circuit would offer him a clerical career.¹¹⁷ But his career went no further than recognition as a choirmaster; local preacher and society steward at Ndabeni Location. Meanwhile his meagre earnings meant he had little hope of setting up a residence in the countryside.

During May of 1912 Silas purchased sorghum and mealies on credit from a European trader, I Iving, but had no money to settle the debt when it was due.¹¹⁸ His nephew, Rev Joshua Moshoele became Silas' lifeline. Throughout the winter, Moshoele purchased grain from Klerksdorp, a Transvaal mining town where he lived, and sent it to Mafikeng, even paying for the cost of rail himself.¹¹⁹ Hardship continued into summer. Plaatje could have sourced grain for his patron but was so completely absorbed by his newspaper that his only surviving reference to the population's predicament was to offer ten bags of grain to any one willing to advance him £100 for *Tsala*.¹²⁰ At least as Silas and his wife saw it, the Reverend had helped them weather life's greatest storms. A few years earlier, when Moshoele learnt of *Koranta's* collapse, he had paid a few pounds towards the debt as a gesture of support and loyalty. (Chapter 1) Molalayane, Modiri's mother, wished her son to marry the Reverend's eldest

¹¹⁶ J. Molebaloa, 'The Barolong and Native Affairs Administration Bill, Native Affairs & Amacqunukwebe Tribe (self-publication, 1936), SPA.

¹¹⁷ J. Molebaloa to S.T. Molmema, 1 February 1912, A979Aa2.

¹¹⁸ Invoice, I. Iving to Molema, 21 May 1912, A979Aa3.4.

¹¹⁹ S. Minchin to S.T. Molema 13 March 1908, A979Aa3.6.2.

¹²⁰ S.T. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, 12 Dec 1912, A979Da22.

daughter. Her name was Anna. The subject of marriage and ‘starting life’ was broached to Modiri in March of 1913.¹²¹ Whether she knew anything at all of the matter, Anna was expected to wait for marriage through chastity and patience. She was to acquire the level of schooling expected of noblewoman, whilst busying herself with preparations for housewifery. In the meantime her promised spouse directed his heart and soul towards the pursuit of his aspirations. His imagination of the future was conceived not only at some distance from his home, but also from Anna.

It was just as Modiri was settling into his job at Graham Remedies that a post opened up at Lyndhurst Public School in Kimberley. Plaatje was the secretary of the School Committee, and persuaded the committee to hire Modiri, who then immediately rushed to Kimberley. He scribbled a hurried note to his father as to his whereabouts, ‘only hoping you will find nothing to displease you in the step I have taken father.’¹²² By the time he arrived at Lyndhurst, his sister Harriet had already been teaching at the same school for two years. There he earned £72 per year and was hoping to save money for his passage to Europe.¹²³ He also met Marianne MacRitchie Mzimba there. She was the only African woman teacher that held a matriculation certificate at Lyndhurst. She had matriculated from Lovedale’s girl school. There were nine teachers in total, and with the exception of Modiri, only one other male colleague was a matriculant. By the time Modiri took up his post at Lyndhurst Public School in April of 1913, Marianne Mzimba had already ‘for several years loyally and faithfully served this school’.¹²⁴ It is most likely that she was the woman Modiri fell in love with at around this point in his life. He only penned a description of her in Sechuana as *moradi oa Skota* (daughter of Scot), leading Starfield to suggest she was either a European woman he met in Glasgow, or a

¹²¹ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 16 March 1913, A979Bd1.

¹²² S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 20 April 1913.

¹²³ *Tsala*, 27 April 1913.

¹²⁴ *Tsala*, 20 December 1913.

member of the well-known Kimberley family of Mveli Skota, an enterprising journalist and compiler of the popular *African Yearly Register*.¹²⁵ But the context in which Modiri used the name makes Marianne the best fit. Her family had achieved the highest ideals of what Scottish missionaries envisioned – to ‘fashion the nationalistic claim of a specifically Scottish contribution to empire.’ They wished to make ‘black Scotsmen and Scotswomen’.¹²⁶

Scottish missionaries’ philosophy was moulded by the thinking that Scotland’s gift to empire was a ‘significant educational and religious history’, which would be spread throughout the world by ‘native agency’. Macvicar’s determination to train African doctors was part of this initiative. Marianne was named after Marianne MacRitchie, one of two Scottish women to take up teaching posts when Lovedale opened its girl school in 1868. Marianne’s family had produced the first African minister to be ordained in the Free Church of Scotland in 1875, Rev Mpambani Mzimba.¹²⁷ Tiyo Soga travelled to Glasgow for education in the 1840s where he married the white and Glasgow-born Jane Burnside. Soga was the first African to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church in 1856.¹²⁸ There developed an ambiguous but nevertheless accepted parlance that described this rural eastern Cape elite as ‘Scotsmen’ even into the 1940s.¹²⁹ The families of Mzimba, Soga and others closely identified with Scotland, to the extent that it had shaped deeply emotive marital and other ties, whilst influencing their tradition of education and work. Not only that, they had either lived in or travelled through Glasgow, as when Mzimba left for Scotland in 1893 for the jubilee of the Free Church. There he raised ‘considerable sums of money’ for the mission.¹³⁰ The Mzimbas were part of a tradition of

¹²⁵ Starfield, ‘A Dance with the Empire’, 483

¹²⁶ J. MacKenzie, ‘“Making Black Scotsmen and Scotswomen?”: Scottish Missionaries and the Eastern Cape Colony in the Nineteenth Century’, in Hilary Carey (ed.), *Empires of Religion* (Hampshire, 2008), 161-76.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁸ D. Williams, *Umfundisi: A Biography of Tiyo Soga, 1829-1871* (Lovedale, 1978).

¹²⁹ J. MacKenzie, with N. Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race* (Manchester, 2007), 123.

¹³⁰ J. MacKenzie, ‘“Making Black Scotsmen and Scotswomen?”’, 161-76.

theological and historical erudition that had deeply captivated Modiri at seventeen in Rev Walter Rubusana's household. It was a tradition perhaps lacking from the history of Modiri's forebears as chiefly evangelists, who learnt how to read and write in small Wesleyan mission stations, but were largely self-trained and self-informed evangelists.

It seems Marianne aimed to pursue nursing - a career black 'Scotswomen' has been pursuing for a generation. From Modiri's brief comments, it appears that their relationship was a communion of pioneering spirits, and they intended to establish a medical practice together. Rather than to his nation, at this time Modiri seemed most committed to his vocation of becoming a doctor. At Lovedale, he had been deeply moved by African patients suffering from mental illnesses on Robben Island.

Oh *Rra* – I visited that place ... and the patients there simply move one's pity ... because *Rra* though they have everything there they are so lonely being far from home for life. There are some Bechuana boys and men there – there is one Liphuko and two men from Ga Maebu. They were so glad to see me – all I could do was to remind them that God careth for them.¹³¹

Unlike Marianne however, Modiri was not a commoner. His father sponsored his education to preserve the nation and the ideals that made Molemas its ordained leaders. Certainly, honouring arranged marriages was part of this legacy, especially given their role in consolidating structures of security in times of vulnerability. Modiri hoped that time would wear away his obligation to Anna. After all, he was leaving for at least five years. On a Friday night in December of 1913, Marianne and Modiri performed farewell solos at Lyndhurst's annual closing entertainment, both 'severing their connection with the teaching profession.'¹³² A measure of 'some strange luck', in his words, had given Modiri passage to Europe.¹³³

¹³¹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema 26 March 1912.

¹³² *Tsala ea Batho* 20 December 1913

¹³³ S.M. Molema to H. Molema, 24 March 1918, A979Ad3.

For the first time in six years a good harvest was forecast for the northern regions. It turned out to be a bumper harvest, although the Native Land Act of 1913 was a scythe to good cheer. Not only the 40 bags of ‘good corn’ sold to Richard Rowland (Chapter 3), but also some 128 bags of ‘kaffir corn’ to a Mr Amos, were part of Silas’ yields.¹³⁴ Colonial officials stood ready to collect from households whose Hut Tax had remained unpaid for several years.¹³⁵ Whilst the fields at home were ripening, Modiri used his proximity to Plaatje and Bud’Mbelle in Kimberley to make contact with returnees from British universities, especially Pixley Seme. He gathered information around the technicalities of application, details of fees and places of residence.¹³⁶ He was determined to be the first benefactor of his father’s returns. He set sail on the *Armadale Castle* for England on 3 March of 1914.¹³⁷ The University of Glasgow in Scotland was his final destination.¹³⁸ This university held the advantage that the fees for the medical faculty did not have to be paid in lump sum at the beginning, but Modiri was perhaps also drawn by a city where Marianne’s father had lived,

Modiri recorded his experiences in Scotland with introspection and open vulnerability in letters to the women in his life – his mother, Harriet and Marianne. He wrote of financial lack and exchanges with other African students. His experiences in Glasgow included being president of the African Students Association, living through the Great War, and the dilemmas of an illicit but committed relationship outside the boundaries of the nation. His letters indicate permeability to new ideas around group identity and diverse peoples’ shared histories. He also wrote a public narrative, a history of indigenous people in the Union of South Africa which

¹³⁴ S.T. Molema to Amos Esq, undated 1913, A979Aa3.

¹³⁵ Superintendent of Natives to Chief Lekoko, 13 December 1913, SPA.

¹³⁶ S.M. Molema to S.T Molema, 17 December 1913.

¹³⁷ Telegram & letter, S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 02 March 1914.

¹³⁸ S.M. Molema to H. Molema, 18 April 1919.

was not specifically focused on the history of Bechuana. As portrayed in this section, lack and insecurity had weaned him from his parental homestead at an early age. The challenge was whether he could preserve his family's legacy whilst pursuing his own desires – both in work and romantic love. As such new ideas around family and nationhood found fertile soil. His younger sister, Harriet, shared many of his childhood experiences, but being a woman set her on a trajectory very different from his own. It is to her life and ambitions that we now turn.

iii. The commitment of a daughter

When Harriet qualified as a teacher she was only sixteen years old. She was known by the family, and especially her father, as his 'little girl'. Harriet had grown up the only girl amongst her brothers. During her early childhood, her sister Seleje was in boarding school and soon married, and Stella was not yet born. Although the actual dates of her schooling career are not clear, she left Healdtown and proceeded to Emgwadi, a girl school, in 1909. There she did her utmost to impress her father with demonstrations of thrift, small sacrifices and the ability to handle money. Even when her father had included a few pennies 'for buying anything I liked' in February of 1909, she paid even that amount into her fees and books.¹³⁹ Having completed her studies at the end of 1910, she struggled to secure employment. Her father despaired when her application at Lyndhurst Road School in Kimberley was turned down in March of 1911, leaving a Wesleyan missionary school in Pretoria, Kilnerton, the only potential opportunity. Infectious diseases in the Transvaal were said to make working conditions there hazardous.¹⁴⁰ Plaatje warned that 'Kilnerton is too unhealthy', and added that a 'Miss Masoafa came back here through illness, and Miss Klassen just died there.' As far as the Lyndhurst

¹³⁹ H. Molema to S. T. Molema, 4 March 1901, A979Aa1.

¹⁴⁰ S. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, c. April 1911 A 979 Da15.

position was concerned, Plaatje promised ‘to make sure that Harriet could get it although the reply has already been made in the negative.’¹⁴¹ Through his influence, Harriet was finally appointed at Lyndhurst in April of 1911.

African teachers’ earnings were low and not always consistent. Salaries for women teachers were generally around £40 a year.¹⁴² Hers was paid at the end of every school term.¹⁴³ The school had just under 200 students and only 52 of these were in Standard I to IV. All the rest were in the lower grade, probably still learning how to read and write.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, she excelled at her teaching. At the end of 1912 she received a letter of commendation from the Kimberley School Board and an extra cheque. The board acknowledged her ‘good and efficient work’, and congratulated her on her ‘good example’ that trained children ‘both educationally and morally, to become good and useful citizens.’¹⁴⁵ She was also the model daughter, helping her parents to shoulder the burdens on the family’s purse. When Modiri wished to go on tour to Cape Town with the Lovedale choir in June 1912, Harriet sent him the required £4.¹⁴⁶ She did not remain in the employ of Lyndhurst very long however. She returned to Mafikeng and taught at the school her grandfather had started in the stadit when it became registered under the Department of Education. Her own father had taught there, making her the third generation of Molemas to teach formally at what had come to be known as the Wesleyan Methodist Mission School. She earned £20 a year.

Early in 1913 when the sixth year of crop failure had devastated the countryside, Rev Geo Rolland decided to shut down the school. Parents could not pay fees and teachers worked

¹⁴¹ S. M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 8 March 1911.

¹⁴² *Tsala* 23 October 1911, 24 February 1912.

¹⁴³ S. Plaatje to S.T. Molema, c. April 1911, A979Da14.

¹⁴⁴ *Tsala* , 28 October 1911.

¹⁴⁵ School Board to H. Molema, 9 December 1912, A979Ae1.

¹⁴⁶ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 2 June 1912.

without pay. Every time Rolland announced closure of the school the chieftaincy pleaded for more time. ‘This is my last word on the matter’, Rolland wrote to the regent in April of 1913, ‘[as] I have done my best, and have failed.’¹⁴⁷ Sending the children away was for the missionary ‘a great sorrow’. Following much pleading, he extended the chieftaincy a little more grace, but by August, not a penny had been paid. The school shut down for one quarter whilst the chieftaincy went about collecting about £80 from parents and other members of the community, but even then not every teacher could be paid. Harriet was amongst the unpaid teachers. Her father wrote to the reverend that

... it is my duty to put before you the complaints of my daughter Harriet Molema who tells me that she has not been paid in full for four quarters in local contribution the amount which now £20 [,] which sum if not paid this quarter will amount to £25 next quarter. Dear Sir, I know very well that the school children do not pay but the little they pay quarterly ought to be divided among the three or four teachers ... Sir, I do not think that is fair. I think she must always get something from the little which is received quarterly from the children. ¹⁴⁸

A solution to the crisis was finally reached in 1915. With a debt of just over £400 owed to the colonial government for the costs of litigation around Dog Tax, the chieftaincy was pressed to raise public funds but in a manner that would yield some benefit in the reserve.¹⁴⁹ Stock had already been impounded to pay the chieftaincy’s lawyers, so a different form of taxation was required. Spencer Minchin was tasked to prepare the chieftaincy’s proposal to the Native Affairs Department that three shillings per annum be collected from every African paying Hut Tax from January of 1915. This would generate sufficient revenue to pay off the debt in a single year. The balance would establish the Barolong Educational and National Fund ‘to be expended for the benefit of Barolong’. It would be ‘applied to the promotion of education

¹⁴⁷ G. Rolland to L. Montsioa, 7 April 1913, A979Bd1.

¹⁴⁸ ST Molema to Geo Rolland, 1 May 1914, A979Aa3.

¹⁴⁹ Native Affairs Department, Justice Department, Finance Department, and R. C. Llyod, 3 March 1914 to 19 March 1915, JUS 109 File No 23079/10.

of Barolong children and to the payment of deficient salaries of teachers and similar objects.’¹⁵⁰ The latter entailed everything from paying the National Secretary and the Deputy Tax Collectors, to the erection of fences and the purchase of seeds.

Even before permission was granted, the chieftaincy had already set about with the task of collecting, not only in the reserve but in the mining compounds. Establishing the national treasury was also a solution for younger notables who worked for the bureaucracies of the chieftaincy without pay, like Harriet, and especially her brother Sebopioa who was then still National Secretary. As Harriet had experienced, secure white-collar employment relied heavily on patronage, even for a chiefly woman. She could have withdrawn into the sphere of home where housewifery would have been a respectable occupation, but this was not an option for the men. Some of her educated male cousins were in fact sliding down mining shafts with their uneducated subjects in Johannesburg and elsewhere. They clung all the more tightly to their dynastic family names, desperate to hold on to that sense of distinction. As the young chiefs joined the seasonal pools of migration into mining towns, they exported the chieftaincy into mining compounds by representing the person of the paramount chief to Barolong miners. Compound managers saw advantage in safeguarding chiefly hierarchy in the mines. They allowed chiefs’ sons to take up posts as headmen of their kinsmen, and thus positioned them to function as group leaders. Harriet’s cousin, Officer Molema, who had been at Lovedale with Sebopioa, had become a mineworker by 1915. As the National Secretary, Sebopioa authorised his departure to Johannesburg after Officer’s visit home and appended a memorandum to the Native Recruiting Cooperation that

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum of Agreement, L. Marumoloa and G. Phoi, Barolong Educational and National Fund, 12 February 1915, A979Bd2.

This is to certify that Officer I. Molema is a member of the Barolong Nation at Mafeking, in the Molopo Native Reserve. His rank among the Barolong in the said Reserve is that of Headman, and among all Barolong boys employed in your cooperation there is none higher than the said Officer Molema. I commend him to you Sir ... he is now returning to his duties at Knights Deep in your Corporation.¹⁵¹

Those junior chiefs languishing in the reserves without any employment sometimes acted as ‘messengers’ of the chieftaincy, and were ‘sent to visit several mines for the purpose of seeing all the boys belonging to the Barolong nation.’ They could look for men who had left the chieftaincy without permission, or those who were called up for trial in chiefs’ courts.¹⁵² On 1 October 1914, Chiefs Tiego Tawana, Sebopioa Molema and Botshelonyane collected money for the National Fund from Nourse Mine compound. At that stage, sub-chiefs Officer Molema, Phillip Motshegare and Richard Phetu were recognised Barolong chiefs in the compound.¹⁵³

Harriet’s marriage prospects were soon an issue for the family. John Montsioa, who was then in line to succeed to the paramountcy, was amongst the more promising of a vulnerable crop of eligible notables in 1915. Especially for his ‘little girl’, a young woman so affectionately doted upon, Silas wished to eliminate as many of the risks of unhappiness as possible. Reducing the likelihood of penury was a very important consideration. The most secure salaried positions in the reserve were those of headmen and paramount chief. They drew their salaries from the Native Affairs Department. Harriet’s father was the highest paid of four headmen in the reserve, earning £16 a year. The rest earned no more than £12 a year. The paramount chief earned £120 a year.¹⁵⁴ In 1911 Sebopioa submitted a petition to the Native Affairs Department, begging for an increase in his father-in-law’s stipend. He explained that the paramount chief ‘is a civilised and Christian servant’, but with insufficient means ‘to be

¹⁵¹ SJ Molema to Native Recruiting Cooperation, 30 June 1915, A979Bd1.

¹⁵² SJ Molema for L. Marumoloa to ‘All Compound Managers in the Transvaal’, 29 April 1914, A979Bd1.

¹⁵³ List of contributions from men and their headmen at Mine, and the collectors, 1 October 1914, A979Cc5.1.

¹⁵⁴ Statement of salaries paid, Undated, January, 1926: 1MFK9N1/1/2 2/4/2/ Part 2.

exemplary in every walk of life' and 'for the education of his children.'¹⁵⁵ Insufficient as this salary was considered to be, it was at least certain. Harriet was a qualified teacher with good professional credentials who could supplement such an income. Her father had ensured her employment in the *stadt*'s school not solely to continue the legacy of Molemas contribution to the school, but also to support his daughter's professional aspirations. She could be wife to the most powerful notable in Mafikeng, mother to their children, but also a highly dedicated teacher. She would also live a few feet from her maiden home, and her father's watchful eye.

Moreover, the circumference of marriage networks had, at least at that stage, a relatively short radius, especially for temperate, educated and chiefly households. Her father had seemingly first considered Theo Gaboutlwele. As James Molebaloa who was at the time taking care of both Theo and Modiri in Cape Town understood it, Theo's family had already 'found for him the daughter of S.T. Molema himself' suggesting family negotiations at least had started. Molebaloa was distressed in 1913 that Theo was embarrassingly indebted to 'everyone' at Ndabeni and had no money in hand to make his way home to Mafikeng. Molebaloa was 'mortified because this boy is a Morolong' and 'a child of great people truly'.¹⁵⁶ Silas was certainly aware that John Montsioa had a drinking problem, but this was a scourge that affected many educated notables, as it did other young educated men in the Cape, including Sol Plaatje's sons.¹⁵⁷ Silas hoped John could be polished and groomed to competence under his wings. Harriet would also serve as an incentive for John to mature responsibly. During the worst patches of John's instability in later years, even after mental deterioration and liquor had cost him the paramount seat, Silas continued to support the marriage, and John. Starfield felt

¹⁵⁵ SJ Molema for L. Marumoloo to Minister of Native Affairs, 1911 October 12, A979Bd1.

¹⁵⁶ J. Molebaloa to S. T. Molema, 7 February 1913, A979Aa1, Sechuana.

¹⁵⁷ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 382-383.

that Harriet was sacrificed by her father for political ends.¹⁵⁸ But Silas held affections for both of them beyond the chess game of political power.

The government was reluctant to recognise John as paramount chief, given his two half-brothers' 'serious mismanagement' of the reserve. John was one of two 'minors' presented as possible successors after Badirile's death in 1911. His candidacy was supported by Molemas' faction. The other candidate was Lotlamoreng, who was then an unschooled mineworker. It was decided that Lekoko would act as regent for John, but Lotlamoreng's supporters (including Lekoko himself) were preparing him for rule. Lotlamoreng was hurriedly sent to Healdtown to learn how to read and write. When Lekoko died, the earlier scuffle over succession erupted into a fuller and more divisive wrestle for power. Joshua Molema was appointed as chief by the Native Affairs Department in November 1915, but apparently the general population was so disgruntled that only hostility ruled, otherwise there was a divisive power vacuum. Lekoko's brother took over the *kgotla*, whilst Molemas stayed away in protest. The educated preferred Joshua, but popular sentiment rested with John.¹⁵⁹ Such instability and the deep anxiety over his position drove John closer to the edge of his mental illness, and closer still to the bottle.

In mid-1916, Harriet, alongside her father, crafted a petition to the Prime Minister, Louis Botha, protesting against the government's involvement in the appointment of chiefs, and insisting that John be recognised as principal chief. Sebopioa had by then left the reserve. The petition was in Harriet's meticulous handwriting and not in the typescript so typical of the chieftaincy's administration during Sebopioa's term. Her involvement reflects how John's incompetence pulled a young woman into the orbit of men's administrative and political duties.

¹⁵⁸ See Starfield, *Dr S Modiri Molema*, 152-163.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

Once Sebopioa left the reserve, Silas was again on his own, with no younger men available to help. The petition in Harriet's hand survives as the most lucid and powerful articulation of nationhood and the reserve's right to self-determination within the Empire.

We claim to be a nation claiming special privileges given to us by the imperial government and recognised by subsequent governments of this country ... the jurisdiction of the native chiefs is to be preserved ... The Barolong take any appointment of a paramount chief by the Government without the assent of the people as an infringement of the jurisdiction of the Native Chiefs over their own people which was promised to them. ... Long before our request to be allowed to come under and enjoy British rule we respected and loved that Government and even before we became British subjects we fought in support of British interests.¹⁶⁰

The petition was signed by 61 members of the *kgotla*. Her husband's appointment was thereafter approved by the Native Affairs Department in February 1917 but only until Lotlamoreng could bring forward his own claim.¹⁶¹ As soon as he took up his position, John's mental stability worsened. He could not cope with ever thickening plots of rebellion and secession by ethnic minorities in Rietfontein (Chapter 2) and so he simply razed the huts of the instigators and lost popularity with ordinary people. Subsequently neighboring Barolong chiefs in the Transvaal, who had initially supported his claim turned against him. As her husband's condition worsened, Harriet endured the hardships of marriage to a violent alcoholic, but also continued to teach at the school in the *stadt*. She settled his medical expenses – over £10 in 1917 – which were about half of her salary.¹⁶² With deepening depression, John completely gave himself to drink. Early in 1918, he left for a spree of alcohol and conspicuous consumption in Johannesburg, and borrowed £300 from the British Loan Company. Pixley Seme warned Silas in 'considerable pain' in February of 1918 that the Supreme Court had

¹⁶⁰ Petition to Louis Botha, 5 July 1916, A979Be1.

¹⁶¹ E. Barret to L. Llyod, 15 February 1917, A979Be1.

¹⁶² Medical Bills, H. Molema, unknown June 1917, A979Ae1.

issued summons for John's furniture and cattle. Failure to cover the costs could see John sent to prison. Pixley relayed the damage John's behavior had brought to the nation's reputation and future.

... the Barolong nation is on the point of experiencing a very deep disgrace. The cause of this lies in the attitude and manner of Chief John Montsioa who has disregarded my advice in several matters of great importance ... I am exceedingly disappointed in John Montsioa and I feel that unless the nation will take hold of his affairs and even the Chieftainship you will go into ruin.'¹⁶³

John continued to occupy his position as paramount chief but was unable to rule. As soon as Lotlamoreng achieved his desired level of literacy he put forward his own bid for the paramount seat. He had waited until John's reputation was so tarnished by drink and irresponsibility that the colonial government wished to get rid of him as soon as possible. The Acting Secretary of the Native Affairs Department, F.S Malan, called a meeting at the court house to resolve the dispute in front of about 800 *stadt* residents. John was deposed in November of 1919.¹⁶⁴ Harriet did not divulge her continuing feelings of despair and neglect in her marriage to her father, saving those horrors for letters to her brother in Scotland. Her letters to Modiri have not survived, only his deeply affectionate responses of comfort and compassion.

Whilst it could potentially yield great political benefits for Molemas, to see the tragedy of Harriet's marriage as a consequence of her father's play for power is to miss completely the traumas of colonial living. As this section has shown, though an extremely unstable personality, John was the pick of a crop amongst educated notables whose rootedness in structures of opportunity was tenuous. The very 'tribal fund' from which Harriet drew her teachers' salary was a safety net for some of her educated cousins, who had either to take up

¹⁶³ P.Seme to S. T. Molema, 1 February 1918, A979Aa4.

¹⁶⁴ Starfield, *Dr S Modiri Molema*, 160-162.

mining or other unskilled work or waste away in the reserve. Unfortunately, the net of arranged marriage trawled no wider than this pool. When young notables did take up white-collar work, drudgery and listlessness set in. For Molema's eldest son, as the next section shows, so did anguish of lost time away from what he felt was his true vocation, namely to rally the nation and embody its highest educational and professional achievements.

iv. The struggles of an eldest son

Unlike his fathers, Sebopioa did not earn an income out of rents, not even after he had established himself at his residence, Signal Hill. He moved there in about 1913 with a mixed bag of patriarchs and their households and presided over his own court. Some of these were Zulu-speaking families, but other immigrants also found their way there.¹⁶⁵ He was not recognised by the Native Affairs Department as a chief and was not paid a salary. He sent an application for work in the public service in January of 1915. The Secretary of the Public Services Commission considered him a well-qualified potential employee but required the usual confidential report from the Resident Magistrate. Like his predecessor, the new Resident Magistrate, R. C. Lloyd prepared an unfavourable report, outlining Sebopioa's relationship to the ruling family, especially his marriage to the regent's daughter. 'In manner', Lloyd added, 'he is always courteous and respectful', while 'in appearance he is as much as any native [though] he shows pallor more than usual aspect in the bridge of his nose.' His conclusion was 'very strong advice' that Sebopioa not be employed in the Native Affairs Department 'for obvious reasons.'¹⁶⁶ Sebopioa was nevertheless fortunate to find employment in the

¹⁶⁵ Interview Galefele Molema, 1912, August, Signal Hill.

¹⁶⁶ RC Lloyd to Secretary of Public Services Commission, 1915 February 8, 1 MFK N1/1/2 2/4/27.

Bechuanaland Protectorate, in Kanye, in August of the same year. He was then thirty-four years old.

Sebopioa worked in the office of the Resident Magistrate as court interpreter, but he also carried out other administrative duties.¹⁶⁷ Though the salary ameliorated his precarious financial position, the post was many rungs short of his initial aspirations. The nature of the work was physically exhausting, requiring him to ride large distances on horseback to deliver messages, assist in the collection of taxes and various police investigations in the reserve. Leave was granted only after twelve months of service. As soon as he was briefed on the details of his work, he anticipated exhaustion, and worried about the strain on his disabled left foot. He was equally anxious about submitting to the authority of his European superior. He wrote to Silas, asking him to speak with his ‘personal friend’ the Resident Commissioner in Mafikeng and

Tell him that I am your son, I have been brought up in good society [,] that you would be very much pleased if he would see that I am well treated by the officer under which (sic) I am working. The [officer] is said to be a very cruel man, who treats men as dogs. Tell him that I am lame and cannot do much walking over long distances. That I shall do all I can to be obedient to my higher officer.¹⁶⁸

The time spent working side by side with Silas in the reserve bridged the rift in their relationship. They had become an intimate pair. After Sebopioa left the reserve, Silas determined to keep up correspondence. Their letters provided mutual consolation and empathy through yet another difficult season in both men’s lives. Joshua had been appointed regent in Mafikeng, but could not benefit from the energies Sebopioa had poured into the previous regent’s rule. Besides, Sebopioa would have found himself in an uncomfortable position in a

¹⁶⁷ S.J. Molema to K. Makgobi, 6 February 1917.

¹⁶⁸ S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 9 August 1915.

war between the ‘fathers’. Joshua desperately wanted to rule, not only as a regent, but in his own right. Silas, alongside many ordinary people, favoured his erratic son-in-law, whom the NAD would not appoint. Meanwhile there was so much work to be done. In the *stadt* of Rietfontein, agitation against rule from the centre was growing more vociferous, whilst the centre itself was imploding from within. Joshua was at the helm of power, but it was essentially Silas who steered the administrative ship and made decisions. As Sebopioa recognised, this was the moment when it was most critical for an educated eldest son to hold up his father’s arm in the battles.

You have spent thousands of pounds educating me to help you and now is the time. Dear father I shall stop here as I feel very very very sad when I think how helpless you are in the new nature of things.¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Sebopioa did become the eldest son his father needed. He had been on the coalface in Mafikeng long enough to place himself in his father’s shoes. To him Silas relayed the exhaustion of weighing up decisions over and over in his mind, and his son had sufficient experience to traverse the maze and landmines regarding which such decisions had to be made, and offer his father affirmation and companionship. In turn Sebopioa shared the grind and tediousness of his employment with his father. Whatever the odds, he consoled his father in 1916 that Molemas were born to lead the nation ‘by God’s design’.

I wished I were present and would have done my duty to my people and nation, but in any way I could not have done more than what you have done. I can imagine what difficulty you are having and everything seem (sic) to be against you but God and right is (sic) for you. Today I am going to Mababe with the Dr and we shall have to travel a distance of 100 miles on horseback without water, living on wild game which we shall have to kill on our way. We have received news that murder had been committed there and were going to investigate ... “Keep on Father” [.] “Go on Sir” [.] The nation is your[s] by God’s design.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ S. J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 9 January 1916.

¹⁷⁰ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 16 April 1916.

A case reputedly of untreated appendicitis took the life of Silas' wife in April of 1918.¹⁷¹ Joshua's health in the meantime was beginning to decline. His wife had died a few years earlier, and with the children away, his need to be taken care of urged him to seek re-marriage.¹⁷² Soon after his marriage, and despite indications that he would recover, he died in August of 1918.¹⁷³ Upon the heels of his death, the global influenza pandemic reached the Cape's northern district and caused the death of Sebopioa's younger brother, Joshua's only other son. In Kanye, the epidemic was claiming between ten and twenty lives every day. Sebopioa's brother's death so soon after Joshua's made, in his words, 'my knees to knock together, my whole hope is very dark and I do not know what will happen'. Without medical doctors or medication, he thought he too was at the brink of death, far from home, 'shut up in the Desert.'¹⁷⁴ He was forced to return to Mafikeng because 'my family is without me and I have to care for them', but to survive there he had again to scratch what he could from the land.¹⁷⁵

Being at home, Sebopioa was readily at the chieftaincy's disposal when the second delegation of the SANNC prepared to sail to England. From the view of notables in Mafikeng and in Thaba 'Nchu, this second trip would yield solid gains, unlike the first. Plaatje declined to join the deputation unless he was provided with £1000. He wished to leave money behind for his family and settle the debts he had accumulated in England during his first visit. He was confident in making these demands because he had won for the Bechuana chiefs some

¹⁷¹ Letters of condolence, 23 April 1918, A979Aa3; SM Molmea to S.T. Molema, 12 May 1918. Interview, Leloba Molema, 1912 August, Gaborone

¹⁷² S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 6 October 1917.

¹⁷³ S.T. Molema to Superintendent of Natives, 27 November 1918, A979Aa3; S.T. Molema to J. Motshegare, 15 August 1918, A979Aa3; S. Plaatje to S. T Molema, 10 August 1919, A 979 Da48

¹⁷⁴ S.T. Molema to S. M. Molema, 18 October 1918.

¹⁷⁵ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 19 November 1918.

important allies at the highest levels of the Crown's representatives in the Union. He knew that Bechuana chiefs could simply not afford not to send him abroad. The hope that at last there was something tangible on the horizon set the nobility abuzz raising funds and preparing petitions. Sebopioa entered the fray with great enthusiasm and confidence, for what Plaatje had achieved was significant, and requires brief explanation.

Plaatje perceived that European settlers' rising sentiments for self-determination outside the ambit of Empire were the foremost worry of the imperial government's representatives in the Union. Some Europeans' call for Republicanism were in Plaatje's language, 'nationalism', a notion he considered to be completely different from Africans' own attempts to establish their own domains of influence and jurisdiction within the Empire. These calls were increasingly concerned with the Union's involvement in the Great War. The response of the Governor General, Lord Buxton, to a petition submitted on behalf of Bechuana chiefs through the SANNK in February of 1918 had left Plaatje with no doubt that the imperial government needed Africans' support against cries to sever the imperial link. When the strikes broke out in the Witwatersrand in 1918, Plaatje was already in the process of establishing 'The Diamond Field's Men's Own Brotherhood' in Kimberley, as a temperance organisation. The movement was a platform intended to showcase educated Africans' Christian values, their commitment to progress and general sophistication. More importantly, it was also intended to present a visibly 'progressive' African constituency, under hereditary chiefs. The mass unrest in the Transvaal presented an unforeseen opportunity to carry these claims further. It made Plaatje's vision even more attractive to representatives of the imperial government. In the Cape, Bechuana chiefs controlled a submissive labour force, and were willing to make it available to the government and to industry; but they wanted a British monarchy through which their own chiefly status and jurisdiction could be recognised.

Strikes could demonstrate chiefs' key roles as holding mechanisms against disorder and anarchy. This augured particularly well for Bechuana chiefs because Kimberley's mining centres drew labour primarily from their reserves. Various chiefs and notables were invited to pledge contributions towards the laying of the Brotherhood movement's foundation stones on 7 August 1918. Lord Buxton, the Governor General and a representative of the mining industry were to give keynote addresses. Lord Buxton, as stated in the advertisement for the launch, was the 'eyes and ears of King George V'.¹⁷⁶ Chiefs used the occasion to demonstrate firm loyalty to the Crown. Plaatje had tirelessly collected pledges from as many chiefs as possible to be read at the launch before government officials and influential dignitaries. John Montsioa was not sufficiently stable to participate. Buxton himself encouraged the SANNC to send a deputation to England. He hoped that the deputation's expression of loyalty to the British Crown would convey to the British parliament and a fervently patriotic public where the sentiment of the African population lay. As Plaatje confidently put it to Silas,

Lord Buxton said we have full right to see our King, more especially because the Nationalists are going to attempt to destroy our kingship (*bogosi joa rona*) ... we are going to defend it.¹⁷⁷

This was just over a year after Buxton's initial expression of support for an SANNC delegation, and seven months after the Brotherhood movement's launch. Constrained by money primarily, Bechuana notables in Thaba 'Nchu took a while to confirm they would clear Plaatje's debts in England.¹⁷⁸ Mafikeng would raise money for the trip. On the evening of 13 March 1919 Plaatje, Sebopioa and his cousin Tiego Tawana held a meeting at the train station in Kimberley. They decided that Lord Buxton's support was so firm that there was no harm in

¹⁷⁶ Copy of advertisement, A979Da

¹⁷⁷ S.T. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 14 March 1919, A979 Da54 Sechuana

¹⁷⁸ S.T. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 05 March 1919, A979 Da54 Sechuana

divulging the contents of their prepared petition to the Resident Magistrate of Mafikeng, who wanted to see the petition. They also designed a symbolic strategy through which Plaatje's representations would emphasise that he was sent by one group of prestigious 'royals' to another.

We agreed that the mission to England is to show the English that we too are a people [.] It is proper that we collect hides of jackal and [...] and leopard if available as gifts of the kings of Secoana to the [English] dignitaries and other important officials, so that as we make our presentation they should see we are really representing a people indeed.

Such a message was to be sent especially to Chief Gaisitsioe of Bangoaketse in Kanye, Chief Lenchoe of Mochudi, both of whom were situated in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, as well as Chief Moilola of Lohurutse, west of the Transvaal. Donations of money and blankets were invited. Each participating chieftaincy would in turn receive a note of thanks from whichever British dignitary was a recipient of such blanket.¹⁷⁹

Sebopioa worked alongside Silas to prepare for the deputation's departure. Mid-March 1919, he represented the chieftaincy in an SANNC meeting in Bloemfontein. His aim was to meet W. Z. Fenyang of Thaba 'Nchu and coordinate the two centres' joint efforts to send Plaatje to England.¹⁸⁰ Fenyang and other members of the Thaba 'Nchu nobility held private title on their farms, and could raise mortgages on their bonds. In the meantime Silas was applying for a sum of £300 from the Barolong National Fund in order to aid the deputation.¹⁸¹ Silas also issued an order to commandeer stock to raise more funds. As he explained to his cousin, 'Barolong are gathering the nation's cattle in large numbers and the nation is simply quiet, not hindering the regiments in any way.' He added 'not being sure about there in the

¹⁷⁹ S. T. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 14 March 1919, A979Da55. Sechuana

¹⁸⁰ S. T. Molema to W. Z. Fenyang, 15 March 1919, A979Cc9.

¹⁸¹ S. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 1919 June unknown, A979Da58.

Protectorate as the regiments have crossed over there yesterday, but here, the day before yesterday, 208 cattle were gathered and fetched £601-0-0'.¹⁸² He also dispatched notices to various Bechuana chieftaincies to invite them to send a representative to England. To Chief Molaloe Mankuroane of Batlhaping, he wrote the following:

Barolong are resolute in their minds to go and they are making ready to find the shoes to carry them to England ... We would be very happy if Batlhaping also can prepare themselves to go to England and speak on their own behalf, so that the oppression that is pressing against us can be relieved by the kingship of England. And the nation of Bangwaketse has also been told to prepare themselves to go, all the peoples of the land that are black are intent to go, and so Motlhaping, even if we personally cannot go – oh Sir let nothing hinder your going. I am confident we can find our way overseas.¹⁸³

What Plaatje and his patrons missed was the potential significance of the war to the balance of forces. The Congress was still scurrying to piece funds together when the war ended in November 1918, weakening any bargaining position, however limited, they may have had. Although the imperial government had already given up any role over policy in South Africa, the symbolism associated with what Plaatje wished to demonstrate was still, at least according to Burton, important. But the political and economic geography of the Union was changing and areas like the north of the Cape Colony were no longer so significant.

The failure of Plaatje's mission for Bechuana in England was undermined also by lack of support for such ambitious collaborative initiatives amongst increasingly impoverished ruling elites. The younger generation that had replaced their fathers as paramount chiefs in various reserves relied far more on the segregationist policies of indirect rule than on building local bases of support in the reserves. Their vision of the world differed from their parents. A

¹⁸² S.T. Molema to S. Motshegare, 21 July 1919, A 979Aa2.88. Sechuana

¹⁸³ S. T. Molema to M. Mankuroane, 16 April 1919, A979Aa2.87. Sechuana

note from the young Chief Molaloe's councillor to Silas in 1921 illuminates such bars to national collaboration. In response to Silas' question about land in the Batlhaping reserve, the councillor wrote that his people knew 'very little about land' since the death of their old Chief Molale. All the chieftaincy knew about, he explained, were 'Europeans and their tax, which they demand now standing on their feet and the debt owed to stores.' He wrote with sadness about a time in the past when their old chief was alive, as 'now we remain with a child here, about whom we do not know, but it seems he will not please his nation. He cares about nothing, takes no advice, and has nothing to do with the councillors of the *kgotla*.'¹⁸⁴ In Kanye, the new paramount chief's uncles complained that when a councillor tried to advise the younger Sebele with an interpretation of 'native custom', 'the Chief started to scold as if he is not speaking to his father but a wild animal, and that incident pained us very much because it is we who are the eyes and the ears to him.'¹⁸⁵ As a pair of father and son united in work and one vision, Sebopioa and Silas were unusual.

The failure of Plaatje's trip to England to bring tangible results left notables in Thaba 'Nchu and Mafikeng disillusioned. Even the Rev Joel D Goronyane, who had been a most eloquent and passionate proponent of Serolong and a greater Bechuana nationalism, was shifting his gaze towards a larger black consensus as the core unit of political mobilisation. Writing to Silas and William Letsapa, a councillor of the Ratlou Barolong, Goronyane painted a disturbing imagery of Africans' suffering.

In this government, we blacks are like a piece of meat on a hob, and whilst it is cooking, the cooks remove now and then a piece to eat as it boils, and so on; it seems that finally it is to be dished out and completely finished off.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ L. Monnarora to S. T. Molema, 25 March 1921, A 979 Aa2.9. Sechuana

¹⁸⁵ R.C. Macgregor to High Commissioner, 5 April 1921, S. 13/4.

¹⁸⁶ J. Goronyane to W. Letsapa, 18 July 1921, A979Aa2.100a, then S.T. Molema, 13 September 1921, A 979 Aa2.100b Sechuana

Amongst the greatly disillusioned was Sebopioa, who completely withdrew from Congress and its politics. Four years after his efforts to see Plaatje off to England, he was again scouring a barrel of despair. He had remained home long enough to help the chieftaincy handle the legal dispute around Rietfontein, which they lost. Subsequently, a large proportion of the population in the reserve was no longer under chiefly control. (Chapter 2) He ‘left home so abruptly’ to take up work in Natal in June 1922.¹⁸⁷

Natal greeted him with the brunt of white hostility and racism. Without a certificate of exemption he could not walk about at night, or walk on the pavement or enter the town without permission. White privilege cared little for the great divide, at least as Sebopioa saw it, between an ‘educated native’ and a ‘Zulu from the wilds’.¹⁸⁸ He worked at Endloveni, a company owned by A.H. Todd, which produced traditional ‘African’ medicaments from herbs and probably other concoctions. Such remedies yielded healthy profits for many Africans licensed to distribute them, including later Khotso Sethuntsa, who became a legendary African millionaire through the trade.¹⁸⁹ Todd’s own brand was called *otukululayo* and claimed to treat illnesses by loosening the bowels, which was widely seen in traditional medicine as a route to health. Sebopioa thought Todd to be a ‘hard Master’ but also a ‘father’ and ‘good advisor’ to him. Todd offered to approach Natal officials around the exemption certificate.¹⁹⁰ Towards this purpose, Silas had to collect testimonials from various ‘respectable’ people, including Resident Commissioners in Mafikeng.¹⁹¹ Todd’s efforts were rewarded, but Sebopioa’s voter registration number had not been forwarded to the Native Affairs Department in Pretoria when

¹⁸⁷ S.J.Molema to S.T.Molema, 27 June 1922.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁹ F.Woods, *The Extraordinary Khotso: Millionaire Medicine Man from Lusikisiki* (London, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ S.J.Molema to S.T.Molema, 27 June 1922.

¹⁹¹ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 8 July 1922.

the certificate was issued, and thus the exemption from 'Native Laws' in Natal had struck him off the voter's roll in the Cape.

This he discovered a year later in 1923. Again he pleaded with his father to follow up the matter. The right to vote confirmed his status as a member of educated and propertied Africans. He was distraught that 'at this later hour in my age I do not want to be left behind when humble votes are being cast by my comrades for the good of my country and my home.'¹⁹² By then he was employed as a time keeper for the Afrikander Mine in Klerksdorp. Being a time keeper was, as he later put it, 'my humble work' but it proved a fruitful season in his employment trajectory, providing even room for some contentment.¹⁹³ By 1926 he had managed to 'meet his obligations & debt' and to have a 'good salary'.¹⁹⁴ He had adopted a stance that so many young notables took to in the cities, simply burying old dreams and professional aspirations, whilst working hard to keep the employment they were able to secure. They still strived for respectability however, and the forms of consumption associated with it. Although the return on investment in education was disappointing for many, being without it meant it was impossible even to hope for white-collar jobs. In 1924 Sebopioa's relative, a Leteane, encouraged his reluctant younger brother 'not [to] give up schooling for a present South Africa accommodates no seats or vacancies for ignorant men'.¹⁹⁵

Sebopioa too had become a chief of the city. He received and kept a watchful eye on Barolong immigrants into Klerksdorp from the reserve, and helped to place them in surrounding mines. He saw this as a 'privilege' he conferred on 'children of Molema and Barolong'. He built a network of friends and relationships that could help Barolong families

¹⁹² S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 2 May 1923.

¹⁹³ S. J. Molema to Mitchell, 12 February 1934, SPA.

¹⁹⁴ S.J. Molema to S. M. Molema, 2 May 1923.

¹⁹⁵ Leteane to T. Leteane, 24 January 1924, A979Cc11.1.

find men who had gone missing, and wrote to the Native Commissioner to make inquiries if they were reported dead.¹⁹⁶ He collected tribal levies towards the Barolong National Fund.

Sebopioa remained nevertheless also a chief of the countryside. In 1926 he came to blows with one Pholo Thari who, it appears, had been a member of a work party constructing a dam very near Sebopioa's residence at Moleloane (Signal Hill). When the absentee chief was away in Klerksdorp, Thari chopped down about thirty poles of brushwood and left them floating in the dam, contravening both the regulations of the colonial government to preserve forests, and chiefs' authority to authorize the cutting down of forests and extract a license fee. The proximity of the reservoir to Sebopioa's home and the latter's control of its use were very likely Thari's reasons for disgruntlement. Following the Rietfontein affairs, some men were no longer obliged to obey chiefs' summons to work. Returning from Klerksdorp, Sebopioa found the poles floating in the dam, and charged Thari for contravention of forest regulation, but also for 'contempt, in that 'he ignored my presence at Signal Hill as his superior represented by Mrs Emma S. J. Molema.' Emma and others begged Sebopioa for lenience, and the charges were dropped, but Sebopioa instructed Thari to remove the poles from the dam and to bring them to Emma whilst he returned to Klerksdorp where he remained for another six weeks. Upon Sebopioa's return, the poles were still floating on the dam, ruined by mould, to the general knowledge of the entire community. So enraged was Sebopioa that he jumped into the dam himself, removing all thirty poles unaided. It was only when Sebopioa fined him two oxen that Thari was repentant. The fine, after much 'praying' by Thari and other men, was reduced to one ox – still a most debilitating fine given vulnerable rural livelihoods.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ S.J. Molema to S. T. Molema, 29 May 1925.

¹⁹⁷ Minutes of Barolong Kgotla, 7 July 1926, A979Ac2.

Though educated Bechuana notables had anticipated a crisis of meritocracy at the turn of the twentieth century, by the 1920s they faced a spectrum of decline far worse. As Sebopioa's experiences in this section reflect, Mafikeng notables were certainly anxious about status. This section also highlighted how disillusionment ran high after the second Congress deputation to England bore no results and some adherents of its erstwhile ethnic nationalism turned more generally to the language of race. However, as the next section argues, there were younger educated Africans whose experiences encouraged alternative idealisations of nationhood. Sebopioa's brother was confronted with such personal dilemmas in love and work that he needed to conceive of the nation very differently if he were to accept his father's baton in leading it. The section below is concerned with his life in Scotland.

v. The endurance of a younger son

One of Modiri's younger brothers was held back from school whilst he completed his sojourn in Glasgow.¹⁹⁸ There was no room for failure or waste of time, yet Modiri was constantly without the financial support necessary for a speedy completion of his studies. The cost of a medical degree at the University of Glasgow was £150 over five years. Upon arrival he calculated that boarding and lodging costs would be roughly £52 per year but the Great War drove costs to at least £110 a year.¹⁹⁹ He kept a meticulous calculation of every farthing he spent in Europe, and sent these records home as well as news about his good progress through university. At the end of 1916, he was almost £60 in the red (having already fallen behind on his rent of £1 a week) but his father could only send him £20.²⁰⁰ Even that his father had to

¹⁹⁸ S.M. Molema to S. Molema, 22 March 19120, A979Ad2; S. M. Molema to M. Molema, 9 July 1915. Sechuana

¹⁹⁹ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 1916 June 17.

²⁰⁰ S.M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 10 July 1917.

borrow from a widow and her son.²⁰¹ By 1917 the cost of boarding and lodging had doubled. ‘If this war does not end soon’, he wrote wryly to Harriet, ‘I am afraid it will reduce many people of whom I will be one – to pauperism.’²⁰² With no money to travel or enjoy other pastimes, he poured any spare moment into an account of the history of diverse African groups, from the San to Bechuana, in the Union and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. As president of the African Races Association of Glasgow, he met a young and educated diaspora of indigenous people from British colonies.²⁰³

He thoroughly interrogated the emotional and cultural makings of his inner world. By 1915 he had found an affirming community of Methodists in Glasgow, and under their influence started to perceive a reticence amongst Bechuana as a stumbling block to cultivating emotionally nourishing families. He spoke to his mother through a new found freedom to articulate feeling and sentiment.

... even if people were to forget their mothers, I would never forget you ... You will understand what I mean when I say I have a friend here, a reverend and an Englishman called Rev Holdsworth ... Every Sunday when we meet at church he asks me “Have you written to your mother?” ... He says parents must tell their children that [“]My child I love you [“] and the children the same. And thus mother - I love you.

It was in the same letter that he sent his mother an account of how the war was transforming everyday life in Glasgow. He noted the thousands of refugees, but focused specifically on women’s changing roles whilst so many men were at war. Women were driving trains and

²⁰¹ Promissory note to P. Montsioa and son, June 1917, A979Aa3.4; Montsioa to S.T. Molema, 17 October 1917, A979Aa3 .

²⁰² S.T. Molema to H. Molema, 04 August 1917, A979Ad3.

²⁰³ Personal Document, Modiri Molema, A979Ad5.

issuing rail tickets. They were not only running the factories that produced weaponry, but learning to shoot and to handle guns because ‘they say they want to go to war.’²⁰⁴

He was always writing home asking for money. As soon as he set sail to Europe, he had already thought of himself as a ‘being a poor man’s son’.²⁰⁵ He depended on the benevolence of his landlord for a roof over his head and guaranteed rations of food, whilst he slogged away at his studies. In March of 1918 he had to postpone his training at a maternity hospital because he could not afford to travel to an unspecified university in England. He had been looking forward to it for many months and felt shame when he was expected in England but had no fare for a train. He was deeply disappointed also in his father. This incident settled in his mind that dutiful service to the nation as a physician must generate an income:

I am really quiet furious just now over this affair as I had made all arrangements, booked a place for myself in a special maternity hospital, and here at the last moment – no money! Just now I am worth less than nothing – Hopeless condition for a medical student to be in. If ‘*Bechuana ba rona*’ [our Bechuana] think, by any chance that after all this suffering they shall have medical attendance, medical advice and treatment from ‘*ngoana rona*’ [our child] free of charge, I fear me they are laboring under the greatest delusion conceivable.

He asked for Harriet’s help in pleading with his father for £100 to enable him to register for his final examinations, only twelve months away. He confided to her that ‘so far it has been a struggle for life’, and he did not know how he was managing to remain a student of the university. ‘It would not have been possible’, he said ‘but for some strange luck, but luck is not a dependable ally.’²⁰⁶ A week later all he received from his father was news of his mother’s sudden death. Shattered, he imagined how ‘grief must hang on everything and every place that

²⁰⁴ S. M. Molema to M. Molema, 9 July 1915. Sechuana

²⁰⁵ S.M.Molema to H.Molema, 22 June 1919, A979Ad3.

²⁰⁶ S.T. Molema to H. Molema 24 March 1918, A979Ad3.

mother had been in this life.’²⁰⁷ His landlords were in the meantime preparing to take him to court for defaulting on his payments.²⁰⁸ His father managed to borrow extensively from two Jewish traders.²⁰⁹ The settling of Joshua’s estate and the possibility to borrow against it also helped.²¹⁰ After Modiri graduated in April of 1919, his father encouraged an extra year for specialization ‘so that no one may for a second question my merits and ability when I get home.’²¹¹

In the meantime his father remarried. Harriet’s brother-in-law’s widow was his new wife.²¹² Modiri was expected to marry Anna, and his relationship with Marianne remained a secret. In 1919 he learnt with relief that Anna had wed Dick Marumoloa in 1919. The two cousins’ relationship had transgressed the boundaries of chastity and sexual purity, and Anna’s disappointed and devout father, Rev Moshoele, insisted on a marriage.²¹³ Dick had failed to be a model of Christianity and respectability. In 1912, Silas had discouraged contact between Modiri and Dick, who was at Healdtown. Two years later, Dick abandoned his studies, following a dismal academic performance and general misconduct. His father forced him to go to Lovedale.²¹⁴ By the time he married Anna, Dick was the National Secretary in Mafikeng. He too was ruined by a love for the bottle and, worse still, was physically abusive to his wife.²¹⁵ Anna claimed that she did not know of any arrangement with Molemas, but a noble woman was expected to wait patiently to be presented to her groom. Modiri feigned disappointment at news of Anna’s ‘affair’. He told Harriet that his ‘intentions were honest and honourable’, that

²⁰⁷ S.M. Molema to H. Molema, 15 July 1918, A979Ad3

²⁰⁸ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema 10 July 1918.

²⁰⁹ See for example, promissory notes: 25 June 1918 for J. Goosent, and 1 June 1918, 1 August 1918, 19 February 1919; A979Aa3.3

²¹⁰ DeKock to S. T. Molema, 28 November 1919, A979Aa3

²¹¹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 1 September 1919.

²¹² Starfield, ‘Dr S Molema’, 158

²¹³ S. M. Molema to H. Molema, 19 May 1919, A979Ad3

²¹⁴ S.J. Molema to J. Henderson, 28 April 1914, A979Bd1

²¹⁵ Noted conversations Molema family, 1912 August.

he had ‘intended to ask Anna’s hand in marriage but that Anna’s behavior led him ‘therefore [to] believe in my conscience that I am not opposing my beloved mother’s will, nor my fathers’ by not marrying her.’²¹⁶

He did nevertheless deeply desire companionship. Having been to town in Glasgow in August 1917 he was awake at midnight, describing to his sister the ‘funny life’ of ‘staying in apartments and lodgings’ being ‘away from kith and kin.’ Having come across ‘happy crowds of people’ had made ‘one realize how much ‘alone’ he is’. He described how ‘you practically live alone, eat alone, sit alone and so forth alone.’²¹⁷ Correspondence with Harriet had provided an important node of companionship throughout his stay in Scotland, but by mid-1920, she was no longer writing, leaving her brother with ‘a long silence’. Harriet’s withdrawal, he guessed, was to do with worsening unhappiness in her marriage. He suggested that she consider a divorce, and view the marriage as an error of human judgment, whose miserable consequences nevertheless presented new opportunity for fresh beginnings. The question was whether or not she was up to the challenge.

I can never think of you without a severe feeling of regret, dear ... Indeed, my Harriet, it often happens that the very things which present misfortune are our making or at least we rise renewed and re-invigorated and our strength increased from the effect of what seemed to be a catastrophe. But to do so, it is necessary above everything that we be strong, we must have a character [,] a moral strength and a dogged determination. You my little girl have some of those qualities which make up a strong personality. I must pray that you give your qualities a full and free exercise.²¹⁸

The main audience for this letter however was himself, to recalibrate his inner compass in the direction of his desires. As he was writing it, he was awaiting a letter from his father.

²¹⁶ S. M. Molema to H. Molema, 19 May 1919, A979Ad3

²¹⁷ S. M. Molema to H. Molema, 4 August 1917, A979Ad3

²¹⁸ S.M. Molema to H. Molema 28 July 1920, A979Ad3

He had asked for permission to marry Marianne – a woman who was not of noble birth, outside the family’s circle of intermarriage and not even Mochuana, having ‘been in love with her for seven years’.²¹⁹ The much anticipated response from his father arrived, but all it contained was information about the court’s ruling against the chieftaincy in the Rietfontein matter. His father had also written about feeling old and his vitality diminished, and was calling him home. But there was broached, in this same letter, the subject of marriage, but his father was merely stating that he [Silas] did not ‘yet know who I [Modiri] am to marry’. Modiri concluded that his own letter was still en route home, but he was wrong.

Rather than an outright refusal, his father was redirecting the conversation about marriage towards the legacies of chiefly power and responsibility that Modiri’s choice of Marianne distinctly lacked. His father was greatly disappointed and wished not to acknowledge the letter and its contents at all. In his decision to narrate the new vicissitudes in the chieftaincy, rather than discuss Modiri’s choice of spouse, Silas had also purposefully mentioned Sebopioa’s efforts concerning the Rietfontein matter. He was hoping to jar his younger son towards that same example. Modiri expressed no great disappointment over the Rietfontein news. He suggested simply that the books on the matter be closed because ‘having appealed to the highest courts we shall simply have to abide by their judgments’. Concerning the welter of the nation’s politics he admitted being completely out of his depth. He acknowledged distance as a contributing variable, but confirmed that he was ‘very anxious’ to come home ‘and especially be of assistance to you father’. With regard to Sebopioa, he was ‘very proud’ for ‘all he is doing and for what he stands (sic)’. Modiri then outlined how his vision for serving the nation upon his return.

²¹⁹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 16 May 1920.

Since I qualified I have been doing my best to increase my knowledge and make myself proficient in my profession, so that I shall be better able to help my people at home. I have several plans which I wish to discuss with you – such as beginning (1) a Nursing Home or Hospital (2) Improving the Sanitation of the stad (3) Giving lectures on Nursing and First-Aid to intelligent girls.²²⁰

His father saw immediately how these plans were wholly steeped in Modiri's professional ambitions and in his marriage to the qualified nurse he proposed to marry. These plans had nothing to do with chiefly aspiration or the nation's long struggle for self-determination. Silas refused to grant permission. He valued the continuing tradition of arranged marriage but his primary motivation, as a father, was to rein in a son who had always put his own interests first. Moreover, how could he hold two of his children to one standard of sacrifice and appear to be slackening the stakes where Modiri was concerned? Harriet did not opt to dissolve her marriage, but accepted her father's help to rehabilitate her husband. Sebopioa had long put aside his professional aspirations and committed himself to his father's work in the prime of his life. Modiri continued to make his supplications.

... She has the best education possible for our women in South Africa... This is the kind of person that would take an intelligent interest in my life work and be of material assistance to me in every way. There are very few girls to think of in connection with marriage who have either ambition or education enough. There are certainly none among our immediate people and more certainly none among our relations ...²²¹

'No son', he assured his father, 'loves and honours his father more than I love and honour you'. His father refused even more firmly. He would not even allow mention of the subject again, insisting that Marianne, 'daughter of a Scot', did not belong to the 'nation'. Modiri was 'feeling so much pain' and 'hardly knew what to say'. He yielded to his father's decision, but took the bold step of laying out in impeccable Sechuana his own concept of

²²⁰ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 27 April 1920.

²²¹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 16 May 1920.

nationhood. He made a distinction between the ‘nation’ as ‘*morafe*’ and the disparate groupings of ‘little people’ as ‘*dichabanyana*’ that comprised it. As he imagined it, *morafe* had nothing to do with geographical location or ethnic difference. Its single boundary was ‘race’ as a real and meaningful phenomenon, and as something embodied. His was a nation of all the ‘dark skinned people’. Modiri also underscored that becoming conscious of this nation was the greatest achievement of his education. His desire was to disseminate the message of, in his words, ‘the nation proper’ (*morafe tota*). If there was any place where Molemas’ great name had to prove its distinction and its commitment to ‘progress’, it was in the painstaking labour to birth this ‘proper’ nation, and no other.

You have refused to do as I asked, that you allow me to marry the daughter of a Scot [*Skota*] ... you say the person I want to marry is of another people [*dichaba*]. I am not asking for permission to marry a white woman, a *lekgoa* like many men here are doing ... [or] a Cape (coloured) or a black woman from Nigeria in West Africa ... I am only asking to marry a woman you know well, a child of people who respect themselves and have a sense of being (*botho*) and education and love ... I am [also] letting you know that it is my intent wish that your name as Rre Molema shall not come to die with Barolong, or be known only amongst Bechuana, or amongst black people of South Africa only ... My intention is to live and work for the liberation [*kgololo*] and life of black people across all of Africa. To do that is my intention, to stop strife and hatred so that our people can unite to become a nation [*morafe*] indeed, not small peoples (*dichabanyana*).²²²

It was this message, he explained, that he ‘taught’ his fellow black students as president of the African Students Association. This was also the message in his first published work, *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa*, published in 1920.²²³ Through its pages, Modiri brought together into a unified whole what his father’s generation understood as disparate African nations. The book’s significance was not so much the narrative of change and Empire, as his biographer has argued.²²⁴ Rather it

²²² S.M. Molema to S.T Molema, 10 October 1920. Sechuana

²²³ M. Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa* (Edinburgh, 1920).

²²⁴ Starfield, ‘Dance with the Empire’, 502.

was in its atypical and novel integration of dark skinned people's histories within a single conceptual and narrative frame as the 'Bantu'. Modiri was arguing that these different people, from the San to the Xhosa and his own Bechuana were the 'Bantu', with a shared history, belonging to one 'nation'. He reconceptualised the language and political geography of ethnic identification but placing all these disparate groups on one map, as the 'Bantu.' (Map 5b) What was revolutionary was not that dark skinned people suffered under white oppression, but that they were one nation. This book was amongst the very first, if not the first, scholarly and political reconceptualisation of African nationhood in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Union. Its author was very young, at twenty-seven years old, and its argument was very subtle.

Plaatje was impressed with the book's scope and even the mastery of style and language. He congratulated and affirmed the younger author, yet, his 'only regret' about the text, though made in jest, was in effect a serious concern. Plaatje was acutely sensitive to the shifting nuances of the times, however subtle, and had not missed the underlying revision in Modiri's conceptualisation of nationhood. He reminded Modiri of the proper boundaries of national loyalties, even despite the deep personal costs involved. Plaatje made it a point to celebrate the book as an achievement of and for the Barolong nation. The 'Bantu', he insinuated, were a mere (and misconceived) idea, whilst ethnic nationalism was the substance of real life, so much so that the reception of the book would be along ethnic cleavages.

My only regret is that this book will excite the jealousies of the very Bantu for whose benefit you have laboured thus unselfishly for the book is BIG. Other tribes will maliciously belittle your efforts while the 200,000 Barolongs will offer you their lip loyalty instead of recommending it to possible buyers.²²⁵

²²⁵ S. Plaatje to S.M. Molema 11 July 1920, A979Da61.

Plaatje wrote soon afterwards to Silas about the book, having met with Modiri in Scotland. He deliberately forged continuity between their generation and the younger Molema.

Whilst I was walking in dismay that Barolong will come to ruin, works like these promise that when a being (*motho*) dies, a being shall remain. Now we do not know what to do with the resentments of the peoples (*ditjhaba*) when Barolong write books that are read around the world like those of whites, while other nations (*merafe*) are still trying to write [basic literacy] but are unable to.²²⁶

Plaatje did not manage to craft an alternative political philosophy. Ethnic particularism remained a lens through which he saw the world. His livelihood also depended so significantly on chiefly patrons, but fundamentally his honour and sense of self was embedded in this idea of nationhood. Throughout his life, his intellectual explorations were wide-ranging, as was the impressively diverse circle of scholars, politicians and writers he met or corresponded with, including from Britain and the United States. He was greatly disappointed in Bechuana for their seeming apathy, but no series of private entanglements had ever caused him such anxiety that he needed to reinvent himself to regain his sense of inner coherence. Foremost in his mind as he prepared to return home in 1920 after his mission to England on behalf of Barolong chiefs had failed, was picking up the pieces of what remained of the nation and its struggles. He envisioned using familiar tools – a national newspaper, and the production of Sechuana culture by developing its orthography and writing vernacular texts. Whilst in London in 1920, he was invited to edit a multilingual newspaper in Johannesburg. In turning down this salaried opportunity, he was nurturing deep hopes that *Tsala* would be resuscitated. He did not want Silas to give up hope.

I will tell Mr Taberer that my people will not allow me to write a paper of mixed languages. They want me to edit a paper in Secoana in the same line as Basotho have one in Sesotho an Matebele have their own. If you stand with me in this *every*

²²⁶ S. Plaatje to S. T. Molema, 25 August 1920, A979Da62. Sechuana

*thing (sic) will come right and we will resuscitate the Tsala again.*²²⁷

On the other hand, Modiri had reached the far shores of a personal journey that separated him in thought, aspiration and sensibility from the earlier generation's frame of politics. Plaatje's powerful image of continuity, where a father's dreams have no grave but are continuously resurrected in the children he leaves behind, was certainly not the case with *The Bantu Past and Present*. He would not marry Marianne because, as he wrote to his father, 'the love with which I love you will not allow me to do what displeases you', but he also said he would not to marry at all – to remain sensitive to his sweetheart's disappointment.²²⁸ With these decisions made, and two medical qualifications under his belt, he returned to Mafikeng in October 1921. Although they disagreed about what this entity essentially meant, like his father Modiri accepted leading a nation as a vocation. In that sense, like Sebopioa had done a decade earlier, he returned home to step into his father's shoes.

In summary, Modiri actively constructed and embraced a new conception of nationhood. This was partly because he was exposed to it through new surrounds, but primarily because he had been fighting deep, and personal demons to escape the obligations and sacrifices owed to his father's nation since he was a teenager. At roughly the same time that his father was defending the nation's boundaries in denying Modiri the choice to marry for love, he was himself disavowing the same boundaries in Mafikeng. As the next section shows, Silas was suggesting that the reserve be split up under multiple, autonomous chiefs. He was trying to rid himself of political opponents, and perhaps in his old age ideals mattered less. His primary instinct was to create some opportunity for his daughter's unstable husband, and her troubled marriage. It is to this moment that we now turn.

²²⁷ S. T. Plaatje to S. M. Molema, 5 August 1920, 979Da62. Sechuana – italics in English

²²⁸ .S. M. Molema to S.T Molema, 10 October 1920. Sechuana

vi. The loyalty of a daughter

A few months after John's official deposition, Silas arranged that Harriet and John travel to Pietersburg, about 540 km northeast of Mafikeng, for a retreat. They travelled after Easter in April 1920, and remained there for some time for John's recuperation. Harriet was therefore no longer teaching. 'We are quite happy', she reported to her father, and that John is 'improving daily' due to the 'change of climate'.²²⁹ Even Modiri in Scotland adopted a more positive line of enquiry around his brother-in-law's health.²³⁰ John's mind was on nothing but the chieftaincy he had lost. He wrote to his father-in-law, pleading with him to call a *kgotla*, and petition for a reinstatement.²³¹ His deposition had been a protracted and humiliating court battle. It was not so much the claims of Lotlamoreng Montsioa that the chieftaincy was rightfully his that caused his defeat. Divulgence of his drinking sprees, his violent behavior, and his complete incapacity to handle everyday responsibilities convinced the Minister of Native Affairs, F S Malan, that the temperate Letlamoreng was a better choice. Silas did everything he could to secure John's position. Despite Malan having called specifically on him 'not to go away and oppose the new chief', Silas did just that following John's plea. He gathered petitioners against the deposition in June of that year, and presented the startling demand that failing John's reinstatement, the

... Tribe be divided up into different Sections, i.e. Stadts, without any ... [paramount] Chief; each stadt to conduct its own internal affairs under its own Chief Headman [and] settle its own tribal, civil and criminal disputes and trials, the only reference to any outside Court to be to the Magistrate as an Appeal Court in terms of Sections 33 BB Proclamation No 2 of 1885. Should neither of the above

²²⁹ H. Molema to S.T.Molema, 26 April 1920, A979Aa1.

²³⁰ S.M. Molema to H. Molema, 20 July 1920, A979Ad3.

²³¹ J. Montsioa to S.T. Molema, 8 April 1920, A979Be1.

be done there is no doubt that in the near future disturbances of a very serious nature, which are now maturing, will materialise.²³²

So long were the knives during the chieftaincy's dark implosion, that Silas abandoned the highest ideals of nationhood. Both the resistance to Dog Tax and the battle to retain Rietfontein, aimed to preserve an existing pattern of racial and ethnic integration in the polity, as well as the interests it served. By the time John was deposed, there was very little left of that nation. Those capillaries of patriarchal power that legitimized chiefly rule had weakened, whilst the paramount chief had jurisdiction over only a slim segment of the reserve's population. (Chapter 2) Even this, Silas proposed, was to be cut up and distributed amongst warring notables. The colonial government rejected the proposal, whilst Lotlamoeng Montsioa held the centre together by enforcing notables' payments of quitrent for their plots on Barolong Farms, especially those who opposed him. The point was not merely a "symbolic gesture directed at the public subordination of his rivals".²³³ It was a structural response to centrifugal vortexes on chiefly rule on the other side of the Molopo River, in the Cape Colony. By the end of the 1920s, Lotlamoeng became even more aggressive. A young notable had his two oxen impounded whilst he was away at agricultural college for failure to pay this quitrent in the winter of 1927. 'It is clear that he [Lotlamoeng] is ruining everything', the young man wrote to Silas, 'I did not know there can be seizure of one's property in his absence and without any notification.'²³⁴

John's predisposition to instability was exacerbated by his public humiliation and loss of power. A month into their Pietersburg retreat, Harriet sent her father an urgent telegram to 'meet me tonight' at Mafikeng's station.²³⁵ John's mental instability had again erupted but in

²³² Starfield, 'Dr S Modiri Molema', 162.

²³³ Comaroff, 'Class and Culture', 87.

²³⁴ Unknown to Molema, 1927 June 1, A979Aa3, Sechuana.

²³⁵ H. Molema to S.T. Molema, 1 July 1920, A979Aa1.

a burst so violent he had to be admitted to a mental hospital in Johannesburg, and then Pretoria.²³⁶ Two years later he had still ‘not recovered’ but the hospital insisted on discharging him.²³⁷ Another of Plaatje’s brothers-in-laws took him in so that, as Sebopioa put it, he does ‘not wander about the streets.’²³⁸ In 1923 John divorced Harriet.²³⁹ Her father shared the news that ‘the children have separated’ with another chief.²⁴⁰ When John died due to alcohol related illness in 1925, Silas expressed pain and perhaps even a sense of disappointment in himself as a father, or perhaps in God given the words his nephew, Rev Moshoele, wrote to reassure him.

To some was given children but those children held nothing of worth to the world. No Father. God is great, it is only that often our hearts do not have God and we forget that we are sinful ones because we do not entrust our lives in Him. In these times, the person who will survive a little while longer is he who entrusts his life to the care of [spiritual] doctors. Father, the days of prodigality are long gone, then we were not in the light we have today. I know it is liquor that has taken all of these children of Montsioa that I know, except Mokgeeta.²⁴¹

It may have been around this time that Harriet wanted to ‘start as a fresh teacher in a fresh school so that I may improve my position with the school.’ She promised to ‘do my utmost best to discharge my duties to the satisfaction of the managers and the approval of the inspector’ at a new Green Point School, whose location is not known.²⁴²

By the beginning of the 1920s, the nation had been hammered on the outside by colonial rule (Chapter 2), but this section has highlighted how it had also imploded from within due to deep rivalries. Although this did not spell a terminal end for the chieftaincy, Molemas were left outside the assemblage of chiefly power that remained. As the next section shows, Silas

²³⁶ Superintendent of Natives to S.T. Molema, 24-26 July 1920, A979Be1.

²³⁷ Superintendent of Natives to S.T. Molema, 11 May 1922, A979Aa4.

²³⁸ S.J. Molema to H. Bud’Mbelle, 29 September 1922, A979Aa4.

²³⁹ Chief John Legal Affairs, A979Be4, Undated document of Supreme Court, 1925.

²⁴⁰ G.B. Gaseitsioe to S.T. Molema, 26 March 1924, A979Aa2. 111.

²⁴¹ J. Moshoele to S. T. Molema, 29 May 1925, A979Aa1, Sechuana

²⁴² Undated draft, H. Molema, A979Ae1.

focused his attention more towards business. In the Congress movement, some felt a change in strategy was required, although reserves remained a focus of political conversation.

vii. A family's resilience

When Modiri returned to Mafikeng in the spring of 1921, James Molebaloa was still nursing his ambition for a clerical career in the Methodist Church. Stuck in the squalor of an urban location, he had still not given up on re-establishing himself in the countryside. Molebaloa was outraged by the changes the government's conception of segregation had brought to Mafikeng. As early as 1916, Molebaloa wrote a petition to the colonial government, pointing out that 'industrial centres' were attracting men 'from all parts of Africa'. His concern was that 'on giving up town life' these Africans were no longer being 'absorbed by several surrounding districts, where European control is more effective'. The Natives Land Act of 1913, he argued, 'by locking up the country to such natives', were preventing settlement in white-owned farms, and 'will reduce our Reserves to a dumping ground for the overflowing black population of the industrial centres, some of whom do not tend to make the best of citizens.' He insisted that 'these territories were never conquered, but were ceded to the British Imperial Authorities by mutual agreement.'²⁴³ Two years later in his testimony before the Native Land Commission, Silas used the same phrase, that overcrowding would 'reduce our reserve to a dumping ground for the overflowing black population of the industrial centre.'²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Molebaloa, *The Barolong and Native Affairs*, unnumbered.

²⁴⁴ Starfield, Dr S. Modiri Molema, 146.

Cape Town, as Molebaloa experienced, was one of the big centres that had proved unwelcoming as far as respectable white-collar opportunities were concerned. Some like Sebopioa returned to the land intending to farm. Silas' youngest son, Morara, was also sent to a college for agriculture in the 1920s.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, they still aspired to white-collar occupations. Independent African churches provided some opportunity for educated Africans' upward mobility. James Molebaloa was eventually ordained in the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa in 1934. Silas' nephew Cornelius Maseloanyane was ordained in the African Holy Catholic Church in 1914. The Wesleyans had denied him such opportunity, and he had suffered 'such very, very great pain that I would rather remain a mine-digger than return to them.'²⁴⁶ In July 1920, Silas paid a subscription fee to join Benefit Limited's pyramid scheme. He was to be paid £10 'as salary for the first month', and thereafter he would be paid 50 percent commission on each new member he introduced into the scheme. He also qualified for a loan of 5 percent per annum from Benefit's Limited.²⁴⁷ Although the success of this endeavor is uncertain, Silas had turned his full energies to entrepreneurship, even resuscitating his transport business. Business was helped especially by mining prospectors who were digging for minerals in northern districts. In April of 1923 he sold prospecting rights on John Montsioa's farm, Devondale, for £100.²⁴⁸ In May 1924, Silas obtained his own license for digging at the growing Molopo Diggings.²⁴⁹

The opening up of this prospective mining territory brought traffic into the reserve, including Europeans who needed to hire wagons and oxen to transport goods to and from the

²⁴⁵ M. Molema to S. T. Molema, 7 August 1927, A979Aa1.

²⁴⁶ C. Maseloanyane to S.T. Molema, 16 November 1913, A979Aa2.43. Sechuana

²⁴⁷ Benefit's Limited Contract, 20 July 1920 A 979 Aa3.

²⁴⁸ J. Flemming and J.L. Ashely to S.T. Molema, 4 April 1923, A979Aa3.

²⁴⁹ Department of Mines and Industries to S.T. Molema, 13 May 1924, A979Aa3.

diggings. From July 1924 a European, Richard Wright, paid Silas weekly for the hire of wagons. Wright was in the business of carting water, mielies and sorgum to and from the diggings. He relied on Silas to provide grain. Wright worked hard, and kept his promise to Silas that 'you will not be disappointed with me.' He also relied on Silas to provide forage for his oxen.²⁵⁰ By March of the following year, Wright's earnings were so low that he wished to dispose of his cattle.²⁵¹ Although no mineral findings were made, and small enterprises like Wright's collapsed, the influx of more people into the reserve had provided temporary unskilled employment and greatly expanded the cash nexus. Hence Africans' growing interest in establishing trading stores. Silas was planning to establish himself as a trader.²⁵² The construction industry also presented new opportunities for the local transport industry. Silas was contracted to transport concrete to the building site in April 1924 when the Union government was building Public Offices in Mafikeng.²⁵³

Hertzog's segregationist policies were not contested in principle by most of the educated African classes. The bolts and nuts of their implementation were the bone of contention. Soon upon the heels of the completion of the Drought Commission of 1923, treasurer of the SANNC Selby Msimang circulated an urgent memorandum to all members of Congress in 1924, including Silas. He warned that the reserves were becoming bare landscapes of denuded forests, soil erosion and severe malnutrition, and also that educated Africans would flounder in the cold should the government continue its vision of territorial segregation. Unlike his brother Richard, Selby had not travelled overseas to study. He had qualified as a teacher, and had worked many years as a court interpreter. He had already started organising the

²⁵⁰ R.. Wright to S. T. Molema, 1, 9, 10, 19, 21 July, 9 August, 18 October, 8 and 22 November 1924 A979Aa3.

²⁵¹ R.. Wright to S. T. Molema, 11 March 1925, A979Aa3.

²⁵² L.Marumoloa to S.T. Molema, 23 May 1927, A979Aa3.

²⁵³ Mitchell to S.T. Molema, 25 April 1924, A979Aa3.

Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in Bloemfontein, and had been lobbying for more Africans to be hired as government clerks. Underlying the new engagement of educated Africans in trade unionism in the 1920s, as Bradford has argued, were concerns about the growing vulnerability of their own livelihoods, and limited opportunities.²⁵⁴ Congress remained focused however on educated Africans' plight. If educated Africans like Msimang had to be forcefully expedited to the reserves by segregationist legislation, then their aspirations and livelihoods would simply languish into waste. His 'fear' was that the 'segregation bogey' would cut Africans like himself off from 'contact with civilised influences' Before then, he urged, 'a beginning should be made now to equip ourselves for the hard life awaiting us in the segregated areas.'²⁵⁵

Msimang urged for a basic plan to support rural livelihoods and create niches for middle-class aspiration in the reserves. He called for a uniform strategy of rural development that could provide new commercial, agricultural and other aspirational niches for educated Africans to sustain themselves in the reserves. There was simply too little time for the idiosyncrasies of ethnically inscribed idealism. Msimang was, in an important sense, advocating just and equitable terms that could nurture African aspirations in segregated reserves. In Bloemfontein, educated Bechuana welcomed the Urban Areas Act No 21 of 1923. According to John Mancoe, the compiler of a directory of educated Africans and so-called coloureds in Bloemfontein in 1937, this feeling spread beyond their town. Mancoe noted that 'the general policy of the segregation of Natives in Urban areas was widely accepted' during the passing of the bill. The main complaint in Bloemfontein, whose African population mainly consisted of Bechuana, was that the 'administration of the laws was haphazard and incomplete'

²⁵⁴ H. Bradford, 'Mass Movements and the Petty Bourgeoisie: The Social Origins of the ICU Leadership, 1924 – 1921, *The Journal of African History*, 25, 3 (1984), 295-310.

²⁵⁵ H. Selby Msimang to S. T. Molema, 25 September 1924, A979Cc9.

because it did not improve the lot of educated middle-classes who lived in urban squalor. The ‘slum areas, liquor dens and hotbeds of crime and vice’ remained intact, whilst no ‘respectable’ housing accommodation was provided.²⁵⁶

Modiri, in contrast to both Mancoe and Msimang, opposed segregation. He argued at a church meeting in January 1925 that black and white were too intimately connected in the ‘organism’ of economic, social and political life for segregation to be advantageous to any one group.²⁵⁷ Modiri read intensely and very widely, especially whilst writing *The Bantu Past and Present*. He had come across and become partially influenced by the ideas of structural functionalists, like Herbert Spencer, who understood society as made up of interdependent ‘organs’. Their proper working together ensured optimal functioning of the social ‘body’. His training as a medical doctor would have lent him ready affinity for these views. His politics nevertheless pushed race into the foreground of analysis. So central was race in fact that he considered marriage across the colour-bar as ‘pollut[ing] the blood.’²⁵⁸ Modiri wanted a complete breakdown of ethnic enclaves – what he conceived as ‘African nationalism’. Congress was simply not ready for the latter, and he remained outside of its structures. Furthermore, Modiri was removed from the pulse of his time precisely because he was, in his words, ‘one of the foremost men of my race and one of the best educated amongst black and white’²⁵⁹ He enjoyed a consistent income in his own private practice as a medical doctor, and did not share anxieties around incomes and status that preoccupied other educated Africans.

Silas had largely withdrawn from political activities during this time. His concern was seeing through the education of his two younger sons and daughter, Stella. Educating them,

²⁵⁶ J. Mancoe, *First Edition of the Bloemfontein Bantu and Coloured People’s Directory*, (Bloemfontein, 1934).

²⁵⁷ Modiri Molema, January 1925, MS 380268, SOAS.

²⁵⁸ S.M. Molema to S.T Molema, 10 October 1910.

²⁵⁹ S.M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 16 May 1920.

however, remained a struggle. In March 1924, Sefetogi wrote to his father from Healdtown ‘to tell you that I am going almost barefoot’. By the time he left home at the beginning of the year his ‘only one pair of boots was finished’ but he acknowledged that he knew ‘quite well’ that Silas had ‘no money.’²⁶⁰ Modiri finally bought his brother’s clothing, but his father remained the principal family provider.²⁶¹ Harriet continued to be a more conscientious contributor to the household purse and granary, not infrequently sending home a bag of grain, and keeping a watchful eye over Stella’s education.²⁶² By that time, she had re-established herself as a teacher in Thaba Nchu, and had married a young notable, Robert Setlogelo. She had no children and ‘borrowed’ them from relatives in Mafikeng who stayed in her household whilst attending school.²⁶³ Before Setlogelo could pursue his medical studies in Britain in the early thirties, Harriet tragically died in 1929, only thirty-three years old.²⁶⁴

Silas handed the reins of salaried headman to Sebopioa in 1926. Sebopioa would be able to draw a salary of £24 from the Native Affairs Department. Sebopioa was keen to succeed his father, and give notice to his employers with immediate effect, but only under the condition that Lotlamoreng Montsioa would also pay him a ‘salary’. He wanted a firm ‘guarantee’ that he would be paid ‘wages for services’ every month.²⁶⁵ Sebopioa continued in the battle to make ends meet, as he would all his life, whilst Modiri’s busy life was punctuated by excursions by motorcar to the countryside for picnics and ‘fine moonlit nights’ where he ‘sang and ate all along the way ... and tea flowed like water.’²⁶⁶ Modiri ran a thriving medical practice in Mafikeng, as the third African doctor in the Union. He opened a subsidiary practice in

²⁶⁰ S.Molema to S.T. Molema, 3 March 1924, A979Aa1.

²⁶¹ M. Molema to S.T. Molema, 24 April 1924, A979Aa1.

²⁶² H. Molema to S.T. Molema, 24 December 1924, 5 July 1927, A979Aa1.

²⁶³ H. Molema to S.T. Molema, 3 January 1927, A979Aa1.

²⁶⁴ From copies of Robert Setlogelo’s papers, Colin Murray private archive for *Black Mountain*.

²⁶⁵ S.J. Molema to S.T. Molema, 19 March 1926, A979Ac1.

²⁶⁶ S. M. Molema to S. Molema 26 May 1921, A979Ad2.

Johannesburg where his focus was ‘directed at high paying white patients’ though he also attended to relatively poor whites. In 1927, white nurses resigned from Victoria hospital in Mafikeng after Modiri admitted some of his white private patients there. The nurses objected to taking instructions from a black medical doctor. Modiri took legal action against the hospital and the nurses were forced to return to work.²⁶⁷ With a white German doctor as partner, Modiri eventually established a private nursing home in Mafikeng. It was staffed with white nurses and treated patients across the racial divide, but this achievement was considerably short of the plans he and Marianne had to serve the *stadt*, which he had described to his father. Predictably, Anna’s marriage to Dick was short-lived. In 1925 a relationship with Modiri ensued. It was a courtship almost choked to death by the skeletons of the past. Anna berated herself for marrying Dick, which she feared caused Modiri’s reluctance to commit to marriage. Modiri’s own answer was only that ‘it takes a long time to forget or get over some things.’²⁶⁸ Nevertheless they married later in 1926.²⁶⁹

Both Sebopioa and Modiri were representatives of the Barolong on the Bechuanaland Protectorate Native Advisory Council (NAC). This colonial institution had its genesis in the spiraling costs of running a British protectorate with severely limited funds from imperial coffers. Moreover, whilst the export of cattle was the Protectorate’s main source of revenue, the region was plagued by outbreaks of lung-sickness primarily and other cattle diseases in the late 1910s. In 1918, the imperial government dropped Bechuanaland Protectorate from the treasury’s responsibilities, leading the Resident Commissioner, J. Macgregor to decide on a fund through which taxation could be raised.²⁷⁰ It was eventually decided that Africans would

²⁶⁷ A. Digby, ‘From Mahlangeni to Gumedede: The Second Generation of Black Doctors in South Africa, 1913-1930’, *South African Medical Journal*, 7, 6 (2007), 424-29.

²⁶⁸ A. Moshoele to S.M. Molema, 27 March 1926, A979Ad5.

²⁶⁹ J. Moshoele to S.M. Molema, 27 September 1927, A979Ad1.

²⁷⁰ J. C. Macgregor to Lord Buxton, 19 December 1918, S. 13/4.

be taxed 3 shillings on every pound of Hut Tax they paid for eradication of stock diseases, native education, and fencing. Europeans had their own advisory council, and would pay an increased tax of 5 shillings (from 2s 6p) on cattle export duty. All of Europeans contributions went into General Revenue. About half of what was collected from Africans was placed into General Revenue as their contribution to the eradication of cattle diseases. The other half was available for reinvestment in their reserves. The paramount chief of each reserve was invited to sit on the NAC along with some representatives of his 'tribe'.

According to the Resident Magistrate chiefs were 'anxious to proceed at once with the collection of the extra 3/-', including Khama of the Bamongoato in Serowe who nevertheless initially declined to sit on the body.²⁷¹ The advantages were immediately apparent. The tax fund provided opportunities for chiefs to improve or build schools, court houses, later even medical services. Through these bureaucracies, chiefs could sponsor the aspirations of some of their educated classes. They paid immediate attention to the construction of dams and the importation of drought resistant oxen in order to help an impoverished peasantry and provide incentives for men to remain in the reserves.²⁷² Though this evolution was more complex than can be captured here, educated Bechuana chiefs were fully collaborating with the Empire to produce a 'progressive' but quintessentially African population who embraced Sechuana and traditional authority whilst modernising their reserves. Chiefs also used the NAC to write themselves into the Native Administration Bill that was introduced in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the mid-1930s. As Sebopioa noted to another minor chief in 1934, 'as usual Chiefs Tshekedi, Bathoen, Lotlamoeng, Dick Lekoko, SJ Molema & Dr Molema spent several nights writing and mending the Draft Proclamation, & we have sent such long letter to His

²⁷¹ Lord Buxton to J. C. Macgregor, 22 August 1919, S.13/4.

²⁷² See minutes of the Native Advisory Council, BNB records, from 1918 till the 1940s,

Excellency and are waiting on the reply.²⁷³ This was one of many stages of the consolidation of Bechuana's nationhood under chiefs. This moment was presciently captured by Modiri during his very first attendance of the council in 1924. In response as to whether or not the minutes of the council ought to be captured in typescripts and disseminated as pamphlets to members, he answered that

This Council is the beginning of our Parliament and Minutes printed in pamphlet form are better and easier to handle than typewritten copies. I think we are unanimous about printing and that the cost be defrayed from the Native Fund.²⁷⁴

There was also an important force of national consolidation from below. In 1931, Emma and Anna's sister, Helen, resigned from their positions as secretaries of the Women's Prayer Union of the Wesleyan Church, following a wrangle over the schedule for lay preaching in the stad.²⁷⁵ Coeval with this seemingly trivial event was increasing evangelism by American preachers of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Mafikeng. They catered for the tastes of the educated classes by distributing pamphlets, reading material and even film shows.²⁷⁶ Fractures in the Wesleyan Church were certainly not reason enough to abandon one flock of the Christian community, but provided some incentive to explore other pastures. The two cousins were later restored to their positions, but in September of 1933, Emma again 'resigned' from her position as the secretary of the Women's Union and as a member of that church.²⁷⁷ A month later she was baptised by the Adventists and was feeling, in her husband's words, 'like a new born baby'. He also implored her to 'preach to several others' amongst their family and friends.²⁷⁸ Sebopioa

²⁷³ S.J. Molema to J. Ratshosa, 31 January 1934, SPA.

²⁷⁴ Minutes of NAC, 1924 March 18, BNB 235.

²⁷⁵ Petition of complaint, undated 1931, SPA.

²⁷⁶ Undated Adventists pamphlets, SPA.

²⁷⁷ E. Molema to J. Mohau, 21 September 1933, SPA.

²⁷⁸ S. J. Molema to E. Molema, undated October 1933, SPA.

too wanted to be baptised, as had Anna and all her sisters. 'Our womenfolk', Sebopioa wrote to Molebaloa 'have joined the Sabath (sic)'. Although he had been in a church all his life, he stressed to Molebaloa that 'we must be born again', and not for the benefit of swelling the numbers of independent African churches as 'Black Man's Movement', but 'for the salvation of your soul.'²⁷⁹ By the 1930s, there had emerged an important core of sisters and cousins, especially the Molema sisters, who had married paramount chiefs, junior chiefs and other notables in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Though Anna and her sisters, as well as Emma, had married temperate brothers and cousins, other relations were not so lucky. Alcohol and violence had imposed severe pressures on marriage. Arguably this social crisis influenced the spread of Seventh Day Adventism along these contours of gender and class. It moulded a deep and submissive devoutness, which was nevertheless robust, independent and authoritative against 'spiritual evils.' For at least three decades, these women spent many hours in daily prayer and Bible study. They urged each other towards courage in the effort to help their husbands regain the fading lustre of chiefly prestige and respectability; to send their children to Britain to gain rare professional qualifications; and to perform 'good works' in the lives of a remaining and vulnerable peasantry. They evangelised through the dedicated work of their hands. They fed the destitute, visited the sick, and exchanged news with ordinary and uneducated women as they taught them how to cook, sow and pray. They also ran schools, including Sunday schools and crèches.²⁸⁰ Their churches did not grow very large and were also less hierarchical than Methodism. They were a peculiar and conspicuous community of the 'elect' who were at one and the same time breaking down social

²⁷⁹ S. J. Molema to J. Molebaloa, 3 May 1934, SPA.

²⁸⁰ Interviews Mercy Molema, Mafikeng and Mmamoroba Letlakana, Gaborone 1912 August, Tshakedi Khama Papers, KHAM/12/EK/2/3 , KHAM/12/EK/2/1

hierarchies, but only to entrench the kind of chiefly and patriarchal authority that ordinary people could embrace.

These transformation in the 1930s and beyond were processes Silas did not live long enough to see, which is unfortunate because they grew also from the sediments of his newspaper, *Koranta*. The changes he witnessed in the countryside in the 1920s differed remarkably, depending on which side of the border he was on. When he visited Barolong Farms in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, change was more gradual, and although even there his position as a landlord had been reconfigured, he still retained control over European tenants and an African peasantry. (Chapter 3) In the Molopo Reserve, as part of the Cape Colony, the pace of change was steeper. In the 1920s, he tried to belong to what would crystallise as an entrepreneurial class of African traders, including butchers, hawkers of fruit and vegetable, bakers and even owners of eating places in the 1930s and 1940s. This class came from various walks of life. They made some money from households that no longer lived wholly on land, but purchased some of their daily necessities.²⁸¹ Even in the 1920s, the potential for lucrative gains were already there, hence the Mafikeng Divisional Council tightly regulated who could trade and where, so as to protect existing European traders. Silas applied unsuccessfully for a license for S.T. Molema, General Dealer in May 1927.²⁸² In July 1927, he hired lawyers J.B. Kieser to compel the council to disclose the reasons for refusing to grant him a trading license, but this too failed.²⁸³ He made some small money by charging a fee of two shillings and six pence every year for the use of his postbox, suggesting increasing levels of literacy in the reserve.²⁸⁴ Silas Molema died on 6 September, 1927.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Rural Trading and Business Sites, 26 April 1945 to 28 January 1946, 1/MFK 58 N2/4/3/1

²⁸² S.M. Molema to DCM, 1927 May 31, A979Aa3

²⁸³ J.N. Kieser to S. M. Molema, 1927 July 18, A979Aa3

²⁸⁴ Post box fee list, undated 1920s A979 Cc11.2

²⁸⁵ P. Montsioa to Superintendent of Natives, 1 MFK 9 N1/1/2 2/4/2 Part II.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored various dynamics concerning identity, power and social change in southern Africa from the vantage point of two generations of Molemas, between the 1880s and the 1920s. The Comaroffs describe how European expansion impinged upon the southern Bechuanas' everyday life and conceptions of self during this time. They explored what Africans' social practices can reveal of their self-imagination, especially given the frequent absence of narratives, meaning people's reconstructions of themselves and their place in the world. Through a reading of practices that often matched lifestyles of their European contemporaries, the Comaroffs argue that Silas Molema and his family held a 'modern' disposition, which embodied *sekgoa*, a reification of westernisation, rather than *sechuana*.¹ The Comaroffs' proposition transcends the notion of 'black Victorianism' that has largely informed the historiography of educated Africans in South Africa. However, educated Bechuanas' narratives in *Koranta ea Bechuana* at the turn of the twentieth century suggest that everyday practices along the colonial frontier did not hold specific cultural meanings. Despite their lifestyles, Molema and other educated Bechuana imagined themselves as embodying *sechuana* and in fact disparaged *sekgoa*. (Chapter 1) As a methodology, family history permitted a historical exploration of the relationship between everyday practices, and the language through which Africans imagined and spoke about themselves.

The practices explored in this analysis were landholding, education and political office. These were strategies through which Molemas attempted to maintain wealth, power and status. Family history reveals how the challenge to transfer inherited privilege across generations shaped identity, intersected with changes in the political economy, and impinged upon deep

¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol 2.

structural transformations in southern Africa. The thesis illuminates some of the novel opportunities for affluence, power and especially autonomy that British imperialism could afford in its various hues of informality, but how these opportunities could later prove jarringly at odds with the imperatives of formal Empire, settler power in South Africa and ‘indirect rule’ in Botswana.² This was a cross-border polity governed by very different colonial administrations, and its history illuminates the variables Empire introduced into the political economy and the lives of Molemas in particular. The thesis argues however that these external variables were a catalyst to a process of disintegration already on the burner. The seeds of decline were, to a large extent, sown by educated chiefs’ own hands. As Bechuana chiefs stabilised and strengthened pre-colonial relations to their own advantage from the mid-nineteenth century, they were shaping a ‘traditional’ world that was increasingly challenged, and making a place in it. The cracks were more readily apparent at the turn of the twentieth century. In this context defending the nation, in both its imaginative and material existence was Molemas’ legitimation for the continuation of chiefly rule, its structures of privilege, and their place at its apex.

The thesis found that everyday sensibilities were informed by a selective process of acculturation. The ‘new’ was not only being integrated into the ‘old’, but also strengthening pre-colonial pathways of accumulation and power. Of the various modes of living that were adapted and integrated by chiefs in Bechuanaland, Protestantism had profound institutional consequences. It brought a new tool of self-making into chiefs’ hands, and etched new ‘world images’ on their minds. Its narrative of a purposeful, ordered journey through a ‘new birth’ helped many to embrace, even desire, change and ‘reawakening’. It smoothed out the

² J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’, *The Economic History Review*, v, 1 (1953), 1-15

discontinuity, arbitrariness and conflict that characterised social change along the northern frontier. Protestantism presented, as Hastings argues, the ideological template for the construction of nationhood.³ Various Bechuana chiefs integrated Christianity, not without rifts and contestations, into their institutions of chiefly power, and the existence of some influential ecclesiastical statehoods lent a particular political geography upon Bechuanaland by the late nineteenth century. Whilst Shillington's account of Africans' experiences under colonisation stresses primarily resistance and reluctant collaboration, the thesis suggests that formal annexation in 1885 presented also opportunity for calculating and educated chiefs.⁴ Empire provided them with stable and secure political boundaries to establish their nationalist projects. By the beginning of the South African War, Silas Molema had emerged as an influential leader, owner of a transport business, and a landlord over a racially and ethnically diverse tenantry. His and his family's imagination of themselves was inseparable from their conception of the nation, which they felt destined by God to lead. (Chapter 1)

Whilst the Comaroffs argue for the 'dialectics of modernity' along this colonial frontier, I conceive rather of the opening up of multiple potentialities of modernisation. Whether and how they were pursued was shaped by the expediencies of material existence and security. Contrary to Anderson and Hobsbawm amongst others, the imagination of nationhood was not always necessarily orientated to modern life or capitalism, and neither was it a response against imperial expansion.⁵ Existing strategies of survival and the institutions that governed and exploited them along various interests, especially patriarchy and chiefly power, were not necessarily discarded in the face of alternatives. Improvisation tailored new means and ways

³ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*.

⁴ See Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana*.

⁵ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*.

of doing things to many of the old ends, which for Molemas entailed the transfer of inherited privilege across generations. Education encouraged innovative chiefly bureaucracies, with typescripts, record books and, over time, a voluminous archive. Europeans and other ‘foreigners’ contracts were grafted onto existing obligations through which African commoners made payment to notables. Practices and new vocabularies of property were being borrowed and implemented. (Chapters 1 – 3) In the meantime, the language of brotherhood, empathy and Christian fraternity contributed some glue to a diverse community on notables’ farmlands, although the stereotypes of racial ordering were inconsistently articulated in everyday life. (Chapter 3) By the turn of the twentieth century, the notion of ‘progress’ (*coelopele*) had become a key orientation to life amongst educated Bechuana, and even a ‘way of the past’. Moreover, livelihood strategies were still mediated by secure access to land and thus lent durability to traditional institutions.

But there were alternative arrangements that could take over traditional functions and ensure security. The money that purchased the new commodities that had become accepted as *sechuana* respectability could also purchase land independently of chiefs, as some wagon riders did in the late 1880s. (Chapter 2) Having successfully shaped and modelled a reconstruction of ‘tradition’ based on formal education and its accompanying white-collar aspirations, chiefs had written for themselves a social contract whose terms they could not readily meet. By the turn of the twentieth century, the most influential chiefs in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, whose ecclesiastical statehoods were more or less intact, were hounded by genteel poverty. Silas Molema himself was beginning his trajectory of decline. Chiefs were not in a position to sponsor *sechuana* as a lifestyle and tradition. The institutions of the Empire presented a way around the precipice, encouraging educated Bechuana’s patriotism and their desire to weld their nations deeper into the imperial frame. (Chapter 1) In this regard whilst the language of

tradition did speak to enduring institutions of the old order, its animated public discussions – especially in *Koranta*'s nationalist sentiments – was a sound of alarm. Although the shift to overt contractual relationships between chiefly landlords and their African tenants in the 1910s (as evinced by cash rents) were certainly precipitated by the Native Affairs Department's segregationist measures in Mafikeng, the foundations of older social arrangements had been destabilised before then. To the extent that relationships of contract, including private land purchases, signalled the emergence of a modern sensibility, they were also an improvisation on older arrangements. The same language of tradition (*sechuana*) facilitated how people adjusted to structural discontinuity but also lent stability to enduring institutions. To build perhaps on one reading of Durkheim, the reconstitution of traditional community is implicated in the rise of modern society.⁶

Family history illuminated the fluidity of everyday negotiations to maintain class, status and power. Inherited privilege required the continuation of chiefly rule, and notables had to toe a fine line between political power and profit. This encouraged constraints against capitalist production on notables' extensive landholdings. As Beinart argues, the thriving peasant farmer producing for profit in Bundy's seminal *Rise and Fall of the African Peasantry* was largely atypical.⁷ Fetters on the emergence of African capitalist farmers largely developed within their political economies and cultural contexts, and did not merely derive from the dynamics of European conquest and colonial rule. When the colonial government worked to disassemble this complex agrarian economy after the South African War, Molemas led the chieftaincy's resistance. Their struggle had an influence on the balance of forces that led towards the Natives Land Act of 1913. (Chapter 2) Their battle was infused with nationalist sentiment, but the

⁶ R. Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* (London, 1975)

⁷ Beinart, 'Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation', 176-88

family's material survival was deeply implicated in their course. Furthermore, children's education and professional trajectories presented another route to generate wealth without compromising chiefly status. Children's conception of themselves from early on was intimately tied to their place in the nation in ways structured by the family's purse and emotive sphere. The subsequent splintering of Molemas' dynastic legacy into different and overlapping trajectories of class, power and status endures today. (Chapter 4)

At the turn of the twentieth century, Bechuana chiefs' quality of life was in steep decline. Molema's own profits in the transport business were consistently down in the late 1890s, due to various family and other pressures. (Chapter 1) His financial ruin went more or less unmitigated until the 1920s. As genteel poverty worsened unabated in the countryside and tarnished the image and reputation of chiefs (Chapter 3), the urgency to preserve a political economy that facilitated inherited privilege increased. The haemorrhage of European rents due to the segregationist measures exposed notables to greater vulnerability, unleashing a crisis of accumulation in the reserve with significant political ramifications. A sizeable proportion of Africans removed themselves from direct chiefly control. The paramount chief's judicial jurisdiction was significantly trimmed down although his office enjoyed unprecedented durability. His notables' position as landlords and sub-chiefs on the other hand became more marginal. (Chapter 2) By the beginning of the 1930s, the Native Commissioner in Mafikeng was handling the great bulk of Africans' affairs in the reserve, relying on his interpretation of customary law. As he put it to the Native Affairs Department in 1931, Africans were becoming 'accustomed to regard the Government as their upper Chief i.e. to look beyond their chiefs for assistance'.⁸ Following the steady institutionalisation of cash rents (Chapter 3), more and more

⁸ Native Commissioner to Native Affairs Department, 21 October 1931, 1 MFK 9 Native Administration Act.

commoners exploited the language of ‘placement’ and became new landlords over more vulnerable others by the 1930s.

Educated Bechuanas’ self-imagination in *Koranta* was expressed partly in the threat of meritocracy that they perceived, especially in the countryside. Their numbers there were swelling, but not so white-collar opportunities to support what were considered respectable *sechuana* lifestyles. However, anxiety about status was not particular to educated Bechuana but an acute symptom of Africans’ worsening disenfranchisement. Though their struggles were wide-ranging, shared concerns about declining status encouraged some educated classes to collaborate in the South African Native National Congress. Though some lived in industrial towns, the Congress’ social base was the ‘enlightened’ countryside, where missionary education was first established. In the decade of Union, reserves were still associated with respectability and cultural flair. As Christianity had made inroads into a diverse social landscape, chiefs had not necessarily been the first converts, but nevertheless sentiments of nationhood took root under varied regional impulses amongst the devout that read and wrote. By the 1910s, a national newspaper, a flourishing cultural life, and especially a modern infrastructure in its reserves, indicated a nation of progress. For vulnerable educated elites, such nations presented hope for opportunity. In Bechuanaland, certainly in Mafikeng, this vision was *sechuana*, but Bechuana chiefs could not fund it, and even a younger generation of notables like Sebopioa Molema found it difficult to model it.

Rather than pursuing a ‘broad based *African* nationalism’, in Hughes words, Congress primarily represented a collaborative platform to wage regional struggles, as different linguistic and ethnic centres brought the visions of their nation to the fore.⁹ (Chapter 4) The practice of

⁹ Hughes, ‘Dialectical Dance’.

what historians conceptualise as ‘nationalism’ was not necessarily articulated as such in the phraseology of the time. Whilst the words ‘national’ and ‘nationalist’ certainly existed in political parlance, they did not necessarily mean the interpretations we confer on them today. Though Willan refers to Plaatje as a nationalist, Plaatje in fact abhorred the label and actively sought closer connection between his nation and the Empire.¹⁰ (Chapter 4) In recent contributions, Odendaal’s recent history of the SANNC tends to take Congress’ own narrative of continuity for granted, rather than historicise how various ideological currents of nationalism came to coalesce into a ‘broad based *African* nationalism’.¹¹ Hughes investigates John Dube’s involvement in Congress’s broad nationalism and the ethnic nationalism of Natal’s countryside. Higgs similarly grapples with how D.D.T Jabavu straddled disparate cultural worlds.¹² Hughes stresses the intersection between private and public lives to explain Dube’s politics. On the other hand Higgs adopts Couzen’s notion of a ‘new African’ to capture a disposition merging various cultural influences in a colonial setting. Both biographies resonate with Cooper’s argument that educated Africans’ nationalism must be situated in how they carved a home ‘in between’ incongruous cultural spheres.¹³ Like Cooper, both biographers do not explain how carving such niches can be achieved without anxiety. This family history on the other hand suggests that nationhood itself was the most successful identification through which disparate practices could be reconciled and, particularly in Bechuanaland at the turn of the twentieth century, the notion of ‘reawakening’ linked a new colonial experience with an imagined past.

¹⁰ Willan, *Sol Plaatje*.

¹¹ A. Odendaal, *The Founders: The Origins of the African National Congress and the Struggle for Democracy* (Johannesburg, 2012)

¹² C. Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality: The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885-1969* (Ohio, 1997), Hughes, *First President*.

¹³ Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection’, 1539.

However, the way emotive sentiments of belonging that constitute nationhood crystallise into a clear political ideology (nationalism) along various interests, as was the case on the pages of *Koranta* (Chapter 1) or in Rietfontein (Chapter 2), was contingent upon historical circumstance. Thus Hastings draws a useful conceptual distinction between national consciousness as an experience of everyday life, and nationalism as a political ideology.¹⁴ Family history also illuminates the private entanglements that shape how individuals may translate their lived experiences as members of a nation, into a rationalised political discourse. Whilst Higgs eschews Jabavu's personal life to avoid 'gossip mongering and voyeurism', private lives are implicated in how individuals orientate themselves towards diverse ideological projects, including nationalism and Congress politics.¹⁵ Molema's sons' understandings of the nation and their role in it, were certainly shaped by their times, but they were mediated by family dynamics and the intricacies of their intimate lives.

Anxieties about status meant the energies of ordinary people were never fully harnessed by Congress in the 1910s especially. Not even the great potential that increasing levels of poverty in the reserve presented for political mobilisation was utilised in Mafikeng's protracted struggle for self-determination. The 1920s saw an acute crisis of white-collar employment and decline in respectable livelihoods amongst many educated Africans, leaving no doubt that the nationalism of the previous decade had yielded no gains. Yet, both in the urban and rural areas, segregation still presented educated Africans with greater scope to maintain respectability. The cry for a 'just' implementation of segregation in urban areas and the development of reserves aimed to mitigate elites' experiences of squalor, white-collar unemployment, and very limited opportunity. Especially if, as Seme put it, the 'segregation bogey' was to evacuate Africans

¹⁴ Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 14.

¹⁵ Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality*, 161.

from ‘civilising influences’ in the urban areas, then reserves had to be developed, and their slide into zones of impoverishment and environmental degradation curbed. Though the language of Congress politics was losing its ethnic edge, and some thought that ‘national’ idiosyncrasies must be sacrificed for a pragmatic and uniform ‘black’ struggle, the Congress family had still some way to go before those like Modiri Molema, who imagined a political geography without reserves could, make it a political home. (Chapter 4)

Some educated Bechuana, like a Prof J. Thaele, maintained confidence that chiefs had a contribution to make. As the president of Congress in 1927, Thaele wrote to Molema of the representation he had made to a skeptical Congress about Mafikeng:

I have explained my Lord to your committee the keen interest you have taken in the race movement. I have further explained to them re extensive local improvements that are carried on at the *stadt* in [the] face of the enemy’s opposition that the Chiefs are with us. [I]t is only a question of time.¹⁶

Shula Marks’ reconceptualisation of her earlier work on African elites neglects some of the regional nuances that Thaele’s remarks highlighted. Marks had previously argued that the earliest Christian converts in Natal were typically socially vulnerable communities, or if chiefs, on the margins of traditional authority. (Chapter 1) She later argues that ‘on many occasions the new elite were indeed the old in new guise, the sons of chiefs and the aristocracy’ given their preferential access to skills and resources.¹⁷ If African chiefs in general, beyond the handful of examples Marks cites, had come to establish themselves as educated modernisers by the time of Union, this process must be historicised. Plaatje tried hard, especially through his Brotherhood movement, to demonstrate that Bechuana chiefs had a contribution to make to

¹⁶ J. Thaele to S. T. Molema, 1 June 1927, A979Aa2.128.

¹⁷ S. Marks, ‘Natal, the Zulu Royal Family, and the Ideology of Segregation’, in Beinart and Dubow, (eds.) 91-117.

national politics. (Chapter 4) Thaele wished to demonstrate to his sceptical comrades that at least Molemas were ready, and that there was therefore hope for other African chiefs – ‘only a question of time.’

The position of class, status and power which Molema had acquired in the 1880s, was not the inheritance he managed to pass on to his children entirely. The emotive sphere of family life mediated how children themselves saw and experienced their circumstances, and how they exploited opportunities that formal education availed. A key paramount variable in this regard, was their relationship to the ideas of nationhood that their father, and even his generation of educated Africans in the SANNC, espoused. Love for a parent, loyalty to a nation and commitment to one’s own aspiration were deeply intertwined, but in ways shaped by experiences of childhood, romantic relationships, feelings of inner security, travel and education itself, for example. The most striking evidence that the structures of inherited privilege were undermined by the turn of the twentieth century is that the most successful of Molema’s sons was socialised away from home and nation. Nevertheless, Modiri continued to situate himself within the language of nationhood and tradition, even whilst abandoning the practice of chiefly benevolence for that of professional service. Tradition was a powerful legitimating discourse for privilege, even for those that had, in practice and disposition, moved away from the old order.

The imperial government’s need for greater African taxation in the Bechuanaland Protectorate provided educated chiefs with opportunities to improve conditions in their reserves. As ‘tribal treasuries’ emerged in each of the Protectorates’ reserves from the early 1920s, some of the bottlenecks on white-collar aspiration could be eased, whilst better farming methods and implements could be more readily introduced. Although funding did remain

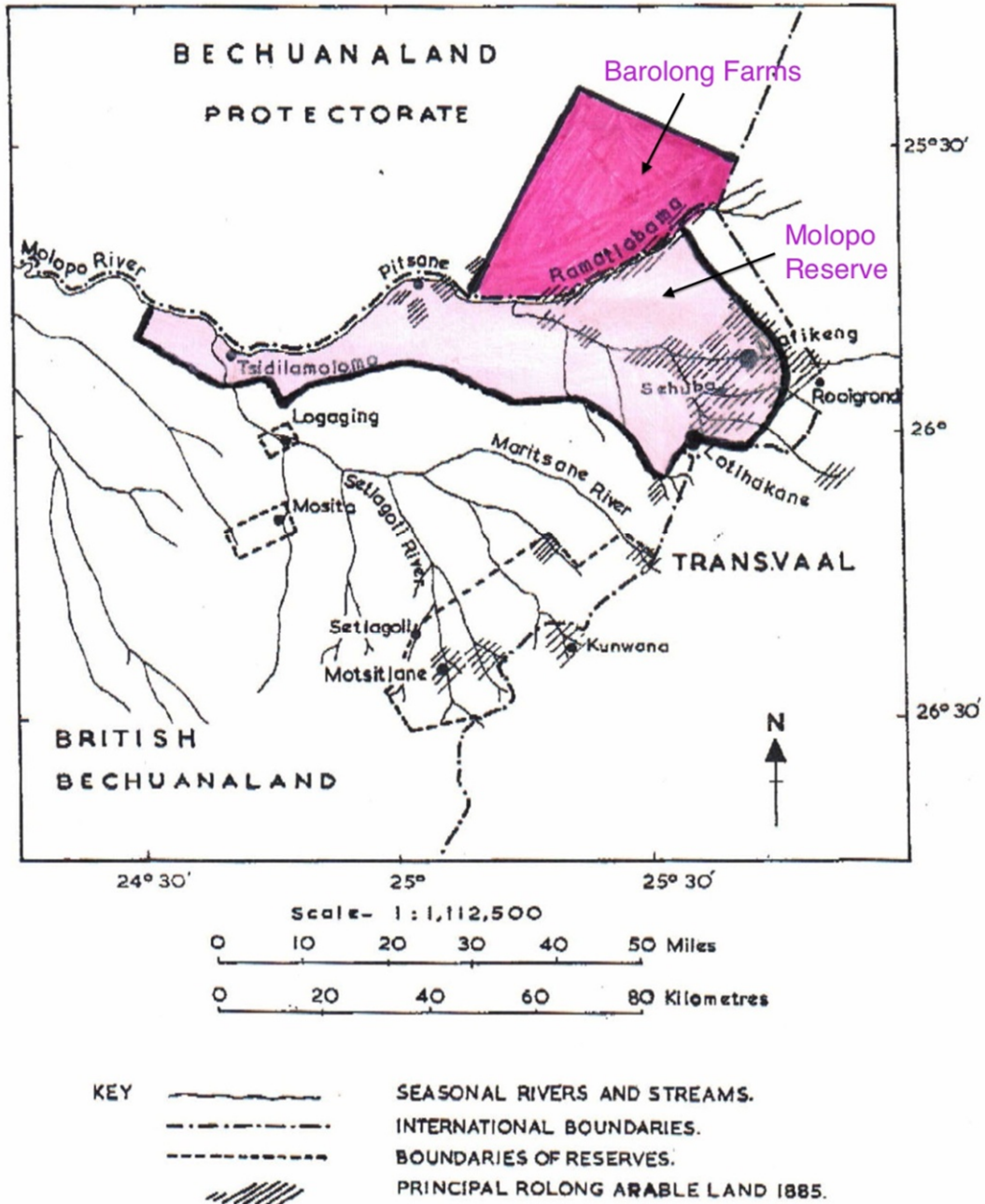
limited, chiefs invested in the agro-towns educated Bechuana had espoused in *Koranta*. Nevertheless, as chiefs recognized, this was not enough to secure chiefs a permanent position in the political economy. Indeed, Protectorate chiefs took great care to learn from the experiences of Mafikeng in the Cape Colony, where Molemas and other notables were finding themselves considerably constrained. Chiefs wrote themselves into the Native Administration Act in the late 1920s, another innovation that sealed chiefly rule into the bureaucratic machinery of the imperial government. Religious fervor from a different source stabilised these developments from the 1930s. Seventh Day Adventism provided notables' deeply devout and prayerful wives with some agency in the battle against drink, and other ills that they perceived to plague their children's generation and their husbands' esteem. These women's 'good works' and evangelical efforts also thickened the glue of their subjects' loyalty.

This family history shows how one Christianized and educated family of African notables attempted to maintain its position of class, power and status over a period of about fifty years. The thesis reveals how Molemas pursued this end through education, landholding and political office as key everyday practices. These strategies and their meaning were shaped by what they understood as *sechuana*, although what this entailed was contested within and across generations. Though this was a fluid way of existence along a colonial frontier characterized by acculturation, as well as ethnic and racial diversity, *sechuana* was an orientation that claimed an almost unbroken continuity with the past. How the family saw itself and how it imagined the nation in this context were intimately intertwined. Nationhood was an accessible identification of everyday life, enabling Molemas and other educated Bechuana to straddle incongruous cultural spheres along a colonial frontier, but also an emotive political ideology through which they defended their own interests. It moulded the aspirations and sensibilities of two generations of Molemas. The thesis argues that the challenge to transfer

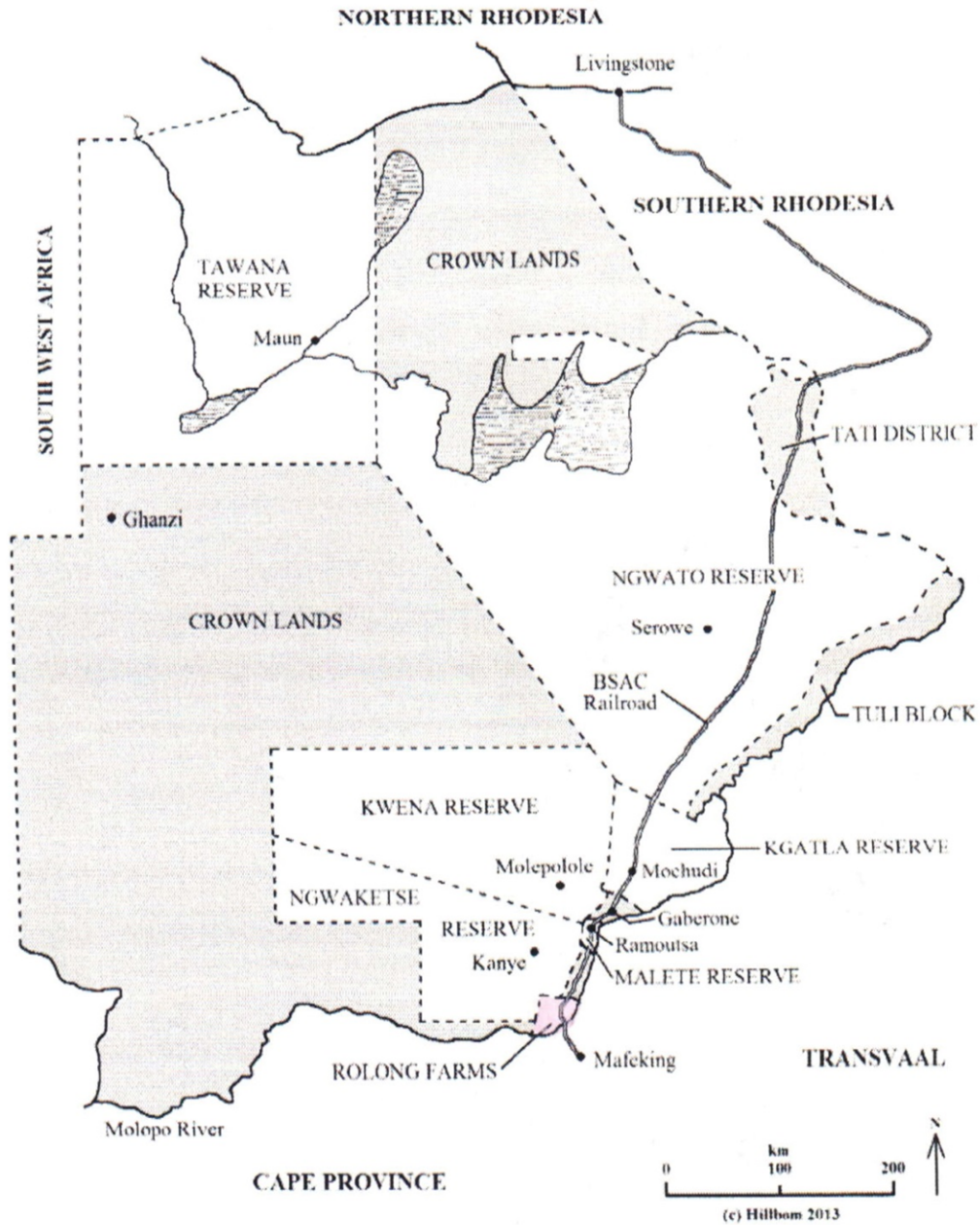
inherited privilege shaped identities, intersected with the reconfiguration of the local political economy, and impinged upon structural transformations on both sides of the Molopo River from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Appendix A

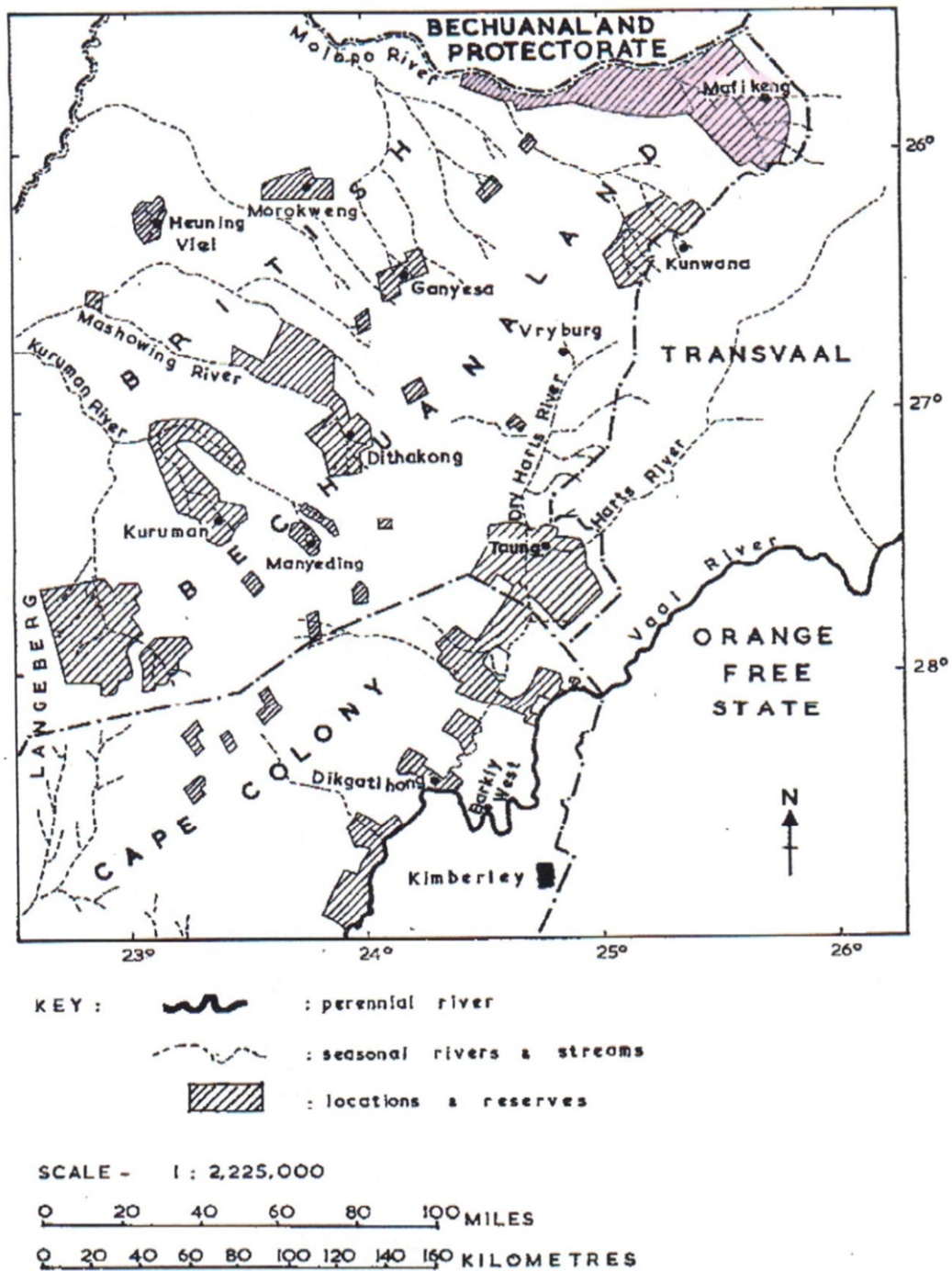
Maps



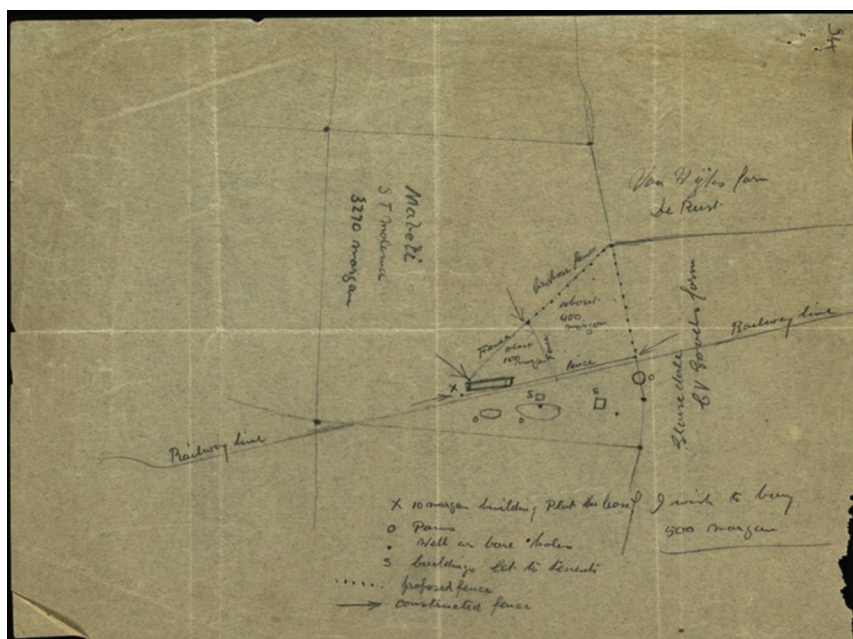
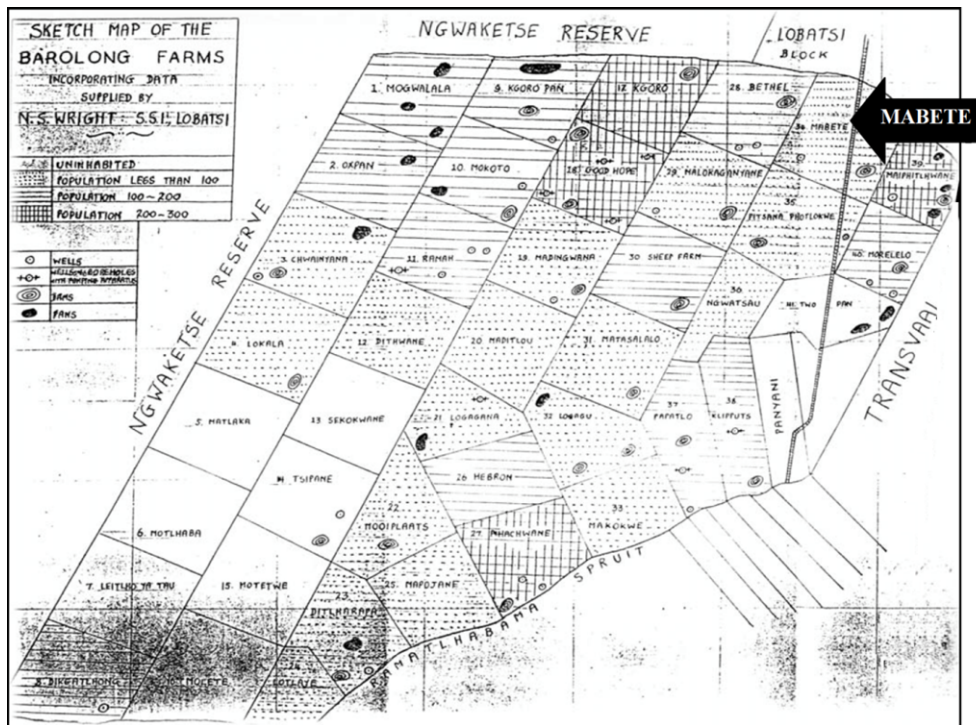
Map 1: (Adapted from Shillington, 1985). Tshidi-Barolong's cross-border polity, with Molopo Reserve north of British Bechuanaland (Cape Colony after 1895) and Barolong Farms, south of Bechuanaland Protectorate.



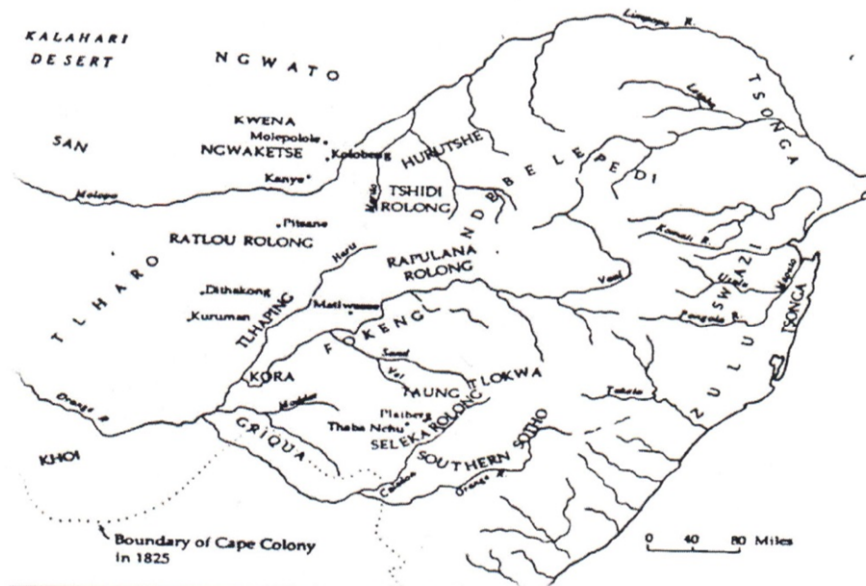
Map 2: (Bolt and Hillborn, undated) Northern section of Tshidi-Barolong's cross-border polity, Barolong Farms, in relation to the main Bechuana reserves in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. It also shows the railway line from Mafeking to Livingstone.



Map 3: (Shillington, 1985). Southern section of Tshidi-Barolong's cross-border polity, Molopo Reserve, in relation to the main Bechuana locations in the Cape Colony



Map 4a: (Starfield, 2008) Various Tshidi-Barolong notables' properties on Barolong Farms, highlighting Silas Molema's 'Mabete', one of its natural pans, and the railway line traversing it. Map 4b (University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers) Sketch of Mabete, possibly a sketch for proposed leasing,



Map 5a: (Starfield, 2008) Various African polities in South Africa. Those identifying as Bechuana were spread out, and lived in separate polities. In this map: Tlokwa, Seleka-Barolong, Fokeng, Thaping, Rapulana-Barolong, Thaping, Hurutshe, Ratlou-Barolong, Tshidi-Barolong, Tlharo, Ngwaketse, Kwena, Ngoato



Map 5b: (Molema, 1920) Modiri Molema's map of Southern in *The Bantu – Past and Present*. The various ethnic groups in southern Africa are represented together as constituting the 'Bantu'.

Appendix B
Illustrations



Isaac Molema, c. 1847

(www.tourismnorthwest.co.za/mafikeng/images/chief_molema_tawana.jpg)



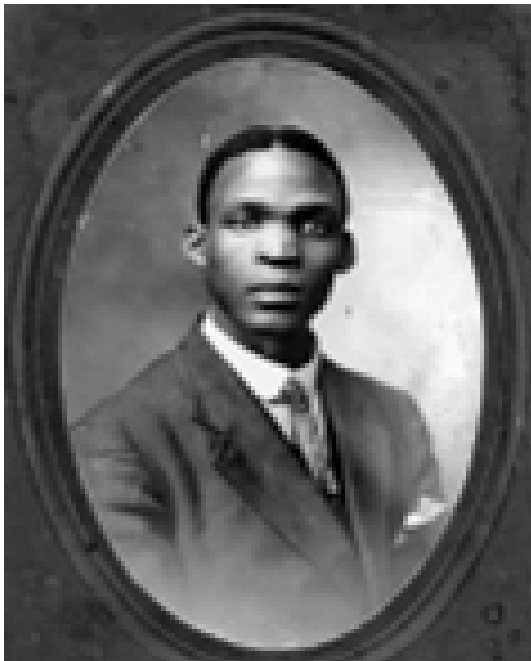
Church built by Isaac Molema in Mafikeng in the 19th century
(Courtesy Galefele Molema)



Silas Molema c. 1901

Courtesy of University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers:

<http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za>



Sebopioa Molema c. 1900s and Modiri Molema c. 1914

Courtesy of University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers:

<http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za>



Solomon Plaatje, c. 1914

Courtesy of University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers:

<http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za>



Wessels and Badirile Montsioa c.1900

Courtesy of University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers:

<http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za>

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Mrs Bothepa Tube, granddaughter of Silas Molema, sister of Leloba Molema, Gaborone, Botswana, August 2012

Warada Molema, granddaughter of Silas Molema, daughter of Leloba Molema, Gaborone, Botswana, August 2012

Mr Galefele Molema, great-grandson of Silas Molema, grandson of Sebopioa Molema, Gaborone, Botswana and Signal Hill, Mafikeng, August 2012

Mr Batho Molema, grandson of Silas Molema and Solomon Plaatje, brother of Modiri Molema, Barolong Farms, Botswana, August 2012

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